

### **Outgoing Chairman's farewell address**

At the meeting of the Parish Council on March 1st, 2021, Bill Cook handed over his Chairmanship of six years to Simon Bing, and offered a few words of reflection on his time in office. Simon's move into the Chair came just before the finalisation of the Council's appointment of a new Clerk, Sam Weller, who was welcomed by Bill in his last act as Chair.



Bill continued by outlining what he felt the Council had achieved during the six years of his Chairmanship, beginning with the Council's role, in partnership with the Neighbourhood Development Plan working group, in having established the parish as the first in Stratford District to have had a 'made' plan. The document had been invaluable in helping guide and defend the village through planning decisions and appeals to the Planning Inspectorate. Long Compton continued, he said, to be a sustainable village where people wanted to live and work as well as visit, largely because of this document.

Bill also expressed his pleasure in having seen to fruition the Council's part in providing social housing. The Parish Council had been instrumental in acquiring land, obtaining planning permission, finding and working with builders, overseeing development and finally handing over to the housing association five new social rent homes in the village, all of which are now occupied by existing villagers.

Over the last few years – led by Cllrs Forbes and Blackwell – this Council had overseen the creation of a set of "leaky dam" defences which will soon surround the village. The work involved here cannot be overestimated – hours sitting in meetings arguing the case for Long Compton, days out persuading landowners to allow more than one hundred dams to be installed, and weeks of work as the dams went in. Long Compton is not of course wholly protected from flooding (there is a lot more still to do) but - pardon the pun - the village is a damn sight safer now than it was in 2015.

Six years ago, the Parish owned some land on which a potentially very dangerous eyesore had developed. The shed in the Hollows was a problem which Parish Councils had known about for a long time and put firmly into the "too difficult" box. This Council decided that it was a priority which had to be addressed. Today the land is cleared and it was hoped that during the meeting a decision would be reached to go ahead with the erection of a simple but sympathetically built workshop which would both provide a place to work for a village business and generate an income which could be reinvested in the Parish.

Bill expressed his pride in these achievements and expressed the belief that his fellow councillors should also be proud of them.

Long Compton, he said, had a reputation as an active and well informed Parish Council, taken seriously by both County and District colleagues because they know it is a Council which really does deliver.

The Council must prepare itself for the challenges which will emerge over the next few years.

First, there is the need to react to the various initiatives emerging from Government and the two Districts of Stratford and Warwick which will be changing the ground rules for planning and development in the coming years. Long Compton must be alert to these changes and to doing whatever needs to be done in terms of

policy development and documentation to ensure preparedness for looking after the best interests of the village.

Second, the Parish Council, in its discussions over next year's budget, had already identified the parish's natural environment as a key priority. This meant work on trees, verges, wild flowers, our dark skies policy and our footpaths. The Parish Council would be taking its responsibility to the environment increasingly seriously over the coming years.

Third, the Council needed to do something about traffic in the village. If there was one issue on which parishioners could rightly point out that the Council had under-delivered, it was traffic – through the village and down Old Hill. It could be (and it has been) argued that it was all Highways' fault and that County and District should be doing more, and that was true. But it could have been argued that Stratford should have built social housing – instead the parish had done it for itself; it could have been argued that County should have sorted out the flood risk – instead the parish had done it for itself. Over the next few years we would be going to have to “do it ourselves” again regarding our roads.

Bill concluded by thanking all his colleagues as Councillors over the past six years – over twenty of them, and with all of whom it had been a pleasure to work. He paid a particular tribute to the current group of Councillors who had battled on through a COVID-affected and, for several months, clerkless period. Their commitment and willingness to step up to the challenges of the past twelve months had been exemplary. Finally, he thanked the only two Councillors who had been in post when he arrived and (despite what they say) expected to be here long after he had gone – Lindsay, Janet thank you both very much.

He thanked the Council again and offered the new Chair his best wishes. He was in turn thanked by the Chair and by Councillors.