**Ercall Magna Annual Parish Meeting - 19 Apr 22**

**Chairman’s Report 21/22**

This report covers the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic, during which time we’ve experienced a phased relaxation of restrictions and the resumption of a more normal way of life for many people. For the Parish Council, a significant change occurred on 7 May last year, when the authorisation to conduct local government business remotely expired. Since then, parish council meetings have resumed in person and I am grateful to all Members of EMPC for their conscientious participation during this uncertain time. I know that Cllr Stephen Bentley, Ward Member, has more to say on the pandemic and its impact on local communities, so I won’t dwell on this topic.

Neither do I intend to catalogue the complete list of business conducted over the last year. Our Parish Council meetings are comprehensively minuted and these minutes are available on the Council’s website. Instead, I’d like to highlight some achievements and ongoing themes.

Parish councils represent the grass roots of government and are most effective when they operate in close cooperation with local communities. Over the last year, groups of residents, Nobridge and Roden garden centres, Park Timber and T&WC have collaborated with support from the parish council to restore, renew and maintain floral planters in settlements including Roden, High Ercall and Ellerdine as well as installing wild flower beds in Roden and Silver Hill.

In response to a request from residents, and with generous sponsorship from local business, a defibrillator was installed in Rowton, bringing the total across the Parish to 5. Responsibility for the play equipment outside High Ercall Village Hall transferred from T&WC to EMPC last year and the Parish Council has an agreement with the Village Hall, who own the land, to ensure that responsibilities are clearly understood. Subject to being brought up to appropriate condition first, it is hoped that the Roden play area will also transfer from T&WC to EMPC in due course. Taking responsibility for the play equipment allows us to maintenance the facilities within the parish, rather than having to seek help from the Borough Council.

The draft Neighbour Development Plan suffered a setback when our external consultant, Michael Barker, became terminally ill and had to stop work. This delayed the progression of the Regulation 15 consultation; however, we are currently responding to T&WC’s comments and making the appropriate amendments in advance of the next step. Regulation 16 requires a further public consultation which is followed by scrutiny from an independent examiner. All being well, we hope to put the Plan to referendum later this year. Sadly, Michael died last month; we are grateful for his expert help and our thoughts are with his family and friends.

This year marks the Platinum Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth; and, as part of the Queen’s Green Canopy scheme, the Parish Council in conjunction with T&WC have planted 7 trees at various locations in the parish, one for each decade of Her Majesty’s reign. Various events are planned by communities across the parish and EMPC has funds available to support these where necessary. For example, I expect to make grants of £200 each to the communities of Roden and Rowton for Jubilee celebrations.

Pedestrian safety remains a key issue within the Parish, especially on our busy, narrow, rural roads. 2 areas in particular came to the fore in the last year. Firstly, the B5063 between High Ercall and Walton. Investigation with the highways authority confirmed that there is no scope to make a walkway along this road. However, with the help of the landowner (Cllr Sandy Walker) a path has been made inside the hedge between Earls Keep and the Harmans Warehouse site. This allows pedestrians to avoid the potentially dangerous bend near Oak Cottage. Early feedback is positive and we will monitor the use of this path in order to determine whether any addition work is required to improve it. The second issue relates to the Poynton Road in Roden, between the B5062 and Marlbrook Way. Again, the highways authority have confirmed that installing a pavement is not viable, so our footpath working group is working with the owner of the field adjacent to the road with a view to making a path along the edge of the field, separated by suitable fencing. This year, we plan to expand the focus of the footpath working group to include Rights of Way within the parish, some of which have fallen into a state of disrepair and disuse.

Over the coming year I hope to continue the mutually supportive relationships that the Parish Council enjoys with residents, businesses and organisations including schools, village halls and churches. Naturally, we will continue to work closely with T&WC and will challenge them when necessary to ensure the best outcomes for our rural communities. As a geographically large parish with a dispersed population, Ercall Magna is established for 13 parish councillors. Recently, 2 councillors have resigned due to changes in their circumstances, leaving 2 vacancies that have been advertised. Parish Councillors are normally elected for a fixed term of 4 years; however, between elections vacancies can be filled by co-option. Our next election will be in May 2023, so anyone joining the council now would serve for a year before needing to stand for election along with the other Members. Anyone interested in this worthwhile role should speak to the Parish Clerk, Katrina, who can provide all the necessary information.

As I reviewed the last year, 2 topics stood out as being of particular importance to residents and it is no coincidence that our two guest speakers represent the Cleveland Phoenix Charity and the T&WC Highways Authority. In a short while, we’ll hear the latest regarding the Cleveland Arms and attempts to purchase and renovate the pub; but prior to that, Chris Pearson, Road Safety and Traffic Engineering Team Leader at T&WC, will address some of your concerns related to highways, traffic and road safety improvements in the parish.

Cllr Kevin Connor OBE

Chairman

EMPC 19 April 2022