

Chairman's Report – February 2014.

This is often a quiet time of year, with the excesses of Christmas a fading memory and the chaos of summer which is often heralded by the hordes of visitors filling our roads yet to happen. Lately I have found myself dodging potholes, fallen branches and puddles the size of garden ponds as I make my way along our highways.

We have not been as unlucky as some parts of the county, where the sea has wrought havoc, or other counties where huge and sustained deluges have created the misery of flooding for many households. I do find myself reflecting on the wisdom and lack of urgency shown by some authorities and organisations; In Dawlish where repair work to the sea wall underlying our rail link with London had not been carried out because they were waiting for a bird survey to be completed. Also in the Thames valleys, where house building on flood plains now looks less like a good idea.

This leads me on to the main point of this month's report – planning, consultation, communication and the press. We all have our opinions and we all have varying degrees of experience and differing levels of knowledge when it comes to planning matters and applications. These differences enable us to make good decisions for the benefit of the parish and its residents as they give us a broad perspective, giving balance to our deliberations.

Following a recent meeting I noticed in the press comments attributed to a member of the public that had been made at that meeting regarding the potential effect of a turbine close to their property on house values. The point was clearly made at the meeting, and I believed understood by all those present. It was however, not accurately reported in the local paper the following week. I have been the subject of similar inaccurate reporting in the past too (though not on Council business.) Often I believe it is without malice and is the result of journalistic 'licence' to create a better story.

One of the few duties I have had outside of regular meetings since my last report was to answer both press and public queries around our position with regards to planning applications. I have been studiously circumspect, offering advice and information where it is requested, but stressing whether it is my own personal opinion, or the policy of the Council and if they differ, stating what the official position of our Council is and how it was reached.

We are never going to please all of the people all of the time and we will undoubtedly get some disgruntled parishioners complaining about what we have done or what they believe we should have done. I am asking you all to ensure that you ensure that any comments or communication you make reflect these distinctions; whether something is your own opinion or the view of the Parish Council following discussions at our meetings. To this end I think in future it would also be helpful and would ensure a degree of consistency if any views and information you wish to share formally with other Councillors are sent to the Clerk in the first instance so that she can ensure all is in line with our Standing Orders and Adopted Policies, before forwarding to others for their perusal.

This may delay the dissemination of information slightly, but it will ensure that we are not allowing people or the press to mistake our views for Council Policy.

Michael Hopkins - Chairman