



STOKE MANDEVILLE PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

2013 - 2014

8th April 2013

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The Annual Report of the Chairman is a resume of the work of the Parish Council throughout the year. With 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 with a total population of nearly six thousand residents. Three of our wards are on the fringe of Aylesbury town and the village ward is rural.

The following is an outline of our working during the period May 2013 – April 2014.

- **Review of District Electoral Ward**

The Parish Council responded to the Local Government Boundaries Commission consultation concerning changes to the boundaries of the Aylesbury Vale District Council Electoral wards. In order for each ward to meet the numbers of electorate required a proposal arose from Aylesbury Vale District Council that the Village ward should be split between the Aston Clinton and Wendover Electoral Ward which would have resulted in the village being split in representation to AVDC. The Parish Council resisted and canvassed residents to seek their views. As a result a counter proposal was submitted by the Parish Council that Stoke Mandeville Parish should be a separate stand alone District Electoral ward. However, the Commission's initial recommendations when published included Stoke Mandeville village pairing with Wendover to make a new "Stoke Mandeville and Wendover" Ward with two District Councillors. The Boundaries Commission also considered that a new Ward should be established for Hawkslade, Southcourt and Walton Court. Stoke Leys and Stoke Grange will remain with the Coldharbour and Mandeville & Elm Farm Ward. Consultation is now taking place on these recommendations.

- **On Street Car Parking**

Problems with on street car parking continue on roads near to Stoke Mandeville Hospital and also near the Station. 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.

In February 2014 a public meeting for Stoke Leys residents took place and a consultation followed on the proposed Experimental Road Traffic Order, which if agreed would apply yellow lines on Kynaston Drive and Winterton Drive and side roads. A survey of residents has been undertaken by Bucks County Council, as the Highways Authority, the outcome of which is awaited.

Arising from a well attended meeting of village residents discussions have been taking place with Chiltern Rail, Thames Valley Police and District and County Councillors about commuter parking on roads around the Railway Station. As a result information signs have been placed at entrances to the station, asking passengers who may be parking on village roads to respect the safety and access of others. Chiltern Rail is also seeking to promote its "Three for Free" parking scheme whereby three or more people sharing a car to the station can park without charge in the station car park.

The Parish Council will continue to work with residents and agencies to bring some resolution and closure to the difficulties caused by on street parking in residential roads.

- **High Speed Rail 2**

HS2 continues to take a considerable amount of Councillors' time, both in and outside meetings. The Second Reading of the Government's Hybrid Bill is imminent. A Task Group of Councillors had been working with the Stoke Mandeville Action Group to discuss issues on which to Petition the Hybrid Bill and both organisations will undertake separate Petitions on the same issues. During the year Bilateral meetings have taken place with HS2 Ltd in order to seek some common ground in mitigating the effects of HS2 on Stoke Mandeville, both during the period of construction and when the rail becomes operational. We have commented on consultations on the draft Environmental Statement, the Property consultation and more recently the final Environmental Statement. Public meetings have taken place in order to keep our electorate involved and to enable understanding of what HS2 will mean for them. During January we held two "drop in" sessions in connection with the Environmental Statement and during March a public meeting for residents to come along to hear about the "bypass" diversion of the A4010. All of these public sessions have been well attended and good feedback from residents received. We have continued to engage with our neighbouring parishes as well as Action Groups and organisations. We are especially grateful to Bucks County Council for the tremendous amount of support and practical advice given. To find that the diversion of the A4010 Wycombe Road "bypass" as suggested by the Parish Council in order to avoid two unsightly bridges had been accepted by HS2 Ltd brought some relief. However we remain resolutely opposed to HS2 and will continue to be so, but the work of mitigation must continue in order that the parish of Stoke Mandeville does not fall "between two stools" should HS2 eventually appear on our doorstep.

- **Planning Applications**

Parish Councils receive all applications for development within their 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 commented on forty eight planning applications mostly for extensions to existing dwellings. Thirty four new houses have been completed at Hawkslade and planning permission exists for a further twenty seven off Isis and Oats Close. 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.

Last year the Government introduced the Planning Policy Framework which reduced restrictions for development. The full effects of this have yet to be seen. We have been involved in the Vale of Aylesbury Plan attending meetings and responding to surveys. The Plan was subsequently withdrawn but we look forward to working with AVDC on its successor the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan and at the same time as developing a Neighbourhood Plan for Stoke Mandeville.

- **Community**

Ideas for improvements to enhance the Parish are welcome from residents as well as being alerted when problems occur. This can be anything from a street light not working to speeding traffic. The Parish Council attempts to resolve anything brought to its attention but sometimes it is not possible either on grounds of cost or being outside our remit. During the year we have:

- replaced and provided additional litter bins and dog bins
- replaced the notice board at Dalesford Road
- provided new play equipment in the children's playground at Eskdale Road
- undertaken maintenance on existing play equipment (replacement ropes on the multiplay and repairs to the aerial runway surface)
- repaired the tennis court fencing which had been damaged by the inappropriate use of footballs

- installed wooden posts around the allotment entrance to prevent damage to the footpath and cars from the allotments crossing neighbouring driveways
- replaced the blown lamps in forty one street lights
- planted and maintained the raised flower bed on the green near the school
- dealt with overgrown trees on the green
- established a new website for the Parish Council
- maintained the upkeep of the old church site
- Commissioned new Park benches to be provided along the periphery path of Hawkslade

- **Street light**

Our contractors have advised that a number of older street lights in the Parish are now obsolete and the fittings unobtainable. We are therefore currently reviewing streetlights throughout with a view to upgrading old stock with the possibility of LED street lighting.

- **Speeding Traffic**

Due to concerns received about speeding vehicles on our roads, trained Councillors have received training by Thames Valley Police in order to use equipment to identify speeding vehicles. Data taken from these sessions has been forwarded on to the Police for their own speed enforcement action and can lead to prosecution.

We have recently heard from County Councillor Chris Adams that he had contributed towards a Mobile Vehicular Activated Sign (MVAS) for the village ward from monies allocated to him from the BCC Community Leaders Fund. With a grant from the Wendover Local Area Forum this will enable the MVAS to be shared by Stoke Mandeville and Weston Turville Parish Councils. Discussions are underway between the two Parishes to identify protocols for its use.

- **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 have 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 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
- Installation of an outdoor gym with sponsorship or other funding as a legacy of the Paralympic Games
- The quest for play equipment on Hawkslade has continued but we are pleased to learn that this will be provided by section 106 monies from the developers of land off Isis Close and Oat Close.
- Develop a Neighbourhood Plan with the local community in accordance with Government specification in order to safeguard against untoward development
- Continue to oppose HS2 and petition HM Government's Hybrid Bill for further mitigation measures in order to protect our community.
- Monitor traffic in order to reduce speeding vehicles in the parish
- Continue to work with Chiltern Rail, Bucks County Council, the Police and Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust to reduce roadside parking
- 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
- Proceed with the replacement of street lights where required

- **Finance**

The annual accounts for 2013-14 will be subject to internal and external audits and will be published thereafter.

For 2013-14 Stoke Mandeville Parish Council's precept represented a charge to an average Band D household of £39.04 per annum which is below the national average of £50.33. At its meeting in January, the Parish Council voted for a 2% increase in the precept for 2014-15 resulting in the Band 'D' tax increasing to £39.82.

The Parish Council is grateful to Stoke Mandeville and other Parishes Charity for providing a grant which helps to keep the precept below the national average and also ensures that all residents benefit from the Charity. In 2014-15, the Parish Council have requested a grant of £10,000. This is 10% of the annual budget and saves the average Band D household £3.98 per annum.

- **New Councillor**

In December 2013 Councillor Mungo Duncan who had represented Stoke Leys ward for 2 years resigned due to work commitments. We thank him for his work, time and commitment. In January we were pleased to welcome Marcus Rogers who in the absence of an election was co opted to represent Stoke Leys Ward.

- **Representation on Outside Bodies**

ARLA Community Forum – Brian Adams

Greater Aylesbury Local Area Forum – Marcus Rogers

Wendover Local Area Forum – Jenny Hunt

Aylesbury Vale Standards Committee – Andrew Clark (nominated by AVALC)

Aylesbury Vale Association of Local Councils – Jenny Hunt (nominated by Parishes)

Appreciation

My thanks go to fellow Councillors for their hard work and commitment throughout the year, sometimes in difficult circumstances. HS2 has once again taken much of our time but we do not let this take us away from the real work of developing the Parish, undertaking our responsibilities and doing all that we can to maintain sustainability.

We do not know as yet whether Parishes precepts (parish funds) will be capped by Government or otherwise or whether we will be subject to referendums if we increase our precept beyond the Government limit. Our financial situation has improved in recent years and yet we still remain one of the cheaper areas for Council tax within the Vale. District and County Councils are finding their grant funding reducing to such an extent that by the end of the decade Government grants will almost have disappeared, but they have again protected parishes against losses for next year but this obviously will not be able to continue indefinitely.

Therefore, our sincere thanks once again to Stoke Mandeville & Other Parishes Charity for their continued financial support without which the Parish would be all the poorer.

To Stoke Mandeville Village Community Association staff and Trustees for their fund raising efforts In order that the Centre can be maintained in good condition.

To our District and County Councillors, Carol Paternoster and Chris Adams who lend support in attending most of our meetings.

And to our Clerk Sarah Copley who obtained her qualification as a Parish Clerk in April and is always willing to “go that extra mile” to meet the needs of the Council - our sincere thanks to you all.

Jenny Hunt

Chairman

April 2014