

STOKE MANDEVILLE PARISH COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

2014 - 2015

14th April 2015

As I write this report Parish and Town Councillors everywhere are approaching the end of their four year term of office and reflecting on the work they have done. Elections for Councillors are planned for 7 May 2015 and whilst some have expressed a wish to remain as a Parish Councillor, others have decided to retire or move on. We have lost a number of experienced Councillors during the past year and some vacancies have not been filled. Hopefully, this year new people will emerge with an interest in playing the vital role of engaging with their local community and representing the views of local people.

The past year has been one of change improvement [getting things done], making slow progress in a few areas which are difficult to change and “fire fighting” when something occurs and needs to be resolved quickly. We have held three extraordinary meetings during the year which illustrates the urgency of some issues with which we have dealt. A number of “old chestnuts” are still around and continue to re emerge from time to time, such as on street car parking, the condition of our roads and the need for a new burial ground.

We strive to keep our community involved and informed of our activities. Our meetings are well advertised and open to the public who have the opportunity to challenge the Council and raise issues they wish to be addressed. Our website is up to date giving ongoing information on the work we are doing and the Parish Magazine, produced quarterly by the Stoke Mandeville & Other Parishes Charity, is a medium we use to reach out to our residents.

The Community Right to Bid

The Government’s publication of the Localism Act 2011 gave new rights and powers to local communities. The Localism Act enables local communities including Parish Councils to nominate assets in their area to their local District Council as being an asset worth retaining. If accepted, when these assets come up for sale time is given for groups and organisations to develop a bid and raise the necessary funding to buy the asset on the open market should they wish to do so. Stoke Mandeville Parish Council has developed a list of assets for the Parish including three public houses/hostelries, two shops including one post office and one sports field. Once the list of assets has been submitted to the local authority, owners may appeal against their property being listed if they wish to do so.

Neighbourhood Plan

The aim of Neighbourhood Planning is to involve local communities in the strategic planning system for their area and to shape the area in which they live. The Plan is not intended to oppose growth but to set out a vision for the future. Once adopted a Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the planning policy for the area and should be taken into account when planning applications are considered.

Stoke Mandeville is a Parish of over six thousand people with four electoral wards, three being urban and one rural. By the nature of its location close to the county town of Aylesbury, Stoke Mandeville will always be vulnerable from large scale development. Therefore, in the summer of 2014 we agreed to develop a Neighbourhood Plan in order to influence development in the Parish for both housing and employment needs. The Localism Act states that a Neighbourhood Plan should be done in conjunction with local people. For the Parish Council it has been difficult to attract local people to be part of this despite public advertising. Nineteen Parishes in Aylesbury Vale have started a

Neighbourhood Plan but only two have completed, which illustrates the complexity of the task in hand. Grant funding allocated from Government to local authorities from 2011 – 2014 was quickly taken. However, more recently the Government has announced new funding from 2015 – 2018 with additional funding for larger Parishes. Hopefully our bid will be successful and we will have the means to progress. However, without local people coming forward to be involved the task will be more difficult.

Devolved Services

In line with the Localism Act, in May 2014 Bucks County Council offered Parish and Town Councils the opportunity to take on certain aspects of light highway roadside maintenance including the cutting of grass verges. Grant funding would be provided by BCC on a decreasing basis over a four year period after which the total cost would fall to the parish. Due to the number of complaints from residents last summer about the inadequacies of grass cutting by the highways authority, we agreed to join a “cluster group” of other Parishes working with Aylesbury Town Council who would become the provider of the service. However delays have arisen in the signing of the Agreement between some Parish Councils and Bucks County Council with work being unable to start by the 1st April as anticipated. However, whilst we remain convinced that this is the best way forward for us because we know our own area, our residents and local land owners, any Agreement has to be right for our parish and negotiations still continue.

High Speed Rail 2

Once again the Government’s proposals for HS2 have taken much of our time with ongoing consultation on various aspects of the scheme to which we have responded. With the Stoke Mandeville Action Group [SMAG] we continue to meet periodically with representatives of HS2 Ltd to learn of the latest developments and to campaign for additional and better mitigation. Our Petition has gone forward and we await summons to present this to the Parliamentary Select Committee of MPs. More recently it has become known that a consortia of local authorities and conservation groups in Buckinghamshire has published proposals for an extended tunnel through the Chilterns to be extended towards Stoke Mandeville with the northern portal emerging near the village. In addition to the tunnel portal a large construction site is planned at the rear of the Triangle Business Park just off the A413 which will be in situ for possibly up to seven years causing havoc to Stoke Mandeville and adjoining towns and villages by nature of the many thousands of vehicle movements on local roads and further afield. Whilst agreeing in principle to the need for a tunnel through the Chilterns, we have expressed grave concerns about the adverse affect the northern exit portal will have on the village once the train is up and running. Such a move will have no benefits for Stoke Mandeville only disbenefits and at a an additional cost of around £360m we consider could be put to better use for mitigation in the Stoke Mandeville and Aylesbury area.

Speeding

During the year we have taken delivery of an MVAS (Mobile Vehicle Activated Sign) which is shared with Weston Turville and will be sited in various “hot spots “ around the Parish in an attempt to prevent speeding. Details of speeding data will be recorded and forwarded on to Thames Valley Police.

We have been successful in bidding for funds of £5k towards a reduced speed limit from 40mph to 30mph along built up areas of Risborough Road and Lower Road. Public consultation has yet to take place.

Car Parking Stoke Leys

Considerable work has been done by local District and Parish Councillors through meetings and campaigns urging Bucks County Council as the local Highway Authority, to provide measures to curtail on street parking in Kynaston Avenue, Winterton Drive and surrounding streets. As a result during September, yellow and white lines were placed on those roads most affected by car parking as part of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order [ETRO]. The Order remains in place until the end of April 2015 when the scheme will be reviewed. Feedback from residents to date has been mostly positive.

Replacement of Street Lights

With discontinuance of the cells we currently use for street lights we had to review the way the service is provided and at the same time look at value for money in our revenue costs. Street light columns and lamps are tested every four years for safety. Meetings with manufacturers and demonstrations of the type of street lights now in use elsewhere has taken place and three LED lights are to be piloted in Carters Ride. Consideration will then be given to the type of street light to be used and the timescale within which this can be afforded.

General Maintenance and Outdoor Provision

The Parish Council is the owner of land and facilities within the Parish which have to be maintained. Our portfolio includes the Playing Field, the Community Centre, Allotments, Burial Ground and the old Church site. Assets comprise street lights, seats, dog bins, litter bins, ‘bus shelters, the children’s playground, skate park and tennis courts which are regularly inspected and any necessary maintenance put in hand. During the year under review work has been done to clear overgrown vegetation in and around the burial ground and on the periphery of the playing field. Maintenance of the old Church Site and planting is undertaken by Vale Countryside Volunteers and the flower bed on the green in Lower Road planted by contractors. Work has taken place on the allotments, litter bins have been increased and replaced and the number of dog bins in use assessed. Three new seats have been provided at Hawkslade. New playground equipment has been provided and older equipment updated at Eskdale Road playing field and an outside table tennis table is on order. The tennis courts have been cleaned and refurbished, all seats have been cleaned and repainted and notice boards replaced at Kynaston Avenue, outside the Primary School, Wendover Road and at the village Post Office. Unfortunately, our plans to provide a playground at Hawkslade starting with an outdoor table tennis table have not materialised due to green space being owned by the District

Council. But we will continue to look at innovative ways to use the space available for play purposes. The Stoke Mandeville Village Community Association continues to maintain and improve the Community Centre by hire of the premises and also by fund raising for which we are most grateful.

Finance

To raise money Parish Councils issue a precept which is added to the council tax bills of residents within the Parish. Parish Councils decide how much money it will spend each year and therefore how much it will ask each council taxpayer to contribute. Our Precept [budget] for the financial year 1st April 2015 – to March 2016 has been set for £97,020 an increase over the previous year of 6.75%. The average increment in council tax based on a Band 'D' property [3 bed semi detached house or equivalent] is 6%. Reasons for this increase are to cope with future costs of devolved services as described on previous pages as well as well as increases in pay and prices.

Membership and Representation

During the year we have said farewell to Brian Tyndal, David Kennedy and Stephen Watson and welcomed Richard Swinney and Stephen Pluckwell.

The Parish Council is represented on outside bodies as follows ~

Brian Adams – ARLA Community Liaison Group
Marcus Rogers – Greater Aylesbury Local Area Forum
Jenny Hunt – Wendover Local Area Forum

Conclusion

This report is but a snapshot of the work undertaken by the Parish Council and it is difficult to cover all the work and events of the year. Our work is recorded in Minutes and reports on our website and in the Parish Magazine. All Councillors are aware of the time taken by being a Parish Councillor and of the commitment which has to be given for a 'job' to be well done. During the year fifteen Council meetings took place as well as well as twenty two Committee and other meetings and commitments.

In concluding this Report I convey my sincere thanks to the Councillors for their hard work, enthusiasm and common sense. To David Starr particularly as Vice Chairman for his ongoing support and for managing our finances; to Chairmen of Committees for the additional responsibility they take on and lastly but by no means least to our Clerk, Sarah Copley, for her tireless work and ongoing support to us all.

Jenny Hunt
Chairman