

Chairman's Report

Sellack Annual Parish Meeting at 6.45pm on 28th March 2024 in Sellack Village Hall

This is my first Chairman's Report since becoming the new Chair of Sellack Parish Council last May, taking over from Mark Whittle who stepped down from the Parish Council at the local elections. I would like to thank Mark for his many years of service on the Parish Council and as Chair. I learnt a lot from him and still have his number to call if I get stuck.

A Parish Council is only as good as the people who volunteer to be Parish Councillors and I would like to thank Cllr Mark Robinson and Cllr Emma Crowe for their part in making us the good team that I believe we are. We have different perspectives and skills which we bring together to try to make the right decisions on behalf of our community.

We meet in public and welcome residents attending to observe us in action, which I like to think is more interesting than you might expect. We have had residents present at all our recent meetings, some coming frequently, and we very much hope that that will continue. A short part of the agenda of every Parish Council meeting is open to residents to speak to provide their views or bring an issue to our attention, and an important part of this Annual Parish Meeting is to provide residents with an opportunity to speak if they wish to.

I can't overstate how pivotal our Clerk, Claire Vaughan, is to everything we do. We are very lucky to have her, and I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank her for all that she does. We achieve so much more because of her efficiency, professionalism and enthusiasm.

This very wet winter has tested our minor road water drainage network to the full. Wet as the roads have been, they would have been much worse without the expertise and hard work of our Lengths Man, Terry Griffiths and his team, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for turning out in all weathers to do their best to keep the drains flowing. Sellack Parish Council opts into the Herefordshire Council Lengths Man scheme which provides a small amount of funding and delegated authority to maintain the minor road drainage network, plus we have taken full advantage of the small amount of additional funding available to carry out drainage repair work. While storm drains might not be very glamorous, the Lengths Man Scheme enables us to get on and do something about minor issues ourselves rather than be told we are a low priority behind areas with more housing or main roads.

Last year, Sellack Parish Council replaced the battery on the defibrillator outside Sellack Village Hall, which the Parish Council owns. The defibrillator is registered with the ambulance service whose recent advice is phoning 999 is the best way to access it, because they will give guidance on resuscitation and dispatch expert help and will provide directions to the nearest, functioning defibrillator if there is someone else to go and get it. With that in mind, we were very pleased to host a CPR training session in Sellack Village Hall last autumn and we have approached neighbouring Parish Councils to liaise about the placement of defibrillators along our common boundary. We have recently purchased and added a bleed kit inside the defibrillator box, which for similar reasons can be accessed by dialling 999 too.

Backney Bridge Picnic Site is the largest asset that Sellack Parish Council owns, and I would like to thank all of the volunteers who have helped to maintain it over the last year. We had our Spring working group last weekend and were pleasantly surprised that the site was freer of brambles and litter than we had feared after our Autumn working group was rained off (twice). We cut back the

brambles further to improve the accessibility of the paths, because the site is well used by people with mobility difficulties to enjoy the green space and the view of the river. In February, we contracted tree surgeons again to re-pollard the willows on the riverbank to keep the view open and to cut down some diseased Ash trees. Last summer, volunteers kept paths cut through the grass, which we will repeat this year because the quotes we received to cut the grass across the whole site were beyond our limited budget. The last 12 months have been mainly focussed on finding manageable ways to maintain the site without asking too much of our volunteers. In the next 12 months we will return to the development of a plan for the future of the site, taking account of the responses we have had to our survey.

Sellack Parish Council's ambition to put a plaque for each of the men on the Sellack War Memorial on footpath gates in the parish has been long in the gestation, but the first plaque is now in place. We first formed the idea in 2018, when the centenary of the end of WW1 made us think about how to continue to remember their sacrifice when the location of our War Memorial is on a busy crossroads, making it impossible to hold an annual Remembrance Sunday event. We did hold a well-attended Armistice Day event in Sellack Village Hall last November, during which we placed wreaths on the War Memorial, and I would like to thank the volunteer who has beautifully maintained Sellack War Memorial for many years now. Thank you to everyone who has already volunteered to sponsor a plaque and we will speak later in the meeting about the next steps for the plaque trail and our plans for further commemorative events in 2024.

We continue to aim to replace stiles with gates to make our footpaths more accessible. Our Footpath Officer, Cllr Mark Robinson, will talk more about progress to date and our future plans when he gives his report next on the agenda.

As the most local unit of local government, we are the point of contact for a range of public bodies who send us a wide range of information. We are selective in what we share through our email circulation group and social media channels, keeping it to things we think might be of interest, which we review at every meeting. Our ambition is to be able disseminate information quickly to all households in Sellack if an urgent situation ever arises. An example would be a problem with the drinking water supply and the need to distribute bottled water. You can subscribe to updates on our website at <https://sellackparishcouncil.gov.uk/>. We will be disseminating another printed newsletter to provide information for those who are not online and to encourage those who are online to sign up to receive electronic communications if they haven't already.

I hope you will leave this evening feeling that Sellack Parish Council is trying its best on behalf of our community. If you feel inspired to consider joining us as a Cllr, we have two vacancies and I would be delighted to talk to any of you individually about the role, either after the formal meeting closes this evening or at another time. I really enjoy being on Sellack Parish Council, and we keep it manageable by being realistic about the limited amount of time people have for the role.

That concludes my report. Thank you for listening and I hope you enjoy the rest of the evening. If you have any questions, there will be the opportunity to ask them in the public section later in the meeting.

Cllr Sarah Aitken, Chair of Sellack Parish Council, 28th March 2024