

Chairman's Annual Report for the 2010/11 Council year.

We have now completed the first 4 year term of the Little Chalfont Parish Council. Three Councillors decided to stand down; my thanks therefore go to Chris Ingham and Martin Dale who have represented Little Chalfont and Little Chalfont South wards respectively since the Parish Council was formed and Peter Martin, who was co-opted but who has now moved out of the village. All three have been valuable members of the Council but I must pay a special tribute to Chris Ingham, who has been Chairman of the Planning Committee for the past four years. Chris has ensured that the Planning Committee looks diligently at all planning applications within Little Chalfont and makes its opinion known to the planning authority. Over the past couple of years he has had to spend considerable time evaluating the District Council's Core Strategy and ensuring that the Parish Council's view is heard. His last major role whilst in office was to attend the Examination in Public and speak on our behalf. This involved studying a very large amount of documentation and preparing himself to speak before the Planning Inspector.

Of the other Councillors, Gary Smith (Vice-Chairman) has transferred his allegiance to Little Chalfont South ward where he was unopposed. Gary has been vice-Chairman of this Council since I became Chairman and, with his financial background, has been invaluable in that position. Lesley Hunt, Michael Dear and Vinny Patel were all co-opted during the last four years and have proved to be very worthy members of the Council. They, and I, were all re-elected on May 5th. Additionally, John Hinkly and David Rafferty were elected and we look forward to their contributions to the Council business. This leaves one vacancy, in Little Chalfont South ward.

My thanks go to our Clerk, Janet Mason and our Assistant Clerk, Karen Sterling. Both deal with numerous issues and do their best to ensure all queries and complaints from members of the public are dealt with efficiently. This has been a very busy year for both of them but they have shown great dedication to ensure the smooth running of the Council. Janet negotiates contracts and manages those that are awarded, liaises with outside bodies, prepares agendas and minutes of our main Council meetings and progresses actions arising from those meetings. As the Council's Responsible Financial Officer she prepares and monitors the budget, maintains the accounts, preparing them for submission to the internal and external auditors, and ensures that the Council's actions are lawful and in accordance with our rules of governance and accountability.

Karen deals with hall and pitch bookings and normally looks after the Planning Committee ensuring that, in addition to preparing agendas and minutes, the relevant planning application documents are available for Councillors to view at meetings. Karen has also assisted the Westwood Park working party and has been heavily involved with our new play area which will be installed shortly.

During the past year, three new grit bins have been installed; the ones on Burtons Lane and Elizabeth Avenue were funded by the Parish Council and the one in Chenies Parade by a donation from County Councillor Martin Tett's community fund.

The Local Area Forum has been the means by which funding has been agreed from the County Council for a permanent VAS (Vehicle Activated Speed device) to be installed in Elizabeth Avenue. In the new financial year we have bid for, and obtained provisional agreement, for lights to be installed to illuminate the pedestrian underpass from Marygold Walk to Beel Close. We have also submitted a bid for another VAS in Bell Lane.

In my report for last year I mentioned we were awaiting news of our bid for a 'Playbuilder' fund grant. We were delighted when Chiltern District Council awarded us one of the two grants in this district but then we heard that the Government's spending review had threatened this fund. However, after several anxious months, we had confirmation that we would get the money and could go ahead with our scheme for a play area in Westwood Park aimed at the 8 – 13 year old group. An application for a certificate of lawful use has been submitted to the planning authority and, as soon as that has been granted, the contract for the work will be placed. Work is expected to be completed during the summer.

The arrangements for the maintenance of our open spaces have continued to work well. Amersham Town Council is contracted to maintain the main part of Westwood Park and a company called 'Spruced-Up' maintains the garden part of the park, the Village Green, the area around the Village Hall and the Finch Lane pond area. Our street lighting maintenance contractors, Forde and McHugh, continue to provide good, prompt service.

The Council is committed to trying to find a site for allotments and is in serious discussions with Paradigm Housing to see if some land they own could be a possibility. If agreement is reached in principle, negotiations will still have to take place with other organisations.

The Parish Council has only one permanent committee (Planning) which meets every three weeks and discusses all planning applications made within the Parish boundaries. It then makes recommendations to Chiltern District Council which is the planning authority. This committee has recently spent considerable time discussing the District Council's Draft Core Strategy leading up to the 'Examination in Public'.

The Village Hall has been well used with a number of new bookings since the refurbishment a couple of years ago. The hall management committee (comprised of a mix of Councillors and representatives of users) meets about four times a year and advises on matters to do with the hall's appearance, usage etc.

The Farmers' Market continues to be held once a month and is now providing a small income. Other activities have been considered, such as a regular craft market but so far nothing has materialised.

The Council is pleased to be able to support various local activities and organisations; the largest financial contribution is to the Community Library. Grants have been made to the Youth Club, which operates on Friday evenings in Bell Lane School premises and is staffed by volunteers; this is now attracting about 40 young people each week and more help is urgently needed. Other grants have been awarded to the Good Companions, Dial-a-ride and the Mayor of Chesham's Christmas lunch; additionally, financial support has been given to the hanging basket scheme in the Village centre organised by the Community Association. The Parish Council finances the Christmas lights on the trees adjacent to the Village Green and the Village Hall.

The next major project for the Council depends on the outcome of the Community Association's initiative to open up, for public use, the area between Snells Lane and the approach road to the High School (formerly known as the Sculpture Park). A charity has been set up with a view to acquiring the land by public appeal and, if successful, it would then be leased to the Parish Council which would be responsible for the maintenance. This is a very exciting possibility and could give a lovely open area in the centre of the village, as well as ensuring that the land would never be available for residential or commercial use.

The Annual Parish Meeting was held in April and attended by about 35 people. Lynn Johnson, Community Relations Manager for GE Healthcare, gave a well received presentation about the company.

I would like to thank all my fellow Councillors for the time they give voluntarily and the hard work they put in. In addition to 11 Council meetings and approximately 17 planning committees each year, Councillors are involved in working parties, representing the Council on management committees of other organisations and attending various other meetings, training courses etc.

We have frequently sought help and advice from our two District Councillors, Don Phillips and Mike Smith, and our County Councillors, Tim Butcher and Martin Tett; our thanks go to all of them for their support. Following the elections in May 2011, Mike Smith will no longer be one of our District Councillors but we are pleased that Peter Martin, who was previously one of our Parish Councillors, has taken his place.

The Parish Council is pleased that our lobbying for a single polling station in the Parish has been successful and all voters were able to use the Village Hall even though those from Little Chalfont South were still voting for different District Councillors than those in the rest of the village. We hope this anomaly will be corrected in the not too far distant future.