

Report by the Chairman of the Parish Council

This was an interesting year in which the Parish Council met 7 times and, in addition, held the Annual Village meeting on 23 April last year. A year in which road closures, broadband and traffic dominated the agenda.

The Council first heard in August that the road between The Causeway and Gypsy Bottom was to be closed between 27th October and 22nd December and then again between 3rd January and 27th February to enable the installation of a 250mm water main on behalf of Thames Water. This we accepted as being necessary work which had to be completed and we met with Thames Water so that we could keep parishioners updated via our website. Unfortunately, the work extended into March and many villagers were inconvenienced particularly those in Main Street and The Close who could not access their drives.

The necessity of having superfast broadband in the village was one of the key findings of the Ashendon Community Led Plan and had also been recognised for some time by the Parish Council. There were originally just two separate options for installing superfast broadband in villages in Buckinghamshire:

- a. Via Connected Counties, acting through Bucks Business First, but from whom we had received misinformation and broken promises of it being installed in Ashendon within the next two years. And secondly:
- b. Aylesbury Vale Broadband which had no immediately plans to extend their small network to Ashendon.

It was, therefore, decided to set up a Working Group under the leadership of Cllr Siân Miller to see what alternatives there were. The Group quickly recognised that the best way forward was to proceed with the BT Community Fibre Partnership Scheme and to enter into a contract with BT to install Fibre to the Cabinet. The cost of this would be £65,744 less £31,150 secured from the Government's Better Broadband Vouchers Scheme. This required the village to raise an initial £32,892 within a month and a final £1,702 on completion.

To achieve this, a decision was made to ask villagers to pledge donations to the project and also seek local grants. The Local Area Forum, under the chairmanship of County Cllr Paul Irwin, agreed to pledge £6,000; St Mary's Church approved a £1,000 grant; and The Red Lion Social Club donated £500. The Parish Council also approved a grant of up to £2,600 if needed.

Unbelievably, pledges from villagers exceeded a further £25,000 thus allowing the contract to be signed with BT Openreach. This means that superfast broadband will be installed in Ashendon within the next year. Our thanks go to Cllr Miller, David Crwys-Williams, Kelvin White, Pietro Ranieri, Sue Maldonado and Cllr Irwin, and of course all those who made pledges. This project has again shown that when there is an extra-special need the village can really pull together.

It has been recognised for some time that the flow of traffic through the village is increasing and that, in particular, a number of drivers of heavy goods vehicles are ignoring the signs that state that the road is not suitable for them. Also, a number of cars and vans are exceeding the speed limit. In addition, we had representation from residents of Upper Pollicott at Council meetings requesting that we apply to extend the speed limit from The Old Forge to below Harrow Cottages. We joined forces with the Parish Councils of Westcott, Cuddington and Chearsley and, through volunteers, monitored HGV traffic on two occasions through these villages. Ashendon had the lowest total of HGV traffic on both

occasions: 28 and 21 lorries. Nevertheless, Councillor Peter Smettem has attended a number of meetings with Buckinghamshire County Council to see if a weight limit can be placed on vehicles passing through the village. He also attends the Calvert Landfill liaison Committee. FCC, the Landfill Operator, takes the issue of vehicles using inappropriate routes to get to and from their facility seriously, and has taken action to ensure that Ashendon is not used as a short cut. Other action taken has been to have white lines painted at the road edge hoping that this will reduce speed; to have sharp bend signs installed at Lower Pollicott to make drivers aware of the hazard and we are to use Sentinel Speed Watch equipment to monitor speeds at Upper Pollicott to see whether a reduced speed limit is justified to make it safer for pedestrians. We have also raised our concerns with Transport for Bucks about the humps in the road from Westcott following the water main installation.

Those were the three main issues but, in other respects, it has been business as usual. Having taken on responsibility for grass cutting in the parish, we contracted Toolshed, a social enterprise based in High Wycombe, to cut the grass verges. There were teething problems which have largely been overcome and we have awarded them the contract again this year. We have also maintained Boughton's Peace as a village amenity and paid for grass cutting in the Playing Field and car park. On the subject of the Playing Field the Local Area Forum granted £500 under a Village Health and Fitness Project and this money has been used to buy sports equipment including balls and tennis nets. We also used the Playing Field and pavilion for *Play Around the Parishes* children's entertainment.

We entered the Best Kept Village competition and were awarded a commendable 81 points out of a possible total of 100 and we organised a litter pick between The Old Forge and Pollicott Bridge. With thanks to Cllr Chris Rand, we provided a bonfire to celebrate the 90th birthday of HM The Queen. We have continued to monitor planning applications and comment as necessary. We have represented the parish at all four meetings of the Local Area Forum and thank them, and especially Cllr Paul Irwin, for the help and financial assistance they have given our community.

We carried out a survey in the whole village to see whether residents would like *No Doorstep Selling Zones*. In Main Street and Upper Pollicott there were majorities in favour and we are in the process of setting up the scheme in those areas. In other areas there was no majority in favour.

During the year our Parish Clerk, Venetia Davies, created a new website for the Council. Parishioners are encouraged to register with the site as this will enable them to receive advance notices of meetings, parish events and planning applications. If you have not already done so, please register.

I thank all parish councillors for their support: Cllr Peter Smettem (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Les Curtis, Cllr Chris Rand and Cllr Siân Miller and I am extremely grateful to our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Venetia Davies for all the work that she does for the parish. I also thank Andy Howes who retires this year having been our internal auditor for longer than I can remember.

Kevin Nash