

**J.A.P. FORBES**  
ALL SAINTS HOUSE  
ALL SAINTS, AXMINSTER  
DEVON EX13 7LR

Tel: 01297 32183 e-mail [ponsonbyforbes@gmail.com](mailto:ponsonbyforbes@gmail.com)

05 March 2017

*Chairman's Report for Parish Meeting Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2017*

**Welcome, once again, to all those present at our Annual Parish Meeting.**

**The past 12 months have seen a great deal of activity on the Parish Council, particularly with regards to our internal financial and administrative arrangements, most particularly due to the ramifications of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, or “*The Transparency Code*” in layman’s terms.**

**In essence, the law now requires that all of the councils financial, administrative and legal documents must now be made freely, and publicly, available via our parish council website and, to this end, I am pleased to report that not only does All Saints Parish Council conform fully with the requirements of the new legislation but that we have also been awarded Quality Status for the content and presentation of the information we provide to the parish. We are one of only 8 councils in Devon to achieve this award. I must congratulate our Clerk for his efforts in achieving this accolade.**

**Thanks must also go to our Honorary Webmaster, Dave Wicken, for his tireless work in ensuring that key documents are uploaded in a timely fashion to keep the parish well informed on what we, the council, are getting up to in your name and on your behalf. As a brief interlude, can I ask all keen photographers in the parish to send through any pictures you have taken that represent and capture parish life so that these can be included on our website for all to enjoy?**

**Of matters financial, I recognise that there was some opposition to, and concern at, the level of precept we set last year, but I am happy to advise that Council met several times at the latter part of 2016 to consider the budget and precept for 2017/18 and came to the conclusion that no further increase would be necessary this year; in fact, in real terms, parishioners will see a small decrease in the parish council element of their council tax bill. The Councillors and Clerk are currently working on a comprehensive Land Ownership Register within the parish to both identify, and develop relationships with, the various landowners in the parish in order to explain their responsibilities in terms of hedge, verge and ditch maintenance. We are also liaising closely with Devon Highways Dept. to investigate ways in which we, as a smaller parish council, can take on the duties previously undertaken by others; works which we hope we could undertake faster, better and certainly cheaper, thus providing improved value for every £1 paid in local council tax.**

**It must be made clear, however, that the financial pressures on smaller local authorities from both District and County Councils continue unabated and it is prudent therefore that your parish council continues to carefully shepherd its resources, spend prudently and wisely, and seek out other forms of funding such as grants and subsidies, to ensure that the financial burden of running the council and providing services are not shouldered by the residents in isolation.**

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**The council recognises that, as purse strings are tightened at the Knowle and at County Hall, more duties will have to be undertaken by the parish council in order to maintain and improve the quality of life for all who live in All Saints parish but with a balanced budget, and the continued help from the small army of volunteers close by, we are confident that we can weather this “austere” storm and emerge into calmer seas beyond.**

**Elsewhere, our fledgling Neighbourhood plan is still in a state of temporary suspension as the Steering group consider best how to gauge parish opinion on matters such as housing, building development and employment; a detailed questionnaire is currently being drafted and this will come out to the parish over the next few months in order to collect in the thoughts, views and concerns of all residents and then use this data to create a plan for the parish that will take us to 2030 and beyond. I would urge all residents to warmly embrace this survey and actively participate as fully as possible so that we can clearly understand what the village wants us, the council, to do for you, and your children, in the decades to come.**

**It would not be a Chairman’s report if I did not pause to thank all those eager volunteers who help to keep the Parish so tidy, well-organised and well-ordered; My thanks go to, amongst others, Libby Dibble, Alan Storey, Craig Ellis, Kevin Feeney, Bill Coltham, Ron Lancashire, our Neighbourhood Watch team, all of the Hamlet representatives and everyone else who gives up their time and energy to make All Saints such a wonderful place to live and play. Thanks too to our Rural Neighbourhood Policing Team who continue to do a sterling job, despite the pressures and financial constraints they have to contend with daily.**

**Thank you, as always, to Ann Carter for producing the excellent Parish Newsletter which is delivered to every household in the Parish and which is always well received and well-read. Thank you to all who ensure that our monthly village Breakfast Fayre is a diary date not to be missed; good food, good company and a golden opportunity to catch up, meet up and fill up!**

**On a sadder note, I have to report that, as part of the recent Electoral Commission Boundary Review for Devon, our sister parish – Chardstock – is no longer connected with ours within the Axminster County Division, but we now have several new parishes joining us, namely Uplyme, Axmouth, Rousdon and Combyne. This council looks forward to working with those parishes for the mutual benefit of all residents. Furthermore, changes are afoot in the District Council wards, as part of another Boundary Review, and it appears likely that All Saints will join Hawkechurch, Membury and Chardstock in a newly created ward which, as yet, has no name.**

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**This issue will be discussed during the meeting that follows this annual parish meeting. No announcements have yet been made as to who our elected District representative might be in 2019 but we will of course keep all residents abreast of events as developments warrant.**

**Lastly, but certainly not least, may I thank my fellow Parish Councillors – Doreen, Jacqui, Bob and Tony - who all give up large amounts of time and effort – at no personal gain – to serve as the elected representatives on the Council, for the greater benefit of the parish. At the risk of repeating what I said at this meeting last year, it is only right to stress the importance that parish councillors play around the country. Without these volunteers, 20,000 strong nationally, local people would struggle to make their voices heard in the higher echelons of the democratic process and for this fact alone, they have my continued appreciation and thanks for what they have done, for that they do, and for what they will continue to do long after I have stepped away from public service.**

Alistair Forbes

Chairman