**Chairman’s Annual Report 2019 – 2020**

The past year has been dominated by the application for the development of a pig rearing unit in the field adjacent to Squirrel Wood.

An initial application was made in 2016 for the erection of a building to be used for the storage of plant and equipment associated with the farming activities (arable) in the field. This was approved, without objection, as it was felt that such a unit on site would reduce the amount of heavy agricultural equipment traffic in the village. No development had taken place, apart from the creation of a hard core “roadway” from The Abbe’s Walk to the proposed building site, and the installation of a new, wider, gateway entrance to the field.

In March 2019, the farmer applied for permission to vary the use of the building to that of a pig rearing unit. This was immediately objected to by the Council, as well as virtually all the residents. A separate campaign was started by a group of residents to raise awareness of the application and its implications for the life and character of our village. Whilst not being part of this group, the Parish Council supported various activities organised by them, including raising petitions of objection from all residents in the village, participating in the mass lobbying of the parents of scouts attending their annual weekend in Squirrel Wood, speaking to Radio Sheffield, making a statement on the ‘Stop the Pig Farm’ website, and contacting various bodies involved in preserving the green and wildlife environment. The Parish Council also part-funded the cost of employing a planning consultant to help in the preparation of objection material, within the strict financial limits imposed by legislation.

After many delays and re-submissions of objections, DMBC eventually refused the application in September 2019.

In December 2019, the farmer then raised a new application, which was very little changed in substance from the previous one. Again, all previous objections were resubmitted, and the campaign group did more work, again financially supported (within the limits) by the Parish Council. This application was refused in April 2020, basically on the same grounds as the previous one, namely, noise affecting the camp site, and traffic, due to the inadequacy of The Abbe’s Walk to accommodate large vehicles.

We await the reaction of the applicant, though the general feeling is that he won’t go away, having invested heavily in the project so far, and, indeed, bought a house in the village.

Now, an update on our Future Priorities statement from 2018.

The fly tippers never stop! Keeping Burghwallis tidy has been an on-going activity, with two “organised” litter pick days on top of the regular “sweeps” of the village by Council members. We had planned to participate in the Great British Spring Clean in April, but this had to be cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak. It is hoped to be able to pick up this activity in September. The closure of the Household Recycling Centre has also resulted in more fly tipping. DMBC do respond to our reports to remove the offending materials.

Following on from the removal of ivy along Grange Lane, we went round all the trees in the Playing Field, and stripped ivy off many of the trees there. We also had 3 dead trees cut down in the park, as there was a danger that they could fall in a gale, and potentially injure children playing in there. Another batch of saplings were planted along Scorcher Hills Lane, to fill in some gaps and replace those which had been damaged. These are supplied free of charge by the Woodland Trust together with support canes and plastic sheaths.

Playing Field (and Pinfold) inspections continue to be made and reported weekly. There is usually little more than small amounts of litter. The new grass cutting contractor has done a very good job and has been retained for the 2020 season.

Burghwallis Hall is still for sale, and there does not appear to have been much activity. There was one prospective sale in the offing, but the buyer backed off when they heard about the proposed pig farm. They were reportedly going to spend a million pounds in renovations/conversion. The crucifix which stood in the grounds near the road has been removed “for safe keeping and renovation”, to be returned when the fate of the building is known. The war memorial wall has been assessed and appears to be stable. The apparent “movement” that we noticed must have happened some time ago. Tell-tales have been fixed to the structure to give an indication of any movement. There has not been any in over 6 months. All other historic sites are in good order, though one of the signs has been “removed” from its wall fixing – to be replaced in due course.

We continue to support the “public” buildings in the village, although activities associated with them are suspended at the moment due to the coronavirus situation.

We approached DMBC, again, in order to try to get a 20 mph speed limit imposed though the central part of the village, but the reply came back in the negative, citing the multitude of research and regulations involved in changing the limit, and the fact that there have not been any “serious” road traffic incidents for some time.

Once again, we organised the annual Pensioners’ Christmas Lunch at The Burghwallis (paid for by the revenue from the Poor’s Field) with an attendance of some 34, and the usual Christmas tree lighting event. The rental contract for the Poor’s Field was renewed for a further 10 years, and the rent renegotiated.

The development of the wooded area adjacent to the pub car park was completed during the year, thanks to the efforts of Jan and John Murray.

Unusually, considering the age profile of the residents, we only lost one person during the year, Margaret Bell, widow of former Parish Councillor, Ted Bell, though we also report the passing of Irene Simm, former owner of The Burghwallis pub.

The PC finances are in good order, with reserves in place within the guidelines for local councils, and, once again, we were able to keep the precept at the same level as previous years.

We would like to thank the residents of our village for their continued support of our activities, and we hope that the recent “coming together” of people in opposing the pig farm application will stand us all in good stead for the future.