

Coddenham Annual Parish Meeting April 2018

Chairman's Report

During 2017 I completed 30 years as a parish councillor for Coddenham and for 13 of those years I have been privileged to be elected annually by my fellow councillors to be chair. I therefore thought it would be good to reflect on what the Parish council has achieved during those 30 years.

However, I am not the longest serving councillor. That honour belongs to Michael West, who was chairman before me, and whose level-headed advice and insight I have always sort and appreciated.

When I first joined the parish council back in 1987 the first task I got stuck into was to rationalise and waymark the footpath network in the parish. Back then the parish had just bought Broomhill from public subscription and many of the footpaths were blocked with brambles and other growth and some by massive trees felled by the 1987 hurricane. A number of the paths also went straight across ploughed fields and were difficult to walk, several others such as Blacksmiths Lane to Lower road and the path behind Webbs Cottages were not official rights of way. Working with the landowners the parish council prepared a package of path diversions and claims for paths to be made official to which everyone locally agreed. However, the Ramblers Association did not and they forced a public enquiry to be held. Fortunately, the inspector appointed to chair the enquiry agreed with the Parish Council and the landowners and upheld the planned diversions so that we have the excellent walking network that we have today. Incidentally every yellow waymark and many of the posts that they are mounted on I have personally installed and maintained.

In the early 1990s a mound (made from the ground excavated to form a parking place at Rose Cottage) with a tunnel through it and a slide were added to the old children's playground. The tunnel was a particularly scary and dank affair and a number of young children had to be coaxed out of it from time to time. Boyed up with the success of Broomhill Mill Hill was purchased as another open space when the owner wanted to dispose of it. Broomhill, Mill Hill and 3-cocked hat were later dedicated as right to roam land to secure public access for all time.

In 1998 people were getting very excited about the upcoming magic number of the year 2000. Lottery funds were available to celebrate the millennium and Coddenham made a bid to build a new village hall as the old one was in poor condition, was cold and damp and the kitchen (well sink and old cooker) had been con deemed as un fit for use. The Millennium Commission decided that it had funded enough new village halls and turned our application down.

Not to be defeated I decided to put together an even more ambitious bid to Sport England for funds to build a Community Centre and Sports Hall. Michael West was instrumental in designing a hall and surrounding area that met Sport England's exacting requirements and minimum dimensions. Land was made available by the Gardemau trust chaired by Lord Eric de Saumerez and a very reasonable rate. Battle then commenced with the planning department at MSDC who were against the development. It was only with the support of our district councillor, Audrey Lillie, and other members of the DC who came on a site visit that the application was approved. With all the plans and supporting local funding agreed in principle the full application was made to Sport England who amazingly decided to give Coddenham nearly half a million pounds. That was almost a £1000 for every person living in the village. Coddenham had definitely won the lottery!

Since 2000 The community centre has been built and opened by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal in 2004.

In 2010 the Children's play area on the recreation ground was rebuilt to produce the stunning range of equipment that you see today.

The Parish Council was instrumental in persuading the District Council and Hastoe Housing that there was a demand for affordable homes in the village, which resulted in the building of the shared ownership and rental properties that we have today at Bickers Hill.

Even this week we have constructed a new feature in the village which is adult exercise equipment which the Parish Council supported and facilitated with financial support coming from the Day Foundation, Community Infrastructure Levy and local fund raising.

All this is of course on top of the routine maintenance of Broomhill and Mill Hill for public enjoyment and relaxation and the provision of allotments for those who wish to experience the benefits and joy of growing their own produce.

In conclusion I would like to thank all those in the village and particularly those Parish Councillors who have put in so much hard work to help maintain and improve the facilities that Coddenham has to offer.

Donald Burton

April 2018