

## **Pitchcombe Annual Parish Meeting**

**13 May 2021**

### **Chairman's Report 2019 - 2021**

To everybody's surprise we did not have an annual parish meeting in 2020, and as a result did not get a chairman's report. I was not overwhelmed with requests to rectify this omission, so this year you are getting two for the price of one, hopefully though not twice as long. However, there has been rather a lot going on!

#### **Planning**

12 planning application in 2019 and 6 in 2020 were submitted in respect of 13 properties.

Whilst most of the planning applications in 2019 were uncontroversial the Parish Council became involved in the discussion regarding the garage extension at the top of Halfway Pitch which as noted in my 2019 report had apparently not been identified by the Parish Council in that year. Notwithstanding local opposition to the application and differing views on the way in which the original permission was executed, the District Council eventually granted planning permission.

The most important lesson to be learned is that those living close to a contested application should ensure that they individually comment to the District Council and do not assume that the Parish Council will identify problems with an application in sufficient time to make proper representation on their behalf.

With the advent of the Covid 19 pandemic, planning activity slowed down, but trees continued to grow and applications to fell trees in the conservation area continued as normal.

Outside of the conservation area the arrival of Ash dieback has led to some significant tree loss. Many landowners who have over the years maintained the rural landscape from which we all benefit have incurred heavy expense as a result.

#### **Maintenance**

Maintenance of paths, verges and foliage etc. remains an on-going interest of the Parish Council, who respond to concerns raised by Councillors and residents. Trimming growth adjacent to the main roads can be expensive as traffic control may need to be provided.

We also continued to give thought as to what might be done to reuse the old-style telephone box at the junction. As it was in the way of the new road layout, eventually this was removed by County Highways and stored at their depot, but various initiatives to re purpose it continue, although no agreed location has been found. The box is still available to us, but the cost of re-installation could be a significant budget item.

The ancient and recently unused bus shelter next to the telephone box also fell victim to the change in road alignment. However, as part of the scheme the village has been provided with a new and modern shelter at the A46 North bus layby, which has been welcomed by passengers.

## **Power Lines and Poles**

With the project to undergrounding powerlines around much of the village unfortunately dormant it was good that work on the section of the overhead lines behind the Church and Village Hall was started and the main trench between the A4173 and XXXX excavated, and the power cable laid in the spring of 2020. The final link trench across the graveyard could not be completed until the scaffolding for the new church roof was removed. This was completed in April 2021 and the overhead lines should be removed shortly. With an open trench between the church and the village hall it was possible to also install a data network cable between the two buildings which should allow a broadband connection for village hall users later this year.

We are pleased at achieving this part of the project which started over ten years ago when we approached the Cotswold Conservation Board for support in removing the overhead lines. We are very grateful to them and to Western Power Distribution for their supporting us, the funding for which came from the National fund to underground power cables in AONB's.

The remainder of the scheme for work in the conservation area has not been rejected but held pending new funds becoming available. We are hopeful that in due course the BT overhead installations currently blocking the scheme might become redundant as more of the village connect to the new Gigaclear optical fibre broadband.

When we started to pursue this matter, we anticipated it could be a long campaign and I trust the Parish Council will continue to lobby to complete the scheme for as long as it takes!

## **Traffic Issues**

The last few years have been dominated by road works. Following the resurfacing from Pitchcombe to Whaddon of the A4173 in 2018 the last two years have seen the major realignment of the A46/A4173 junction, for which work started in XXXXX and was not completed until mid 2020. Fortunately, most of the major diversions occurred whilst traffic was light during the Covid lockdown, so disruption was minimised.

The Parish Council is pleased to see this long awaited project being (more or less) completed. Discussions on alternative plans ranged far and wide over many years, and whilst not every resident was happy with every aspect of the solution in general the junction seems to be working satisfactorily. Entering and leaving Halfway Pitch is a slightly curious manoeuvre, and the immediate slope slightly increased but on balance the design seems to have proved well thought out given the extremely difficult topography of the junction.

I say more or less completed as we still await a decision on sorting out the speed limit. For years, the Parish Council on behalf of the village has argued that a 50 mph limit on the main roads and particularly at the junction is excessive. We have made extensive representation to get it reduced, and whilst over many years we have had some support from Gloucestershire Highways, bizarrely Gloucestershire Police have consistently objected. Their argument based on a rigid and (in our view) illogical interpretation of government guidance on the use of statistical models seems to be that as most drivers do not exceed 50 mph the present limit is fine. This of course ignores the practical stupidity of traversing the roads and junction at this speed. Perhaps they have other reasons but are not telling us.

I am sure the Parish Council will continue to fight for a reduction in speeds through the main roads.

## The Community

Pitchcombe is a small village. There are only 235 on the electoral roll. Over the years we have maintained an active and distinctive community with several groups and individuals working hard to make it a pleasant place to live. The groups are of course headed by the village hall and the church, who between them work hard to run the fetes, flower festivals and functions that we can all enjoy. They all need people getting together to make things happen, and we always need new people willing to join in and help. I know newcomers are often wary of volunteering for fear of disturbing established 'customs', but with a changing and aging population we need new folk to get involved. With Covid restrictions lifting there will be lots of things to get involved in.

A remarkable demonstration of village determination during the last 3 years has been the project to raise £200,000 to reroof the parish church – that almost £1,000 for each resident! The project led both by church members and non-regular churchgoers together worked hard but had great fun. A range of events and some inspired applications to trusts and the Heritage Lottery fund successfully raised the required cash, and we have now have one of the best natural stone roofs in the area, all within budget.

The village hall, an independent village trust, has continued to serve the village with a variety of activities, curtailed of course since March 2020 by the lockdowns. We all look forward to seeing a resumption of 'normal service'. Please do support the village events by helping, attending, and joining in with the organisations.

Throughout normal times and pandemics Pitchcombe Net (again an independent initiative) has continued to keep us informed of the local and wider issues we need to know and now reaches over 90% of the village households.

## This Council

Holly Paton was appointed clerk to succeed Roy Balgobin in March 2019 and has been a great support. Felicity Broome left the village and resigned as a Parish Councillor in May 2019. We are grateful for her effort particularly in setting up the Parish Council Website. Jamie Cross responded to our call for a volunteer was subsequently co-opted in May 2020.

In October 2020 Pitchcombe suffered a huge loss in the death of Michael Little. For many of us Michael was the embodiment of Pitchcombe, and as the major landowner his and his family's stewardship of the estate fields and properties has given us the delightful environment we all enjoy. Michael was a Parish Councillor for many years, including ten years as Chairman. He was for me a pleasure to work with, always helpful, practical, and looking to the best for the village.

Richard Pearson was co-opted in December 2020. I have been chairman for almost ten years and was hoping to resign from this post last year, but the Covid rules meant there was no election last year and as a result I remained chairman until September 2020. I am grateful to Philippa James, as Vice Chairman for stepping into this office, particularly as I was undergoing rather exhausting medical treatment at the time.

As a result of the recent uncontested election all existing parish councillors have been re-appointed.

And finally, a parting thought on why we are here. In law the Parish Council can do a whole host of things. Over the years we have tried to be an authentic voice of Pitchcombe within Stroud and Gloucestershire, representing our needs in the wider community. Within the village we keep an eye on planning, traffic, and road maintenance etc. Unlike some parishes we do not have much resource to do 'practical' things, relying on persuasion and the good offices of individuals and other organisations. For a small parish to undertake much more would require considerable increases to the annual Council Tax. Whilst in theory we have the legal ability to do this, I am not aware of many in the village who would support such a strategy, and we should continue our own version of 'small government'.

I do however believe this Parish Council is a key to preserving our 'identity' as an independent village; a role we should always hope to hand down for the benefit of future generations.

Nigel Shaw

FICE FCIPS MIMechE CEng

Chairman – Pitchcombe Parish Council 2019- 2020

DRAFT

**Appendix 1 – Pitchcombe Planning Applications 2019 – 2020**(To year ending 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020)

<b>SDC Reference No</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>SDC Decision</b>
S.20/0050/HHOLD	Sunnybank Halfway Pitch Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LJ	Single storey extension	Withdrawn
S.19/2589/TCA	Bedcroft Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LN	Works to Yew, Willow and Maple tree	Approved
S.19/2570/TCA	Spring Bank Cottage Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LN	Various tree works	Approved
S.19/2357/TCA	Gable End Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LN	Willow - Fell and replant	Approved
S.19/2187/TCA	Manor Farm Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LN	Tulip - Crown Reduction by 2.5 - 3m and crown raise to 3m.	Approved
S.19/2114/FUL	Resthaven Nursing Home Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LS	Convert a disused agricultural outbuilding to (C3) residential use	Withdrawn
S.19/2093/TCA	Pitchcombe Mill Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LN	Various tree works	Approved
S.19/1922/TCA	Elm Tree House Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LN	Various tree works	Approved
S.19/1587/HHOLD	Hillcrest Halfway Pitch Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LJ	Erection of a new outbuilding ancillary to the main dwelling (home office and storage)	Permitted
S.19/1298/MINAM	Sunnybank Halfway Pitch Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LJ	Minor amendment to permission S.18/2117/HHOLD - alterations to the materials and addition of Velux windows	Approved
S.19/1257/HHOLD	Vyners Halfway Pitch Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LJ	New garage/ carport	Permitted
S.19/0878/DISCON	Hillcrest Halfway Pitch Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LJ	Discharge of condition 3 (asbestos removal) from permission of the application S.17/0909/HHOLD (384821 - 207704)	Permitted

**Appendix 2 – Pitchcombe Planning Applications 2020 – 2021**

(To year ending 5<sup>th</sup> April 2021)

<b>SDC Reference No</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>SDC Decision</b>
S.21/0725/TCA	Hillside Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LN	1 x Common Yew: To begin shaping into a more formal traditional 'yew globe'.	Approved
S.21/0452/TCA	Mill Orchard Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LN	Various tree works	Approved
S.20/2381/TCA	Pitchcombe Mill Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LN	Various tree works	Approved
S.20/2075/TCA	Vyners Halfway Pitch Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LJ	Fell Goat Willow and Paulownia	Approved
S.20/1942/COU	The Byre Resthaven Nursing Home Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire	Conversion of cow byre to guest accommodation (C3) (Revised layout received 9.12.20)	Permitted
S.20/0942/HHOLD	Sunnybank Halfway Pitch Pitchcombe Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 6LJ	Single storey extension and use of garage as ancillary living accommodation	Permitted