

**STOKENCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL  
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2016**

**Staff**

Firstly, we said farewell to Rob Hawkins who took retirement and welcomed Fay Shelton as our new Parish Clerk in January. Fay was previously an OFSTED inspector and has already provided invaluable support to the council with her knowledge and experience of process management. Fay keeps abreast of the issues facing us both on a day to day basis and in the long term. In March we also said goodbye to Helen Daly, our Hall bookings clerk who had worked for the Parish Council for the last thirteen years. We thank Helen for her contribution to the council and wish her every success in her new role. It was decided after careful consideration by the Council that the hall bookings clerk would be incorporated within the Parish Clerk's job description therefore the bookings clerk role will not be replaced at this time to save costs. We have had to make some very difficult decisions too and carry out restructuring activities. As a result, the resident caretaker position will cease to exist with effect from 23rd May. As part of our cost saving initiatives, looking at ways of increasing our revenue with the anticipated future expenditure we will be responsible for and striving to avoid the need to increase the tax payers precept this coming year, we believe this to be justified. We thank Fred Dutton for his services to the Parish Council over the last four years and wish him every success for the future. Our Parish Warden, John Harding, looks after the commons and the minor maintenance jobs. This role is often understated, but we thank John for the good work he does, which if left unattended can create a false impression of neglect. John has been notably thanked for his works in the parish graveyard. We are also fortunate in our grass cutting and landscaping contractor, Richard Thompson, who apart from routine grass and hedge cutting, renews the bollards that keep the commons free from vehicles.

On a personal note, I would like to thank Camilla Baker, our Vice Chairman for her support since I came into the chair last year. Camilla has listened and advised where needed and I respect her wholeheartedly. I value her knowledge and her experience as a Parish Councillor.

**Finance**

Our finances remain healthy. The Parish Council holds a monthly Finance Committee to review the council's expenditure. Our aim is to spend your money wisely, and where possible locally. Although the Council is not a planning authority, we continue to scrutinise planning applications and to make recommendations or objections as appropriate. As previously stated, we have been able to hold the same amount of precept for 2016/17.

**Quality Council Status**

Stokenchurch Parish Council is now in the process of becoming a "Quality" Council under the local council award scheme run by the National Association of Local Councils. To achieve this status we will show that we meet the standards set by the sector and to ensure continued improvement. The **Quality Gold Award** demonstrates that a council is at the forefront of best practice and achieves excellence in governance, community leadership and council development.

**Policies & Procedures**

As a result of striving for a quality council status, it was brought to our attention that our policies and procedures required attention. We have recently implemented new policies and procedures which have been welcomed by some and not so much by others but implementation was required to ensure we are consistent and compliant. Some people do not like change, it takes you out of your comfort zone, it's the unknown..but change is healthy and needed especially in the fast moving world we live in today. We as a Parish Council need to ensure we embrace best practices and governance. The Parish Council works as a team, not one person but eleven of us who make decisions as a whole for the benefit of the parish.

## **Devolution**

The grass cutting contracts from both Bucks County Council and Wycombe District Council have been transferred to the Parish Council commencing this year. This week the Parish Council appointed a ground maintenance contractor on an initial 12 month contract to carry out the grass cutting transferred from BCC & WDC with the first cut scheduled for next week. Please bear with us over the coming months whilst we get a regular schedule underway. Any concerns please raise with the Parish Clerk. This is additional grass cutting on top of the normal parish grass cutting carried out by Thompson Garden Services.

## **Mudds Bank**

In the last year the Parish Council have continued to resist multiple planning applications on the land at Mudds Bank.

As parishioners may be aware this farmland was originally sold to a company called Vantage Land, a land banking company which appears to specialise in chopping up farmland and selling it in small plots aggressively marketed for investment opportunity with a huge emphasis on gaining planning permission. The Mudds Bank site now comprises around 30 sub plots of various acreages owned by multiple people, the vast majority of whom have not registered with Land Registry. There are plots of landlocked land in the field now owned by people from everywhere from London to Uganda. Clearly this whole site is about property speculators wishing to colonise the Green Belt and AONB to take land values from £ 12,500 an acre to in excess of £ 100,000 an acre. We understand that and realise we can do nothing about property developers trying to do so by stealth. However what we can do is to alert the Local Planning Authority to what is happening and comment by objection to Wycombe District Council about any planning applications.

On 24/2/2011 WDC made this area subject to an Article Four Direction which means no development should occur unless planning permission has been granted. However, development has taken place without the required permission and we have strongly complained to WDC to enforce against this.

The most blatant breach of planning control relates to Lot 27 informally known as 'Berry Farm' or 'Peartree Farm' it is one small parcel of land in the middle of the various lots all sold following fragmentation of the farm. Since 2014 there have been ten applications for planning on this plot, all of which the Parish Council have objected to. WDC have also refused these application, though we note with some regret in March 2016, the Planning Inspectorate overturned the refusal for two polytunnels and hardstanding over the public footpath, which they granted on appeal. This has now prompted a further application in April 2016 with great emphasis on the Inspector's words in their Agricultural Justification Statement.

The Parish Council has also objected to planning permission being sought for a blue sea container to be stored here for a Microlight, but regretfully, WDC granted permission for this. We also reported a caravan that appeared without permission and a stone track being laid to the said caravan at the northern most tip of the site. We now await the inevitable applications for these.

The Parish Council met with our District Councillors and senior planning officers from WDC on 31/3/16 to walk the site at Mudds Bank, so they can see for themselves the 'illegal' developments that need enforcing against. The visit was positive in that they could see for themselves the limited chances of commercially growing 'rare' berries in heavy chalk flint soil. They have promised to fully enforce against such breaches of planning, so we hope to see proper enforcement where required moving forwards.

As of yesterday, Cllr Saddique and myself have been in dialogue with Alastair Nicholson, head of planning and David Johncock, Cabinet member for planning to express our concerns with regards to new breaches that have taken place over the last 7 days.

We continue to thank all parishioners for the feedback they give us on Mudds Bank and especially to those who have given up time to attend meetings to help us prepare case after case to object. This is somewhat of a thankless task against a relentless industry of applications. We share parishioners' concerns and frustrations. Whilst we only have a consultative comment with planning applications and no powers ourselves, we continue to do our best on behalf of the Parish to protect our Green Belt and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

### **Hall**

We have noted as a council that we have a snagging list with regards to the presentation of Longburrow Hall. We have had the large hall floor re-waxed and remedial repairs to the small hall floor. As a result, it was agreed by the council that money is set aside in this year's budget to allow remedial works to take place. We are looking to redecorate both halls, hallway, refurbish/refresh of toilets and kitchen. In addition, we have replaced the locks and introduced a new key system and new deposit process. In addition, we will be shortly installing a new CCTV system for the hall and grounds. This new system will have the facility for nominated persons to review live footage remotely from their computer/phone. In addition, we will be organising security patrols around the hall on a daily basis every evening whereby the premises will be checked after the last hire and the hall and gate locked. This will alleviate concerns. This Hall is used by a wide variety of organisations and we look forward to its continued use as an important meeting place for the Parish and as a venue for social functions. The cost of hiring the Hall compares favourably with local venues. We are also in line with regards to our new refundable deposits for hirers when comparing to neighbouring parishes. We advertise in 'Chiltern View' and Freestyle which circulates in the Thame and Chinnor area.

### **Tesco / Yellow Lines/ CJ Stores**

As we are all aware Tesco opened which has proven to be very popular and has brought employment to our village. Barry Collins, Store Manager is here with his body armour on this evening to take a short Q&A from the floor. With regards to the parking, we all know the problems we are experiencing with the parking outside of Tesco with school drop off, pick up and tesco customers. We all know yellow lines have been installed and we all know this has not made any difference as the lines are not being enforced. Cars are still parking on them and now parking on the pavement on either side of the bellmouth at the George Road entrance. We have approached TFB who are happy to install bollards on either side of the entrance at a cost. We have requested that they proceed so currently at the feasibility study stage which will result in this proposal going to the BCC Local Area Forum for funding consideration. On the subject of the Local Area Forum we are also awaiting a start date from BCC with regards to the safety issue we currently have outside of CJ Stores. We have secured the funding on a match funding basis with BCC so just awaiting lead times.

### **Defibs**

We are committed to installing a further three defibrillators around the village in the near future. Our current defibs are located here at the hall, the Kings Arms and one at the Medical Centre.

### **SGCC**

We have committed funding to ensure that the SGCC building is watertight. The building was cladded earlier this year with replacement windows imminent. Their Chairman will shortly provide an update.

### **Play Equipment**

The play equipment project has been ongoing since October 2014. The skate park proposal was not pursued following a public meeting and a vote taken by the Parish Council at this meeting which voted against a skate park in Stokenchurch. I am very pleased to report that the additional items of play equipment along with outdoor fitness equipment were installed in December 2015. A big mention and thank you must go to the Betty Messenger Foundation for their generous contribution of £25,000. In addition, another big thank you goes to the Stokenchurch Educational Charity who kindly donated £5000 towards this initiative and £4725 from the Bucks County Council Local Area Forum. Feedback has been extremely positive. We are in the process of finalising the implementation of the additional play equipment at Cricket Ground Lane and Studley Green. Once

completed, this will complete the project with play equipment successfully installed into Studley Green playing fields, Longburrow Hall playing fields and Cricket Ground as per our original scope.

### **Communications**

We again promote the recently revamped Parish Council website to you as a source of information about village news, forthcoming events, minutes and agendas of Parish Council Meetings, as well as a guide as to what is available in the village. We do our best to keep parishioners aware of what is going on locally; there are 7 notice boards in the Parish, we use the 'Community' pages of 'Chiltern View', a useful means of giving notice of forthcoming events. There is also a Facebook page. In late 2015 Stokenchurch Community Action Forum conducted a Village Survey. The Parish Council received favourable feedback but also requesting drop in clinic type sessions for parishioners to meet with councillors. There also appeared to be interest from some members of the parish with regards to future parish councillor vacancies should they arise- was positive reading and great to see.

### **MUGA**

The Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) continues to be attractive to outside organisations. Over the winter months, the availability of lighting has been a real asset to sports teams, both locally and from further afield. We have just had the MUGA courts re line marked and looks fab and replaced the damaged netball/basketball posts.

### **Allotments**

The allotments at Stokenchurch and Water End are self financing, and the Allotment Association continues to flourish.

### **TVP**

Sadly, our village is not immune to the problems of crime and other issues that affect communities everywhere. Recognising this, we continue to be active in local Forums and Groups; the Parish Council is represented on the local Neighbourhood Action Group, and we continue to co-operate with Thames Valley Police, represented by our local officers, Pc Danny O'Driscoll and PCSO Penny Ling. We are still pro-active in our speed awareness and have speed devices around the parish. We also request TVP's support in patrolling Longburrow Hall more frequently.

### **Youth**

The Youth Club is a valuable source of recreation, but like any similar organisation, it is in need of help, not merely financial, but from people who are prepared to become involved. It is five years now since BCC withdrew their financial support to the club so they rely heavily on donations and fundraising. Currently numbers are low and the committee are currently reviewing the way in which the YC runs i.e. frequency, timing, offering etc. If you have children year 7 (11 years and up) encourage them to try the Youth Club. The Youth Club runs every Friday evening. Would you help ?? If you can volunteer, please speak to Nigel Entwistle who will be delighted to talk to you.

The Parish Council consists of eleven councillors including myself. I am proud to say we are all elected representatives.

Camilla Baker  
Ian Chadwick  
Dan Davies  
Chris Saunders  
Mike Jones  
Andrew Preece  
Robin Thomas  
Paul Harding  
Chris Parkinson  
Malcolm Penny

Fay Shelton – Parish Clerk  
John Harding - Groundsman

It is pleasing to see the attendance here this evening, and we look forward to seeing you on a regular basis. We actively encourage the public to attend our Parish Council meetings. We meet on the first and third Wednesday of each month at 7.30pm here at Longburrow.

It's been a very busy 12 months since we were elected and we will continue to work hard and look after the parish for you.

Representatives of a number of local organisations are here to bring you up to date on what they are doing in the village. They will be happy to answer your queries.

Thank you again for coming along this evening and I now hand across to our first update of the evening .....

TVP

SGCC

Medical Centre

Bucks Fire and Rescue

Stokenchurch Football Club

Stokenchurch Educational Charity

M40 CEG

Bucks County Council

Stokenchurch Community Library

Youth Club and Neighbourhood Action Group

Community Bus

Day Centre

Cricket Club

Tesco

Suzanne Bell

Mr Martin Elliott

Station Officer Tom Brandon

Mr Dave Fisher

Mrs Mary Shurrock

Dr. Ken Edwards

Cty Cllr Carl Etholen

Ms Louise Newell

Mr Nigel Entwistle

Mrs S Chadwick

Mrs Val Messenger

Mr Peter Langford

Mr Barry Collins

Victoria Nuthall, Chairman, Stokenchurch Parish Council.