

VICE CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT – AGM, NOVEMBER 2017

Standish Voice has been involved in many more issues other than just Standish Neighbourhood Plan and housing developments in the past year.

Shortly after last year's AGM, we ran the first Standish Christmas Market, which was a huge success on many levels.

It attracted three times the amount of people we expected, with an estimated 6,000 people visiting, £7,500 was raised for various charities across the day; shops, pubs and businesses across Standish saw record takings and we received wonderful comments about how it was run from the public and stallholders.

We conducted a feedback survey and 91% who replied said the Market was excellent or good and we have striven to make this year's event, which will be on Saturday, December 2, even bigger, better and more festive.

We have double the number of stalls, two more venues, the Methodist Church and Standish Social Club have been delighted to join us, we have more attractions and we have partnered with The Albion pub which will run the beer bar this year. The Christmas Trail returns, which allows shops and businesses to be involved, and there will be entertainment from choirs and bands.

We would like to thank everyone on our Christmas Market Committee for the many hundreds of hours of work they have been putting in to make sure this event is a success, especially Standish Voice's events lead Jaime Jones, who has chaired this year's committee and keeps us all on our toes. We would also like to thank Wigan Council and the police for their ongoing co-operation in ensuring the safety of everyone on the day.

We still need volunteers who can help us on the day – so please sign up on leaving this meeting if you can do that.

And Standish will be that bit more festive this year after Standish Voice established a group to co-ordinate the village's Christmas Tree and its decoration.

Last Christmas, we carried out a fundraising campaign to collect money for Gordon Thorpe, a Standish businessman and father of six to help pay for his cancer treatment.

For each pound raised we placed a red ribbon on the fencing around the Christmas Tree to brighten it up and show Gordon's family that the community was thinking of them during that terrible time. In time for Christmas Day, more than 600 ribbons were flying. Sadly, Gordon lost his fight against cancer a few months later.

The widespread disappointment about the village Christmas Tree and lights in recent years prompted Standish Voice to set up the Standish Christmas Decorations committee, which included representatives of Standish organisations and Councillor Ray Whittingham, which has been chaired by Standish Voice committee member Ron Wade.

We have secured sponsorship from Holts brewery to pay for a permanent living tree, which was planted in front of the church today and will grow and be shaped over the next few years to become a centre piece for our Christmas celebrations.

We beat our fundraising target of £1,000 from the community to pay for its lights in a single night of crowdfunding through our Facebook page and collection tins will be going out over the next few days to raise more to put towards flagging and decorative fencing around the tree ready for next Christmas. We would like to thank everyone on that Committee and Ron for pulling it all together.

Earlier this year, we moved quickly to make sure The Beeches building would be protected due to its closure. We told the council the community would not allow the building to be demolished and said we would apply for it to become a listed building if it was threatened.

We have liaised with the agent who was marketing the building and are incredibly pleased that the site will become a restaurant again, with the original building being fully refurbished. We liaised with the landowner during the recent situation involving travellers on the car park and we have reached

an agreement with him to use the car park on Christmas Market Day for our stallholders' parking, which we are extremely grateful for.

However, another landmark venue is still under threat, The Crown, at Worthington. But we have been helping the Save The Crown campaign this year in their excellent work in trying to keep the building as a hospitality venue. A plan to knock the building down for housing has been delayed for almost two years after we and others objected and during the year we have met the agent involved in marketing the site with leaders of Save The Crown and there is now a very keen interest in keeping the building alive.

We also held a number of discussions between landowners, the council and commercial car park operators about a new public car park in Standish, which is badly needed. This is on sites other than The Rec, which Standish Voice believes is not desirable for a car park. Last year, we secured the commitment of around £170,000 from Wigan Council for more parking in the village and Standish Voice and others will be looking at suitable sites in the New Year.

We know traffic and transport is a very important issue in the village and earlier this year we managed to get Standish on the radar of Transport for Greater Manchester concerning the possible reopening of Standish railway station. At a meeting in Manchester, its head of railway station policy told us Standish would be included in a report, due to be published at the end of this year, about the feasibility of future railway stations across the city region.

Many technical and financial hurdles stand in the way of this, and it will take many years if it is at all possible, but for now, at least, a station at Standish is being considered.

One of Standish Voice's aims is to help and support community groups across the village and our Facebook page is a great way to do this.

We post news, views and events on our page once or twice a day. We had to introduce new rules for the page at Easter as a handful of people were abusive. Since those rules were introduced, the number of people who follow the page has risen by a third to 5,200 and we have only had to prevent three people from leaving comments – a testament to the decency of people in our

community that they respect these rules and want to interact with each other with civility and restraint.

Standish Voice also interacts with its members via our monthly newsletter and information is also on our website, which is evolving over time.

There are also smaller ways we have been involved in village life, such as helping Standish campaigner Debbie Parkinson secure a defibrillator for the Parish Hall; having an agreement from the council to look at changing signage on the motorway to deflect through traffic from Standish when new roads off Junction 26 are open; encouraging the creation of a Standish Business; calling on authority figures to keep through trains to Manchester Piccadilly from Appley Bridge and Gathurst; achieving grant funding for bird boxes; liaising with police and residents about anti-social behaviour in Church Street and continuing discussions with the council about their plans for affordable housing on the new developments. We also held fundraising events, including a whisky tasting night and a fashion show.

But we have had disappointments too. The Line project, which will transform a muddy track into a multi-use path has been delayed again. Work was hoped to be completed by now but a legal problem with a landowner objecting to changing the route into a bridleway has caused a delay. The council still hopes to begin work by the end of the year and we will monitor this.

More positively, another project we have been keeping tabs on is soon to begin. We had a meeting with Wigan's Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles earlier this week about Standish Leisure Centre and if legal agreements can be signed soon, work on the scheme on Rectory Lane will begin early in the New Year. Designs for the building are impressive and will be published soon.

2017 has been a successful year for Standish Voice and I want to thank the whole committee for their hard work over the past 12 months, but especially Gill, who as chair has led the organisation with professionalism, strength, dignity and good humour. I'm sure 2018 will be just as busy for Standish Voice.