

## **CHAIRMANS ANNUAL REPORT - MAY 2024**

This is my first year acting as Chairman of Ashchurch Rural Parish Council and it has certainly been one of significant activity and ongoing development. My colleague David Garnett was elected as Deputy Chairman.

The year started with elections to the Parish Council and we welcomed 4 new members following the retirements of long serving members - John Hargreaves – Chairman, Angela Brown Gordon Shurmer both of whom are former Chairmen and the passing of Dave Street all of whom served the parish for many years between them and we thank them for their service and commitment to the community.

New members are Ian Parker, Sue Mitchell, Richard Drewitt and Gareth Gray

Subsequently Brian Cook also retired and we have thus also co-opted a new member – Ben Wright. We thank Brian for his commitment to the community as well

The new members have all brought a new enthusiasm to the parish council and have embraced the many issues that we as a Parish Council are seemingly continually facing – particularly new developments for housing.

The Garden Communities programme is effectively for c10,000 new homes and 95% of these are to be built within the parish of Ashchurch and if it proceeds it will transform the entire parish doubling the population of the whole of Tewkesbury and the surrounding district. However this is still a concept and there are many hurdles for it to clear if it is succeed.

The principles of the Garden Communities programme are to develop new homes alongside employment opportunities and supporting infrastructure which in principle is welcome. However the characteristics of our parish and in particular the A46 which is already nearing capacity through our parish during peak periods and National Highways together with Gloucestershire County Council Highways are developing schemes for the public to comment upon. We are hopefully expecting some sort of options during the coming year but there have already been significant delays.

Once a solution is finalised then there has to be a business case submitted to the Ministry of Transport, subsequently approved complete with a suitable design specification and an application to central government for funding. There is much speculation as to the costs involved but we believe indications of c£250m or more are involved. Even when that is approved we do not expect construction to commence much before 2035.

Meanwhile Tewkesbury Borough Council are unable to provide a 5 year housing land supply and thus speculative development for new homes has the presumption to be approved unless there are significant planning reasons for not doing so. Consequently the parish is

being inundated with new planning applications and we have already seen permissions granted for 1470 new homes in the Fiddington area, 200 south of Wheatpieces and new applications totalling around 535 new homes at Aston Cross, south of Pamington and more along Fiddington Lane. These are all individual applications without any significant infrastructure improvements and thus simply exacerbate the issues with the A46 and the capacity of supporting services including schools, medical services and utility capacity e.g. sewerage, water and electricity supply.

We are also aware of additional potential applications of around 4000 homes north of the MOD site however these are adopting Garden Town principles and will provide new infrastructure and thus in principle are perhaps more desirable for the community however it faces many challenges to proceed - not least transport and flooding concerns to which there are no obvious solutions.

During the last year we have met with a number of the developers concerned - challenging erroneous assumptions where necessary and to try and maximise resources for the community. These will no doubt continue throughout the coming year.

An example of community resources is that ARPC will become the owner of a new large community centre, sports fields and allotments as part of the Persimmon development for 850 new homes at Fiddington Fields. This will not be available until the site is half built i.e. before the 425<sup>th</sup> home is occupied and we imagine this to be in another 4 years or so. Additional resources will be available as part of the 460 homes south of the above 850 being developed by Barratt Homes.

Make no mistake here the parish is being transformed before our very eyes and the rural environment as we know it today is becoming urbanised and not always in a good way. I also note that we have not seen any proposals for the development of employment land which is a key element of the Garden Communities programme. We all should also be aware that unless it is located within easy reach of housing it will simply exacerbate car travel congestion at peak periods.

In addition the parish council has embarked upon a review of the existing Neighbourhood Development Plan or NDP. This is perhaps the main tool we have to challenge speculative development as applicants will need to adhere to the policies contained within it. The existing plan which became official policy in 2022 is predominantly focussed on transport matters. The review will up date these existing policies given the scale of ongoing development but also add a) a Local Nature recovery strategy which we are developing with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and b) Green buffer zones around existing communities. The plan being to not only preserve what is currently in place but to also improve the environment where we can.

A result of the NDP is that ARPC are entitled to 25% of the Community Infrastructure Levy applied to all new developments. These are significant sums and we welcome suggestions from residents for investment in projects that will benefit the parish community.

Clearly with so much activity within the parish our clerical support is being stretched and becoming overwhelmed with all the administrative work to keep us not only compliant with regulation but also to enable us to accommodate all the ongoing day to day work that the above generates. Fortunately we took the decision a couple of years ago to strengthen our capability in this regard and appointed a trainee as an assistant clerk who has subsequently undertaken the relevant Cilca training and provided valuable support. We are now about to embark on adding a third member to the support staff team and hopefully will be able to recruit another trainee who can follow the same path and thus ensure we remain equipped to face the challenges ahead.

**Tony Davies**  
**Chairman**  
**20.5.24**