

STOKE MANDEVILLE PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT OF CHAIRMAN MAY 2010 – APRIL 2011

Parish Councils are corporate bodies, an elected tier of local government whose job it is to represent the interests of the parish. Parish Councils can only act within their powers and not do anything unless it has a legal power to do so. During there last year a number of initiatives have been published by Government about the way forward for involving local communities, including parish councils and the voluntary sector, such as Big Society and the Localism Bill, yet to be agreed by Parliament. Such changes could include the planning system, devolution and transfer of services to local councils and changes to the way local councils are funded. However, in the meantime local councils have continued to maintain and administer the affairs of their parishes in a number of ways. Stoke Mandeville parish has a large population of over six thousand people and covers a wide geographical and diverse area comprising four electoral wards. Adjoining the boundary of Aylesbury town it is both urban and rural in nature. In summary our activities during the year under review have included the following :-

Highways

On two occasions the parish council has submitted a bid to the Local Area Forum, which holds funding for minor traffic schemes, for the widening of the junction of Marsh Lane to Lower Road by allowing traffic to filter to the left and avoiding tailback down Marsh Lane. The cost of such a scheme has been estimated at £21k. The outcome of the bid is for the next financial year is still awaited.

Discussions with the Highways Authority about reducing speeding along the A4010, Risborough Road were without success. It emerged that the parish council would be responsible for obtaining evidence of need and to fund any improvements along this busy stretch of road. The cost was prohibitive. The matter continues to be debated and a resolution sought.

Access to the Wendover Road from Elham Road is increasingly difficult and the Parish Council has advised and supported residents in their quest for some improvement.

Environment

Repairs have been undertaken to notice boards and bus shelters with new notice boards provided at Wendover Road and the allotments. A new shelter is planned for the bus stop opposite Hampden Hall being a joint project with Weston Turville Parish Council. New dog bins have been provided at Hawkslade. The long awaited map of parish footpaths was published during the year with the help of the Parish Footpaths Partnership which sadly has now been abolished. Repairs to styles have been identified and will be carried out.

A number of power cuts were experienced in the village during winter months and as a result a meeting was held between the Parish Council, local residents and UK Power Networks in an endeavour to resolve the situation. Whilst the problems experienced by the service provider were recognised the situation is far from satisfactory and it is hoped that the frustration and concerns of local people are noted and that some improvement will be effected before next winter.

Considerable discussion has taken place with Aylesbury Vale District Council about the provision of play facilities at Hawkslade. Unfortunately, the withdrawal of various Government grant schemes has meant that very little funding is now available. However with initiatives and ingenuity by residents it is hoped that some provision for older children and also toddlers will be able to be made.

Allotments

The previous waiting list for allotments has been cleared during the year by the introduction of half plots which are preferred by many of our tenants. Rental costs remain relatively low compared with adjoining parishes.

Old Church Site

On consulting with the County Archaeologist last year and other Environmental Officers of both District and County Councils work was commenced in January on upgrading the old church site. Vale Countryside Volunteers were commissioned to clear the site of brambles, elder bushes and vegetation exposing small stone walls and grave stones. Work on tree preservation was undertaken. Plans are in hand for providing bird and bat boxes and planting of meadow flowers.

Community Centre and Recreation Ground

Continued liaison exists with the Stoke Mandeville Village Community Association which manages the Centre on behalf of the Parish Council as owners of the building. The building erected in 1977 is requiring increasing maintenance and replacement. During the year new guttering has been provided and repairs undertaken. The Council agreed to meet the costs of funding a part time care taker in order to undertake the administration for the Centre. Considerable efforts made to make wider use of the playing field did not come to fruition due to the cost of upgrading to meet Football League standards. Many repairs have been undertaken to the children's playground due to vandalism, which is something we have tried to prevent by additional vigilance and police checks. Funding has been obtained by various grants to provide a new robust and fireproof safety surface for the playground which should be safer and cleaner for children. For this we are most grateful to Stoke Mandeville & Other Parishes Charity and the Aylesbury Vale Community Chest for funding the project.

Planning

Parish Councillors have a role to play in considering and commenting on applications for planning and development which have been submitted to Aylesbury Vale District Council as the local planning authority. All applications are considered on their merits and responses submitted to the local planning authority to be taken into account in the decision making process.

High Speed Rail 2

The announcement by the Government for a high speed rail line between London and Birmingham passing through the Chilterns, including parts of Stoke Mandeville, has featured most prominently in the work of the Council. During July 2010 a successful public meeting was organised by the Council to bring parishioners together with guest speakers to enable them to learn about the proposals. From this meeting a unanimous and resounding mandate was given by residents to oppose the proposals for HS2. In addition Stoke Mandeville Residents Action Group HS2 [SMAG] was formed in September, whose members have worked tirelessly to promote the campaign against HS2 at both national and local level. The official consultation on the route of HS2 was published in February 2011. The Parish Council has agreed to formally oppose HS2 believing that the business case does not stack up, no evidence of need has been proved, there is no economic case and the proposal is not in the public interest, taking into account the current economic situation of the country. A well attended public meeting was held in April to publicise the consultation, allowing residents to question experts and enable people to learn about changes made to the route over the last year.

Parish Precept

The Parish Council receives its funding from Aylesbury Vale District Council which has been collected through the Community Tax. In discussing the precept for the forthcoming year 2011/2012 it was reluctantly agreed to increase this by 2.9% in order to cope with new and necessary financial commitments. For many years the precept for the parish has been

extremely low with minimum increases year on year. This has resulted in Stoke Mandeville parish having the lowest precept of any parish of a similar size in the area but has restricted development. Therefore, it has been necessary to build up reserves to enable the Council to move forward.

Farewell and Welcome

During the year Tom Wilkinson, Tom Crutchley and Philip Gough resigned as members of the Council. As a result David Kennedy and David Starr were appointed to fill those vacancies as co opted members.

Appreciation

In concluding this report I pay tribute to my fellow Councillors and co-opted members of committees, whose hard work and commitment is illustrated by the snapshot of our work outlined above. Special thanks to those Councillors who also represent us on outside bodies. My sincere thanks to our Clerk, Paul Walter, who although only in post for a year, has made tremendous strides in progressing the Council's achievements. Also to members of the SMVCA for their commitment to the management and fund raising for the Community Centre and ensuring that this remains a viable building for use by the community. To Stoke Mandeville and Other Parishes Charity without whose understanding and support our parish would be very much the poorer. The life of a Parish Councillor is an extremely busy one, sometimes frustrating but not without satisfaction and sometimes the reward of a successful outcome.

Jenny Hunt
Chairman
April 2011