CHENIES PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Council Chairman's Report to Annual Parish Meeting - 2024

This report to the Annual Parish Meeting covers the past year. It will be posted on the Parish Council web site in the next few days. There is a legal requirement for the Parish Council to present an annual report to parishioners after the financial year end.

Your Parish Council held six meetings during the year, meeting in person as required by the Government. Meetings are now usually held at 8.00pm on the third Wednesday every other month normally in the Sun Room at the rear of The Baptist Chapel – check the PC web site for the date of the next meeting. We have changed them to the third week in the month so that they are less likely to be in a bank holiday week. Our local county councillors are also invited but have not managed to attend any meetings – we are disappointed with their lack of involvement. Meetings are open to all and the first item on the agenda is the democratic quarter hour which gives parishioners the opportunity to raise any issues of concern.

There were no Parish Council elections in 2023 nor this year: Councillors are elected for a 4-year term with the next election due in 2025. The council comprises myself, Charles Macleod Matthews, David Le Neve Foster, Sue Smith and Molly Newton.

I was elected as chairman and Charles Macleod Matthews as vice chairman at our annual meeting last May. In order to reduce the workload on the Chairman, the Officer roles are reviewed and potentially reallocated each year with each Councillor taking "first call" for a specific area. Current roles are :-

- David Le Neve Foster – planning
- Molly Newton – roads and highways
- Sue Smith – Community Board and Village Forum
- Charles Macleod Matthews – footpaths, trees and the environment
- Martin Walker – website

Paul Messenger has served as clerk since April 2019 and I would like to thank him on behalf of the parish for his time and work over the past years.

Local Government

The new Buckinghamshire Council was established in 2020. Sixteen Community Boards are now established as are local groupings of parish and town councils known as Village Forums. Chenies is part of the Chesham and Villages Board area.

Maintenance

The grass cutting contract with Chesham Town Council covering the Green and Greensward as well as occasional maintenance of the verge along Claypits Lane has now terminated as Chesham TC did not wish to renew it. A new contract has been let – the best quote we could obtain was 50% more than last year - we will be monitoring it closely.

The Red Lion has applied to use the Greensward for additional outside seating again this year. The PC met with the manager and local residents and has neither supported nor opposed the application. We want the pub to succeed (witness how depressing it looked when it was closed) but acknowledge that local neighbours have concerns about its use of the Greensward. We would encourage you all to support our local businesses.

Footpaths

Some of our footpaths are not in the best state of repair. Of particular concern is the Chess Valley Walk which remains flooded in several places due to the winter rains and the unprecedentedly high ground water level. Should

ground water levels remain so high, we will need to investigate whether the footpath can be raised in several locations.

Please report any footpath problems HERE and also let us know via email to clerk@cheniesparishcouncil.gov.uk

The feasibility study into the plan for a footpath to be created on the east side of Village Road from opposite the Cricket Club entrance to the A404 was completed. We consider the cost to be astronomical and way beyond anything a small parish like ourselves could fund even with support and grants. But we will continue to see whether there are other options.

Trees

We continue to monitor all the trees for which the PC is responsible – along the Greensward and the Green.

Our application to remove and replace the tree on the Manor Drive near the school which we thought was in poor condition was rejected. A formal report from a qualified arborist was sought which concluded that it was in good health and does not require any short-term remedial work. We will continue to monitor it. An additional tree has been planted opposite it on the manor drive.

Highways

We met face-to-face with our Local Area Technician twice during the year. We find these meetings useful in order to highlight specific issues and ones which we feel need on-going focus.

The road between the Cricket Club and A404 was patched but is in a very poor state. Hopefully it will be repaired permanently at some point. Similarly, a section at the top end of the Village Green. The reality is that BCC has very little money and much of the ongoing maintenance budget was spent on the unprecedented flooding this year. Subsequently despite our regular meetings, progress is very slow. Although we are constantly reassured that our issues are on works orders they are not given priority.

Buckinghamshire Highways do not consider the flooding on the A404 between the garden centre and Claypits Lane to be potentially dangerous and is therefore not seen by them as a priority.

Please report any highway issues via Fixmystreet at https://fixmystreet.buckinghamshire.gov.uk It only takes a few minutes - please take the trouble to report them. If you don't report them, Bucks will not know about them and they will not get fixed!

Traffic Calming

The MVAS Camera is now back in operation and we are recording the data it gathers.

The Community Speed Watch team have been in operation regularly outside the Court House. We have nine volunteers but need more as three people are required for each session. In the past year we have reported 337 vehicles to the police. All these vehicles were travelling at 36 miles per hour in the 30 mph limit – please speak to Molly Newton if you can spare any time at all particularly between 8 am and 9 am as that is when we capture most offenders.

Planning

We continue to consider all planning applications in the parish and comment on these to the planning department for the Chiltern Area of Buckinghamshire Council. Your Council is very anxious to preserve the look and feel of the very special environment we enjoy in Chenies whilst fully accepting the need for our housing stock to be maintained and enhanced in line with modern day requirements. We do comment or object when we feel that a particular application adversely affects this especially in the Conservation Area. It is frustrating for residents and for your Council when the Planners do not always agree.

Most of the village is a Conservation Area and the countryside around it is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Green Belt. This places additional restrictions on all development. We urge you to seek advice before commencing any works.

Most of you will be aware of the Chicken Farm development which was constructed without planning permission. When the owner submitted plans, the PC objected and Bucks CC rejected them. An enforcement notice was issued and the applicant has appealed. We await further developments. Additionally, an enforcement notice has been issued by Bucks regarding the use of accommodation on site.

Works to repair the Village Pump House, a listed building, and secure its long-term future has been completed. We are very pleased with the results.

As part of the Bedford Arms' alterations the defibrillator was ~~be~~ relocated to the front of the annex building which means that you do not need to contact their night porter to gain access to it out-of-hours.

The Precept

Having remained the same for 3 years, we have increased the precept for this year by 5% to £8652. The increase only covers half of the increase in the cost for grass cutting which is by far our largest annual expense.

Best Kept Village Competition

Once again we entered the competition and, once again we were awarded a Certificate of Merit. We will be entering this year's competition and judging takes place between 1st June and 14th July. Last year we got a certificate of merit again, four years running if you discount the two years off for Covid. Last year's mark was 187/200, just about our highest mark ever!

There will be a village clear-up – this is planned for Saturday 1st June at 10:30 – meet on the Village Green. More information to follow on the PC website, CVS email and Facebook. As well as our own houses & gardens, we need to encourage businesses, churches and clubs to also make sure that their properties are tidied - communal spaces are key areas where marks can be gained or lost.

The Village Pond

Working parties have cleared the pond which is by the Cricket Club. It will need on-going maintenance to keep it in peak condition. Thanks to Jo & Jason Sutherland for organising this.

Electricity Supply Network

UK Power Networks have completed the undergrounding of the electricity supply in the valley and the old pylons have now been removed benefitting the views in the valley.

Website

The Parish Council has a web site – its address is https://cheniesparishcouncil.gov.uk/ . Please take a look!

Its primary purpose is for the publication of all the information which councils must now provide including Agenda, Minutes, Accounts and policies. Here you also will find details about your councillors, their responsibilities and contact details. We add news items as they become available – this report will be published there in the next few days.

Finally…

Responsibility for keeping Chenies and the surrounding area a great place to live rests with us all. Report any issues through the appropriate channels. Unless they are recorded, they can't be actioned – don't assume that someone

else will do it. Please keep the area around your property looking perfect and participate in activities to improve our environment.

PC elections will be held next year – please consider whether you could become a councillor – speak to any of us for more information!

Martin Walker
Chairman, Chenies Parish Council
May 2024