Warden's Notes: June 2026

Hello….. and Goodbye



This is the last of these personal notes by me, Martin Stuart, the Parish Warden. After doing the job for some 11 years it's finally time for me to retire……and spend more time with my motorbike and my dogs.

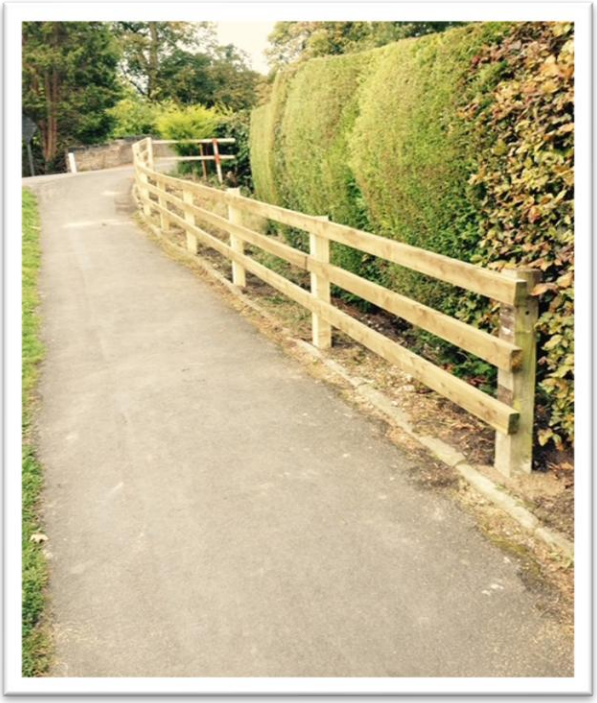
I started the job in June 2015 and was asked to expand the role beyond the litter picking only that the previous occupant of the post had done. So that's what I did. Regular readers of this column will have some idea of the range of tasks that I (and now Bradley) perform.

And I have to say, I've enjoyed (almost) every minute of it. But there comes a time where it's time to stop and let somebody else take on the challenge.

A great part of the satisfaction I derived from the job has been the opportunity it gave me to interact with and talk to the staff and Councillors of the Parish Council, the volunteers who have helped out with so many tasks and last but not least, the lovely ordinary members of our community who talk to me on the streets and even thank me for doing the job.

So, for this final, valedictory edition of 'Notes' I've covered some of what I consider the highlights of my time in the job before I hand on the baton to whoever is chosen to succeed me.

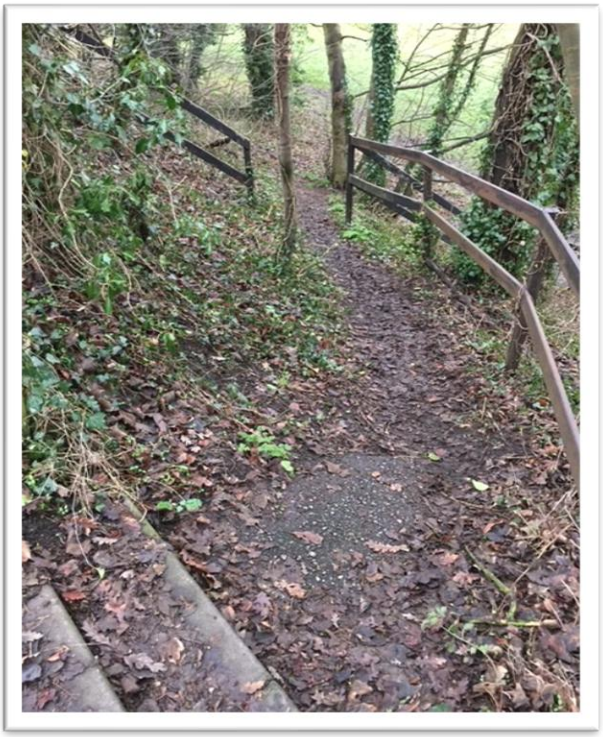
Fence at Bellhouse Lane/Glebe Avenue, Grappenhall

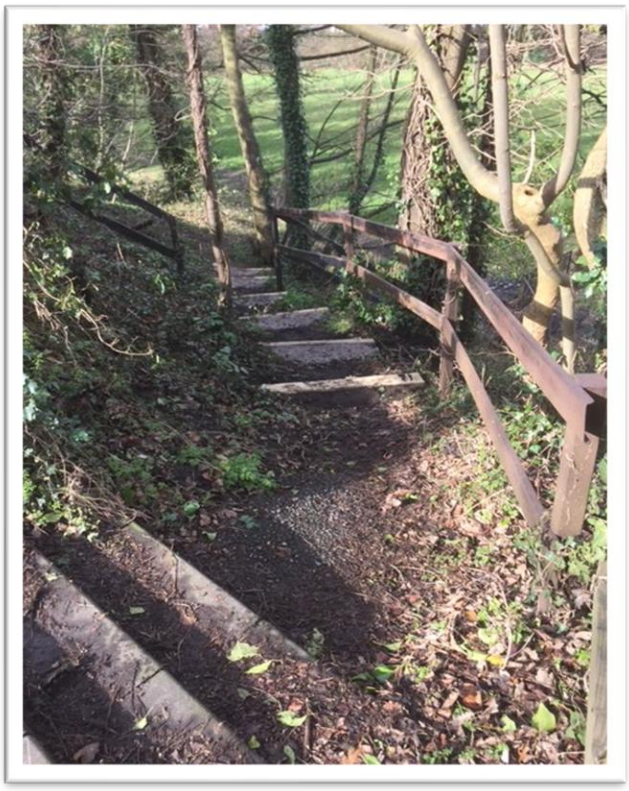


This was a classic Warden's job. The old fence here had fallen apart and nobody would take responsibility for renewing it or maintaining it.

The Parish Council therefore was able to fill the breach. We bought the timber and I built a new fence which seems to be lasting well, given that it was put up in September 2015.

I was thanked at the time by several local residents, not least because it can be used to hold on to when, as often happens, the path is slippery with ice in winter!





Steps at Stockport Rd/Wilson Close

You may not recognise this spot but it's the footpath leading down from Stockport Road to Wilson Close at Thelwall which is actually a Public Right of Way.

The first photo shows it as it was – a nasty slippery slope down which you wouldn't dare to walk in wet weather.

The second shot shows it after I'd installed a series of simple timber steps on the path so that it was (or is) passable even in wet weather.

Another case where nothing was being done about an unacceptable situation until the Warden was able to intervene in March 2017

Best Kept Village Award

This one is slightly different as it's not what I did but rather the result of lots of things that I (and others) did in order to win this award.

In 2016 the Parish Council entered Cheshire Community Action's Community Pride Competition and came first in the category of villages with a population of over 10,000 people.

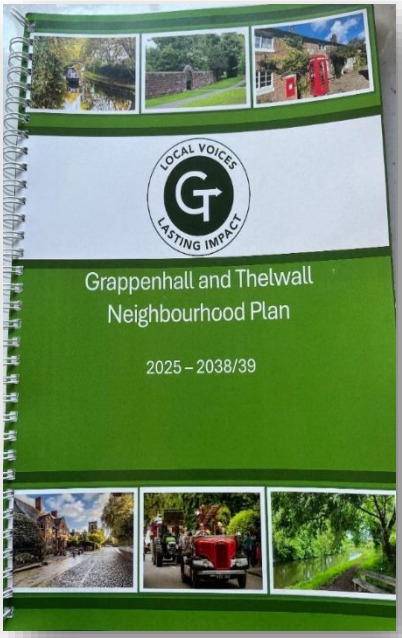
The picture shows me being presented with the award at a ceremony in Sandbach.



The award was in recognition of the Parish Council's action in maintaining the parish's environment as a clean tidy and well-kept area, in competition with other similar sized parishes in Cheshire.

You will see versions of the plaque that the Parish Council was awarded on the Big Room of St Wilfrid's church in Grappenhall, on the front of the Parish Council office and on the Pickering Arms in Thelwall.

Neighbourhood Plan



Not a normal part of the duties of the Parish Warden but seeing as I spent 40 years before starting this job as a local authority planning officer, it seemed only sensible that I would play a part in preparing the Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish.

The Council therefore allowed me to spend one morning a week working in the office on the Neighbourhood Plan, an interesting but very different working environment from my normal work routine.

The end result is a document that I and the members of the steering group are rightly proud of and which, all being well, will in due course help to maintain and develop the parish in the way that local people want.

Stocks



In 2018 I repainted the railings around the stocks located outside St Wilfrid's church in Grappenhall. When I say 'I' I mean 'we' cos as you can see, I was ably assisted by my niece Abi who was volunteering with me as part of her Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Over the years I have had several young people help me with my work to fulfil the community service section of the award.

It is rumoured that the adjacent Parr Arms pub intends to use the stocks for unruly customers instead of just barring them!

Balsam Bashing



This fairly unflattering picture shows three of our sturdy Parish Councillors taking part in one of the 'Balsam Bashing' sessions that we organised over the last couple of years. Balsam Bashing is the process of uprooting Himalayan Balsam plants, an invasive species that can quickly overrun our open spaces and outcompete native plants. Due to its persistent nature, the only way to eradicate it is to uproot all the plants every year for up to 7 years.

Well, we've made a good start in Morris Brook Park with the assistance of councillors and volunteers.

Parks



The Parish Council does, of course, own and maintain the two parks, one in Grappenhall and one in Thelwall. Jubilee Park (aka Euclid Park) in Grappenhall and Diamond Park in Thelwall.

It therefore falls to me to maintain these parks, their landscaping and trees and the play equipment.

The picture shows the big slide at Diamond Park in the process of having its big side piece replaced (due to a cut which could have trapped tiny fingers.)

Community Litter Picks



Community Litter Picks are something that I instituted early on in the job. We run two or three of them a year throughout the spring and summer.

We invite anyone to come along and take part for the morning and usually finish off with drinks and cake.

Attendance varies wildly from the 30 or so that turned out for this one in April 2019 to nobody but me being there on another occasion. I've never quite figured out what it takes to spark people's interest and get a big turnout. Nevertheless, we carry on and usually enjoy the day. Even if we don't get a big turnout, anyone who's taken part in a litter pick will never throw litter away again.

Although Bradley and I litter pick all the main roads in the parish, my impression is that there is less litter to pick up nowadays. This could be because people are less likely to litter into a clean environment or it

could be due to the growing number of people taking responsibility for litter picking their own local area.

I suspect we have a growing culture within the parish of local people taking responsibility for caring for the local environment, rather than just expecting ‘authority’ to do it. This has been typified by two particular individuals (mentioned in previous ‘Notes’) who voluntarily chose to carry out the very hard labour task of cutting back soil and weeds that tend to narrow rural footways alongside main roads.

Arrividerci

Anyway that’s enough for now. I won’t say goodbye but arrividerci as I’ll still be around in the villages (and suburbs) hopefully taking part in some of the myriad activities that go on in this very active community we live in.

Cheers

Martin