

Chairman's Report

It is my pleasure to present my third report to you as Chairman of Little Marlow Parish Council.

The full Parish Council has met 9 times since our last Annual Parish Meeting. In addition to attending those meetings and numerous sub-committee meetings, your Parish Councillors have also spent a good deal of time representing the Council and therefore you, the parishioners, at meetings of other local organisations and public bodies which deal with issues affecting our Parish. As a Council we try to keep abreast of all the changes happening in local government and more widely which impact on the work of the Council. The Clerk and Councillors have therefore attended training and briefings on a range of issues including GDPR, the Local Plan, planning more generally and the proposals put forward by Bucks CC and the four District Councils respectively for major changes to local government in Bucks.

We have again produced two newsletters this year and are continuing to draw our net more widely to include articles and photos from local organisations. It is now a year since we revamped our website. I hope that you are finding it more user friendly and a good source of information about what is going on in the Parish and the wider community and of course what your Parish Council is up to.

We are fortunate that even though we are a relatively small Council we own a number of assets which benefit the community, bring in an income but also of course require maintenance and can take up a lot of the Clerk's and Councillors' time. They therefore feature among our main areas of activity during the past year:

Abbotsbrook Hall

I hope that you have noticed some improvement to both the inside and outside of the Hall. We used the services of the Thames Valley Community Payback scheme. Although progress was slower than we would have liked they have done a good job, particularly on the railings and the exterior paintwork. [Our latest improvement has been the new curtains.] We have also had new fire and emergency signage and lighting installed here and at the Pavilion. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Hirings Administrator, Christine Samuels, for dealing with Hall bookings on our behalf, and our caretaker, Peter Samuels for all his hard work.

Pavilion and Recreation Ground

Following all the problems we had last year with our heating, we bit the bullet and had a new heating system installed in August which has been much appreciated by the users of the hall. Those of you who attend our Parish Council meetings will be aware that we have had a number of discussions about the refurbishment of the Pavilion. We have drawn up a list of work which includes internal and external decoration, improving access to the loft, sanding and sealing the hall floor, improving the kitchen, installing display boards in the hall and improving storage for chairs and tables. Councillors agreed that we should apply to the Public Works Laon Board for a loan of £20,000 to cover the costs of the refurbishment. One of the requirements of the loan is that we seek the views of parishioners. Details of how to do this are given

in the newsletter and on our website. Our major investment in the recreation ground this year was the purchase of the Brig, which has proved to be a popular addition to our playground equipment. Speaking of the recreation ground, I should like to thank Richard Tedham for all he does to keep the ground in such excellent condition.

Burial Ground

We have created a new area for infant interments. We recently carried out a further “topple test” on the memorial stones and have identified a number in the new part of the cemetery which are unsafe. We have laid down these stones and are trying to contact the families to ask them if they wish to arrange to have their stones repaired. I am delighted to report that we have finally cleared the old waste disposal area at the cemetery and now have a new waste bin which is emptied weekly.

Roads and road safety

The Council arranged for the footpath from Abbey Road to Chalklands to be cleared which has made the road safer for pedestrians. We have also committed funds to a speed review in Little Marlow village as part of an attempt to have the speed limit reduced from 30mph to 20mph and to improving the exit from the Athletics Track onto Westhorpe Lane. We have obtained matching funding for these projects from the Local Area Forum.

Allotments

We did a lot of work on the allotments in 2016/17 so we have had less to do this year but we have moved the tap! I would like to thank our allotments warden, Jane Vincent, for all her efforts to help maintain the allotments and find new plot-holders.

Athletics Track

The Parish Council has continued to work with Active-in who have been operating the Track on behalf of Adventure Learning Foundation. You may be aware that Serco Leisure which runs the Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre has recently taken over the running of the Athletics Track from ALF. We were hoping to have a representative of Serco with us this evening to update us on the latest developments but they have told us that as they are still in a transition period it would be premature to give a report this evening, but they have promised to set up an alternative meeting with the Council at a later date.

General

I mentioned in my report last year that one of the requirements of being a Quality Award Council is that we have to draw up an Action Plan setting out the Parish Council’s objectives for the coming year. This not only helps us to set our priorities but also lets you, the parishioners, see what these priorities are and enables you to hold us to account at the end of the year. We reviewed our 2017/18 Action Plan at a recent Council meeting and I am pleased to report that we have met most of our objectives. The Council also agreed our new Action Plan for 2018/19. There are copies available here this evening. The new Plan is also on the website.

The Parish Council is continuing to carry out the grass cutting and other work which Bucks County Council devolved to us in 2015. You will find a report on devolved services in your papers. I should like to take this opportunity to thank our two contractors, Greg Taylor and Steve Rogers, for the excellent work they do maintaining the Parish open spaces and the burial ground.

We have again undertaken work on the trees in the burial ground, the recreation ground and Abbotsbrook Hall as part of our tree maintenance plan.

I reported last year that we had obtained a grant for £3000 to improve the Spade Oak Car Park. Two new soakaways have now been put in and the car park area increased. We continue to be extremely grateful to the volunteers from Coldmoorholm Lane who have kindly maintained the car-park throughout the year.

Parish Councils are the lowest tier in local government and as your elected representatives, it is important that we speak up on your behalf about local issues. One of the issues which took up a lot of the Council's time this year was the King's Head pub. This will be covered in the planning report.

Many of you will be aware that the Spade Oak Quarry and the field off Coldmoorholme Lane have been sold. We were concerned about the Permissive Path around Spade Oak lake which is covered by an agreement between Lafarge and the Parish Council. We wrote to Tarmac before the sale to make sure that prospective purchasers were made aware of the Permissive Path Agreement. We have since written to the new owners but have not yet had a response.

Like all other public bodies and organisations, we have been grappling with the implications of the new Data Protection Regulations which are due to come into force on 25 May. Thanks to a huge amount of work on the part of our Clerk as well as the engagement of our Councillors we are confident that we will be compliant with the new legislation when it comes into force.

We continued to follow developments on the draft Local Plan for Wycombe District for the period 2017-33. We submitted comments to WDC supporting the policies in the final version of the Plan relating to the the Little Marlow Lakes Country Park and the Westhorpe site, particularly its retention in the Green Belt and non-inclusion among the proposed areas suitable for development. We also expressed concern about the policies relating to the proposed development at Hollands Farm. The Plan has now been submitted to the Inspectorate.

The Parish Council has been represented at various meetings about Bucks County Council's proposal to replace BCC and the four District Councils with a single Council and the four District Councils' counter-proposal to replace them with two Councils. The issue was also discussed a number of times at Council meetings. Following the announcement by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government that he was "minded to" abolish the existing County Council and District Councils and create one single unitary Council for the whole of Bucks, the Council has written to the Secretary of State to express our concern about his intended course of action. We pointed out that given all the uncertainty and confusion surrounding Brexit and the effect this is already having on business,

investment, employment and the provision of health and care services, this is not the right time to make a major change to the structure of local Government in Buckinghamshire. We therefore proposed that the status quo be maintained for a minimum of 5 years and that the structure of local government in Buckinghamshire should be revisited once the implications of Brexit had been worked through. We also said that any new process should involve more thorough consultation with Town and Parish Councils and much greater thought being given to their future roles and responsibilities and how they would fit into any new structure of local government. The deadline for submitting views is 25 May so you still have time to write in with your views. I would urge you to do so. The future of local government in Bucks affects us all.

You will be pleased to know that I am almost finished. I have left one of the most important elements of my report till last and that is my vote of thanks. I know that I said this last year, but I think it bears saying again. We are really lucky to have two active Residents' Associations in this Parish. I should therefore like to thank the Chairmen of the two Associations, Jason Downes and Richard Boas, for all their support and co-operation. We are also very fortunate to have County and District Councillors who take a close interest in our Parish and who are always willing to fight our corner. I should therefore like to thank County and District Councillor David Watson and District Councillors David Johncock and John Savage for all they do for us. But 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. They really are a great team. I don't think they always get the recognition they deserve for all they do. And last but not least, I would like to thank Emma Marsden, who is a clerk in a million! The role of a clerk is becoming more and more demanding but Emma just rises to all the new challenges and responsibilities thrown at her. She is a tremendous support to me and all the Councillors. With all these great people, it is not surprising that our Parish Council has had another successful year. I hope you agree!