CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - 2021 ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY

My thanks to residents who were able to join us 'virtually' on 21st April for a rather different Annual Parish Assembly. It has been a tricky time for all over the past year and I would particularly like to thank my fellow Councillors, Clerk, Volunteers and Contractors for their commitment and dedication in adapting to alternate ways of working enabling the PC's commitment to the residents of Rotherwick to continue during what has been an exceptionally challenging time, from the first UK Lockdown back on the March 23rd 2020 through to the staged easements, following Lockdown3, we are currently seeing.

Whilst the country navigated its way through our changed lives the Parish Council swiftly adapted to virtual meetings (Regulations passed in Parliament on April 2nd 2020). Repairs and Maintenance throughout the Parish have continued within the varying levels of restrictions imposed on meeting contractors. We are delighted, and somewhat surprised, to have achieved a spend of £28,812 against a budget of £29,600 despite these challenges. Works undertaken include; repair to the Information Board opposite The Falcon, replacement of rotten or damaged dragon teeth, repairs to the bridge at Chicken Farm, repair to the Noticeboard at the playing fields together with the clearance of tree debris left behind by Storms Brenda in January, Ciara in early-February and Dennis in mid-February. We have also used over 41 hours of Lengthsman time in chicane maintenance, dead tree removal, pond edge repair and ditch clearance leaving us just 4 hours to carry over into 2021/22.

Communication and engagement were essential as Government Guidelines swiftly evolved especially in the early days of the pandemic, specifically to the closing of public facilities such as the playground, tennis courts and outdoor trim trail equipment. The requirement for weekly safety checks, sanitisation of high touch areas, displaying of safety signage, permitting lawful opening, still continue to this day at the playground, playing fields and Hudson Copse.

Community Engagement
The use of both parish noticeboards was prohibited, within the April 2nd 2020 Regulations, resulting in the increase use of Mailchimp circulars and the creation of a PC Facebook page both channels aimed at direct communication with parishioners. The PC website was upgraded to comply with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications)(No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. We would invite residents to visit and familiarise themselves with the website, it being the most comprehensive source of information from the PC. For those of you who have yet to register for Mailchimp updates, you can do so via the 'Get Email Alerts' section of the website www.rotherwick.org.uk Following a suggestion from a resident at the APA the PC are committed to producing a quarterly Newsletter type communication keeping you involved in what we have been doing, what we plan to do and also, importantly, inviting you to get involved with projects.

Playing Fields and Pavilion
Maintenance of the playing fields continued throughout the year with the grass cutting contractors being engaged for a third year with no price increase. The Pavilion underwent much needed refurbishment to the kitchen, toilets, and showers. The upgrades were necessary in order to (a) protect the enviable thatched cricket pavilion and (b) to meet Health & Safety and Food Hygiene standards. The refurbished kitchen also enjoys a range of new 'white goods' which were donated to the PC by Rotherwick ITW Cricket Club following their successful grant application from the ECB (English Cricket Board).

CIO
The PC, in May 2008, entered into a Deed of Dedication with Fields in Trust for the protection of the Freehold Land at Rotherwick Playing Fields. The Deed created a charitable trust in relation to the land and from that date the land has a charitable status and RPC were then Sole Trustees. The Deed specified two requirements (a) The Trust be registered with the Charities Commission and (b) the land be registered with HM Land Registry. On July 27th 2017, the land was subsequently registered with HM Land Registry and on March 8th 2020 Rotherwick Playing Fields Trust CIO, Charity No. 1193733 was established. The newly formed CIO will, as a registered charity, be eligible for grant funding not available to the PC.

Precept & Reserves
Working towards and achieving Registered Charity Status for Rotherwick Playing Fields has allowed the PC to begin reducing the levels of Financial Reserves held and Precept Demands year on year. The Financial Reserves were £77,945 in 2017/18 reducing down to £56,463 for 2020/21. We are budgeted to spend £27,893 this 2021/22 year with a Precept Demand of £21,000 down from £23,870 2020/21. The PC are committed to supporting the CIO until such time as it is established and financially sound.

Highways
The village gateways signs are now completed and are a smart entry into the Village. Rusted signpost as well as stolen signs have been replaced improving the visual appearance of the Village. Hampshire Highways have also upgraded the gully drainage around the pond which should improve water levels in the pond. Pothole around the Parish have been repaired however new ones will continue to appear and your PC will continue to communicate with Hampshire Highways highlighting issues, members of the public can also report matters https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/roadproblems The repairs of the School fence are ongoing and hoped to be resolved as soon as possible.

Planning
Though a small Parish (the 2011 Census recorded as comprising a population of 564 with 212 dwellings) the PC reviews planning applications which reflect the diverse nature of the Parish with its large conservation area, significant number of listed buildings and many dwellings in the countryside. The PC seeks to apply objective criteria when considering applications, using principles in the Rotherwick Neighbourhood Plan to elaborate policies in the Hart Local Plan.

During 2020/21 the PC considered some 18 applications, of which it supported/had no objection to 13 and objected to 5. Of particular note were applications approved by Hart for community facilities, comprising renewed consent to extend Rotherwick Cricket Pavilion and implement parking facilities (20/02983/FUL) and consent for an improved Scout Hut (the Den) (20/02983). Local views were expressed particularly strongly in relation to a retrospective application relating to a woodland plot in Street End Copse (20/02941/FUL) and the proposed 50MW solar power scheme at Bunkers Hill Farm (21/0552/FUL).

Bunkers Hill Farm is one of three 50MW solar power schemes being proposed near Hook, the other two being at Cholsley Farm, North Warnborough (full application consultation period closed) and Ford Farm, Upton Grey (full application not yet submitted). As each scheme requires over 200 acres of countryside, the PC is monitoring the evolution of these schemes and potential impacts for Rotherwick.

The PC is also monitoring schemes with the potential to reduce the gap between Hook and Rotherwick and seeks to make residents aware of these on the PC web site where appropriate, even where outside the Parish. The proposed 72-bed care home near the B&M site on the B3349 (21/00608/FUL) is an example. A scheme for a retirement care living development of 160 units at Owens Farm is also in prospect.

Hudson's Copse, Playing Fields, Lyde Green Pond
The PC commissioned a Woodland Management Plan for Hudson's Copse and ~~a~~ Visual Tree Assessments during Spring 2020. The VTAs highlighted some urgent tree works and some maintenance works at Hudson Copse, the Playing Fields, Lyde Green and the Village Pond. Removal of invasive species of cherry laurel together with a reduction in the holly trees has been completed at Hudson's Copse. New fencing along the internal parameter has been installed, and the access gate has been upgraded to allow for greater accessibility. Overgrown vegetation obscuring some road signage in Cowfold Lane has been cut back to improve visibility with the intention of vehicles abiding by the speed limit. Sustainability projects are planned for the woodland and the PC would welcome community involvement in the form of a working group. If you have an interest in woodland management, natural habitats please do get in touch with Cllr Rachel Johnson rachel.johnson@rotherwick.org.uk

Other Projects
A new fence at the chicken farm was erected demarcating the Parish owned ransom strip helped with a parishioner's financial contribution. Repairs were made to the Telephone Box (library) when the hinges failed. The finger posts, benches, notice & information boards and road signs have been repainted or treated.

Planned Projects for 2021/22
Purchase of a new noticeboard in Wedman's Lane allowing space for 'event' advertising as well as PC meeting Agendas, Minutes (from May 7th 2021). Installation of parking stops at the School to prevent cars overshooting causing damage to the fence and to help keep the pedestrian pathway clearly identified. Identified tree works on multiple sites including planting trees to replace the removed dead trees (*Dutch Elm Disease*) opposite The Falcon. Ad hoc verge repairs, ditch clearances, street furniture treatment as well as clearance work on the Village Pond.

Lucy Bardwell
Chairman, Rotherwick Parish Council