

2015 –P C Chair’s Report

I concluded last year’s Annual Report by forecasting that we could not anticipate any lessening of the issues and problems which would face us in the future. Well that certainly turned out to be true, with a vengeance, for some new challenge has arisen at least once per month while some of the former issues remained, and look likely for some time yet, to continue to demand attention.

A major blow fairly early in the Council’s year came when our Parish Clerk, David Warner, decided it was time for him to retire from the post. As the Clerk’s past experience in the post and the subsequent accrued knowledge of people, background and problems are such great supports in our work and decision making, councillors were rather apprehensive that we would not find anyone of the calibre required. Well, how absolutely needless were our worries for we had some very suitable applicants, from whom, after interviews and deliberation, we chose Brian. Thanks to David and Brian, there was a seamless transition from previous to present Clerk so that Brian was quickly able to assume the role on his own. Since then we have come to enjoy his efficiency and quick grasp of so many situations. He has trouble shot, advised, organised and consulted widely and ably. We are grateful for his many initiatives, his wise counsel, his calmness and discretion. Thank you, Brian, from us all.

Now to a run down of the year’s dealings.

Our monthly meetings have been enhanced by the frequent attendance of other residents. That has been encouraging. I hope they feel that they are treated with consideration, but will also acknowledge the latitude allowed to them, in contributing their views on agenda items. Although this practice contravenes the strictures of Standing Orders I hope I am correct in believing that the permitted freedom is recognized, respected and appreciated by those attending. Such interventions are generally helpful and instructive.

Among the new challenges facing us has been the County Council’s desire to shed some of its responsibilities and budgetary pressures by devolving certain responsibilities to parish councils. After much deliberation, many meetings and hours of discussion, we agreed to take over all grass cutting of public areas by extending our contract with a local firm, only to discover that other responsibilities were also to be included in the package, plus questionable demands regarding insurance cover and legal responsibility. Regrettably this has been a lengthy, time consuming and confusing process which has cast a cloud, hopefully only a passing one, over relationships between parish and county councils. AVDC and VAHT will continue to cut their own grassed areas which will undoubtedly continue to cause some confusion.

We were asked to look at some ways in which we could ease present restrictions and anomalies with regards to allotment holders. Welcomed changes have subsequently been made, including a trial use of hosepipes which were previously banned. Stemming from the airing of these matters there was some regrettable friction, which we trust will have proved temporary, but unfortunately we are still being questioned over related issues, particularly on an interpretation of some central legislation, including the Freedom of Information Act. This has been time consuming and caused Clerk and councillors additional work.

HS2 has again eaten up hours of consultation, negotiation and debate. We all wish the project to be abandoned, for it is going to mar the lives of our residents for many years while it is constructed, will bring no obvious benefit to locals, cost millions, harm our environment, disrupt routine and scar our landscape for ever. Recognising that the project may go ahead we have pressed for mitigation but have, to be honest, achieved little of consequence, despite the active, strong support of our M P and County Council. Sadly we failed to reach agreement with the Bucks Railway Centre over the rerouting of Station Road so, on this matter and noise pollution, we will be petitioning the parliamentary select committee. Many thanks to John Knox for volunteering to head this appearance, which will occur some time after the General Election. We hope also to have an opportunity to show the Select Committee, on a brief visit to our pastures the week following the General Election, the likely harm to our neighbourhood.

The Incinerator has risen into the sky and its electricity supply is being expensively channelled several miles from a substation. We still conjecture whether it will ever prove viable financially and continue to question its siting, its effect on natural life, light pollution, road surfaces, traffic flow and air quality. We were shocked by the appearance of a gigantic wind turbine between Quainton and the even more perturbing, rolling splurge of housing which creeps ever nearer from Aylesbury.

The future of the Swan and Castle remains uncertain. A small group has spent hours investigating, arguing and contending with authority figures. Our M P was consulted, District Council officers questioned, a petition organised and countless hours spent in deliberation and communication while the developer continues in pursuit of his plans which plainly do not have village benefit as a priority. A Government Inspector has now been appointed to decide whether the two properties planned for car park and garden may go ahead. We are opposing as we wish firstly to have a clear idea of the future use of the main building in order to ascertain how much car parking will be necessary for occupants of that part of the site before any new buildings are erected.

Moves to secure a Neighbourhood Plan have picked up pace, thanks to Kevin Hewson and his team. Hours of discussion and investigation by a small team of volunteers, to whom we are extremely grateful, are leading to heartening progress. Despite unavoidably losing one of its two new leaders the Youth Café has survived, thanks to Joy Dyson and other volunteers. Kissing gates will soon replace stiles in five or six places but the bridle gate initiative has been halted by red tape. Thanks to Quainton Stud, a hard standing parking area was established at the rear gate of the church, somewhat later spoilt by heavy vehicles but still a bonus. Thanks to volunteers more daffodils were provided and planted in the autumn; the problems presented by litter will lessen as residents continue to volunteer to clear regularly sections of road although fly tipping regularly increases as the irresponsible element appears to multiply. An anonymous donor provided a replacement bench for The Green, volunteers have repaired other benches and stiles, and new no parking signs have been acquired for the Green, where residents have been active in clearing the ancient pathway. Much needed extension to the Sports Pavilion is due to start and complete refurbishment of our street lighting should soon be evident. We plan to replace completely the Christmas lights on the Green.

Most planning applications have provoked no comment but we have needed to oppose one or two where it was felt such plans would be to the present or future detriment of the village. Thankfully the planned dwelling at Sawpits Yard will not proceed; instead the area will be incorporated into a local garden. We hope the problem with kerosene odours for some residents on The Green has permanently disappeared for it was most worrying when no source of the problem could be found.

There are of course many matters still to be resolved. The Station crossroads continues to present a danger. Statistics are said not to warrant any further safety measures but we will again be meeting officials on site to press the case. Repairs to roads and paths are required in a number of places, such as North End and The Strand. Flooding at Lee Bridge, Townsend and much of Station Road should have been lessened after ditch clearance and additional draining, but kerb weirs have not been fully unblocked, especially in lower Station Road. We will continue to seek improvements but anticipate the lack of funding will often be the excuse for inactivity. The Green is now at last on a rota for gritting in icy weather, albeit a secondary route, but lower Station Road to the A 41 is still a significant danger when ice forms.

Four G P surgeries held in the Memorial Hall have dwindled to just one visit per week with even that intermittently cancelled. The Speedwatch volunteers' sessions continue to help in alerting speeders to their responsibilities and meant that police continue sporadically to use their radar equipment. Community asset status has been granted for the George and Dragon and both shops. Superfast broadband has been made available and new leases signed with Sports and Football Clubs. Work will begin soon on an extension to the pavilion using Section 106 money, a LAF grant and football club funds. Efforts to locate owners of a small plot of land between Dymock Court and White Hart Field have been unsuccessful so a partnership between a resident and the Parish Council will look after the site commencing with the planting of indigenous fruit trees. The centenary of the First World War was remembered on the appropriate date in conjunction with British Legion members. A request to dispense with or relocate the village phone box came to nought when the cost of either was prohibitive.

Having held the precept at the same level for several years a 2% rise was agreed for the coming financial year. The Council is aware of more which could be done for the village with further finance. A lack of off street parking leads to difficulties for residents and large vehicles, particularly during School opening and closing times and those functions in the village which bring in large numbers from outside the village.

I thank all those councillors who have served Quainton since the last election, including our District Councillor, Sue Polhill, who retires at the coming election. Every one has given selflessly of time and abilities. I hope residents feel that the Parish Council serves them well and that those many villagers who are active in building and spreading strong community spirit feel their work is supported. We certainly appreciate them. In four weeks time a new Parish Council will hopefully be elected, rather than formed by default. Whatever happens may Quainton continue to thrive.