

Report of Cllr Frank Pearson to the Annual Parish Council Meetings within the Central Meon Valley Ward.

After the year April-2021 to April 2022 that has been severally impacted by a Pandemic – the first major one since 1919, where do we start?



Winchester City Council, and the elected members operated to a large extent from home via, Microsoft Teams (WCC preferred choice) or Zoom. The strength of one was frequently the weakness of the other! Often no more than 150 Officers were in the Council Offices at any one time because of Covid Regulations. Unfortunately, this safety measure slowed up a great deal of decision making. As these Regulations have been relaxed (or scrapped) many are now back in office, and most meetings are now face-to-face.

In May 2021 and in May 2022 I was asked by the Conservative Group leader to be the Conservative spokesperson for Environmental matters. I have also been asked to continue my role on all the Committees mentioned below. These positions will be confirmed (or not) at the Mayor Making and Annual Council Meeting ceremony on 18th May. This meeting will also see Cllr Derek Green elected Rt Hon Mayor of Winchester, with Cllr Angela Clear as his Deputy for the year 2022-2023

My Council activities may be summarised as: -

- Full member of the **Planning Committee** which considers about 8% of the applications that come to Planning Officers. We consider those applications that have received a number of objections from local residents; that is the contentious ones! The Planning Committee is an all-day affair (from 09.30 to about 16.30).
- You may have read in the Press that Planning decisions are on 'a hold' at present as the result the updated requirement from Natural England (part of Defra) control the outflow of Nitrates and Phosphates from a housing site. It had been interpreted that this was the result of nitrate, and phosphate fertiliser being used on 'old' arable land. Mitigation money from this had been used to enhance the 'wilding' of meadows within the same river catchment area. It has now been pointed out that human effluent is a bigger source than fertiliser used to enable the production of cereal crops (nitrates), or root crops (phosphates). Planners and Developers are busy trying to work out how this might be achieved – upgrading sewerage systems?
- Some believe that it is the Planning Committee that is choosing which of the **SHELAA Sites** are to be built on during the next 10 to 15 years. Unfortunately, this is NOT so. That is the province of the **Strategic Planners along with the Council Cabinet**. At present we are moving to the final few weeks when Parish Councils (having consulted with their residents) may express their opinions. Hopefully many of you will have taken part as the final Consultation date is 31st May with the results going to Cabinet in the July meeting.
- This is an 'exercise' that does not impact on those of our villages that are not within the SDNP as the Park is its own Planning Authority and they will be making judgements about their own settlements throughout the Park. Having said that Soberton might well be asked to absorb up to 40 houses in the area outside the Park boundary.

- The second committee is the **Health and Environment Policy Committee** dealing with such issues as Air Pollution especially from traffic in Winchester urban area; the Green Environment, that is trying to debate and possibly recommend to the Cabinet, what policies are available to not only expand biodiversity, or reduce Air Pollution. Natural England, part of Defra, has a requirement that any developers should illustrate how the site can have a minimum of 10% biodiversity gain. Swift boxes, bat boxes, or hedgehog tunnels by themselves are, in my opinion just not enough if their habitat is destroyed. We need to have trees to absorb carbon dioxide, preserve or enhance hedgerows, establish natural grassland meadows, preserve natural water meadows (flood control) and re-establish natural habitats for wildlife in general. Personally, I look for gardens for every house, and open spaces for blocks of flats; I want artificial, and natural play areas as part of any development that has more than ten houses. We look for “carbon neutral” housing that are well insulated, and draught proofed, ideally with solar panels! I support the demand that the Local Gaps should be preserved to protect the identity of each village, but also to preserve “wildlife corridors”. If I call these “Green lungs” you will perhaps understand. It is slow work, but it will enable us to update our Planning policies. It will be fuelled by new Regulations coming through in 2023 that emanate from the new Environment Act 2021. This means that the NPPF, and Building Regulations have to be updated by Government to create an upgrade to the building regulation standards to a level that permits us to allow “carbon neutral homes that will not only generate energy but also require the use of less energy to create a comfortable home.
- I have also been co-opted by the Council to be a member of the **River Hamble Harbour Management Committee up until 2025**. While I am not a sailor, unless on a cruise ship, the Environment input is very interesting. For example, were you aware that the “Lakes Stream”, correctly the Moors Stream, is a tributary of the River Hamble? It ‘rises’ in the area known as Hill Pound in Swanmore. Only about 100 metres of the tidal River Hamble is in Winchester District. This Committee is chaired by one of our County Councillors – Cllr Hugh Lumby – who is a sailor!
- My last committee is as a member of the **CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) Planning Policy Ctte**. Our aim is to preserve as much as possible of our green landscape. Fascinating, if not occasionally frustrating.
- Of course, alongside this is to be a full member of Winchester City Council. The **Council Code of Behaviour** requires attendance at its meetings, as a priority over attendance to any Parish Council Meeting. The growing frustration is that the way that the Council Constitution is being interpreted. For example, the Cabinet is the **ONLY** decision-making body, rather than the **FULL** Council. I was in the Chair of Council when the Conservatives introduced it and passed it. I doubt that many of us realised that it could be interpreted in the way it is presently operated. The backbenchers have little value in their minds, or they are “frit” (fearful) of **FULL** Council debates. Read “Animal Farm” again, as it well describes, in my opinion, the current system.
- Meanwhile, we can speak directly to ‘Officers’ on occasion, and ask them perhaps, to rethink a decision that they might have made. *It is illegal to say that they must*. That is defined as harassment or bullying. Recall that many of them, defined as ‘experts’ are short on ‘lifetime experience’, but their interpretation of the (Planning) Policies is definitive. We on the other hand, are “elected representatives” and are deemed to be lacking in expertise. *Nonetheless, we can act as a link between residents and the Council officers at various levels in matters relating to such things as Licensing, Planning Enforcement*; indeed, anything related to Winchester City Council.
- For the future, it seems that we must accept a **five-bin waste collection system** that will be National in scope. All waste collection authorities must use the same system and collect the same materials.

So, **Bin 1** is for weekly food collection; **Bin 2** for paper and cardboard only; **Bin 3** for all other dry recyclables including glass bottles (the crates will not be used in future); **Bin 4** for green garden waste; and **Bin 5** for what is left i.e the residuals. It is possible that the bins will all be 120 litres over time. Householders will be doing the Primary sorting i.e., they must ensure that the correct material goes into the correct bin. Waste (WEE) Electrical goods, and batteries will continue to be collected as now. Germany has been using this system for something like thirty years. Hampshire will need at least one other Material Recycling Facility (Possibly in Eastleigh), and an Incinerator (near Alton?) along with Anaerobic Digesters for the Food Waste.

- It seems that we may all be involved in a **20-mph speed limit** in all our settlements especially close to our schools.
- Regulations will continue to emerge from the new **Environment Act 2021** affecting Air Quality, Biodiversity, Water, as well as Waste Collection.

Cllr Frank Pearson – 14th May 2022

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