

Annual Borough Councillor's Report

From Councillors Mark Sheppard -Bools, Joyce Crooks & Robin Webber-Jones

As this is the Annual Council meeting, we thought it appropriate to reflect on the previous 12 months and start to look ahead to the next 12. To say that it has been a strange year is an understatement. We have found it very frustrating not to be able to see people in person. We have spent time trying to communicate with residents through social media channels we have set up and through the phone. While restrictions carry on, we are encouraging all residents to get in touch if we can help them.

There have been several motions we have supported at Council in the past year. This has included supporting extending the National Forest, calling for pay rises for nurses and to improve mental health services. We have also called for pragmatic responses to increase economic activity during the period of restrictions.

There have been a wide range of planning issues we have worked on. This has included ensuring that the countryside is protected when planning permission is granted. We have also undertaken a range of casework on planning for residents. This has included engaging with enforcement officers, talking to residents about planning concerns and liaising with the County Council on concerns about highways.

We have run several campaigns this year on issues such as speeding, parking, and the environment.

We have been disappointed that the Westminster government did not provide a Medium-Term Financial Settlement until extremely late, and that the settlement does not have the longevity it should. The Council has played a pivotal role in COVID recovery including ensuring refuse continues to be collected, supporting small businesses with grants, and providing food parcels. We have supported this work and we would have hoped that the work of the Council was recognised by those in Westminster.

We are looking forward to restrictions being lifted. The Council's Leisure Centre has played a small part in this in being a central vaccine centre. We have continued to also undertake our roles on the Council remotely. Mark has chaired the Licencing Committee; Joyce has chaired Planning and Robin has chaired the Ethical Governance and Personal Committee. We have also had additional roles such as Joyce on the Neovia Liaison Committee, Mark as Health Champion and Robin as Children's and Families Champion (in this role we have been able to undertake online sessions for young people from across the Borough). As restrictions lift this work will carry on in person. We will also be able to undertake more residents' surveys to establish how we can continue to best support residents in the area. This will start to inform the campaigns and work we do for the next 12 months.

Finally, we would like to thank all residents for bringing forward any casework this year and we hope we will be able to continue to help next year.

Mark, Joyce, and Robin