

## **Chairman's Report**

To

### **The Antrobus Parish Council (APC) Annual General Meeting (AGM)**

18<sup>th</sup> May 2020

This year's AGM is a departure from previous years as there cannot be a public Parish general meeting for me to deliver this report. Government Regulations prohibit local government and other such meetings to contain the spread of Covid -19. The AGM of the Parish Council Councillors will be held via a video link to which my report is to be noted as a public record and published. There will be a Parish general meeting when the current 'lock down' regulations are lifted.

The APC deals with a range of issues at its monthly meetings and these are reported on our website and notice boards in the village. This report is to bring out some of the bigger issues that have affected the APC over the last year and will continue to be relevant for subsequent years.

#### **COVID - 19**

Covid-19 is the dominant event of my last year as Chairman. It was completely unexpected at the beginning of the APC year in May 2019. Quite frankly there was no contingency plan in place within any level of local government to implement. APC must learn from that fact. Guidance on Covid 19 given by Central Government has been supplemented by local initiatives. In this respect Antrobus has reacted with tremendous co-operation and support from within our community.

The Parish Council, the Antrobus Village Hall (AVH) and the Antrobus Community Shop Association (ACSA) immediately sought to respond locally. It published a joint action plan distributed to every household within 48 hours. The Village Hall had to close. The ACSA Tea room also had to close but the retail side of the enterprise became the hub to ensure food supplies for members of the village. A new Covid-19 'Whats App' group organised 'foraging', prescription deliveries, the exchange of baking advice, sources of yeast and flour and toilet rolls to name just a few. Working with other Parish Councils the APC has been able to order and distribute hand sanitisers to every household for use if soap and hot water is not available. From comments on social media and emails received by the Parish Clerk this initiative has been much appreciated.

Informal networks to support people have also operated through the St Marks Church, the Methodist Chapel, the Quaker Meeting House and St Mark's school. Online contact has become the norm for local clubs and associations. The NHS medical staff living in the village have kept us informed of the challenges they are facing giving a sense of authenticity that news media does not always convey. Our thanks to them and their colleagues must not be forgotten in the future.

The Parish Council has kept in close touch with other Parish Councils through the Cheshire Association of Local Councils (Chalc). Our Marbury Ward Councillors have kept us informed of the response of Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) to Covid-19. Ward Councillor Lynn Gibbon has been able to attend our meetings and been very supportive in difficult and demanding circumstances.

To all the people who have self isolated, volunteered to keep the ACSA open, distributed over 300 sanitisers, baked cakes, sourced other food items, secured oil supplies, arranged transport, stood in queues for prescriptions for others - we thank you.

## **Climate Change**

Earlier in the year, from mid October to March, we experienced 3 times the average rainfall and at times an intensity of rain (inches or millimetres per hour) never previously recorded in the UK. This has caused significant disruption to agriculture with fields unable to be ploughed and planted and animals being kept in winter accommodation longer than might otherwise have been the case. Roads in the Parish have been flooded and some culverts under roads for field drainage damaged, requiring roads to be closed for repair. CW&C carried out some improvements to the underground sewers at the junction of Knutsford Road, School Lane and Barbers Lane. There is still a partial blockage on the original sewer pipe and CW&C know they have to come back to fix that. We have been notified by CW&C they are allocating some of their budget for projects to alleviate damage through flooding and climate change. The APC has discussed the need for a new relief sewer at this point to cope with expected rainfalls and take that water away from the centre. This proposal meets the criteria of flood protection and climate change and the APC will continue to press CW&C to allocate funds for this work.

## **Highway Maintenance**

Highway maintenance continues to be an issue on the village road network, which is 36 miles long over 33 roads. Reduced budgets year on year for District Councils has meant maintenance has not been carried out. This is not just a problem for Antrobus but affects many district councils who are Highway Authorities. The 'Greenbook' approach means rural areas are affected to a much greater extent than urban areas of any district council. What the Greenbook does is pose the test of 'benefit to most people' by the proposed expenditure. The consequence is urban areas and even South of England versus the North results in public expenditure meeting that test leaves less for the North nothing for rural areas. Antrobus has been on CW&C highway maintenance programme for several years but always at the bottom of the list because it is a small Parish in terms of population<sup>1</sup>. So the road surface year. What might have been a small job becomes a much larger one. After the last election the Prime Minister no less said his government would replace the Greenbook test with a more equitable assessment procedure. We wait to see the practical effect of this change. In the meantime the APC asks everyone to use the CW&C website to report every highway issue and send a photograph please as this helps the engineers at CW&C to assess the many complaints they receive. The APC will also report complaints it receives but individual complaints are added up so report it to both to the APC and directly to CW&C. It has more impact.

With 33 roads and 36 miles to maintain in Antrobus it is helpful information for the engineers to have.

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<sup>1</sup> 791 persons recorded in the 2011 Census. Estimated December 2018 as 747. Source UK Office for National Statistics website. Population living in a given area is not the only indicator of use or wider importance of a local highway network to a wider area than a Parish boundary.

Works have been carried out by CW&C to the footways and pavement crossing to drives on Knutsford Road and we expect CW&C to return to finish the programme after Covid-19 enables CW&C to operate normally. The APC has been pressing CW&C to implement, by extending the School Lane 20mph zone to cover the length of Knutsford Road and Barbers Lane to the 20mph zone in the Old Orchard, a Home Zone. This would reduce the speed of vehicular traffic through the 'centre ' of the village and rationalise the current speed limits of 30mph and 20 mph into a single speed limit of 20mph. It would be clearer for the motorist and safer for pedestrians. It would apply also to cyclists and deter road time trials where cycling speeds often exceed 20mph. The APC continues to press CW&C for the necessary finance for this road safety initiative that is consistent with Government policy and guidelines.

### **Town and Country Planning (T&CPAct)**

Quietly, and without any public consultation in Antrobus, Warrington District Council are promoting the release of 600 acres of greenbelt for development in the Parish of Appleton Thorn which borders Antrobus to the North of the Parish. This is a major change to the physical environment in the area. For several years now we have been concerned about HGVs navigating the narrow lanes and ditches to traverse Antrobus to Barley Castle Industrial area. This is usually because the driver has come off the motorway network at J10 of the M56, found weight restrictions on roads in Appleton Thorn, and followed the driver's satellite navigation onto the small lanes of Antrobus. We have recorded examples of HGV's stuck in drainage ditches and damage caused to hedgerows and ancient mature trees. The traffic police have been required to attend in some cases. This will only get worse as the 600 acres is developed mainly for distribution. Stobart submitted a planning application to Warrington for a major warehouse (634,910 sq ft) and HGV driving school at Barley Castle. The APC wrote to the Secretary of State to request the Stobart application be called in for determination. The application was granted consent in July 2019 by Warrington. The PC had asked CW&C to make the same request of the Secretary of State. CW&C declined saying it was not a matter for them as an adjoining Planning Authority. The APC disagree with this because the legislation is clear that where development is on the boundary of two Planning Authorities, and particularly where the impact of the development is likely to affect the local authority that is not the Planning Authority, then it should consult with the adjoining local authority. The 600 acres has yet to be decided. We are grateful to the input and support from Marbury Ward Cllr Phil Marshall in this matter.

Please continue to let the Parish Clerk of future incidents involving HGVs with photographs if possible. In presenting Antrobus's case evidence of the matters complained of is vital.

Other planning applications where APC is a statutory consultee have been dealt with and are reported in the published minutes of the APC. Enforcement action by Warrington planning authority in conjunction with CW&C against Applejacks entrance onto the New Road Arley at the boundary of Antrobus and Appleton Thorn continues.

The operation of the section 106 provision in connection with allocation of property on Manley Close has been corrected by Vale Royal Housing Association and the APC continue to monitor the situation.

## **The Antrobus Community Shop and Tea Room (ACSA)**

The 'Van', as it is affectionately known by some, has proved it's worth to our community since it opened and in particular in recent weeks. ACSA, after its first year of trading from the Van, has been investigating how to sustain the future and has consulted with CW&C planning officers. ACSA wants to use the Neighbourhood Planning legislation to develop its ideas for a new shop and tea room. CW&C advised that the Parish Council is the only 'qualifying body' that can apply for a 'neighbourhood area' under the 'Neighbourhood Planning' provisions of the T&CPAct. ACSA has asked APC to do so and APC has agreed. ACSA will now be able to develop its proposal for public consultation in Antrobus. As part of the ACSA proposal will be a reintroduction of a post office facility. The shop landlord sold the premises and the post box was taken out of service. The Royal Mail did not follow its own requirements for that process of decommissioning the post box. The APC and individual members of the community successfully complained at this arbitrary and irregular action and sought to have a post box reinstated. This has been done and is now located close to the former telephone kiosk on School Lane. Please use it or lose it. Royal Mail continues to reduce their letter collection and delivery services by removing post boxes.

## **The Children's Playground**

The playground is the responsibility of the Parish Council. Unfortunately the 'lock down regulations' requires such facilities to be closed. We are taking the opportunity to arrange for maintenance work to be carried out. The timing is however dependent on the weather and availability of contractors.

## **The Antrobus War Memorial**

The war memorial for Antrobus is located inside St Marks Church. It is the engraved choir stalls with names of those who died in the two world wars. As part of the commemoration of the armistice in November 1918 to halt the fighting on the western front in Europe, and subsequent signing of the Peace Treaty in July 1919 ending WW1, the APC felt as its contribution and support of the Armed Forces Covenant,<sup>2</sup> and to complement the other acts of remembrance, that the names on the memorial could be made clearer and easier to read. To do this required the consent of the Church of England Diocese authorities and that has taken a considerable amount of time. Under the Covid-19 emergency regulations churches are closed but when St Marks is able to re-open you will see that the work to the war memorial has been completed. Mr Silvano Cioci Faux (Northwest Murals) is the restorer Master Craftsman who carried out the work. The APC will continue to ensure the memorial is appropriately maintained. The Commonwealth War Grave Commission is to attend to the maintenance of the grave of Walter Keen<sup>3</sup> in St Marks.

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<sup>2</sup> The Armed Forces Covenant (2011) is between *the People of the United Kingdom and Her Majesty's Government and all those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown and their families*". The current government intends to bring forward primary legislation and has established the Office for Veteran Affairs in the Cabinet Office to ensure the Covenant is part of public policy.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Keen aged 16 killed in July 1918 whilst serving with the Cheshire Regiment.

## **Manchester Airport**

The airport is holding consultations over its proposals for future flight paths. The background to this topic is a long running series of consultations over the future planned expansion of the airport. This is a national infrastructure project that the APC is not likely to be able to greatly influence. The location of Antrobus to the Southwest of the airport is in the direction of most 'take offs' from the airport as the prevailing wind is from the Southwest to give lift to the aircraft taking off. The airport intends to install computer take off capability in order to increase the number of take offs in the available airspace. The other consideration is the height to which the aircraft will have reached over Antrobus. The higher is less intrusive and steeper climbs could be considered. We are not able to say exactly what the impact on Antrobus may be of these proposed arrangements. We think this is a significant matter to affect Antrobus. Cllr Carol Bunn is our main liaison with the airport and of course anyone from Antrobus can attend public meetings.

## **St Marks School**

I met the current Chair of Governors, Mrs Teresa Nixon, and had a tour of the school during the school day. My apologies for any interruption this may have caused. St Marks continues to offer a 'good' (OFSTED) primary school education. The Parish Council fully supports the retention of the school in Antrobus. It's federation structure with Gt Budworth is considered by the school Governors to be the right structure for the two schools and the Church of England diocese are providing continuing support to this Grant Aided School. Early years are full and this is expected to continue. The PC has made a grant award towards the new garden experience that you can see from the School Lane frontage. We wish everyone in the school continued success and congratulations on being third in best performing primary schools. (17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2019 Northwich Guardian)

## **The APC Finances**

The APC is advised by Central Government to raise its precept year on year by inflation to avoid 'spikes' in future increases. On your community charge bill from CW&C for the current year (2020/2021) it shows an increase of 1.3% for the Antrobus Parish precept. That is lower than the predicted inflation target of the Bank of England and lower than the other named statutory bodies on the bill. The APC seeks to keep cost down for every household. The APC believes it has appropriate reserves for contingent liabilities that are reasonably foreseeable. The current account is in balance and the APC has no long term debt to finance in the coming year.

## **Your Parish Council Profile**

APC is made up of Councillors with a variety of backgrounds and experiences. They receive no allowances or other payment. The gender balance reflects the population of Antrobus estimated in 2018 to be 51% male and 49% female. The age distribution is close to the age distribution for Antrobus of 62% between 18 and 64 years. Similarly the other metrics of country of birth, ethnic group and religion are comparable with the profile of Antrobus. In the year Cllr Jackie Gratey resigned. The APC thank her for her service. There is currently one vacancy for a person to be co-opted onto the APC.

## **Conclusion**

The Parish Council is the most appropriate agency to represent the community of Antrobus with public agencies outside Antrobus. Those agencies such as the District Council (CW&C) in its many guises genuinely want to obtain information, and perceptions from an informed and local community source to counter those who simply shout the loudest. This is also true of our Ward Councillors who are engaged in debate at the district council level of our local government. This is not a quick moving process. It requires persistence and clarity in presentation.

As Parish Councillors we have been greatly assisted in this work by Simon Palmer who within 25 paid hours per month as Parish Clerk and Financial Officer processes a lot of information in the digital world we live in. It is important the Chairman and Clerk have a good working relationship and I am very grateful for his support over recent years and recognise a review of the paid hours should be re-considered going forward.

To my colleague Councillors - my term in office has been easier and more enjoyable because of your support and contribution to the work and I thank you all for that.

Prior to being on the APC I was not at all clear what the role of these historic institutions was in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One might feel it is a layer of local government that could be eliminated to reduce the tax (precept) burden on us all? I am however now convinced that well run and responsive Parish Councils, such as Antrobus, bring directness to people who would not be heard at all if they did not live in a Parish Council area. The value of a Parish Council's right, as a statutory body, to be heard is not to be underestimated and should not be easily given up by Parishes. I encourage everyone to consider giving some of your time to being a Parish Councillor. It is open to anyone over the age of 18. Please contact the Parish Clerk or speak to any current Parish Counsellor to express your interest. You can make a difference in the community in which you live.

In closing may I wish Antrobus Parish Council a long and successful future and I am grateful for the opportunity to have served on it.

Stephen Barker  
Chairman (2018 -2020)

May 2020