

## **VILLAGE MEETING 10 MAY 2010**

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for taking the time to come to this Annual Village meeting this evening.

Can I first ask you to welcome Andrea Curtis, who took over as Parish Clerk during the last year and to join me in thanking Mary Searle for her sterling efforts during her time as Parish Clerk.

One of the major issues that seem to face many parishes in the northern part of Buckinghamshire is that we are pretty much ignored by our County Council. Whilst your Parish Council speaks up loudly in respect of matters that we regard as important to our village, and probably to other similar villages in the area, we do not find that other councils are as willing to poke their heads above the parapet. Sure we get private support for matters we raise but not the sort of concerted voice that demands to be heard. We will, however, continue to raise these issues on your behalf and I will point to some small successes that we may have had during this address.

A year ago I was reasonably bullish about a number of issues that we expected would be resolved during the following year. In some cases I am afraid my optimism was somewhat misplaced and we find that we are in almost the same position as we were a year ago.

Specifically, the conveyance of the Burial Ground is not yet signed but I continue to be optimistic that this will happen in the near future. However, it is important that we continue to press for this to happen, especially in view of other developments that may consume parts of the field in which the burial ground extension sits. I am pleased to say that Ant Wood, and the Parish Clerk, Andrea Curtis, are hot on the heels of the site owner and we are now much closer to resolution. There will obviously be some costs associated with this project, but most of these will be met from the accrued burial account.

Similarly, the dredging of the water course by the side of the Recreation Ground and then on towards the White Bridge, on Portway Road, and towards Portway Road by Keith Cherry's home was delayed by the bad weather. This is something of a setback as making these courses run more easily would have possibly helped to reduce the amount of water passing across Portway Road during periods of heavy rain. Regrettably the Drainage Board were unable to complete their prior commitments in time to get on to our stretches before they were required to stop to allow nesting birds to fledge their young. Whether it is the Drainage Board's intention to come back to this task in September or thereafter is not clear. There is a suggestion that the Environment Agency will require Drainage Boards to concentrate their now somewhat curtailed resources on Category 1 and 1a rivers, which ours are not. If we are not on the list for a visit this autumn it is possible that we will look to the village to organise a working party to clear some of the vegetation and rubbish.

I am afraid that everything in local authorities seems to grind exceedingly slow and some of the other initiatives that we had hoped would be well underway have been delayed for most of this year. For example, we were awarded some funds to erect Vehicle Activated Signs on both of the approach roads but, as we speak, the County Council has not yet put these in place, although the posts have now been erected. We had also anticipated that some improvements would be made to the road layout at the Knob up to the Chapel but again input from Bucks CC has been painfully slow. However, perhaps this is not altogether a bad thing as I sense there may be a few new people in Bucks CC, or Transport for Buckinghamshire, who are somewhat more enlightened towards how villages can manage traffic and it maybe that we can latch onto some ideas that will make the area safer and more aesthetically pleasing.

The slow grinding of the wheels also applies to the plan to put a camera into the under-road pipe in Portway Road at the point where flooding occurs. We have been promised this on a number of occasions but have been let down by the County Council each time. We are now promised this "when resources are available"! It may well be that we need to commission this study and any subsequent clearance for ourselves although this will inevitably result in additional expenditure. However, your council has taken the precaution of raising a prudent precept this year against such eventualities.

Clearly one of the issues that have faced the village for several years is the deterioration of the road surfaces. The Parish Council has been in a protracted, and sometimes very robust, dialogue with Bucks CC, firstly through the Local Area Forum, and more recently, when it became clear that our frustrations were shared by some of the Council's middle ranking managers and by our own County Councillors, with the head of transport for Buckinghamshire, Jim Stevens. I would say that our efforts have been partially successful; we have had the majority of our potholes filled, although the life of some of the repairs may be limited. We have also extracted an agreement that repair of the road surface at the end of Portway Road will be a priority and that efforts to make the bridge towards the Steeple Claydon crossroad safer will be considered as a matter of some urgency. We have also had the assurance of the County Council that should we apply salt or grit from their delivered supplies to our roads we are covered by the public liability insurance of BCC. Further, should we decide to acquire a snow plough the County Council will remunerate any driver, usually a farmer, who carries the appropriate amount of public liability insurance. We have had a request from a villager to make the drop kerbs more user friendly for pushchair and wheel chair users and we are in the process of applying for Planning Permission to improve or create about six at various points in the village.

I am disturbed that in the past year there have been a number of acts of anti social behaviour of a type we have not witnessed for a few years. For example, a number of acts of petty vandalism in the Rec., sight screens being damaged and the watering system for the square being turned on and left running, fly tipping in some farm gateways, at the allotments and in Mill Lane, car vandalism in Rosehill Crescent and continuing littering of the bus shelter by people consuming take aways. We do have a neighbourhood PCSO who is often in the village and who needs to be kept informed of these incidents, particularly if the perpetrator is known so that action can be taken at an early stage.

The reclassification of Mill Lane to restrict its use by general powered traffic, which many in the village opposed, has reached the stage where the Rights of Way Committee, having rejected the reclassification on one occasion, performed a volte face having received some, in your Parish Council's view, rather strange legal advice and upheld the reclassification. The final throw that the village has is to appeal to the Secretary of State, which has been done. However, with the turmoil in which the Parliament now finds itself I doubt that it is at the top of any minister's, in post or prospective, list to be resolved. In the meantime the reclassification is the current position.

Although, of course, the village shop is not the responsibility of the Parish Council we were involved in the planning application for the temporary arrangements that have been put in place. We also conducted a survey for the Shop Association to establish what the village was looking for as an ongoing solution, the results of which being presented at the meeting in the Chapel in March. As any application to build a permanent shop on the current site will also be made by the Parish Council we have given an undertaking to consult with the village on the style and type of building to be erected. I am pleased to be able to tell you that a number of issues having been overcome we will be able to proceed with this consultation in fairly short order.

You will, of course, be aware that the village is faced with two potentially worrying environmental threats. First, the prospect of there being an incinerator built close to the landfill site at Calvert has returned. It appears that the currently preferred bidder, Covanta, whose site is at Stewartby in Bedfordshire, made their bid based on a currently undeclared but erroneous assumption. This having been discovered has resulted in Bucks County Council deciding to re-open the bidding process with a new decision being taken, possibly by the end of 2010. Second, the village is hard by the preferred route selected by HS2 for the construction of a high-speed rail link between London and Birmingham. In both cases your Parish Council will join with others to ensure that the best possible outcome for the village is obtained. What could be available as an outcome should the incinerator come to Calvert is not known but it is known that a potential Exceptional Hardship Scheme is being considered in respect of the rail link and what villagers should do in order to benefit were the scheme to be put into effect was detailed in a recent Newsletter. If you have not taken action yet then you should do so as soon as you get home, as there is a deadline set for 20<sup>th</sup> May 2010 for your input to this. Contact Rae Sloan if you need any guidance.

Finally, can I turn to the Recreation Ground and congratulate the Cricket Club and Football Club as well as Richard Simmonds for the immaculate condition in which it is kept. Once again the work that has been done has been recognised by the local county football association with only the facilities offered to referees holding the ground back from receiving a greater accolade. There, are, however, plans afoot, which will be part of a village consultation, to extend the footprint of the Pavilion to provide larger changing areas for both players and officials.

Our thanks are also due to all of those people who work to keep our village tidy, be that in the Churchyard, at the allotments or bottle bank or just be removing litter as they see it.

What you will also have noticed in the Recreation Ground is that new post and rail fencing has been erected on the northern and eastern boundaries and that nearly 600 hedging plants have been put behind these fences to provide wild life habitat. The hedging and fencing were both paid for by grants obtained by the council. During the School's eco week one of the younger classes brought some Rowan and Silver Birch saplings along to the Rec. and the children helped plant these. They have all agreed to come and talk to the saplings so that in due course these can be replanted, perhaps along the perimeter of the extended burial ground.

We feel that after five years the Parish Plan could do with re-visiting and we will do what we can to facilitate this process with the other groups in the village. This is an important piece of evidence of a Parish's capabilities should the devolution of powers, and money, from first and second tier councils to Parishes be resurrected under whatever new Government we end up with.

Please remember that your Council acts as far as it can on your instructions, we welcome dialogue and input so please continue to talk to any of the Councillors and we will try to go forward with your suggestions.

Thank you once again for your interest. Are there any comments or questions that you would like to ask?