

Romsley Parish Council Chairpersons Statement for the annual meeting May 2018.

As I look back over the past year, I find many reasons to celebrate the activities of the Parish Council. However, I remain deeply concerned about the tiers of local government that sit above us, and the impact that the reductions in their services are having on our Parish.

During the past year, Parish Council fiduciary responsibilities were fulfilled effectively. Our audit findings were excellent, and our budgets showed no overspend with financial reserves improving.

Community consultation has been strengthened significantly by the Parish questionnaire which took place between May and July last year. We received nearly 200 questionnaires making the results statistically significant. We are using the information obtained to support our dialogue with the higher tiers of local government.

During the last year, the Parish Council organised another extremely successful Romstock music event that attracted more than 1400 residents. Romstock is a challenging event to organise and with the heightened security requirements and demands for public safety it is becoming ever more time-consuming. My thanks must go to those parish councillors who work hard to deliver this event to the community, and I look forward to good weather and another successful Romstock on June 9th.

In addition, during 2017 we held a new and extremely successful celebration for St Kenelm's day which involved both the fireworks display and brass band concert. The feedback we received from this event was excellent, and we will be organising a similar gathering in July of this year.

The Parish Council has been proactive in overcoming the problems associated with crime and antisocial behaviour. We are maintaining an effective dialogue with the Police and through the distribution of Smart Water to all residents free of charge is an effective deterrence. The denial of secluded and unprotected areas through the use of gates, fences and vegetation management is having an effect on reducing drug dealing and illegal dumping of waste. We encourage all residents to report all antisocial and criminal behaviour to the relevant authorities.

The Parish Council has continued in its attempts to improve the look and feel of our community. The new bus shelter and improvements to the wildflower area are most welcome as is the ongoing enhancement of the Park.

I am also particularly pleased with the refurbishment of the telephone kiosk on St Kenelm's road and through community fundraising the installation of a defibrillator for the benefit of all. And I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Hillside ladies, the children at xxxxxxxx nursery and Severn Trent Water for their fundraising contributions.

The past year has seen the establishment of the Friends of Romsley community group, whose members want to improve the look and feel of the area in which we live. They have a number of ambitions to improve the floral areas of the village as well as to increase the number of amenities available. The Parish Council looks forward to working with and supporting their activities.

The installation of dog mess bag dispensers, as well as signage for encouraging responsible clean-up, is a good step forward. Working with community colleagues, 2 very successful litter picking events have been undertaken, and we continue to look at opportunities for improving the number and location of bins around the parish.

However, the ongoing problems with grass cutting highlight my growing concerns with this general support we are receiving from District and County Council. During 2017 we approached Bromsgrove District Council with the desire to move responsibility and funding for grass cutting to the Parish Council so that we could deliver a better and more efficient service. This was unfortunately rejected for budgetary reasons nevertheless we have continued to raise quality concerns and lobby for transfer of these amenity services all of which should and can be improved if the Parish Council was directly responsible.

Planning and development control is another key area of concern. During 2017 the community and Parish Council worked hard to protect the Rolling Hills from development. The Parish Council has continued its attempts to build meaningful relationships with key members of the planning team at Bromsgrove District Council. However, because of lack of resources, inconsistent planning rules and the pressure being placed on the planning officers by government means that at times there is not enough consideration of community concerns or impacts. New development is inevitable, but it must bring benefits to the community and not create unnecessary or unsustainable impacts on people or infrastructure I remain deeply concerned that going forward.

I must also take time to comment on the ongoing problems we have with the roads in the Parish. Sadly, the fatal collision that occurred last summer has not been the wake-up call to the County Council over the numerous problems we face on our roads. The Parish Council has been lobbying extensively on this matter and has met the most senior representatives of the highways department in an effort to make progress; I must also add that we have received extensive invaluable support from our County Councillor, Karen May on these matters. From these dialogues, proposals have been tabled by the County Council for improvements to road markings and signs on the Bromsgrove Rd, as well as a reduction in speeds and a house bank to 30 mph. But I do not believe these go far enough to address what is a dangerous section of road that has had repeated collisions and safety incidents occurring on it. Going forward we will continue to lobby for additional improvements including a proper pedestrian crossing, improvements to school and shopping area parking arrangements and methods to reduce traffic speeds across the Parish.

Looking forward I regret to say that I can only see increased challenges and problems for our residents as the general decline in Local Authority services continues. As a community, we will have to do more for ourselves, and all residents must work together to maintain and nurture the beautiful place in which we live. Both this and future Parish Councils must provide an effective community leadership role to coordinate and strengthen these efforts. It must also continue to lobby all the tier of local government above to ensure a fair share for Romsley. However, I personally do not believe that this is only a matter of funding, we all recognise that Local Authority budgets have decreased significantly and services must continue to change. But it is vital that Local Authority officers embrace this challenge positively and find new and innovative ways to deliver the services that communities want and need.

Finally, I would like to use this opportunity to thank all the members of the Parish Council and the Council Clerk for all their hard work and support. I would also like to thank the many members of the Community who be it through responding to planning, participating in litter picking, cutting grass or attending community events are all participating in strengthening and sustaining our Parish.

Richard Arrowsmith, Romsley Parish Council Chairperson,

May 2018