

Chairman's Annual Report for the 2014/15 Council Year

The Parish Council has been at full strength during the past twelve months with five elected and three co-opted Councillors. Parish Council elections are scheduled for May 7th. Two of our present number are not seeking re-election but the others have all agreed to stand again. As there were no other nominations, all six are returned unopposed. Changes to the ward boundaries mean that we should now have nine councillors so we start the new session looking to co-opt three more people on to the Council. Full Council meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month and planning committee meetings are held every three weeks.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking all my colleagues for their commitment. They have all worked extremely hard, bringing various skills and experience to the work of the Council. My thanks also go to Janet Mason who, after seven years in office, resigned as our Parish Clerk. Janet's dedication to the job was much appreciated, not only by Councillors, but by many members of the community who had dealings with her in various ways.

Natasha Meldrum, who was appointed Assistant Parish Clerk in October, has now been promoted to Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer. Eight people were interviewed but the three members of the interviewing panel were unanimous in deciding Natasha was the best person for the job. Her replacement as Assistant Clerk is Susan Owens who joined us on April 14th. I am confident that we are therefore in safe hands and that the friendly and efficient service, for which the Council is known, will continue.

In my last year's report, I stated that the Council was looking at the possibility of installing a war memorial in the village. I am delighted to say that this was achieved in time for a Remembrance Sunday Parade service on November 9th. About 350 people, including around 100 members of uniformed organisations, attended the service conducted by the Rev. Ruth Boughton. The simple design of the memorial has attracted many favourable comments with donations towards the cost, from local residents, businesses and organisations, being gratefully received.

During the early stages of planning the war memorial, we heard about the national 'Lights Out' event, to commemorate the start of the First World War. Members of the working party agreed that Little Chalfont should have its own event on the village green, close to where the memorial would later be sited. About 150 people attended the very moving ceremony lead by the Rev. David Allsop, with members of local organisations gradually extinguishing candle lights.

Some time ago, Bucks CC stated that it would like to devolve some services e.g. grass cutting, to local town and parish councils, effective from April 1st 2015. The negotiations have taken much longer than we expected but I am pleased to report that, albeit slightly late, we have now signed the agreement. Spruced-Up, the company that is already responsible for the maintenance of the village green and parts of Westwood Park etc. have been appointed as our contractors to do most of the work. The money paid to us by the County for doing this work will just about cover this year's cost but the payment will be reduced in 2016.

Many residents already cut the grass on verges outside their homes for which we thank them and encourage them to continue to do so.

Westwood Park continues to be a popular place for many outdoor activities. Amersham Town Council does an excellent job of maintaining our football and cricket pitches which are very well used, as are the tennis courts. The children's play area is still a big draw and we are pleased that the local Churches Together have opened the pavilion to provide refreshments and access to toilets during school holidays. Young people have made good use of the Multi-User Games Area (MUGA). However, the surrounding fence has been damaged by people climbing over and under it to retrieve balls so the MUGA has regrettably been closed pending the installation of a new fence.

Parking and speeding issues are always emotive subjects and the Council is active in trying to find ways of answering the calls from residents for improvements in both of these areas. The local parking surveys, organised over the past two years, have resulted in much discussion with Transport for Bucks and it is expected that they will shortly be proposing changes in parking restrictions. As for speeding, the long awaited movable vehicle activating sign (MVAS) has been installed, initially on Amersham Road.

Representatives from the Parish Council and the Community Association, assisted by three local residents, helped in making a joint statement in response to Chiltern District Council's Local Plan, which replaces the defunct Draft Delivery Plan Document. This can be viewed on the Parish Council's web site.

Our planning committee has submitted its views to the local planning authority on well over 100 applications during the past 12 months. The Council was very disappointed with the appeal inspector's decision to allow the application to build on the old parking and garages site next to Chenies Parade.

During the past year, the Council has awarded several grants to local organisations including £3000 to the community library towards its running costs plus a further £3000 towards the cost of building an extension to the building.

The second public consultation regarding the proposed community centre resulted in a number of helpful comments which have been incorporated in to a revised design. A pre-planning meeting with Chiltern District Council's planning officers is scheduled shortly when we should learn more of what might be acceptable.

Our latest newsletter, edited by one of our Councillors, has been distributed throughout the village but a copy can be obtained from the Parish Council office or downloaded from our website www.littlechalfont-pc.gov.uk

Brian Drew
April 2015