Snippets from your Ward Councillor

First, I wish to express my thanks to all who voted at the May elections. It was humbling to be returned for a fourth term with an increased majority. The ward now includes Puxton and I will do my best to work with residents in both parishes to tackle problems and seek positive outcomes for our communities. I am also continuing as Leader of the Independent/Green group on Council.

One positive outcome of lobbying is the restoration of direct bus service from Congresbury to Clevedon and Portishead four times a day on weekdays. Route 88 may not fully compensate for the former X5 service, but we should use it whenever we can to ensure it continues. The bus stop is at the bottom of Kent Road.

North Somerset Council and the Parish Council are preparing to defend the refusal of the Barratt Homes application on the site off Brinsea Road. The appeal will be heard in October. Meanwhile, the Secretary of State has indicated that he is not ready to give a clear ruling on the Core Strategy housing number requirement and method of calculating five-year supply of sites available. So a great deal of uncertainty remains about future development. The Council have plans for encouraging more housing in Weston Town Centre and are purchasing the old Magistrates’ Courts and Police Station with that in mind.

The pedestrian crossing near the Plough has now been agreed and we await a start date for the work. It will be a Zebra crossing and will need to be used with great care and awareness of approaching vehicles. Road safety in and around the village remains a major concern. I was pleased to note that our Police and Crime Commissioner, Sue Mountstevens, has added road safety to her major priorities.

Tom Leimdorfer
leimdorfer@care4free.net; 01934 830435

Village Toilets

Two years ago the Parish Council took on the ownership of the public toilets from North Somerset. On take-over it carried out essential maintenance work on the building and installed new equipment such as hand dryers. Mary Keyte agreed to take on the cleaning.

Over the past two years there have been instances of vandalism which have been dealt with promptly by the Parish Council to minimise the disruption to users of the facilities. Unfortunately, the situation has got much worse recently – there have been incidences of damage to the fittings and very offensive graffiti which has necessitated expensive repairs and redecorations. The toilets had to be closed whilst the necessary works were carried out. Mary has had to regularly deal with the removal of vomit, human and dog faeces and urine from the building and its surroundings. The majority of the vandalism and misuse of the toilets seems to occur in the evenings and over the weekends.

The facilities are much used by villagers and visitors who find them a very useful asset. To minimise the damage and expense caused the Parish Clerk has over the past few months opened the toilets in the morning and closed them at about 5 o’clock in the evening on her work days (Monday to Wednesday) and when she is able to do so on other days and weekends.

The Parish Council has decided to continue with this arrangement and see if the limited opening time overcomes the vandalism problem. However, it does mean that the Parish Council cannot guarantee when the toilets will be open. Perhaps you could help?

We are looking for volunteers who would assist with the opening and closing of the toilets. If you are prepared to help pleased contact the Parish Clerk on 01934 838802 or Clerk@Congresbury-pc.gov.uk.

Also, if you are in the vicinity of the toilets and witness any inappropriate behaviour or vandalism please report it to the Parish Clerk.

Di Hassan - Chair of Parish Council
Proposed Name change of Congresbury Parish Council

In England, parish councils were formed in 1894 to take over local oversight of social welfare and civic duties in towns and villages. Before this date a variety of groups based around ecclesiastical (church) parishes had responsibility for these matters, in a system of local government that dated back to the feudal system of the 8th century.

It has been proposed that Congresbury Parish Council (CPC) changes its name to Congresbury Village Council (CVC). The reason behind this proposal is that often a Parish Council is confused with the Parochial Church Council (the executive body of a Church of England parish). It is suggested that a change of name would better reflect the Council involvement with the village in its entirety and save any confusion.

The author of this article has undertaken a “straw” poll which resulted in a large number of Congresbury residents, especially the under 50s, do consider the CPC as part of St. Andrews and did not understand that it was non religious. A name change might prompt more applicants to become councillors hopefully from the younger Congresbury residents.

This change is allowed under the “Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Section 75, subsection 3, 5(2c) “….. “the appropriate parish authority may resolve that the parish shall have one of the alternative styles ……” - and one of the choices allowed is “Village Council”.

All comments are welcome.

Chris Beyfus
Parish Councillor

New Building Community Right to Build Order Grant

Congresbury will be one of the first communities in the country to apply for a Community Right to Build Order (CRtB) following the new village hall / community centre project being awarded £23,870.

A CRtB order enables community organisations to progress new local developments without going through the normal planning application process, as long as the proposals meet certain criteria and there is community backing (over 51% of people who vote) in a local referendum.

North Somerset Council planning team are helping us through the process which is new to all of us. The draft order and Architects plans will be published and sessions held for villagers to view these and talk to the project team in the next month or so.

The CRtB draft order is then submitted for an independent examination, the examiner being appointed by North Somerset Council. As long as they recommend approval of the order it is then progressed by North Somerset Council which will arrange a referendum in the village of all those on the electoral roll. We hope the referendum will be completed by the end of the year but this is a learning process for all of us. For more information see the project website www.congnvh.org.uk

As part of our fundraising activities there will be a big quiz on Saturday 24 October from 7.30pm in the Old School Rooms, email info@congnvh.org.uk to book a table for six. We are also investigating with the Guinness book of records a bid for collecting 5p pieces, details to follow but please start collecting these now.

Ian Sheppard
Chair of New Village Hall Development Trust

Message from CRAG

One of the few good things that can be said about the firms of developers circling Congresbury like a group of vultures over a recent kill, is they have brought residents together.

There has been a great community spirit in this village for many years, and the threat of unsustainable, unwanted and unnecessary building projects has reminded us just how strong that spirit can be.

Over the spring and summer, Congresbury Residents Action Group (CRAG) has received many offers of help – financial and otherwise – at a series of public events. The group also has the support of MP John Penrose.

The YACWAG wildlife meeting by the river Yeo and the village fete both featured CRAG stalls where members of the public showed their support. Public meetings have drawn dozens of concerned villagers and hundreds have voiced their opposition by objecting to the planning authority, North Somerset Council.

And it is because of the council’s decision to reject Barratt’s plan for a new estate, that North Somerset faces a public inquiry, due to take place on 6 October - venue to be decided.

By the time this article appears in print, CRAG will have announced the date of another public meeting, sometime in September, to emphasise the importance of that inquiry. Not just to Congresbury, but to several other North Somerset villages as well.

CRAG’s message to residents is simple: “If you care, be there.”

John Mills - CRAG
I have always described Congresbury as being like a number ‘8’ with the Bridge joining the two circles together. When the opportunity arose in ‘2000’ to obtain a grant from the Millennium Commission to form a Village Green, Congresbury Parish Council was the first to apply.

At last we had the chance of joining the parts together, even better by adding another circle. Circles are an emblem of unity and solidarity and it all started to fit. Needless to say we managed to get the largest grant in the whole country to buy the land, build the bridge and provide the landscaping.

We didn’t have enough money to buy all the trees but as always Congresbury people did it themselves. The trees were planted in memory of many people who had previously lived in the Village. The trees have grown and flourished adding to the beauty of this wonderful place.

15 years on the vision of those who planned and worked so hard to obtain the money, do the work and now maintain the Millennium Green deserve a huge vote of thanks. As with all anniversaries, many who did the work are no longer around to enjoy their efforts. Sue Grant has 5 stones in her memory near the entrance with the simple inscription Forever Green - Her Vision. Without her endeavours it would never have happened. Thank you Sue.

Our original dream of having a Village Green has exceeded all our expectations. It is a lovely place to walk, ponder, dream and be thankful. Congresbury is a special place made even better with this little green oasis of tranquillity.

Michael Greaves
Original Trustee

Shape the Future Congresbury

Let villagers say how Congresbury should grow, rather than developers. This was the message from the Parish Council which is leading the development of a Neighbourhood Plan. The first step of designating the area and consulting on has happened but now comes the difficult part – developing the Plan. A Neighbourhood Plan will allow Congresbury to grow at the pace it wants to and decide where it wants to grow. The Plan will back up the North Somerset Core Strategy, which together will ensure a sustainable future.

To make this work the Parish Council needs help from you the villagers. A large array of skills are needed, which are abundantly available in Congresbury – any time you can commit will be welcome. In October we will hold a village meeting to explain more and help people get involved.

The Strategic Working Group has made great progress in its first phase and you can view all the information on the Parish Council website (access via the Planning link on the main homepage). This group will move into the Neighbourhood Plan Development Steering Group but we need your help.

If you want to know more or wish to be involved contact me on 01934 876104 or contact the Parish Clerk on 01934 838802 or Clerk@Congresbury-pc.gov.uk.

Stuart Sampson - Parish Councillor

Geoffrey Peacock Garden

The Geoffrey Peacock Garden is the triangle of land situated at the top of Broad Street by the traffic lights.

The plot is managed by the Parish Council and has had a number of makeovers over the years, some more successful than others. A number of years ago a layer of bark was applied to control weeds but this has had limited success. In recent times the Parish Council has employed a gardener to maintain the garden throughout the year. Unfortunately, he has recently given this up.

The Parish Council would like to take this opportunity to take a fresh look at the garden and come up with a new design. It is looking for a scheme that would:

- Look good and provide interest throughout the year,
- Encourage wildlife to the area,
- Be easy to maintain.

If you have any ideas on how this can be achieved or would like to become involved with the project please contact the Parish Clerk on 01934 838802 or Clerk@Congresbury-pc.gov.uk.

Di Hassan - Chair of Parish Council
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Cadbury Hill

The top of Cadbury Hill, which is owned jointly by Congresbury and Yatton Parish Councils, has recently been the site of much needed scrub clearance. Brambles, nettles and other invasive weeds had taken over, not only choking the more delicate grassland plants but completely smothering the archaeology. In 2013 the Parish Councils formed a partnership with Natural England and grants, match funded by the Parish Councils, were obtained to carry out extensive improvements to protect the natural habitat and to preserve the archaeology; Cadbury Hill Fort is a site of significant archaeological importance.

Walkers on the hilltop will have noticed that large areas of overgrown brambles and nettles have been removed, exposing the banks and ditches of the Iron Age hill fort. Some trees have also been felled, not only to open up the woodland but also to stop their roots damaging the fragile archaeology. An important part of the management of the hill has been the introduction of grazing animals as the cattle and sheep keep the vegetation under control during the summer months.

The stewardship agreement is a long term commitment by the Parish Councils to improving access to and information about the history and biodiversity of Cadbury Hill. Future plans include erecting new signage boards at the main entrances to the hill, funded from S106 money, whilst further scrub clearance will take place this autumn.

Arthur Hacking & Janet Dixon
Parish Councillors

New Project at Allotments

This year an exciting new project has been introduced at Congresbury Allotments; a plot for the years 1 & 2 children of St Andrew’s School. In the Spring members of the Allotment Association cleared and prepared an abandoned plot for the children to plant and sow.

The first visit took place in April when over 80 excited children saw their plots for the first time. As well as planting potatoes and sowing radishes and peas they picked rhubarb which they cooked later that day back at the school. Each class has its own space which the children care for with the help of allotment volunteers who look after the plots between visits.

In June the three classes of enthusiastic gardeners happily weeded and watered, harvested their radishes and planted the sunflowers and pumpkins which they’d been growing at school.

Their final visit in July saw bags of peas, potatoes, spinach, rhubarb and gooseberries being carried back to school by children eager to sample the fruits of their hard work.

Thanks need to be extended to Don Cox and Rod Stephens for all the ground work they carried out, the Parish Council for providing the school with a rent free plot, Michael Greaves for sourcing sponsorship for the children’s tools and all the volunteers who have maintained the plots and assisted the children on their visits.

Janet Dixon - Parish Councillor

Your Parish Council

We would like to introduce you to the members of your Parish Council.

We are (L to R): Ken Hill, Steve Eastment, Janet Dickson, Di Hassan (Chair), Stuart Sampson, David Ashton-Hilton, Liz Greaves (Clerk), Arthur Hacking (Vice Chair), Chris Beyfus and Paul Doolan.

As you can see we only have 9 councillors when we can have a maximum of 12.

Would you like to make a difference to Congresbury and help to shape the village you live in? If you are interested in joining the Parish Council you would be made very welcome. Please contact the Parish Clerk on 01934 838802 or Clerk@Congresbury-pc.gov.uk.