Parish Council Report – Councillor Pam Bennett

I start with a number of 'Thank You's'. Firstly to the Village Hall Committee for their hospitality this evening, and to the speakers who have contributed to this evening's thought-provoking presentations.

We have heard about developments concerning the Neighbourhood Plan, broadband and traffic-related matters, with which the Parish Council continues to be heavily involved. These are all on-going and the fact they remain incomplete is not through any lack of effort by the Parish Council, but because they are out of our hands, which is very frustrating. We will keep residents informed of any progress. I reiterate my thanks to all concerned in these projects, be they Councillors or not.

I take this opportunity to introduce Cllr Johnny Kidney, who was co-opted to the council in March. I thank my fellow Councillors, several of whom we have heard from this evening, for their hard work and continued dedication to serving this parish and the Parish Clerk for her valuable support.
I begin my 2015 report by picking up on other matters mentioned in last year's report.

WW1 Commemoration August 2014

At the end of my report this time last year, I was encouraging residents to support the commemorative events planned to mark the 100th anniversary of the start of WW1. The WW1 team, so ably led by Phillip Bush, put together a number of most memorable and moving events to mark this centenary, with full support from the Parish Council. I feel sure all residents will want to join me in thanking Phillip and his team most heartily. Quite apart from the public events, a huge amount of work had gone on behind the scenes, for example researching the detail of those Winsley residents who had been on active service during the war. I understand more is planned by way of commemoration over the next few years, so if you can help in any way, please contact Phillip Bush direct. Clearly, Armistice Day 2018 is a date for further commemoration.
The Parish Council is pleased to have initiated and supported the WW1 commemoration, and to have overseen the restoration of the War Memorial in time for the main public events. I hope all residents agree this was public money well spent. It is hard to remember how dull, dark and un-loved the memorial used to look. Thanks go to Cllr Ed Gilby for spearheading the restoration arrangements, which included securing a grant from the War Memorials Trust.
The commemorative events included a ceremony of remembrance with wreath-laying at the memorial, and were attended by over 200 people; a display of memorabilia in the VH with refreshments kindly provided by the local W.I. a film and an evening of words and music. The exhibits included items such as medals, letters, photographs and the history of family members involved. There were also items loaned by Winsley School from their recent project work on the subject, including most touching pigeon-post letters. The display generated a lot of local interest across all age-groups, as did the accompanying booklet. The commemoration culminated in a candle-lit vigil marking the time of the

declaration of war. Meticulous planning – down to the fraction of a second – ensured a fittingly respectful end to the events.

Maintenance

As I said last year, maintenance continues to be a major feature of the work of the Parish Council. The Parish Council is responsible for a number of areas in the parish and in the last 12 months we have paid for work to trees and for shrub maintenance in the Village Garden and in Crossways Path. We are pleased with the quality of the work of our grass-cutting contractor and have renewed his contract. The annual safety report on the Playground in White Horse Road identified a number of matters needing attention, and these have all been dealt with. The Parish Council has recently been able to call on the services of Wiltshire Council to undertake some local maintenance of areas which fall within their remit, thus saving us money. One such matter concerns the dangers, particularly to passing pedestrians, of overgrown and overhanging hedges and shrubs. I take this opportunity to remind residents of their personal responsibility to ensure that hedges are kept well cut back from pavements. The Parish Council responds to residents' concerns over maintenance and I urge all residents to send any such concerns direct to the Parish Clerk who will be able to decide whether they are the responsibility of the Parish Council or of WC and set in motion the necessary actions wherever possible. Continued maintenance of the planting at the roundabout and in the tubs at the surgery is undertaken by members of Winsley Gardening Club, for which we thank them. A team of volunteers from the Gardening Club recently spent a hot and tiring afternoon clearing and pruning the Peace Garden ,planting bedding plants and re-seeding the poppy trough. This is very much appreciated by all who pass by here, and helps keep the whole area round the War Memorial looking well cared for. They have plans, so I understand, for further work later in the year, for which we are all extremely grateful. I would also like to thank Messrs Presland, and Treble and their team who look after Murhill Bank Nature Reserve and Ashley Ponds. Money raised during the Jubilee celebrations of 2012 has now been used to plant wild flowers in the nature reserve. Both of these organisations give their labour for free with the Parish Council paying for any materials required.

3 Other items which improve the local scene

The Parish Council was very pleased to support the energetic enthusiasm of local resident Brian Micklam, who initiated the replacement of stiles with the more accessible Kissing Gates on footpaths to the north of the by-pass. He is currently at work in extending this project, aiming for a "stile-free' Winsley, which the Parish Council is again pleased to support.

The bus shelter at Dane Rise now has its commemorative plaque, thus completing this project, started in the year of the Queen's Jubilee, and, after much debate as to whose responsibility it was to provide it, finally a timetable in its own case was supplied by Wiltshire Council Passenger Transport.

Residents will have noticed the welcome return of the 3rd stone dog on the Dorothy House wall. This is the result of a lengthy project undertaken by Stephen Bushell of Wiltshire Council, who is keen that we all keep a watchful eye on all 3 dogs to ensure they are kept safe. The 3 - 17th century stone dogs have recently been granted Grade 2 listing by English Heritage – all the more reason for us to take really good care of them in the future.

Turning now to the Parish Council's Finances

We are pleased that for the third year running we have kept the precept at £19K. The Parish Council finances are in good shape, and we are confident there are sufficient funds to cover all known running expenses with an adequate contingency against the inevitable unknowns.

Planning applications

The Parish Council has scrutinised and commented on over 15 planning applications in the last 12 months. This is a smaller number than in previous years, which may be accounted for by the recent financial crisis. The vast majority of planning proposals received are straightforward and uncontroversial. However, if this is not the case and the Parish Council has significant reservations or concerns over an application, we have the power to have the proposal referred direct to the Planning Committee at Wiltshire Council. We do not hesitate to do this where necessary and have done so on a number of occasions.

Finally a word about BUSES! No sooner do we have a new bus shelter complete with timetable and a largely reliable, regular half-hourly service, much envied by other rural areas, than we learn of the need to close the A36 and we are left potentially high and dry. Or we might have been, had it not been for the persistence of the Parish Council working with Wiltshire Council to provide a service in Winsley. This is by definition a compromise, but it is clear that repair to the A36 is essential, without it there would be no bus service at all! If nothing else, this 'inconvenience' to bus-users serves to remind us of just how fortunate we are to have the bus service at all.

Not wishing to spread doom and gloom, I am aware, as maybe many of you are, that the local train service will also be subject to serious amendments due to electrification of the line. Disruption to normal Time Tables is likely during the school summer holidays, and we hope to be able to provide detailed information via the Weaver, website and notice boards.

I close by reminding residents that any matters of concern should be sent direct to the Parish Clerk, and that your Parish Council remains committed to working to the benefit of all residents.
Thank you all for your attention and your support to us on the Parish Council.

Keeping Safe

The world today is a pretty dangerous place. There are some very sophisticated criminals around who are determined to separate us from our money and property and in many cases are ruthless about the methods they choose to achieve this.

What we are increasingly faced with in today's high-tech life is cyber-crime – people using the phone or internet to get us to divulge our bank details only to then help themselves to our money. They easily find ways of gathering other information about us which could put us in danger of exploitation – or worse.

If we are vigilant and err on the side of caution, we can do a lot to safeguard ourselves and our belongings from these sorts of dangers.

But what would happen if we were faced with a major natural disaster affecting the whole community? Living as most of us do at the top of a hill, it is unlikely that the river will flood on a life-threatening scale, but we are vulnerable to other hazards, both natural and man-made, such as storms and snow-bound roads, power-cuts, fire…. The consequences of any of these could spell real danger, particularly to the most vulnerable among our residents. So how would we cope? It is clear that the recent cuts in funding to Wiltshire Council have resulted in a reduction to their emergencies budget, so we cannot rely on them to be able to help us. If the whole community were affected, then we would need to work together as a community to support each other. This is where the Neighbourhood Watch and the website could be essential for contacting residents, giving advice on what to do, especially if time would allow for contingencies to be put in place, and sending out the latest news. The Parish Council has undertaken a local risk assessment and will act as facilitator and will co-ordinate information, should the need arise. To this end, if any member of the public has relevant experience or skills, or equipment that could be called upon in the event of an emergency, they should send details to the Parish Clerk who will compile a register for this purpose. In an emergency, the bulk email facility, mentioned earlier, could be a life-line, and I would urge all residents who have email to sign up.

Residents will perhaps know of the intention to install a defibrillator in the village, in memory of the late Mrs Allen. We are working with the Ambulance service to provide this facility, which will be of enormous help in the event of a local major medical emergency.

I take this opportunity to remind residents of the importance of leaving our narrow village lanes and roads free for emergency vehicle access at all times.

We are fortunate in that we have two or more large community spaces, plus the churches and the school, which could be made available as temporary shelters, a number of local residents with 4x4 vehicles, a local health centre with doctors living in the vicinity but, above all, we are a community of helpful, resilient and caring individuals.