

Annual Report 2017/18

from the Chair of Scruton Parish Council

This is my first annual report of my current two-year term of office as Chair of Scruton Parish Council and I am pleased to be able to give an account of another productive year.

First of all, I give thanks to the people who serve on the Parish Council with me:

- to current parish councillors – Mike Widmer (Vice Chair), Trevor Howe, Richard O’Neil, and Anthony Wood;
- and to Clerk to the Parish Council, Chris Barron for his continued support and efficient administration.

Everyone brings an important contribution to the workings of the Parish Council and I am grateful for their commitments and efforts.

I do need to register a concern, however, and that is that I feel we aren’t as truly representative of the community we serve as I think we should be; it would be good to have some younger members who represent the young families of the village, some newer villagers who can bring good ideas from elsewhere, and – I’m bound to say – more women!

That said, we as a group work together well and we are pleased to put on record our achievements this year, and raise some of the ambitions for our activities in future years.

(1) Achievements & Projects (Current and Future)

(a) Village Scene

Village Green – our contract with regular grass cutters Walkers is paying off plus the occasional special treatments given by Greensleeves, leaving us with an attractive and healthy village green. Last November we had an excellent job of leaf clearing done by the Community Project again and the Village Green is in good order. Our intention over the next year and beyond is to keep it so, and undertake any identified remedial work as and when necessary.

Trees – Following the comprehensive survey of trees some years ago, we continue with our programme of regular review to stay ahead of any tree problems. The liability of trees in public spaces is one we take seriously and our year-on-year programme of review and treatment as and when deemed necessary appears to be successful and we shall continue the process.

Safety – every month our Councillors undertake an assessment of the condition and safety of the village green and other parts of the village for which we have a responsibility. We check on the health of trees, the condition of bus shelters and bins, the content of notice boards, the safety and appearance of the swing on the village green and the benches around it etc. This is required of us but we also do it so that we can be on top of repairs and our assessments inform our budgeted programmes of work. We would like anyone who spots any issues to let us know as early as possible so that remedial work can be put in hand for everyone’s benefit.

Storage of Parish Council Files and Records – we are pleased that the Village Hall Committee’s programme of improvements to the Village Hall has afforded us the opportunity to review our

storage facilities. Our unsightly old filing cabinet has now gone and our records are now housed in a new cupboard purpose-built into the chimneybreast, equipped with a safe in which our more historic records are kept.

Precept – For many years running now, we have been able to maintain the precept without needing to increase it despite the many initiatives we have undertaken and the improvements we make. This will continue to be a priority for as long as we can sustain it.

(b) Communication

I and fellow councillors firmly believe that the Parish Council should be inclusive and accessible to all and we encourage villagers to attend our sessions. We comply with all the requirements of giving notice of meetings, setting and publicising agendas and making minutes and other information readily available.

Newsletter – Once again my thanks go to Richard Zealley for his flexibility in responding to my requests (sometimes at short notice) for newsletter printing.

Network Scruton - The newsletter is no longer the main source of news. Since the introduction of the excellent Network Scruton more immediate messages can be whizzed out quickly taking some of the pressure off the newsletter, but nonetheless, some people prefer to get their news in 'hard copy' and we will continue to produce it. I have given notice that I will hand over the task of producing the newsletter when I step down as Chair and Councillor in May 2019.

Meanwhile many thanks to Stephen Elmer in his sterling work regularly communicating with those who subscribe to Network Scruton.

Village Website - Thanks also go to Richard Zealley for keeping **Scrutonet** up-to-date; and this year he will be helped in this task by Bridget Vickers and myself.

(c) Specific Projects

Scruton Railway Restoration Project – I have nothing but admiration for the continued efforts of the volunteer group who are involved in the refurbishment of the station buildings and its environs. They turn out every Wednesday in all weathers. Their endeavours have met with success in several awards – culminating in the last one - the best improvement to the operational viability of a station - in the extension of the platform. This prestigious award was presented at Merchant Taylor's Hall in London and was only possible because the Parish Council applied for and was awarded a grant for the project. Though not exactly a Parish Council initiative, two councillors are pleased to support the highly acclaimed and awarded **Scruton Station Heritage Educational Project**: Anthony Wood as one of the role players who works directly with the schools and other organisations visiting the project and myself as a member of the Management Committee and Friends of Scruton Station Support Group.

WWI Centenary Celebrations – The Parish Council is proud to be involved in an exciting year of activities that commemorate not only the cessation of fighting but also the fact that Scruton celebrates 100 years of having become one of the few villages (54 in total at present) where all our service personnel returned home. Whilst at the time villages like Scruton were a little diffident about this (after all, everywhere else was mourning the loss of so many people and raising monuments to their Glorious Dead), these days we are very proud of the designation Thankful Village. In 1921 a clock was acquired, funded by public subscription, and installed on the clock tower. In 2014 I was proud to receive a plaque for the village acknowledging our

status of one in 54 Thankful Villages as part of a sponsored initiative acknowledging 100 years since the outbreak of the Great War. One hundred years on since the end of those hostilities, we have decided to provide another lasting legacy in the acknowledgement of this designation on our village signs. We have also undertaken to help the coordinating committee meet its costs in the purchase of a village beacon, and to help in any other way we can. I am indebted to our local county councillor Amanda Wilkinson for encouraging us to bid for a Localities Budget grant towards some of these costs.

Scruton Society – This has now been officially wound up and the remaining funds in the bank account are in the process of being transferred to Scruton Charities.

Mineral Extraction – I hope that we can claim with some confidence that the immediate threat of mineral extraction of sand and gravel on sites around the village appears to have receded but the County Council has yet to publish its full recommendations and implementation plan. The latest iteration of this shows Scruton as no longer a preferred site.

Commercial Encroachment – the latest and current consultation is over ‘Employment Sites’ and a call for land has gone out to increase the commercial and business areas to the north of the Wensleydale Rail line and south of the new access road. This triangle is targeted for its commercial and employment potential. Our fear is that it heralds the further encroachment on the south side of the railway line and north of the A684 - another triangle of land that is ripe for commercial or residential development. All of this is worrying and regrettable and will undoubtedly impinge on the quality and serenity of our village life and, potentially, the value of our homes, but it is unfortunately one of the penalties of being sited at a major road junction and logistics ‘hub’.

.... And last but not least ...

Financial Accounts - As the Parish Council receives financial accounts for the other groups and organisations in the village on a yearly basis, it seems only right that the Parish Council should itself table financial accounts. These are tabled for your interest (but, please note, these will be finalised and presented at the Annual General Meeting next month).

(2) Chairmanship of the Parish Council

In accordance with the tradition re-established in 2003 when I first took over as Chair of the Parish Council, my two-year term of office will finish in May 2019 and, as I indicated earlier in this report, I will be standing down as chair at the AGM.

After more than 25 years’ service, I am also minded that I will probably step down as a Councillor at the same time, as I firmly believe that the Parish Council needs younger members who represent the young families in the village and who will bring fresh enthusiasm and new ideas to the Council.

Finally I would like to thank everyone for their support to the Parish Council and to hope that we have an equally good year next year and in the years to come.

Janet Crampton
Chair of Scruton Parish Council
12th April 2018

