

## **Standish Voice Chairperson's Annual Report 2023 by Gill Foster**

This is the ninth annual report for Standish Neighbourhood Forum – Standish Voice - and I am pleased to report we have again continued to go from strength to strength as our profile and membership has continued to grow in the village. We now have 1,900 members and 12,600 followers on our Facebook page.

We have continued to meet with the Chief Executive and senior officers of Wigan Council and I would like to thank Alison and her officers for their continued support for Standish Voice and the work we do.

Together with our local councillors we have continued to hold discussions with a number of officers of Wigan Council in respect of the Section 106 developer contribution monies being utilised in Standish. Following the council's public consultation on the proposals in March 2021, the School Lane widening scheme, which Standish Voice led the opposition to, was dropped and I am pleased to say that we have been able to progress a number of the projects. These include extending The Line enhancements to Pepper Lane and Almond Brook Road, and installation of the pedestrian lights on Market Street.

Other schemes have been approved and we continued to work with officers of the council to have an input into the improvement schemes to extend The Line, footpaths and cycle routes around the village. Improvements to parks and open spaces are also being discussed and proposals for works to create a new park and increase biodiversity at Robin Hill field, next to the Line, are well underway with works due to start early 2024. Traffic lights are due to be installed at Bradley Lane railway bridge in the coming weeks. Work to improve the ponds and nature area at Almond Brook are continuing. All these projects were identified in the Standish Neighbourhood Plan and other Standish Voice reports and we will continue to ensure that the council adheres to this.

We will continue to work with the council to ensure that all the Section 106 funding from developers is spent in the village to benefit Standish residents and businesses. We are committed to continue to push for improved parking facilities and have attended a number of meetings of the council's car parking group.

We have also continued to respond to planning applications, and particularly to object to further housing developments, via our response to the Greater Manchester spatial Framework consultation to protect and retain Standish's Green Belt. The Places For Everyone plan has entered its public inquiry stage and we will continue to monitor its progress. It is expected to be ratified this year, protecting our Green Belt until 2037.

We have also given our vision for Standish as part of consultation on Wigan's own borough-wide Local Plan. We attended the planning consultation event held in Standish, but were dismayed that the proposals had not incorporated the neighbourhood plan and this has been taken up with senior officers at the council. We have received assurance that as the Local Plan develops, the Standish Neighbourhood plan will be taken account of.

Standish Voice actively campaigned against the use of Kilhey Court by Serco and the Home Office to house asylum seekers on the grounds it was unsuitable. We lobbied the Home Office, MacDonald hotels, Serco, Government Ministers and our MP. We held numerous meetings with the Council, and in November the Police and council officers attended our monthly meeting to update members of Standish Voice.

We also engaged an independent planning consultant to review historic planning conditions and forwarded the findings to Wigan Council. We are pleased that the Home Office has now rescinded its decision and that the use of Kiley Court for asylum seekers ended just before Christmas and the hotel will no longer be used. We have asked Macdonald hotels for their intentions regarding the site and have been informed they will be considering it in the New Year.

In December we were able to put on our annual Christmas Market and this has gone from strength to strength over the years. Paul will talk about this in more detail.

As in previous years, Standish Voice's committee members, who have been elected to office and voluntarily given their time, have each taken on responsibility for specific areas of expertise and have played a crucial role in the work of Standish Voice. Their contribution, dedication and hard work has been fantastic, and I would personally like to thank all the committee members for all their hard work and perseverance over the last year, and for the amount of time they have each devoted to getting us to the stage of implementation of Standish Neighbourhood Plan. In particular, I would like to thank Ron Wade for his work on taking forward footpath improvements, Robin Hill field improvements and car parking.

We have continued to actively raise the profile of the neighbourhood forum, locally, regionally, and nationally through a series of press releases, use of social media, meetings, and discussions with national bodies.

Paul Ogden, Vice-chairman, has undertaken the role of communications officer since we were established and has been responsible for producing our fantastic newsletters and keeping the website and face book page up to date with the latest information on the work of Standish Voice and other local issues. He is assisted by Ian Trafford and we now have over 1,900 members, which is brilliant. I am sure you will all agree both he and Ian have again done a phenomenal job, especially this year, in keeping us all informed of local issues, so thank you both.

I would personally like to thank Paul for his valuable time, hard work and his passion for Standish Voice, which has not wavered. I feel sure that all the committee members would like to join me in thanking him.

In addition to the development of the neighbourhood plan Standish Voice committee members have been involved in a number of areas to help improve the village which Paul will talk about in more detail.

When we signed up to "The Deal" we were asked by the Chief Executive what project would be of benefit to the local residents and we are pleased that The Line has continued to be well used by local residents walking and cycling, which reduces

car journeys into the village. It has been so successful that the works to extend it from Cat'ith Window to Pepper Lane have now been completed.

So, what will the next twelve months hold?

We will need to continue to work with the Council to influence and ensure that the monies that are coming in as a result of the approved housing developments are maximised and spent to the benefit of the Standish community. We will continue to push to ensure that some of the other projects will start to be delivered in the forthcoming year to benefit the village.

We will also be working with the council to promote the objectives of Standish Neighbourhood Plan in the development of Wigan's own borough-wide local plan and will be meeting with council officers in the coming months.

In addition to the work on the Neighbourhood Plan, we hope we will be able to support events and encourage people in the village to support the work of Standish Voice.

We are an non party political organisation, however we have worked closely with our three Standish Councillors over a number of issues affecting the village and its residents and businesses and we will continue to do so in the forthcoming year. Our thanks go to them for their continuing support of the work we do.

Special thanks, as I mentioned earlier, to Paul our Vice-chairperson, to Karen Bliss our treasurer, and to all our other committee members Fran Aiken, Sarah Djali, Allan Foster, Diane Gore, Reverend Andrew Holliday, Janet Monks, Nicky Ogden, Kathy Robertson, Ron Wade, Sharon Gerrard and Ian Trafford. It has been a privilege to work with such a diverse, dedicated and committed group of people.

In this report I have concentrated on the formal work of Standish Voice Committee. However there has been a considerable amount of other work which has been undertaken which Paul Ogden – Vice chair, will report on next.

As Chairperson, I am extremely proud of everything that the committee members have achieved so far on behalf of the village, and I hope that in the coming years Standish Voice Neighbourhood Forum continues to go from strength to strength.