

Quainton Parish Council – Chairman’s Annual Report, April 2020

The older you are the faster time goes – I am sure most can vouch for that. It seems but a short time ago that I was presenting the 2019 report and here we are now, in 2020, a year which, for some of our Parish Council stewardship team might have been their final year of such service. Postponement of the elections intended for next month means present incumbents are now presumed to remain in office for a further twelve months, until 2021. As I value each of your contributions, from my point of view this continuation of service is a good thing but I can understand that it may not be so beneficial for our electorate, since new faces often bring new ideas and new skills.

However we will face a new working scenario. Since central government has declared that the planned demise of District Councils will go ahead there will only be one tier of local government above parish councils which, in our case, will be Buckinghamshire Council. For the next twelve months District Councillors will become part of the new Council mechanism sitting alongside those County Councillors presently in post, with all remaining in their own wards. Thus, although Parish Council representation remains undisturbed, we will be dealing with a fairly complicated hierarchy which leaves us all wondering what life will be like and how much influence or power Parish Councillors will actually have.

Regrettably the absolute backbone and workhorse of Quainton Parish Council’s structure has tendered his resignation and planned to leave us in June. Typical of the man, Brian has unselfishly put his plans on hold in order to see us through the present difficulties resulting from the existing coronavirus epidemic and also the local government changes described previously. We are most grateful to Brian for offering to extend his tenure as Parish Clerk and eventually to ease any newly appointed Clerk into that position. Thank you, Brian.

The chief bugbear, present in Quainton for three years now, and still active periodically, is a company which has caused immeasurable inconvenience for all residents. Thames Water has blocked roads, flooded properties, missed deadlines and often caused havoc. Our demands for compensation have fallen on deaf ears and I am afraid the company continues to plague us as we await their return to complete their programme or, in some cases, to repair their mistakes.

Very closely behind Thames Water in terms of generating the most complaints and arduous chasing up has been that slithery body, HS2. They continue to plague us with blocked public footpaths, road closures, and disregard for vegetation, landscape, human and animal life. It is a constant task to remind them that we are a living community deserving of respect and consideration. The way several landowners have been treated has not just affected their property but the health of several individuals too. We are grateful to our recently retired M P, John Bercow, for his unstinting support in attempting to humanise HS2 and are thankful that in new M P, Gregg Smith, we have another who is prepared to stand up to this monster which is set literally on running a railroad through our community. In comparison we have,

so far anyway, been relatively undisturbed by those working on East-West rail and the Oxford Cambridge expressway, the latter now apparently mothballed.

In third place for causing us problems comes TfB who still have to accede to our long standing requests for the clearing of blocked drains which cause regular floods at Townsend, the bottom of Winwood Drive and Blackgrove crossroads. We also have too frequently to press for pothole repairs, sign replacement and greater consideration for residents when road closures are permitted.

On a far more positive note the new owners of the Village Stores and re-established Post Office have proved a real boon. The coffee shop at George and Dragon has established a widening reputation with both visitors and residents. It is of great credit to all our services and businesses that they bring us such comfort, never more so than in the way they have adapted so effectively to provide all the relief they can during the present lockdown.

Little wonder then that so many look to join our community. It is largely with this popularity in mind that there is a need to ensure that any developments, in terms of housing and businesses, enhance rather than harm that which makes Quainton such a desirable place in which to settle. To that end a small team of volunteers has been reviewing our Neighbourhood Plan, particularly in light of a planning inspector's judgement in permitting, on the fringe of our settlement, plans for what would be our largest housing estate. Significantly such development, or the other twenty or so dwellings with planning permission granted, has yet to be started. The golden goose of new housing sales appears to have stopped laying. Once current restrictions are lifted we will be consulting widely on any modifications to our Neighbourhood Plan.

One of the outstanding features of our village is undoubtedly The Green, an attribute no one wishes to see whittled away. School Lands Charity members and the Clerk have been busily and sensitively addressing the question of ownership, bylaw enforcement and rights of way, with a view to more firmly establishing and restoring boundaries. Few residents will be adversely affected but there will be a small number of present parking spaces restored within The Green's boundaries. Sadly the much admired red chestnut on The Green had to be removed after an arborist declared it disease ridden.

Thanks to the small group of councillors, plus the Clerk, our finances are carefully monitored and allocated. With this and the help of a grant from the New Homes Bonus Micro-grant scheme a movable speed indicator device is being purchased to monitor and further educate drivers to observe the 30 mph limit. To that same end another small group of volunteers will continue to employ the Speedwatch equipment at police approved points within the village boundaries.

Two new kissing gates, one in Church Street, the other in Station Road, have improved accessibility to some of our much appreciated public footpaths. At other sites where access

could have been so improved we have sadly not been able to secure landowner's cooperation.

A particularly contentious matter- whether the beacon temporarily placed on Mill Hill should become a permanent feature- raised the temperature of several on both sides of the argument. To achieve permanent status planning permission would need to be sought at which time residents could make their views known rather than via a referendum which many saw as troublesome. Presently this matter seems to be on hold but should be resolved once we return to some form of normality.

Thanks primarily to Councillor Lucas an Emergency Plan has been in place for some time and, thankfully during the present circumstances she was speedily able to establish a structured group of volunteers to ensure that those within our community finding themselves in need of assistance with shopping, medical requirements or support could speedily be identified and supported appropriately.

In similar vein our Clerk has efficiently enabled our Council to discuss matters via video conferencing, thus keeping us abreast of matters requiring council attention. The same individual has improved our e mail security and channels of communication by moving us each to dedicated e mail addresses, as well as establishing a reconstructed village website.

As we move into the 2020/21 session your Parish Council pledges to again do its best to represent the wishes of residents in continuing to ensure that Quainton remains a place valued as much for its secure and caring community as it is for its surroundings and ambience. Undoubtedly we must embrace some development and some change but only at a pace which residents consider acceptable.