**Chairman’s Annual Report 16/17**

The highlight of the year has to be attaining our Gold Award under the nationally recognised Local Council Award Scheme – the first and to date only Council in Cambridgeshire to do so. This recognises good governance, engagement and improvement, developing and achieving outcomes for residents beyond expectations. I would like to pay particular tribute to our clerk Penny Bryant, as this award also recognises her major contribution to our continued success.

I know many were surprised to learn in the April/May issue of Somersham 4U, of the wide range of functions that the parish council performs, supports or influences, some of which go unnoticed by our residents. We increasingly need to predict and prevent problems rather than wait and react. This is particularly important as we consider the individual needs of the people we strive to serve.

**Somersham & Pidley Time Bank** is a fine example and celebrated its 5th anniversary this year. Under the excellent stewardship of Lucy Bird this community initiative continues to include, connect and support a wide range of people. As an extension to this work, Lucy and Penny have successfully taken advantage of a funding opportunity I developed in my County role, to provide help for the growing number of people in our community recognised as experiencing neurological problems such as dementia and Alzheimer’s. An action plan is currently being prepared.

**Health & Wellbeing Group**. Our own local group continues to provide a valuable network of practitioners, voluntary groups and key contacts – all of which improves the delivery of local services. It meets 3 times a year to update on specific issues and potential solutions.

**Nature Reserve**. We are very fortunate to have such a wonderful facility on our doorstep. It is managed by a dedicated group of volunteers who have been very active over the last year. A balance needs to be maintained between safe public access and preserving wildlife habitat. The parish council supports their training needs and they do an excellent job. They have held several special events over the last year as well as working parties on the first Sunday morning of every month. I would encourage others to join in. Plans are still in place to extend access to the north, once long-standing issues with Lafarge have been resolved. The council is responsible for many trees across the parish, not just on the Reserve. We have just completed a costly but very necessary 3 year maintenance programme. This helps protect the health of our trees whilst ensuring the safety of the public.

**Heritage.** This is something the council is proud of and particularly keen to protect. In the village centre, the historic finger post has been refurbished and the war memorial has now been Grade II listed as a building of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. Work on the Fire Hooks will soon be complete so they can be returned to the wall of the Tithe Barn.

**The Youth Club** continues to be a valuable asset to the village, with the junior sessions being very well attended. The senior club is much less popular, but we will be reviewing how to best cater for their needs and attract greater participation. Regrettably our Youth manager Alice Boon has had to leave us, but we are fortunate that Alice Eastham has stepped in on an interim basis. Teresa Clark is now acting Principle Youth Leader and we look forward to continued success.

**Play facilities** on the Norwood field continue be very popular. A review of all the equipment is underway as some are ageing or wearing badly. A programme of maintenance has already started and some may shortly need to be replaced.

**Speeding** is an issue constantly reported to the parish council, particularly on St Ives Rd, Parkhall Rd and more recently through Hammond Way. Unfortunately most culprits are local, so the safety and the quality of life for our residents, along with the cost of any control measures, are largely down to the anti-social behaviour of a few of our own. Following on from the Chatteris Rd features, a review is currently underway to improve safety at the White Post junction. Having successfully applied for funding, County Highways will submit proposals for consideration by the parish council.

We were sad to lose two councillors during the course of the year. Thanks go to Davina McMurdo and Guy Wakelin for their time on the council. Fortunately, we have just appointed Alice Eastham and Kevin Hawkins as replacements and I look forward to working with them.

I would like to thank all councillors for their contributions throughout the year, with a particular mention to Paul McCloskey for his support as Vice Chairman. Special thanks also go to Penny our clerk and Megan her assistant, along with our other members of staff who help the smooth running of the council.

Steve Criswell