



Annual Parish Meeting 2023

Parish Council Chairman's report

Hard to believe, but another year has flown by and time for me to provide you all with a report of the Parish Council's work over the past 12 months. It has been an extremely busy time and if you would like more detail than I provide here or would like to ask Councillors questions please join us at the Annual Parish Meeting on **Wednesday 19th April at 7.30pm in the village hall**. This is not a formal PC meeting but your chance to get involved and have a say - whether you have ever been to a meeting before or not. After the meeting you are invited to join us for informal conversation, drinks and nibbles.

Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee weekend

The year started with the village's celebrations for the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Without a Recreation Committee organising village events anymore the Parish Council (PC) felt it was important to take a lead in celebrating this historic occasion. A bespoke brazier beacon was commissioned from Mill Green Forge in Essendon and lit simultaneously with all the others around the country at a BBQ party at the cricket pavilion. The same weekend a street party on the field, with entertainment from a world champion Irish dancer, was enjoyed by over 100 residents and their friends. The Parish Council also supported the Queen's Green Canopy Project and two new oak trees have been planted on the field with benches nearby to enjoy the shade they offer.

Welcome Back Fund Grant

This European Commission backed fund was made available to encourage people back into their high streets and villages after Covid. The PC worked hard to secure a generous grant and are pleased to report that good use has been made of the benches, four new picnic tables, a cycle rack, gazebos and an outdoor table tennis table by both villagers and visitors alike.

Cricket and Community Pavilion

The Community Café held in the pavilion on a Friday morning has become a regular date for many residents. It offers an opportunity to meet up with friends and neighbours over a very cheap, but delicious coffee or tea and to indulge in delicious, homemade cakes and biscuits. If you haven't been along yet, please do, you will be made extremely welcome.

As well as providing a venue for the café, the pavilion is let to The Little Berkhamsted Sahib's Cricket Club between April and September. The club play nearly every Saturday and have some friendly matches midweek and on Sundays. They welcome spectators and visitors to the club bar. Apple Day Care nursery also make use of the pavilion for a few hours each week, providing the toddlers in their care with a safe place to play and learn.

A great deal of money has been spent on the refurbishment of the pavilion in recent years and the Parish Council have been working hard to ensure good use is made of the building. As well as our regular tenants the building has been let for private events and parties and this summer will be hosting another village wedding reception.

Village Hall

The Parish Council is now turning its attention to the village hall because this old building needs insulation and other energy saving improvements to make it fit for purpose in the 21st century. The rise in the cost of electricity this year has made this a priority. This is an expensive project, and we are investigating any grants available and hoping residents will support our fund-raising efforts. The hall is a great space for both village events and private hirers and we hope that improving the energy efficiency will increase its use.

Village Website

The increase in use of both the hall and the pavilion has required an upgrade of the village website to make the booking process easier for both bookers and the Clerk. We are hoping that the new website will go 'live' in the next month. Although the PC sponsor the website, we are keen for it to be a useful resource for the whole village so please let us know if you wish to use it to link to your business or to advertise local events, courses etc.

On the current website there is a 'History' page with some interesting information about the history of the village contributed by resident, David Cooper of Stratton's Tower. David has recently given the Parish Council a large amount of village archive material which will be digitised so that some of it can be on the website, and it is all preserved. We hope that it could then be put together for a display in the village hall – there are some fascinating photographs.

Highways

Although our highways are the responsibility of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) the PC receive many emails about both the state of the roads in the parish and the speed and volume of the traffic using them. Working with 20s Plenty for Herts we continue to campaign for a default speed limit of 20mph on roads where people and vehicles mix but despite many other counties and parts of the UK adopting this, HCC are yet to be persuaded to change their policy. HCC Highways department have no traffic data from the village, so the PC have commissioned a traffic survey to be conducted on Church Road and Robins Nest Hill in the next couple of months. This will give us the information we need to progress discussions with Highways about ways to at least achieve compliance with the current 30mph limit.

The drainage works on Robins Nest Hill have been completed and CCTV footage taken of the drain so that repair works can be undertaken. The cause of the large puddle that formed by the war memorial every time it rains has been identified but regular maintenance of the ditches will be required to completely solve the problem.

Planning

The PC are a consultee on every planning application received by East Herts Council (EHC). In order to make informed decisions about them we contact the applicant and arrange a site visit to discuss their plans. Although there have not been as many as immediately after Covid we have made around nine such visits this year.

Volunteers

Our thanks to all those in the village who give their time to help keep the parish looking clean and tidy, including regular surveying of the footpaths and bridleways, planting up the containers, cleaning the bus shelter, cutting the grass around the war memorial, and collecting litter.

A very successful litter pick was organised in October, with over 25 people clearing the roadside verges for a couple of hours followed by a sandwich lunch kindly provided by the Five Horseshoes Pub.

A free first aid course has just been held, open to all residents and providing up to date training in emergency life support including use of the Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) that is installed at the village hall.

We have arranged for a group of volunteers to organise a village celebration for the Coronation of King Charles III on Saturday 6th May. This will be held on the field, with the cricket club bar open, a BBQ, live music and an Auction of Promises. The money raised by the Auction and a share of the BBQ profits will go towards the Village Hall Insulation project.

The PC work within a highly regulated framework, supported by Laura Brookes Payne, the Parish Clerk and our Ward Councillor, Linda Haysey and County Councillor, Ken Crofton. We are very grateful to them for all that they do. As a local government organisation, the PC work hard to minimise any waste of resources, ensure that we get value for money, take advantage of grant funding, are transparent in our dealings and try to foster relationships with residents and local organisations. However, we need your support. It is not the role of the PC to organise social events so a new recreation committee or similar is needed to develop community spirit and raise funds for the benefit of all. Please let us know what you can do to help.

The members of the PC are all volunteers. They give an enormous amount of their time outside of the bi-monthly PC meetings, working hard on behalf of residents across all the areas mentioned above. None of the above would have happened without their enthusiasm, commitment and good humour and whilst I would like to thank them on your behalf here, it would be lovely if you can come along to the village meeting on 19th April and thank them in person.

I look forward to seeing you then,



Penny Stokes

Chair of Little Berkhamsted PC

