

Standish Voice Chairperson's Annual Report 2024 by Gill Foster

This is the tenth annual report for Standish Neighbourhood Forum – Standish Voice, 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 more than 2,000 members and 14,000 followers on our Facebook page.

During 2024 we have continued to meet with the Chief Executive and senior council officers, by zoom, 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 as Wigan Council to progress projects utilising the Section 106 developer contribution monies.

Significant projects have included:

- The improvement and extension of the Line to Almond Brook Road and Robin Hill Lane, as well as the ongoing work to improve The Line from Standish Wood Lane to Beech Hill, and other footpaths and cycle routes around the village.
- Robin Hill field has finally seen extensive tree planting following years of discussions with Sports England, with City of Trees and the council.
- Bradley Lane railway bridge traffic lights were installed and we sought to ensure that pedestrian safety was secured through improved lighting and signage.
- Improvements to parks and open spaces are also being discussed, including Ashfield Park and Southlands Rec.

All these projects were identified in the Standish Neighbourhood Plan and we will continue to ensure that the council adhere 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 residents and businesses. We continue to push for improved parking facilities and have again had extensive discussions with council officers, who are now drawing up plans for enhancements to the car park at Quakers Place.

Standish Voice continued to work with the council officers and we were pleased that the pressure with exerted with our councillors resulted in both Kilhey Court and Britannia Hotel stopping housing asylum seekers from March last year.

You may recall several years ago we successfully persuaded the Council not to sell a piece of land which would have enabled land at the rear of Chorley Road to be developed and have worked with local residents of Chorley Road regarding this scheme.

In October, I attended the planning committee to object, on behalf of Standish Voice, to a planning application for an access road next to this site which would potentially have opened up land behind Rowton Rise and that site to further housing development and was contrary to policies in the Standish Neighbourhood Plan. After successfully arguing against the proposals, and against the planning officers' advice, the committee voted to reject the application as the application was

contrary to Standish Neighbourhood Plan policies. We have also continued to respond to planning applications, and particularly to object to further large-scale housing developments.

At that same Planning Committee in October, I also objected to the Persimmon Housing development for 57 houses off Pepper Lane, again arguing that the development was in breach of Standish Neighbourhood Plan policies. The health service also had major concerns about the impact additional housing would have on Standish Medical Practice. Again, the application was rejected by councillors as the application was in breach of the Standish Neighbourhood Plan policies.

To date Wigan Council has not received appeal notices to these planning application refusals, however we have a wealth of evidence to support and challenge any appeal and have told Wigan Council we will work with them to fight them. We are all grateful to the Planning Committee for rejecting applications which are contrary to the Neighbourhood Plan policies and this is a test of the robustness of those policies.

As in previous years, the 15 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 the Neighbourhood Plan. In particular, I would like to mention Dave King, a valued committee member who sadly passed away on 5th June last year. His help, assistance and knowledge on green spaces was invaluable. Dave was one of the founder members of Standish Voice and he worked tirelessly to help shape the neighbourhood plan and green policies.

In addition, I would like to thank Ron Wade for his tenacity in ensuring that public rights of way are progressed and he has also worked with the council and Standish Community Forum to develop and produce 3 walking route leaflets around Standish, and the Inner and Outer Heritage trail walks.

This year we have continued to support the community events held at Standish Library and I would like to thank Fran Aitken for her work with the Friends of Standish Library on these.

We were thrilled we were able to hold our annual Christmas market again on 30th November. My thanks to the committee members who are part of the Standish Christmas Market committee: Kathy Robertson, Ian Trafford, Paul Ogden, Diane Gore, Sarah Djali, and Judith Atherton. Paul will speak more about this great event.

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 the newsletters and keeping the website and Facebook 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 2,000 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.

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.

In addition we will continue to work with the council on the development of the new Local Plan. This was put on hold awaiting the new planning review, but this will form a large part of our work to ensure the Neighbourhood Plan policies are taken into account.

Standish Voice will apply again to be registered as the statutory Neighbourhood Forum for the village for the next five years, in a process we have done twice before, and which we will start to undertake in the coming months.

We hope we will be able to continue to support events and encourage people in the village to support the work of Standish Voice.

We are an apolitical organisation, however we have worked closely with our three Standish Councillors over a number of issues affecting the village, 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, Sharon Gerrard, Janet Monks, Nicky Ogden, Kathy Robertson, Ron Wade 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.