

ANNUAL REPORT –LEIGHTON and EATON CONSTANTINE PARISH COUNCIL – April 2021

What a year this has been! This time last year I reflected upon how things had changed due to the onset of the pandemic. Little did we know then that 12 months later, we would only just be coming out of our 3rd lockdown and still meeting virtually.

Although awful, Covid has shown the best of us in our community reactions. The community support groups that have grown up, volunteering, looking out for each other and of course the recent testing and vaccination successes that shines a light to the "new normal". Leighton and Eaton Constantine residents are lucky to have such a dedicated and hardworking collection of Councillors who have supported our community in so many ways during the Pandemic.

I pay tribute to all our healthcare workers who have worked in unbelievably tough conditions, and all front-line workers who have kept us fed, safe, taught our children and frankly just kept us going. I also pay tribute to the staff at Shropshire Council who have had to learn new roles at short notice to react to the pandemic. Council staff are slowly returning to their substantive posts but there is a considerable number of staff that continue to work across track and trace and testing and vaccine centres.

The pandemic has brought out the absolute best of our community spirit and kindness and I sincerely hope that this spirit continues well after the pandemic has been controlled.

PLANNING MATTERS

The planning applications for the Ironbridge Power Station and the extraction of Sand and Gravel on the site has been and continues to be a huge concern for the Parish. There has been regular meetings with the planners and Buildwas Parish Council, Sue Jones has attended all of these meetings and together we have pushed back hard. Last October I spent 3 days walking the Highways and Planning teams along the possible access routes meeting a few of you so that you could air your concerns along the way! The applications have been delayed again due to the compelling arguments put forward.

I am pleased to say that Shropshire Council has agreed to put speed reduction measures in place in Leighton, the scheme will be brought to the PC for their input which is a real step forward. Sue has put in some very detailed objections and taken I am sure many hours/days of work sifting through mountains of

information. Well done Sue, your dedication and hard work has really helped develop many, very strong, objections.

Leighton and Eaton Constantine remains Open Countryside in the local plan but there is little doubt that proposed development in the surrounding areas will impact on us and it's important we contribute to all the planning applications.

The Farley Quarry application was recently refused and although some distance away the cumulative impact on our area would have added to the volume of traffic.

BUDGET

The Council's finances have again come under enormous pressure, Covid has played a huge part in this but thankfully funds from Central Government have helped offset some of the expenditure and loss of income but not all. We have seen significant additional pressure in costs for Children's Social Care with the number of looked after children almost doubling in 12 months.

Council agreed in February 2021 to increase Council tax by 1.99% which equates to approximately £3.5M, in addition the government Social Care precept of 3% was requested by the officers but members reduced it from 3% to 2% for this financial year. However, the 3.99% increase in Council tax does not even cover the increased Children's Social Care budget. We continue to lobby government for levelling up funding. Unfortunately, the Fairer Funding Review did not take place due to the pandemic, but we are told it will be undertaken later this year.

HIGHWAYS

Over the past year Highways and the lack of communication and getting the job done has been a real issue for many residents and Shropshire Councillors alike. Shropshire Council has 3,200 miles of roads to maintain, one third are A & B roads, two thirds are C roads or unclassified. Two thirds of the resources are spent on the A& B roads leaving insufficient funds for our C and unclassified roads. We seemed to make really good progress on potholes during the early part of 2020 but by January of this year we seemed to be back at square one. It is very apparent that whilst some roads just need potholes sorting out many roads require major works. The budget available for this work is not sufficient and a promise has been made by my group to invest an additional 40M over the next four years. We, alongside many other rural councils, are also working with our MPs and government committees to instil on the government that more funds are needed for our roads. We are winning some battles, but the war is yet to be won! Over the past 6 weeks I have driven and walked the whole Parish 3 times and have reported all of the potholes that I encountered, I have to say that some were absolutely

horrible. On my last drive around many had been filled in and hopefully over the next four years we will see a marked improvement in the state of our roads.

I have always enjoyed working with Leighton and Eaton Constantine Parish Council and, hopefully, I can continue to do so.

Thank, as always, for your support. It is much appreciated.

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