

## **Chairman's Report 2021-2022**

The full Parish Council has met nine times since our last Annual Parish Meeting in March 2021. The Parish Council committees, including a new Environmental Committee, have met regularly. Parish Councillors have represented the Council on various outside bodies, including the Southwest Chilterns Community Board and its four action groups.

Buckinghamshire Council and Town and Parish Council Elections were held on 6 May 2021. There were nine candidates for the nine places on Little Marlow Parish Council so there was no need for an election.

Sadly, one of our long-standing Councillors, Councillor Richard Mash, died suddenly at the beginning of March. Richard was highly respected and much loved by us all. Council meetings are just not the same without him. During his many years as Parish Councillor, Richard was of great service to the Council and to our local community. He was well plugged in to what was going on in the Parish, particularly in relation to local land issues. We benefitted as a Council and as a community from his local knowledge and experience and his great love for the outdoors. I would just like to record our sorrow at his death and our thanks to him for his many years of service.

Two of our Councillors have stood down since our last meeting: Cllr Roger Randall in March 2021 and Cllr Geoff Fitchew in January 2022. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them both for all the work they did while they were on the Council. I will just say a few additional words about Geoff as he served on the Council for 20 years and was Deputy Chairman for many of those years. Both the previous Chairman and I greatly valued his advice and support. I am particularly grateful to Geoff for his hands-on oversight of Abbotsbrook Hall, dealing himself with many of the maintenance issues which arose there and for the expertise he brought to planning related matters.

We were delighted to welcome to the Council Cllr Sam Kershaw who was co-opted in September 2021 and Cllr Stephen Goss who was co-opted in April 2022. Sam hit the ground running and is already making his mark on planning matters as well as getting on top of other aspects of Council work. It is obviously early days for Stephen, but I am sure he too will quickly find his feet.

The Council is fortunate to own a number of assets which serve the community and bring in a welcome income.

### **Pavilion and Recreation Ground**

We were able to allow our regular hirers to return as the COVID 19 restrictions were gradually lifted between April and July 2021. It was good to be able to welcome back first the children's groups and then the adults who use our recreation ground and a little later those who hire our halls for children's activities before finally being able to open our doors to adult exercise groups and finally all our hirers. Not all groups came back right away, some preferring to wait until September or even later, but most are now back. We were fortunate that the pre-school was able to continue to operate throughout the pandemic. I would like to thank Richard Tedham for the excellent job he has done maintaining the recreation ground. This was particularly challenging this year because of the large number of rabbits who all seemed to want to build their burrows in Little Marlow village. There were so many holes in the football pitch that the Bourne End Junior Sports Club were forced to stop playing. We eventually had to resort to drastic measures to resolve the problem and we are now looking forward to the return of the junior football teams.

### **Abbotsbrook Hall**

I am pleased to report that most of our regular hirers have returned to Abbotsbrook Hall, although we are not yet back to full capacity. The pre-school operated throughout the pandemic. Maintenance work undertaken at the Hall last year included digging a new soakaway in order to divert the rainwater from the east side of hall to the existing drains at the west side and work on the guttering. I am grateful to our Hirings Administrator, Christine Samuels, and our caretaker, Peter Samuels, for the way they coped with the ever-changing rules over this last year.

### **Burial Ground**

In September, we started work on expanding the cemetery by clearing the copse. This area will eventually become a new area for burials once we run out of space in the existing cemetery. In the meantime, we have sown wildflower seeds in the top part of the copse. The Council organised a working party at the cemetery in December to clear leaves and cut away the ivy on some of the old gravestones.

### **Allotments**

The allotments continue to be an asset for the community. All our allotments are now taken.

### **General**

The Government decided not to extend the legislation allowing Town and Parish Councils to meet remotely beyond 7 May 2021, so the Parish Council had to revert to meeting physically at its meeting on 18 May.

We reviewed our 2021/22 Action Plan which set out our objectives for the year at our March Council meeting and drew up a new Action Plan for 2022/23. This includes a number of new objectives relating to the environment. The plan can be found on our website alongside all our previous plans.

The Parish Council is committed to improving the sustainability of our community and to this end created a new Environment Committee to draw up an environmental strategy for the Council to guide our decision making and ensure we take environmental factors into account. The Council had a number of discussions about whether we should declare a climate emergency. We eventually decided that we would not do so, but the Council confirmed that we are committed to following through on the actions for addressing the climate change emergency locally as identified in the Parish Council's environmental policy. The policy can be found on our website. Key aims include reducing the carbon footprint of the Council, supporting and educating parishioners to help them reduce their household's or business's environmental impact, protecting the natural environment in the parish, seeking to improve biodiversity locally and encouraging behaviours that will build resilience in face of climate change.

The Parish Council was involved in the successful bid which Transition Town Marlow, through its Releaf Marlow project, submitted to the Local Authority Treescapes Fund. Our portion of the bid was for 3 Wild Cherry trees in Little Marlow Recreation Ground, 6 Black Poplars in Spade Oak Car Park, 4 mixed native broadleaf trees in the Allotments and 4 mixed native broadleaf trees in Fern Lane Cemetery. These were all kindly planted by Cllr Anna Crabtree. We were also allocated 534 mixed native hedgerow species for each side of the causeway footpath (on the east side of Spade Oak Lake) for which we did not bid. Transition Town Marlow kindly arranged for these to be planted.

The Parish Council recognised that we needed to be in a better position to influence the evolution of the Little Marlow Country Park. It therefore set up a Little Marlow Country Park Vision Working Group whose main objective is to produce a vision for the Country Park that will influence both Buckinghamshire Council's and private landowners' plans for and investment in the Country Park, as well as influencing consideration of planning applications within the Country Park. The Working Group has been asked to produce a vision document for consideration by the Council before

submission to Buckinghamshire Council. The vision document is to include recommendations of what we would like to see in the Country Park in terms of access, leisure, recreation, biodiversity and habitat expansion and facilities, as well as on the types of development which the Council should and should not support in the Country Park.

The Parish Council continues to carry out the grass cutting and other work which the then Buckinghamshire County Council devolved to us in 2015. The Devolved services contract was rolled over for a further year until March 2023. I should like to thank our two contractors, Buckland Landscapes and Steve Rogers of SR Farm Services, for the excellent job they continue to do maintaining the Parish open spaces and the burial ground respectively.

As always, we are grateful to the volunteers from Coldmoorholme Lane for the time and effort they put into maintaining the car park on the Lane on behalf of the Council so as to ensure that it remains a valuable asset not just for the Lane, but also for the wider community. We were saddened by the death last June of the then Chairman of the Coldmoorholme Lane Residents, David Brown. The Council is grateful to David for all the work he did on behalf of his residents while he was Chair and is indebted to him for ensuring that the annual donation which the residents receive from the Spade Oak Restaurant to help cover some of their costs in maintaining Spade Oak Car Park is now covered by a formal agreement.

I am not covering planning in my report as the Planning Committee Chairman will shortly be giving a separate planning report.

The Parish Council continued to play an active role in the South West Chilterns Community Board and its four action groups, ensuring that the interests and concerns of Little Marlow residents are taken into account in discussions. We submitted three bids to the Board: one in support of a bid from Transition Town Marlow to reduce the speed limit along the A4155 between the Westhorpe roundabout and Sheepridge Lane, one for funds to enable the Council to engage a landscape architect to help create a vision for the Country Park and one for funds to enable us to install bike racks in the Parish. The first two are still under consideration and the third was successful so we are now in the process of arranging for the racks to be installed.

I would like to end by saying a few more thank yous. We are fortunate to have two active Residents' Associations in the parish. I greatly appreciate the support and co-operation I receive from their Chairmen, Guy Carter who took over from Jason Downes and Sam Kershaw. I am also grateful to Buckinghamshire Councillors David Watson, David Johncock and Jocelyn Towns for attending our Parish Council meetings, for their continued interest in our Parish and for their support and advice on issues affecting Little Marlow, particularly in relation to planning matters and ongoing issues with Thames Water. My biggest thanks go to my fellow Parish Councillors for all the service they have given to the Parish Council and the wider community throughout the year and for the advice and support they have given me as Chairman. The Parish is really fortunate to have such a strong team of Councillors who work so well together. Between us we have a wide range of skills and experience which we can draw on for the benefit of the Council and the community. And last, but by no means least, I would like to thank our Clerk, Jo Murray, for keeping the council running on a day-to-day basis and for the support she provides to us all.

Cllr Valerie Brownridge  
Chairman, Little Marlow Parish Council