

Chairman's Report – West Hanney Parish Council Annual Meeting

22nd May 2018

Firstly, a very good evening to all, and thank you for turning up on such a lovely evening when many other things must have been more appealing. I would especially like to thank, on behalf of us all, the ones amongst you who regularly turn up throughout the year to support us. We really do appreciate it.

Time goes by so quickly and it hardly seems possible that it is one year ago that we were sat here reviewing our previous year's work.

As Chairman I have attended various meetings throughout the year and of course met with, and talked on the telephone, to what seems like hundreds of residents. That has never been a problem for me. That is after all why we become Parish Councillors. To be there for residents when needed.

I also attended meetings of the Hanney Parochial Charities as a Councillor for the Parish along with Dulcie Parfoot as the other representative for our Village.

In November last year I attended the Grove Parish Council reception together with Sandy, my wife, as no other councillor was available. This evening is very useful as we have a chance to exchange views and meet with some of the representatives of organisations that attend, and we are grateful to Grove Parish Council for the invitation. The wine and refreshments aren't bad either!

Turning back to our own village, in the middle part of last year we were hit by two planning applications that, had they been successful, would have meant over 90 new properties being built in our small village. Up to 56 houses were proposed in the field at Townsend on the western end of the village and a further 35 off School Road.

We organised a public meeting in the Church to discuss the plans, and nearly 100 residents attended. After the important facts to cover when objecting were discussed and explained by Eddie and Graham, lively and open discussions took place and subsequently scores of residents wrote in to the planners giving these valid reasons to refuse the applications.

The application for 56 was turned down by the planners, but the application for the 35 off School Road is, perplexingly, still alive. Although we are led to believe the plans will be rejected, the Vale Planners have apparently had to put some applications on hold whilst they work on the Districts future land supply plans.

As it was a major factor in having the Townsend application dismissed I would at this point like to thank Graham for his work in submitting photographic evidence, proving that the field in question often flooded after heavy rain, and thank you for turning up on such a lovely evening when many other things must have been more appealing. I would especially like to thank, on behalf of us all, the ones amongst rain, and from overspill from the Childrey Brook. Although the Agency constantly said they would

upgrade, or effectively downgrade, their records it took continual calls from Graham before the Environment Agency finally agreed to change the status of the land from Flood Risk level 1 to Flood Risk level 2 effectively rendering it totally unsuitable as building land. Thank you Graham.

A thank you also to Eddie who has dealt so efficiently with the Vale Planning Department and the formality of our reactions to planning applications throughout the year. Thank you Eddie.

I was approached by Alan Cottrell during last year who wanted to talk about our reaction to an application for 9 properties on land at Deans Farmhouse, Church Street. As this area of land was close to an area designated in our upcoming Neighbourhood Plan as possibly being suitable for development, we agreed that we would not object in principle but that we would be seeking something for the village in return. Possible funding for a Community Bus would be amongst our options. At this time however, no application has been submitted.

Another momentous occasion in terms of planning was the fact that we actually got the long awaited new footpath in Winter Lane, when the developers of Elderberry Close actually complied with the planning requirement. Thanks here to Jim Stagg who effectively became a sixth member of the parish council by continually badgering the developers, planners and eventually the contractors to hasten proceedings. In the end the event warranted a 'Royal' opening which unfortunately I had to miss.

The Community Woodland and the Wildlife Meadow is thriving and for that we owe a big thank you to Paul Sayers and the loyal band of volunteers who have spent considerable time keeping the area in such good condition. Regular work parties, usually 15 or so, meet at regular intervals throughout the year. Their work involves cutting back growth, clearing dense areas and generally keeping the woodland tidy. Des Thomas uses his own tractor and equipment to cut the rides and deserves special praise and thanks. Thanks also to our very own Kay Sayers who always provides liquid refreshments and scrummy cakes for the mid work break.

We were delighted to receive a grant from the Michaelmas Fayre Committee for a new bench in the Woodland, also a grant from Hanney News to fund a new Kissing Gate. That enabled us to provide an access to the Woodland from the Community Meadow gifted to us by Sweetcroft Homes. A big thank you to both those organisations. Alan Cottrell agreed to mow the meadow for us at the appropriate times in exchange for the hay, and we are very grateful to him for that.

During last Autumn we carried out our usual annual bulb planting session. Trevor and myself together with volunteers planted around 35 kilos of daffodils. Thank you to Chris Jay, Paul Sayers and Rob and Nick Haisman-Smith for their help which was very much appreciated.

Time has also been spent on village clean ups, again with the help of volunteers. This time thanks are due to Alan Wilkinson, Dulcie Parfoot, Stanley, Alison Trowell, together with Mark, Kate, David, Ivy and Reggie from 'White House'. Graham, Trevor and myself were very grateful for their help.

In the summer, weedkiller was applied to the road edges along Main Street by myself and the resultant debris was subsequently cleared by Trevor. Thank you Trevor.

Thanks must also go to Chris Green along with Jackie Whyte who have either cut the grass along School Road themselves or persuaded others to do it. Well done to them.

Graham and Eddie have been working long and hard on our Neighbourhood Plan which is almost at the point of being ready for submission. This has taken up a lot of their time with endless meetings, including joint work and discussions with East Hanney Parish Council and I would like to compliment them and thank them both on behalf of us all for their continued hard work. If we are successful in getting our plan adopted it will go a long way to enabling us to control future developments in our village.

In terms of safeguarding our village we were astounded when the Land Registry gave title to the land at the northern end of Winter Lane to farmer Neil Walker. This is Common Land that was 'Vested in West Hanney Parish Council' by the Commons Commissioners back in the sixties. We assumed that the land was therefore Parish Land and arranged the 'Village Gates' and bulb planting many years ago. Not so say the Land Registry, which means we needed to start looking at other areas similarly 'Vested in West Hanney Parish Council'.

In relation to this I personally approached around a dozen long term residents who completed 'Statements of Truth' in regard to their knowledge of the areas in question, and their belief that the Parish Council had always looked after the land. After the compilation of a comprehensive dossier of information, including copies of old Minute Book records and proof of costs associated with the land we submitted our claim, through our solicitors, to the Land Registry. After several requests for further information from the Registry we were eventually granted Possessory Title to 'Headings Pond', which safeguards that area for the village. I am currently working on trying to obtain title to the land along School Road. Again residents have helped us with Statements of Truth to support our claim. If we were successful in claiming this land we could stop any access for possible future developments on the South side of the road, safeguarding the green space between West and East Hanney. At the time of this report however, Oxfordshire County Council are objecting to our claim as they say part of the land – the footpath itself is, 'Highway maintainable at public expense'. Strange then that when we asked them to deal with the dangerous tree roots pushing through the tarmac several years ago, they said no, – this land is owned by West Hanney Parish Council and the responsibility is therefore yours! The battle goes on but I fear we may lose this one. Oxfordshire Council Council are a powerful force.

It should be noted that where we are successful in obtaining Possessory Title to land, future WHPC Councillors should apply to upgrade the title to Absolute after 12 years. Maybe it will still be some of you here today handling the work.

One of our biggest problems this year has been the position of Clerk to the Council. We thought we had been successful in recruiting someone when Dawn Hutcheon took on the role, but unfortunately that did not work out for reasons I won't go into here. Last month Alan Wilkinson suggested that Barbara Martin may be interested and as Barbara is here

taking minutes this evening we are very hopeful that she will become a permanent member of our team.

Another big thank you is due here. I would like to pay Tribute to our colleague Kay who took back the work of clerk a few months ago, although in truth she never really let go of the reins entirely as she had some doubts about the future. All this time of course Kay continued her role as a Councillor. I think we all know that without your ability and willingness to step up Kay we could have been in a very serious position. In fact, had you not refused to hand over control of the accounts until you were confident they would be handled correctly by the former 'new' clerk goodness knows what state we would have been in. Thank you so much Kay.

Finally then, but very importantly, a sincere thank you to all my colleagues for their work and endeavours during the year. Hopefully this year, with the Vale's Local Plan being adopted we will not see so many opportunistic planning applications for us to contend with.

Chris Surman

Chairman

22/05/2018