

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT MAY 2018

It is with a sense of sorrow that I make this my final report as Chair of Hampsthwaite Parish Council, for reasons which I will explain later.

It has been my privilege to serve as a Parish Councillor for 20 years and as Chair for 10 years. Throughout my years as a Councillor paramount has been the need to serve the needs of the community and to seek to preserve and protect all that we value about our village. This has never been more needful over the past year as following the failure of Harrogate Borough Council (HBC) to produce an approved Local Development Plan we have entered a period of a developers free for all. Housing developments prior to this period whilst not always without controversy, have generally been assimilated successfully into the village structure. The rot began however with the approval of the Grange Park development and these past twelve months have witnessed development threats which would fundamentally and adversely alter the character of the village. This is not just the opinion of the Parish Council but of the vast majority of residents. As a result the Parish Council agreed following a public meeting attended by over 100 residents, to support the formation of an action group with the objective of harnessing public opposition to specific development threats. A series of public meetings updating residents on the activities of the Hampsthwaite Action Group (HAG) have confirmed the widespread opposition to major housing developments in the village.

HAG, so ably chaired by Terry Mouncey, and supported by a dedicated and energetic team have achieved an amazing amount in keeping residents informed, monitoring the actions of developers and landowners and keeping pressure on HBC to properly scrutinise planning applications. The Parish Council have been totally behind HAG by taking part in public meetings and allocating Parish Council monies to the Fighting Fund which was set up to pay for the necessary consultants fees and for publicity materials. Without HAG I am convinced we would not have been able to oppose so vigorously and professionally all the planning applications that have faced us over the past year i.e. Rowden Lane, Elton Lane, Church Lane, in total including Grange Park and Brookfield Garth a potential increase in housing of c 300 homes. So my huge thanks to HAG for all the work and many hours they have devoted to this project. There is still much work to do and we need to continue to support and encourage them.

But of course the Parish Council has to deal with many other matters and I need to express my thanks and appreciation to my colleagues over this past year for all their work and dedication. They have given time and energy to the many varied issues that regularly need to be dealt with, so to Helen Brown, Geoff Howard, Malcolm Wray, John Fairfoot, John Carney and Jeremy Backhouse, you have been great.

As well as myself John Carney has decided to retire so John thank for your contribution over the past years especially with your involvement with the Memorial Hall and footpaths. Please continue to support the new Parish Council in what is often a thankless task.

Apart from major planning issues , I would like to mention the following :

- The revamping of the Community Resilience Plan under John Fairfoot.
- The progress made in producing a Neighbourhood Plan under Helen Brown.
- The involvement of the Community Payback Scheme under Geoff Howard and Malcolm Wray.
- Regular contact with the school by Jeremy Backhouse.

Before closing however I want to give more information about my decision not to seek re-election. Whilst I had trailed at the last Annual Meeting in 2017 my decision to stand down , over the ensuing 12 months , given the huge planning threats, I had at times wondered whether I should continue. However a final decisive factor which has led me not to seek re-election was a complaint made against me and Helen Brown by a resident to HBC's legal department, that our involvement with HAG was a conflict of interest. The complainant also challenged the validity of the monies allocated to the Fighting Fund (£2000). Helen and I were then subjected to an investigation by HBC's solicitor in November 2017. A report was produced in January and in Helen's case she was exonerated from any misconduct and the report also stated that the monies allocated to the Fighting Fund was in order. However in my case because I had displayed a poster in my front garden supporting HAG and attended HAG meetings I was deemed to be a member of HAG (by the way they currently have no membership) I was therefore conflicted and in breach of the Code Conduct applicable to Parish Councillors by not "declaring an interest" in HAG and registering my interest. I should also have withdrawn from meetings in which HAG matters were discussed in particular the decision to allocate monies to the Fighting Fund. In conclusion the report stated I was in breach of the Code of Conduct. Following this report I wrote to the Solicitor disputing various facts and her interpretation of the situation and requesting the complaint be dismissed as "without foundation and totally spurious". Despite various correspondence I failed to get the Solicitor to alter her opinions. In March I also wrote expressing fundamental concerns with the whole process namely that:

It was only at the close of the investigation Helen and I were given the detail of the complaint.

No suggestion was made of someone attending with us as a representative, legal or otherwise.

Also no warning was given that remarks made in what I regarded as an informal discussion would be used against me as evidence. This was particularly relevant when in all innocence I said that IF there is a membership of HAG then I suppose I am a member.

In March the Head of Legal Services wrote and made the following recommendations:

- That I register my membership of HAG.
- That I declare at future Council meetings my interest in HAG and withdraw from those meetings where HAG business is discussed

Whilst the censure I have been given is relatively mild in fact I could have been subject to public criticism and faced with a stain on any further public service (*see the Harrogate Advertiser 22 March re Councillor Nigel Sims*)

I am simply not prepared to compromise my involvement with HAG based on a complaint which in my view should have been dismissed and has involved a waste of taxpayer's money and enormous hassle to me and Helen

Sadly the involvement in the final stages of our local Borough Councillor and Member of Parliament failed to get any support from them.

So there we have it. For me total disillusionment for the way volunteers are treated.

There is much more I could say but I will leave it there and simply wish the new Parish Council and Chair every success in the ensuing year.

David Collett

May 2018