

## Chair's Annual Report, Quainton Parish Council, April 2016

Following last year's annual meeting residents were presented with an opportunity to change the membership of this Council. With two new nominees, Malcolm Wearn and Iain Marfleet, taking the place of two councillors not standing again, no election was called for as no challenge was made to the sitting incumbents. This either means residents are complacent and view the Council as an insignificant body not worth bothering about, or that villagers value and strongly support those who are presently their representatives. Naturally I believe it to be the latter and encourage you all to think similarly. There has been one change in personnel since that time, as Iain decided he could not give the role the time he deemed necessary. Again no election was called and so we were very pleased to co-opt Michelle Thompson, a resident whose contributions we had already valued greatly, as a voting councillor.

So, what has the year, 2015/16 been like for the parish of Quainton? Well, we had, for some time, viewed from a distance, several of our neighbouring councils being harassed by firms wanting to put housing in inappropriate places. Such firms were, and are, being given added impetus by a central government desperate to increase housing stock and thus prepared to give carte blanche to developers. We knew that our turn to be similarly pressurised would come and so it has. With Aylesbury Vale District Council's future housing plans refuted by central government, intending developers presently have even more advantages in pressing their often grandiose plans. An already wildly expanding Aylesbury has been left pretty defenceless and its surrounding communities under siege. Although AVDC is in the throes of preparing a new plan to accommodate government instructions it is perpetually further handicapped by being forced to also take into account the needs of other local authorities, including relatively distant Luton and parts of Hertfordshire, in addition to Milton Keynes and South Bucks, whose councils claim they have insufficient space within their boundaries to meet their own set targets. Quainton has therefore been classified by AVDC as a large village. As such this village is targeted with an expectation of increasing by some 120 dwellings within the next 15 or so years. We reject this classification on several grounds but have so far been unsuccessful in securing any change.

Time consuming and uncomfortable though it has been resisting those developers pressing forward presently I suspect Quainton still has to face the full force of the demand to relinquish more open space to these voracious companies. The odds are, of course, heavily in favour of the developers who not only have the active support of central government in principle but also in increasing legislation to stifle opposition. Furthermore these developers have financial, legal and professional resources that we, elected by our community to be at the forefront of democratic responsibility, cannot hope to match. We will do our very best to protect our village from those who would totally ruin the environment and community

closeness we presently enjoy but do not be deluded into believing that rural life will be left completely unravaged.

We will continue to oppose any developments which are unsupported by a majority of residents. One such means of opposition afforded to us lies in the production of a Neighbourhood Development Plan and everyone must be aware of the many hours and days of diligent industry which lie behind the production of a most fantastic document, Quainton's N D P, in conjunction with a review of the Conservation Area and the adoption of a further C A centred on Townsend, plus an excellent and approved advocacy of certain green space areas within the village. We all owe a great debt of gratitude to the contributors to these magnificent pieces of work which I am certain will become fascinating reading for future generations in addition to providing some protection from the development at all costs vultures presently encircling us. The NDP has passed its preliminary inspection with some mainly minor changes and will eventually proceed to a referendum of all residents eligible to vote.

This has by no means however been the only task facing your Council. Our struggle to mitigate the negative impact HS2 will have on our surroundings and enjoyment of relative rural tranquillity have continued, culminating in, thanks chiefly to Messrs Knox and Killip, an appearance in front of a House of Commons Select Committee who, their reactions indicate, listened politely but helped us not a jot. Attendance at umpteen meetings and countless attempts at negotiation have been time consuming and energy sucking. Thank you to all who so laboured.

As usual we have commented on, opposing where necessary, any contentious planning applications. We continue to press for repairs and improvements to our infrastructure whenever necessary. Eventually there have been some steps to improve safety at our Station crossroads but Berryfields crossroads remains a likely accident hotspot. In all cases the lack of district and county finance is a weighty handicap. With our own funding the entrance to the allotments and the access to water for our tenants have been improved. New LED lighting has been largely installed in all areas but The Green has yet to fully profit from the planned improvements. Within two years we are told to anticipate major improvements to our mains water service pipes. We believe that VAHT has been persuaded, via our involvement, to improve its treatment of tenants when it comes to property improvements and repairs.

The restoration of the windmill and the Saye and Sele Hall should both benefit from finance secured by this Council. We are working towards the securement of a defibrillator and, in conjunction with other villages, are investigating the possible acquisition of a community minibus. The Sports Pavilion has been extended, including toilet facilities for the disabled, and the skate park repaired. The substitution of kissing gates for stiles, the digging of ditches

and surface improvements by volunteers have improved access to many of our public footpaths. Some stalwarts have made most appreciated contributions to the removal of litter which so disfigures our landscape. We continue to provide public liability insurance for several village events such as fireworks, beer festival, Christmas tree and Youth Café, all of which contribute so much to community spirit and all these events being provided by wonderfully committed residents. We await further devolution of services from both County and District Councils. Grass cutting, fingers crossed, has not proved problematic.

In order for the Council to be effective we are totally reliant on both individual councillors and residents. We are seldom, if ever, disappointed. Without fuss, repairs are undertaken, the disappointed mollified, the angry or resentful pacified, the innocently ignorant surreptitiously informed, opposition disarmed and harmony spread. No one stands aside. All contribute something. The voice of reason, usually that of our wise and tenacious Clerk, speaks out and wins the day when sourness or misjudgement threatens and so the team ethic in this council survives, to the benefit of Council and community.

Undoubtedly we will continue to face many challenges but we will continue to count our blessings and keep matters in perspective, recalling and appreciating our good fortune to be living how, when and where we do.