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Better Streets report, APM 2021

First the name. "Village Improvement" seemed a good name when the working group was formed four years ago. But everything the parish council does should aim to improve the village and life within it. So we've changed the name to reflect more accurately the focus of the group: to do what we can to make our village streets better: both as attractive places to be in and as safer places to move about in.

Much as I'd love to claim we're blazing a trail, in truth it's more like we're jumping on the bandwagon. It started in 2007 when the government published a document called The Manual for Streets. Well really it started earlier: that document was simply setting down as policy a philosophy which had been growing since the late 1990s: that is, to return our residential streets to the community by engineering them to create a greater sense of place, to provide an environment that is accessible and safe for all, and one that improves the quality of life.

But hang on a minute! What is the parish council doing talking about "engineering our streets"? Surely that's Hampshire's business? Well, to a large extent that is true, but 2014 brought us another government publication; this time called Street Design for All. It was intended partly to remind professionals of the new philosophy, but here's the interesting bit: in his foreword the minister said it *is also intended to help local community groups understand how they can take part in the development and adaptation of their own streets and talk with knowledge to decision makers*. Hampshire County Council is also facilitating this with its Community Funded Initiative, which allows parish councils to undertake some works which previously would have been the preserve of the County Council. The new bollards in East Street are an example of that.

Which brings me nicely onto what the parish council has actually done. Had this been last year's report, it would have been pretty thin. Almost everything we do seems to take two or three years from inception to completion - or even longer - for a variety of reasons I won't go into here. Another frustration is that where we have a vision for how to improve a particular area, the implementation is piecemeal so that the overall impact of the changes is lessened. A big council like Hampshire would blast in and do it all at once. The parish council isn't able to do that. So at Lotts Corner, for example, improvement is taking place in maybe five stages. The first, a year or two ago, was when the fencing round the big pipe catchment basin was reduced in height. It was too dominant and was detracting from the iron railings installed by HCC. A lot later we replaced the plastic bollards installed by HCC with oak. Then a little while later the new cast-iron street name signs for Cams Hill and West Street were installed. Within the next few months we are hoping the new village entrance sign will be installed. And the final stage would be to tidy up the traffic signs at the pinch point. All fairly small changes, but adding up to a significant improvement.

If last year we wouldn't have been able to point to much activity, this year a number of projects are making good progress. We've had ten of the new street name signs installed and arrangements are in hand for the final eight. We've also installed a rather nice sign in the High Street for the church and the school. We have local resident Mary Stone to thank for the artwork on that sign. We're expecting all three new village entrance signs to be installed. Those have been designed by another local resident John Richards. Up in Madams Copse we've replaced three stiles with kissing gates, working in conjunction with the landowner, making the path easier for many villagers to walk. In East Street outside the old George Hotel we've installed new cast-iron bollards. The new planters have been in place for some months and are now being planted to a plan provided by Green Zone Designs, who also designed the Green Man beds for us. We are also in the final stage of the fingerpost project, started five years ago.

So in the coming year you should see a lot of projects coming to completion. The funding situation means there won't be much initiated this year, but we shall be working on the Strategy for Roads in Hambledon. The traffic survey, which Chris will be reporting on next, forms part of the input to that strategy.

Dr John Thornton
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