



I began my membership of the parish council at the beginning of the year and what a bizarre year it has been.

At the beginning of the year the low lying fields south of the settlement in Marsh Benham were flooded as I have not seen them in over 30 years of living in this community. Evenings were haunted with the calls of waterfowl and the constant sound of flowing water. Walking through the village at dawn and dusk the light reflected off the seemingly permanent lakes was enchanting. Some parts of the area remain flooded. The formerly coppiced woodland south of the old allotments appears as a desolate landscape imagined by Tolkien on dark, sunless days and a number of private gardens exist in a fragile limbo, repetitively flooded at the slightest occurrence of rainfall.

This reminds us that the landscape in which we live is fragile and that we alter both the natural but also the historic landforms, watercourses and land that our predecessors managed at our peril. Understanding and respecting how land has been looked after allows us to make more informed decisions as to how best to manage it for the future. Land is an extremely valuable resource and at no time in the past has it been under such pressure as it is presently. The current priority for ever increasing numbers of houses places enormous pressure on the open spaces that provide the environmental balance vital for a reasonable quality of life.

The opportunity to go outside has never before seemed so valuable as it is at present. Some of us are lucky enough to have immediate access to fantastic open spaces and the discovery of fabulous walks on the doorstep has been one of the positive benefits of the present situation. But for others the importance of the open spaces that are curated by the parish council must not be underestimated and I certainly feel the significance of my role as a parish councillor in ensuring that these spaces can support the needs of all parishioners. Spaces to play safely. Spaces to meet friends and neighbours in a neutral space outdoors. Somewhere to exercise both humans and canines organised or individually.

I hope that in my momentary role as a parish councillor that I will be able to make a small contribution to ensuring that these valuable open spaces are safeguarded and that the spaces that are managed are done so in the best way for the benefit of all parishioners. Parishioners need to help. To build on the community spirit that has come to the fore during the present pandemic and to let us know what the value of the outside is to you.

Cllr Gill Butter