

Erlestoke Chairman's report 2020 – 2021

It seems I start all my annual reports with “it has been a strange and busy year for such a small village”, well this year as we all know has been strange and busy coping with Coronavirus and Zoom meetings. I would like to thank our councillors for their total commitment to making Erlestoke safe for our residents and giving thought to our neighbours who don't have access to the outside facilities that we enjoy. We know of five people who recorded positive with Covid and thankfully all pulled through successfully with no long-term effects.

The knock-on effect of the Covid pandemic is that the number of visitors to Erlestoke has increased, the council has introduced a number of procedures and installed fencing to help direct visitors in a more controlled way. Up to now Erlestoke has been a quiet and in some ways hidden village, but “the times they are a changin” and we must cope and move with the times.

You will remember that the Council elections should have taken place last year but the Government stopped the elections and Councillors were to do an extra year. This year elections are now going ahead. Unfortunately, Councillor J Simmons decided to resign from Erlestoke Parish Council. The Council are sorry that Councillor Simmons decided not to continue and wish her all the best. There are two changes this year, we are pleased to have Caroline West as a new Councillor, Caroline has already proved constructive and is focused on the speed limits on the B3098 and litter picking. The second change is I am stepping down and making room for new ideas and focus.

After Covid the next big change for Erlestoke is the George and Dragon Pub has now been purchased and the new Landlords are making the building smarter and ready for business. We wish them all the best and give them our full support. I would like to thank Keith Lewcock who ran the campaign for the “Erlestoke Hub” in conjunction with the Parish Council for at least five years highlighting benefits and correcting inaccurate publications. We were also helped with the fact there was always at least one interest and sometimes two interested parties in buying the George and Dragon as a pub not as a residential property.

Back to more normal Council business, every year we organise a maintenance program fixing fences and making sure the play area is safe. The Play area was closed at the start of 2020 because of Covid but now we have managed to upgrade the area and its back in use.

We have had three flood issues that needed looking at, the drains through the village and down to outside The George and Dragon were constantly being blocked after a heavy rain storm. This is now resolved by Wiltshire Council who have cleared the drains and put Erlestoke on their list to be checked every two months. Having said this the drain at the bottom of the Garden Road leading to the Secret Garden still needs unblocking. The second flood issue is the flooding under the railway bridge along Lower Road, the reason for this flooding involved negotiations between Highways and British Rail. The communication between these seemed to delay the resolution by at least two months thankfully now the road is cleared for use. The third flood is the area behind the houses in the Park, the road is

used by the Water Works some temporary work has been done and may still require attention this summer.

Traffic on the B3098 is always on the agenda, last year we received notice of a number of cars that have overturned on bends. The pandemic has changed the road usage in the village with more people visiting and enjoying the area. We have introduced "SLOW DOWN" signs to help but a more permanent approach has been taken and we are asking Wiltshire Council to move the 30 mph limit signs on the B3098 at the West and East end of the village by at least 100 metres further out. In conjunction with this we would like the speed limit reduced to 20 mph. The speed indicator device (SID) was loaned to us by Wiltshire Council some years ago. We found this very important slowing traffic entering the village, with the added benefit of being adjacent to the road crossing that visitors and walkers use on route to Erlestoke Woods. The SID has become troublesome and now needs replacing with a new one. The Parish Council have decided to replace this and are hoping for help with funding the from the Area Board in Devizes.

The SSE Sub Station in the Park has been upgraded, this seems to have taken a long time although still untidy has been fenced off so it is safe. The Council are still waiting for the agreement to be finalised from SSE, it seems a David and Goliath situation and we are the David.

There have been a number of reports of motor bikes and mountain bike users across Erlestoke Woods that cause issues with walkers. Now we have generated a comprehensive map of all public footpaths this is now displayed on the Erlestoke web site www.erlestoke.org. The Pandemic has raised stress levels of some people and a number of incidents have been reported. The issue for the Parish Council is the woods and fields South of Erlestoke are MOD property and Councillor Jones works closely with the MOD trying to help out. The MOD have now increased the policing of the area to solve these issues. Councillor Morgan Frise and councillor Jones are working on a notice board and leaflet box to help with do's and don'ts in the woods.

The Erlestoke Woods are going through a major forestry program removing a number of Pine and Ash trees, they are replanting with broad leaf trees for future generations to enjoy.

The church AGM was on Sunday 25th April this is an important meeting and will determine the future of the church as Hellen Diskett and Liz Kemp have stood down and there is nobody to help run and administer the running of the church. The Parish Council use the church we hope a solution can be found.

The litter pick was well attended by 10 people we collected a massive amount of litter from around the village and very little from the wood road where visitors roam. Again, Jane Batt and Mandy McCaan have done a stern job picking up litter and dog poo so residents and visitors have a clean path to use, a big thank you to both as well as the 10 who attended on the 11th April litter pick day.

The Council work to a tight budget and must be very careful what we spend our money on and this year we decided to keep the parish precept the same as last year at £6805.00 for 2020/21.

I would like to thank all our councillors including Richard Gamble who is standing down this year and Polly Doyle our Clerk for all their help and advice throughout the year.

Stan Jonik Chairman Erlestoke Parish Council