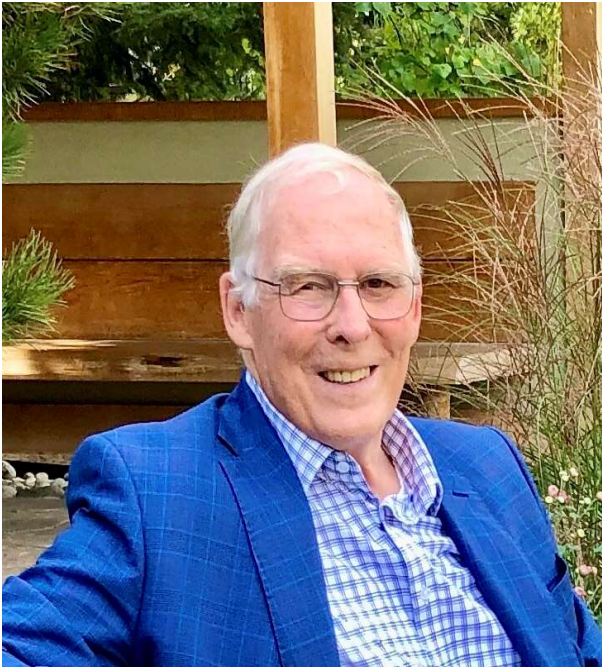


Annual Report from District Councillor Frank Pearson
Central Meon Valley Ward
March 2021



How does one describe the March 2020 to March 2021 year?

The whole has been, quite clearly dominated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Such a pandemic has not been seen before by any of us.

The Councils have Emergency Planning routines and policies in place following a major practice in 2016 by the County Emergency Planning Team. Of course, the whole has been directed by advice from SAGE – the Government Emergency Planners.

The policies were aided, at local level by Community Volunteers from Charities like Age Concern, from the Parish Councils, the local churches, and let us not forget those individuals who stepped forward to help their neighbours. The many teachers in our Primary Schools, and in Swanmore

College have done a superlative job in developing on-line teaching to assist the input of parents. Many will have a new appreciation of teachers, doctors, and nurses who have continued to work.

Thanks also to the local shop workers who have continued through this difficult year. This has been a reminder that if we do not use our local shops, we lose them. On-line shopping has ‘exploded’ so thanks again to our postal delivery teams, and delivery companies.

All carers, within the NHS and private organisations deserve an incredibly special vote of thanks. They have gone way beyond normal expectations required by their jobs.

Within that context, I and many other Councillors (and MPs) have been in semi-lockdown since March. The implication of that for me is that all Meetings have gone on-line. We have had to learn the idiosyncrasies of Microsoft Teams (for Council Meetings) or Zoom (for every other meeting). Those of you who have attended virtual Parish Council Meetings will understand that we all learned very quickly the need for a very efficient internet service. It was not too bad in Swanmore and Waltham Chase, but unfortunately Denmead and the Meon Valley often had difficulties.

Meanwhile our work as District Councillors continued via e-mail, or phone calls, rather than face to face chats. Planning issues were as usual, common. In this, Parish Councils are consultees, as are those Councillors that do not sit on the Planning Committee (for Planning applications, or on the Licensing Committee for new Pub licences, or for Taxi licensing. I have had the privilege of being a Deputy on both Committees during this last year.

As the Shadow Portfolio Holder for Environmental matters, I have a special interest in Climate Change Emergency matters, Biodiversity and the Green Environment so I was delighted when the Liberal regime, and the Government started raising the importance of these issues. I have been a member of the Air Quality Policy Group that at present is in final consultation about the emerging Air Quality Special Planning Document, that will link the Air Quality Action Plan to the emerging Local Plan that is presently under Consultation.

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To date, the Air Quality Action Plan focuses on 'transport' in Winchester urban area, rather than the District as a whole. In my opinion their view point is very 'narrow', as air pollution also comes from gas powered central heating in homes, and in offices! Garden bonfires don't help as they put PM2.5 into the air, the new licensing regime for the use of a wheelie bin does not help and is deemed by many to be an addition to our Council Tax if we have a garden!

The Health and Environment Policy Committee tries to raise the profile of what we hope will promote what can be done to protect 'delicate' habitats and therefore the flora and fauna that live in them. In my opinion Climate Change and Environmental matters also impinge on Planning. Defra, and Natural England are moving towards a *requirement to produce a minimum of 10% gain in Biodiversity*. These would mean that any 'development' of housing, business, or farming would have to look towards Environmental Protection as part of what they do. The planting of trees in protected 'wild areas', protecting ponds, and streams, developing Green (wildlife) Corridors, and green walls. Effectively, each one of us could help to mitigate against changes being brought by Climate Change, and Developments.

It is a requirement of landowners that drainage ditches and swales should be maintained to allow water to move downstream to streams and rivers. This impacts on residents with gardens, and on Developers. Neglect of these can lead to local 'ponding', or even flooding

Today this movement of water from developments and farmland is often polluted by nitrates, and phosphates. This is now of great importance because the sources of such (homes, and farmland) must now contain mitigation measures to stop pollution in the Meon Estuary, and in the Hamble Estuary.

I also sit on the Hamble River Management Committee. Much of this work has special interest to the river users who have moorings below the M27 bridge across the Hamble River. The river environment is also a theme that is of interest to us. Nitrate, and phosphate pollution impacts on the biodiversity of the rivers and the Solent.

I am also a member of the CPRE Planning and Policy Committee, the Countryside Charity, who are looking like the SDNP, to protect Rural England. Inevitable my focus is on Winchester District general, but the Meon Valley, and Southern Parishes in particular. I and others are looking to preserve the rural gaps between our villages, and hopefully, the development of a Green Belt north of the M27 motorway.

The battle is that planners of developments look at the environment, from an urban perspective, rather than following the view of the CPRE, and the SDNP. They look at it from a rural environmental viewpoint. Is that what is impacting on the proposed Five Oaks Farm Sand Quarry?

I joined the Council in 2002 to make sure that the villages in this Ward, were not forgotten by the people in Winchester. That determination is still in place.