Chair's Report for Loders Annual Parish Assembly
Tuesday April 27th2021

This report necessarily covers the period of the last two years, as the onset of the Covid pandemic prevented our Annual Parish Assembly taking place in April 2020.

Council business was brought to almost a complete halt in March 2020 when the imminence of an unknown period of lockdown made it necessary to hold a short emergency meeting to set up the delegated structure required to carry us through until meetings could once more be resumed. The parish council was unable to meet in April and May. In June we held our first remote meeting via Zoom, and these have continued until the present. It is not currently known whether regulations will change to allow remote meetings to continue beyond the current statutory deadline of May 7th.

The new Unitary Authority, Dorset Council, came into being in May 2019. This has brought many changes:

First, Parish councillors' normal period of tenure was extended from four years to five, until 2024.

Second, ward boundaries were changed. Loders Parish Council became part of a new, larger ward called Eggardon.

Third, we no longer had the District council layer in our local government structure. Our liaison with the new Unitary Authority, Dorset Council, rested solely on one of its members, our new "ward councillor". We are fortunate to have Cllr Anthony Alford who has energetically represented our interests with the new Authority and has attended almost all of our meetings.

Parish Councils had been told to anticipate having to manage increased devolved responsibilities as a result of the move to a Unitary Authority. In line with advice from Dorset County Council, we raised the parish precept for the two years prior to the change. This was a difficult exercise since those involved in the formation of the new Dorset Council had not, by May 2019, provided Parishes with the necessary information to plan properly to meet the challenges the changes would bring. By December 2019, in the continuing absence of any guidance from Dorset Council we felt it necessary to raise the precept yet again. At the end of its second year, this uncertainty remains: the new Authority has still to address the issue of the changes of roles and responsibilities for Parish Councils within the Unitary framework. Loders Parish Council has not raised its precept for this new financial year.

Last summer we were pleased that David Cannon and David Last agreed to be co-opted to our council. David Cannon has been our Footpath and Rights of Way officer for some years and David Last had previously served on the council. Our numbers now stood at eight out of a possible ten.

However, in November, we were sad to lose our long serving Vice Chair Hilary Nadin who, over the 13 years since joining us, had taken on responsibility for many key aspects of council work, most recently coordinating the village's Covid 19 Community Support Initiative.

Another long-standing councillor, Bryan Hyde, left us in January this year, having joined the council in 2010. For many years the parish has benefited from his wide-ranging practical skills and local knowledge. We are indebted to them both for their generosity and commitment to our community.

We were delighted, at the start of this year, to welcome four new fellow councillors: Peter Nardone, Stephen Tilton, Olwen McCrindle and Julie Bryce. We now have our full complement of ten councillors.

Loders Parish Council formally adopted the Dorset Council's declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency in May 2019. Wishing to reflect the views of our whole community, we were ready, in February 2020 to take our first community-based steps to launch and implement our parish Climate and Ecological Action Plan with a public meeting. The Covid pandemic prevented that from happening. Since then, we have been exploring the use of virtual media to enable community engagement. Currently we are preparing a questionnaire for all residents to enable us to gauge support for our draft Action Plan. We will be distributing this in May and look forward to the time when our community can meet to make our plan happen.

More than ever before, councillors have been asked to respond to proposed Government and Local Authority policies. Consultations on important issues which will affect our community have been both numerous and lengthy. Since last September these have included consultations on the Government White Paper "Planning for the Future", Dorset Council's Climate and Ecological Strategy and their Draft Local Plan. Currently we are preparing our response to Dorset Council's Community Governance Review and their survey on the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Council Service Provision. Responding to these initiatives has required councillors to acquire often detailed knowledge in order to make informed responses and has involved huge efforts and many hours of councillors' time. Meeting these extra demands have also necessarily increased the clerk's workload.

As their reports will show, councillors have also been busy meeting their various parish-based responsibilities. These include monitoring and maintenance of council property, including the playing field, play area, trees, noticeboards, allotments, cemetery and the village drains. Planning applications have been monitored and responded to in line with the Loders Neighbourhood Plan and issues associated with road safety and footpath maintenance pursued. The Rivers Asker project has been guided and developed. Our finances have been carefully husbanded. We have responded to individual concerns raised by parishioners in the course of the year, many of whom have attended the democratic forum at the start of our meetings.

Sadly, substantial efforts to ensure the extension of Superfast Broadband coverage to the remaining 15% of our parish who currently have little or no provision have met with no success over the past two years. Nigel Day, an Uploders resident, has tirelessly represented Loders Parish in our negotiations with the local authority and Open Reach. We hope that the Government's recent declaration to further support extending provision to "hard to reach" rural areas will finally lead to all Loders parishioners having decent broadband access.

Our website has been extended to facilitate community- based content. Loders History Group is continuing to develop its linked site. We hope others will follow.

Especial thanks are due to our skilled and hardworking clerk, Joanne Hughes, who continues to ensure that we are well organised, well run and well informed. And who has just successfully completed unit 2 of her Certificate in Local Council Administration course.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of our councillors for the huge amount of time and energy they have generously given to our community in the past two years.

It is as true today as it has been in all the years that I have written the Chairman's annual report that, together, we have enabled the Parish Council to carefully husband the Parish Council's resources and to ensure that our Parish interests continue to be well served.

Michele Warrington, Chair, April 27th 2021