

Mayor's Annual Report May 17th 2021

Well, what a tumultuous two years we have experienced after our last public Annual Town Meeting in May 2019. My report is a tale of two halves – pre-lockdown and post-lockdown in March 2020.

2019/2020

I think it's fair to say that 2019 was a very challenging time for this Council, as we had three temporary clerks as well as several months with no clerk at all. We finally welcomed Cas Leo as our permanent Town Clerk in late February 2020, and a couple of weeks later our worlds were turned upside down as we plunged into lockdown. Who would have thought it?

Autumn 2019 was particularly difficult, as our office staff spent several weeks with serious internet problems, and six months with a chaotic and wholly unacceptable banking service from Barclays. We had two councillor resignations, and were meanwhile in the midst of negotiations to take on the Library and relinquish the council offices in Chapel Street.

However, despite all the difficulties, we successfully navigated the legal hurdles and took ownership of the Library building and management of the Library Service on 1st November; and we gained three staff from the Library – Vicky, Sarah and Annie. We moved out of the old offices in January, and into a refurbished office space at the Library. Following elections in December 2019 and January 2020 we welcomed two new councillors, Daisy Gibbs and Chris Denley.

During the financial year 2019/2020, the Council awarded grants to a wide range of community groups and organisations in St Just and Pendeen: to our children and young people at The Ark Pendeen and Nancherrow Youth Centre, the Boxing and Table Tennis Clubs, and the Sports Centre; to groups such as the Twinning Association, the Miners' Chapel, the Community Land Trust, Pendeen Community Heritage, the Men's Shed, the Care and Repair Café, Lafrowda Festival and others besides.

Two groups linked to the Town Council were hard at work throughout that year:

- 1) The Climate Action Group, under the chairmanship of Cllr Constance Moore, brought together members of the community with councillors, working on raising awareness of this critical issue in our community
- 2) The Neighbourhood Planning Group, supported by Cllr Debbie Shephard, put in a huge amount of work from 2018 developing a plan for St Just and Pendeen. The household survey in June 2019 resulted in a response rate of almost 40%, with 1000 responses returned, and the team spent the following months analysing the data, liaising with Cornwall Council and local stakeholders, and committed to delivering proposals which reflect the community response.

I had the privilege, as Mayor, of joining in many events in the parish between May and March. From the Toddler Group at Nancherrow to the Memory Café; from the National Coastwatch Institution Evening to the St Just in Bloom Presentations; from Bosavern Community Farm to the Douglas Woolcock Transport Project; from Pendeen WI to Geevor Tin Mine; at Feast and the Annual Awards to residents; at events in all three of our schools..... it was a delight to meet so many people doing so many wonderful things in our community. I prioritised visits within the parish over invitations beyond, but I also attended mayoral functions in St Ives, Carbis Bay, Penzance, Hayle and Marazion, along with the opening of Kresen Kernow in Redruth.

The two most momentous events for me were the visit of Langa Methodist Choir from South Africa for several days in July and the Cornish Gorsedh in September – the sights and sounds of these will stay with me for ever. But other summer highlights included the Midsummer Bonfire at Chapel Carn Brea, the Federation of Old Cornwall Societies visit, the Lafrowda Festival, and Mayor's Sunday at Pendeen. Autumn saw the Levant 100 commemorations, along with St Just in Bloom successes, and St Just Feast. Christmas brought the usual gatherings, nativities and carol services, and we prepared for Spring with the St Piran's Celebrations, as well as several tree-planting schemes in Kenidjack with the National Trust, and in Botallack.

2020/2021

Then, just as we thought we would be moving into a more settled time as a Council, we found ourselves in lockdown when COVID-19 took over our lives and brought all normality to a halt. We had barely finished unpacking from the move. The Library and Council Offices were abruptly closed, staff worked from home, and council meetings were suspended. However, just four weeks later we resumed with virtual meetings, and we held nineteen Full Council meetings on Zoom, along with a range of committee meetings. Tonight is our first physical meeting since early March 2020! Our priorities changed, with a focus on supporting those in the community through lockdown. Cllr Daisy Gibbs worked to develop a network across the parish of over ninety volunteers, responsible for every corner of the parish, to ensure a lifeline for those needing support. The Library foyer became a collection point for the Foodbank, and received remarkable support from the community.

Initially, our main focus was dealing with the 'new normal' which was living with COVID-19. This included, when businesses started opening up in the summer in St Just, consulting with residents and businesses about how best to support safe social distancing. This led to attempts to slow the traffic driving through the town with a series of road signs. The Library reopened its doors slightly in July, with a reduced service, though with extended opening hours. We continued to grapple with the vagaries of the planning system, and then had to familiarise ourselves with the wide-ranging changes to planning which were announced; along with frustrations over the lack of planning enforcement. We heard concerns about the future of recycling. There were continuing discussions about increasing wildflower spaces for pollinators, to be balanced against the need for visibility and accessible walkways for pedestrians.

As lockdown measures eased a little in the autumn, I set to work to complete the Town Council's Emergency Plan. In our Council meetings, councillors continued to express concerns about speeding traffic through the parish, and inappropriate parking. Concerns about the dangerous junction by Boscawell Stores led to a site meeting, but nothing was resolved, sadly.

We marked Remembrance Sunday and Remembrance Day with moving ceremonies in both St Just and Pendeen. I also presented our Annual Citizens' Awards out and about across the parish – to Mo O'Brien at Cape Cornwall Surgery, for rowing the Atlantic; to Archie Prout at Cape Cornwall School, for his sporting achievement; to Daisy Gibbs and Jo Warburton in Botallack, for their work with the Daisy Chain; and to Riley Rivett in front of his neighbours in Talveneth Pendeen. for his good neighbourliness during lockdown. Those were four very happy and memorable occasions.

As 2021 arrived, we were delighted with the efforts of our 'Community Ambassador' Doug, for trying to tackle the dog fouling and littering issue in St Just. Although the project from Cornwall Council has now finished, I really hope that Doug will be retained by our Council to continue his sterling service in this area.

The Emergency Plan was completed and submitted, although it will need updating next month with the new Council in place, and continual updates to the contents and contacts. This plan is something we hope we will never need to implement, but it's really important to have a plan in place.

The Neighbourhood Plan was drafted, passed all its tests, and shortly concludes its public consultation; it is anticipated that the referendum will take place in the autumn. It already carries weight in planning applications, so it will be vital that all councillors are well informed about its contents to ensure that decisions are made in accordance with the Plan.

Applications for grant funding reduced during lockdown, because very few local organisations were continuing to operate. However, grants were awarded to the Air Ambulance, Citizen's Advice, Lafrowda Festival, the Ordinalia, the Nancherrow Centre, Pendeen Community Cemetery, Wheal Buzzy, the Childrens Ark Pendeen, and the rugby, boxing and football clubs in St Just.

Work to improve our environment has continued this spring, with plans for the space around the Library, in the town, and footpaths and trails both rural and coastal. As my own contribution to this, I committed my Mayor's Allowance this year to public amenities - the purchase of benches for St Just and Botallack.

Understandably, we had no Mayor's Sunday Community Celebration this year, but moved online instead and a 'virtual' event is available to view on YouTube, featuring local children plus musicians, singers and dancers, as well as reflections on truth, justice and humility – important qualities for everyone, and particularly all in public service.

Sadly, however, there are several outstanding issues awaiting completion. The transfer to the Town Council of the toilets and car parks in St Just and Pendeen has been rumbling on for over ten years, and I never dreamed, when I joined the council eight years ago, that we would still be waiting to sort this out. Let's hope that it can be resolved very soon. The ground works and entrances to the Plen an Gwary are also taking a long time to sort out and, again, I can only hope that this will now be completed before the winter sets in.

Other longstanding issues which it is to be hoped can be addressed by the new Council include Climate Action matters and speeding traffic – this latter an issue which I'm sure our former mayor Clemo will take up in his new role as our Cornwall Councillor, and about which I know he feels strongly, along with policing matters.

One positive from lockdown was the formation of the "Mayors of Cornwall" group, which started meeting monthly on Zoom in May 2020. I found it both interesting and helpful to build relationships with Mayors right across Cornwall as far as Torpoint and Saltash, and discuss issues of common concern; I hope this is an initiative which will continue with the new mayors of Cornwall.

In conclusion, I want to acknowledge the work put in by the previous Council, seven of whom have not returned to this table for the coming four years, and whose insights and commitment have been so valuable. I also want to thank our Council staff – our Town Clerk Cas, office staff Shirley and Julie, and Library staff Vicky and Sarah, along with Annie – for their steadfastness and adaptability during a period of change and disruption they could never have imagined. Hopefully the Council can look forward to a return to a form of normality in the coming months, as new councillors are welcomed who now take up the reins in service to this exceptional community. I wish you all well. Thank you.

Marna Blundy

2019/2020 Mayor's Allowance spent on:

- Cape Cornwall School Arts Awards
- Memorial plaque for Carnyorth resident and campaigner
- Staff post-Christmas meal
- Gift to David Gallie
- Donations to:
Pendeen Lunch Club, Pendeen Parish Hall, Pendeen Outreach, Nancherrow Project,
St Piran in St Just, St Just Community Nativity & St Just Care and Repair Café (7)

2020/2021 Mayor's Allowance spent on:

- 3 benches for public use outside the Library and in Botallack
- Staff meal