

STOKE MANDEVILLE PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

May 2012 – April 2013

**Jenny Hunt
Chairman
2nd May 2013**

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The Annual Report of the Chairman is but a snapshot of the work of the Parish Council throughout the year and with the ever changing role of Parish Councils and the increasing workload the demands on Councillors time is immense. Stoke Mandeville parish includes four wards being the Village, Stoke Leys, Stoke Grange and Hawkslade. Three of these are semi urban and one is rural and have similar but sometimes very different needs. In recent years one of our main priorities has been to protect the whole of our parish from the threat of overdevelopment, additional traffic and on street car parking and of course the ongoing proposals for high speed rail.

A Time of Celebration

The summer of 2012 was a time of celebration in Stoke Mandeville with HM the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the Paralympic Games and the achievement of the Queen Elizabeth II status for the playing field in Eskdale Road. Parish Councillors were involved in planning the Jubilee Celebrations held in the school and despite the dismal weather a good time was had by all. Likewise Parish Councillors were involved in planning for the Paralympic Torch route through our area on its journey to London, organising volunteers and being available on the day to assist. An art competition took place to celebrate the Paralympics in liaison with the Osbidian Gallery to whom we are most grateful. In the early summer we heard that we were one of eight parishes in Buckinghamshire to achieve Queen Elizabeth II Playing Field status for our playing field in Eskdale Road which gives protection to the field for ninety nine years. The field has been renamed to take account of this special award. The planting of an Oak Tree on the field took place in December to commemorate HM Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Plans are going head for the development of an 'outdoor gym' as a legacy of the 2012 Paralympic Games for which we are currently seeking external funding. An exhibition and film slide showing many of these activities takes place after the Annual Parish meeting.

On Street Car Parking

Problems with on street car parking continue on roads near to Stoke Mandeville Hospital and also near the Station. The length of time which it has taken to find a solution has been phenomenal. Parking on residential roads is not illegal but has to be in accordance with the Highway Code. Where indiscriminate parking occurs without consideration for others it brings disruption to the lives of residents, inconvenience and misery. Despite intervention by County, District and County Councillors very little has moved forward at the hospital where more car parking is desperately needed. The sale of hospital land to provide an ASDA Foodstore at the front of the site can only add to the problems. Discussions have also taken place with Chiltern Rail and the Police about commuter parking on roads around the Station. Information signs about parking have been erected at the Station and further work with Chiltern Rail is being taken forward. Yellow lines are not always the answer. Where these already exist residents are finding that their families and visitors are being ticketed for parking outside their houses. The Parish Council will continue to work with residents to bring some resolution and closure to the difficulties caused by on street parking in residential roads.

High Speed Rail 2

Stoke Mandeville will be one of the most badly affected communities by the construction of HS2 which should start in 2017 and will take some ten years bringing noise, pollution and disruption to

our everyday lives. To date there appears to be no loss of momentum in the Government's proposals.

During the year we have been working with Stoke Mandeville Action Group Against HS2 [SMAG] in opposing HS2 but we have also given consideration to mitigating the affects of the route in order to protect our community should HS2 go ahead. With information from HS2 Ltd that the train will travel across Stoke Mandeville at a speed of 400 km per hour at 97 dcb and be heard by more than 95% of our residents, mitigation is a tremendous task. We have therefore commissioned a noise assessment for comparative purposes and are working with Bucks County Council, SMAG, the National Trust and surrounding parishes in submitting a proposal for the diversion of Marsh Lane and the Risborough Road to avoid having two large bridging structures across those roads with accompanying work sites. The site of the former 11c church of St. Marys off Risborough Road is in the path of HS2 and will be destroyed. It is the most archaeologically important site along the route and an investigation is taking place about providing a safe haven for the storage of gravestones and artefacts. The work Councillors in connection with HS2 during the year has been time consuming but is essential. However, we recognise that this must not stand in the way of other priorities.

Planning Applications

Parish Councils receive all applications for development within the parish on which to comment. Parish Councillors do not make decisions on these applications but can make recommendations to the local planning authority. During the year we have received twenty four planning applications mostly for extensions to existing dwellings. The Council strongly opposed the building of the ASDA store at the front of the Stoke Mandeville Hospital site, the building of 3000 homes and other facilities on the Hampden Fields site and also for the erection of 24 houses at the rear of Isis and Oats Close at Hawkslade. Often the decisions of the local planning authority are not in accord with the recommendations of the Parish Council and whilst applicants can appeal against a decision, objectors, including Parish Councils, cannot.

Community

We are pleased when residents draw our attention to ideas for improvement or where problems occur. This can be anything from a street light not working to speeding traffic. The Parish Council does everything it can to resolve problems but sometimes it is not possible either on grounds of cost or being outside our remit. During the year due to public comment, we have replaced and provided more litter bins and additional dog bins. Additional seats have been ordered for the playing field, new play equipment to replace older and outdated equipment in the children's playground and new tennis nets and cleaning of the tennis courts is to be undertaken. Notice boards have been replaced and repaired and dangerous trees removed from verges. Gravestones in the burial ground have been catalogued and improvements are being considered to that area. White lines have been provided in Station Road and white line hatching requested for Risborough Road. The quest for play equipment on Hawkslade continues. It is hoped that funding will be available in the foreseeable future and that a suitable site can be found. Councillors attend meetings of the ARLA Community Group and the Local Area Forums.

Speeding Traffic

Because of concerns received about speeding vehicles on our roads six Councillors have been trained by the Police in using the technical equipment for identifying speeding vehicles. Five sessions have already taken place along Risborough and Lower Road where there are believed to be particular problems. Speeding was found to be an issue at the bottom end of Risborough Road and this data has been forwarded on to the Police who are now doing more vigorous checks in that area. In Lower Road speeding was not recorded as being problematical although there is a strong perception of

speed. Work will continue on monitoring these two roads and also Station Road and Wendover Road. We are also taking initiatives to monitor speeding along Anton Way, Hawkslade.

Our Plans For the Future

The Parish Council has been underfunded for many years and although we are one of the larger parishes both in geographical area and population, the community charge precept for the parish has been one of the lowest in Aylesbury Vale. In the past the Parish Council has attempted to keep costs down but it is now impossible if the parish is to move forward. Buildings and equipment are aging and has to be replaced and costs of street lights, maintenance and all utility services have increased. The Community Centre is nearly forty years old and beginning to need additional maintenance work. There is work we need to do and other we would like to undertake in order to develop and improve the parish. Our Plans for the next two years include:-

- Programme of Maintenance for the Burial Ground and investigate future provision
- Work towards becoming a Quality Council which gives the Council additional powers
- Installation of an outdoor gym at Queen Elizabeth II field with sponsorship funding as a legacy of the Paralympic Games
- Seek funding and a site for the provision of a play area for Hawkslade
- Involvement in the new Vale of Aylesbury Plan in the interests of the population of Stoke Mandeville
- Develop a Neighbourhood Plan with the local community in accordance with Government specification in order to safeguard against untoward development
- Provide new hardstanding to the access road to the allotments
- Continue to oppose HS2 but to explore potential mitigation in case this goes ahead.
- Monitor traffic in order to reduce speeding vehicles in the parish
- Work with Chiltern Rail, Bucks County Council, the Police and Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust to reduce roadside parking
- Provide new play equipment
- Develop new website
- Undertake numbering of street lights to enable easier identification by residents and with the use of an online mapping computer programme
- Catalogue all trees in ownership of Parish Council and planting of additional trees
- Review current street furniture seeking the views of the local community where this is required
- Consider future use of allotment land at Marsh Lane [required by HS2 for safeguarding]

Appreciation

My thanks to fellow Councillors for their hard work and commitment throughout the year, sometimes in difficult and time consuming situations. Thank you to Stoke Mandeville & Other Parishes Charity for their continued financial support. To Stoke Mandeville Village Community Association members and Trustees for their fund raising efforts and enabling the Centre to be a place where people "want to go". And lastly but not least to our Clerk Sarah Copley who obtained her qualification as a Parish Clerk within her first twelve months of office. Her tireless work and competence is much valued.