**Croft Parish Council**

**Chair’s Annual Report 2020/21**

**Covid-19**

Parish council meetings were held remotely via Zoom throughout the year starting in May 2020, having been cancelled in March and April due to the Covid-19 lockdown. The Christmas 2020 lights switching-on event was cancelled due to the difficulties of organising it on a socially-distanced basis. Unfortunately Croft Carnival due in July was also cancelled by the Carnival Committee.

The playing field was closed from 24th March according to the government’s Covid-19 guidelines, and re-opened on 14th May but with the children’s playing equipment still closed. The play area remained closed until early July, when it was reopened on the basis of usage limited by health guidelines.

**Playing Field Maintenance**

The parish council has continued to devote much attention to the upkeep of this valued community facility. We have monitored the safety and state of repair of the playing equipment, with regular comprehensive reports from a contractor. Repainting of much of the equipment is to take place. The soft pour surface at the play area, which was in need of attention, was replaced. Some of the trees are to be replaced and a wild flower garden put in. A new drainage system will alleviate flooding in an area of the field, and the benches have been repaired. Plans to demolish the toilet block have largely stalled due to Covid-19 issues.

**Parkside**

In June it was announce that the plan put forward by St. Helens Borough Council to develop the land at the site of the former Parkside colliery into a warehousing/distribution site had been called in for a public inquiry. The parish council, which had previously objected to this plan, decided to appoint its planning consultant, Peter Black, to represent it alongside Culcheth& Glazebury Parish Council.

The public inquiry was subsequently held in January/February 2021 but its outcome is as yet unknown.

**HS2/ Rail Transport Provision**

In May the National Infrastructure Commission conducted a Rail Needs Assessment for the Midlands and North, and the parish council submitted a response once again outlining its opposition to HS2 Phase 2b. Our response also emphasised the need for an integrated approach which took into consideration the requirements for east-west rail provision as envisaged by Northern Powerhouse Rail. With regard to this, it was made clear that any consideration of rail provision for Leigh via the reopening of Kenyon Junction was a decision to be taken within Warrington rather than Wigan and with due regard to the needs of local residents.

In November, we continued our opposition to HS2 in responding to the ‘HS2 Phase 2b Western Leg Design Refinement Consultation’. We made clear our view that the Golborne link is unnecessary, expensive, and should be cancelled. We were however happy to report that HS2 listened to our pleas to keep Wigshaw Lane open, and that it would now be realigned on to a bridge over the track.

**M62 Junction 11 Motorway Service Area**

The parish council continued its opposition to a proposal to build a motorway service area and a 100 bedroom hotel at junction 11 of the M62. In June the chair wrote to Charlotte Nichols MP asking that the proposal should be called in for a public inquiry.

**‘Planning for the Future’ White Paper**

In October members held a joint meeting with members of Culcheth & Glazebury Parish Council and Peter Black to discuss a response to the government consultation on its new planning white paper ‘Planning for the Future’. Peter produced a comprehensive objection to this, which was also used by Culcheth & Glazebury Parish Council. We also asked Charlotte Nichols MP to make our views known to the Secretary of State for Housing & the Environment on this.

**M6 Jns 21a-26 Smart Motorway Scheme**

The concern was raised in February that, despite the dreadful safety record of smart motorways, the M6 was to be ‘upgraded’ from the Croft interchange north to Junction 26. We wrote to both the MPs for Warrington North and Leigh asking them to make representations to the Transport Secretary against this multimillion pound project. Our concern was for the safety of the many Croft residents who use the M6 on a daily basis, and who had already had to suffer a similar project on the M62 close by which caused years of disruption.

**Travellers**

In August 2020 travellers set up an encampment on Silver Lane, and again in November, breaking the barrier to enter. The officer at Warrington Borough Council responsible for travellers, Ian Brackenbury, was called to attend the December meeting to answer questions.

**Traffic Problems/ 7.5 Ton weight Limit**

The issue of commuter traffic speeding through the village was an ongoing concern. Speed activated cameras were installed on Heath Lane, and the police were asked to address this with radar gun enforcement measures.

There were further concerns in May 2020 and again in April 2021 about heavy goods vehicles using local lanes to access the recycling site at Kenyon Junction. These have been addressed by the imposition by Warrington Borough Council of a 7.5 ton weight limit and representations to Opus Ltd to ensure their vehicles take another route.

**Fly Tipping**

The parish council continued the battle against illegal fly tipping, which had been particularly bad due to the closure of recycling facilities during early lockdown. Deterrent signs warning against this were installed in July on Main Lane and subsequently (though as yet unsatisfactorily) on Sandy Brow Lane.

**Support for ‘Crofters Helping Crofters’**

The parish council recognised the great work done by this group of volunteers during the Covid-19 lockdown, in looking after local people in need. At Christmas 2020, the parish council donated £400 to the group towards its Croft Christmas Trail which was enjoyed by 200 children. We are also providing support to Croft Litter Pickers in their efforts to eradicate dog waste from our pavements.

**Planning Applications**

Throughout the year the parish council has been consistently vigilant in assessing the many planning applications brought forward and ensuring that the green belt and character of the area are respected.

**Flooding**

Great concern was expressed at the February 2021 meeting about the flooding which had taken place in the village, and the issue of the many blocked gullies causing this was taken up with Warrington Borough Council to get the problem areas cleared. If necessary a contractor would be independently commissioned to undertake cleaning works to resolve this.

**Round Thorn**

The issue of the poor accessibility and parking problems on Round Thorn was once again raised in February, an issue which had been a running sore since at least 1999. Care workers attending residents and transport collecting special needs children have difficulty accessing Round Thorn, and potentially the access for emergency vehicles needed to be addressed. The parish council raised the issue with Charlotte Nichols MP with whom a resident had a meeting, and we are hopeful that discussions with Torus, the social housing provider, will at last bear fruit.

**Parish Plan**

It was resolved in February that progress on the Croft Parish Plan published in 2019 would be regularly reviewed.

**Thanks**

On behalf of the parish council I would like to thank our departing members, Merril Cummerson, Carole Thewsey and Martyn Griffiths for their dedication and work not only over the last year but for the whole period of their membership.

At the March meeting we said goodbye to Siobhan on her departure to work for the Cabinet Office, and our thanks are due once again to her.

Finally, Mike has of course given us notice of his resignation as Clerk. We cannot thank him enough for his service to Croft and he will be enormously missed.

Norman Partington
Chair 2020/21