

Q P C Chair's Annual Report – April 2021

Had it not been for postponement owing to Covid restrictions there would have been both Parish and County Council elections this time last year, so for twelve months we, at Quainton PC, have continued in post, as have the District Councillors despite the fact that no District Council still exists. For one year the District Councillors acted as County Councillors. They now disappear and the Buckinghamshire Council has become the next tier of local government above us. Postponed elections are now due in May of this year for both County and Parish councillors. Despite our reluctance Quainton has been placed in the Great Brickhill ward which will be represented by three councillors after May's elections.

Since our one County Councillor under the previous system had resigned Quainton has, for twelve months, been represented at County level by our previous District Councillor who was not a member of the ruling party but we acknowledge we have also received some support from representatives of the latter.

The demise of AVDC meant the end of our Local Area Fora to be replaced by a series of Community Boards representing much larger areas and with only County Councillors permitted to vote when it comes to the allocation of funds, so a sad diminution of our previous effectiveness. We acknowledge that our newly elected M P has also been supportive, particularly in our dealings with HS2.

Our Parish Council meetings have had to be online. After early struggles with achieving successful communication, matters have improved but there is still not the ease or comfort which face to face meetings engender. It has been a particularly challenging time for our new Clerk as he eases himself into a role which demands so many widely different skills and pools of knowledge.

Last year our biggest bugbear was Thames Water who still prove problematic but nowhere near as much as HS2 who have caused, and continue to cause, environmental desecration, major and repeated inconvenience and disruption, often with complete disregard for our community. It is fair to say that they have caused locally far more frustration and harm than has Covid. They have taken over land without warning and without compensation. Vague promises of returning the land at some time are not believed by landowners who feel exploited, having been let down so many times. HS2 so often act without consultation and when negotiations are held it is too clearly on HS2 terms and for their benefit rather than having given any thought about how their actions will affect the community. Frequent and prolonged road closures for the sole convenience of HS2 work are tiresomely commonplace.

We have also been disappointed that our problems with what is left of our road and pavement network have not been attended to with any urgency, with problems, which have repeatedly been reported over several years still not in receipt of attention yet, frustratingly, matters we judge to be of minor importance attended to promptly, leaving councillors looking inadequate and ineffective.

These frustrations, I fear, may be reflected in the increasing disregard for public welfare as shown in increased litter, growing contempt for public bodies and I suspect the main reason for several of the present Parish Council not standing in the coming elections, although, on the positive side, there is a chance for new blood to bring fresh impetus to the situation. I very much hope that will be the case. Sadly I see my hopes have not come to fruition as out of 7 available places only 3 have been filled.

On the positive side, during the ongoing difficulties caused by Covid there has been a fantastic response to requests for volunteers to assist those residents finding themselves in need of practical or emotional support. Several noted individuals, and I am not going to name any individual for fear of omitting those deserving equal praise, although we each know who they are, have taken the calls and organised the relief, supported by a whole army of wonderful volunteers. Quainton is well known for its natural beauty and has become equally highly regarded for its community spirit, never better exemplified than in the number of those only too willing to volunteer for whatever role was required by those needing support. Thank you to all who were willing to assist and to our local businesses who have provided such speedy and amazing support.

What of the future?

Seen off, for the present, but probably not for ever is the Oxford to Cambridge expressway, although the probability of a new city coming right up to our parish boundary is still, I suggest, wriggling below the surface, now to be joined by the possibility of a vastly extended prison with all the accompanying challenges and strains on our public services and utilities.

Other challenges include unwanted developments, not just new buildings but also extensions which reduce space around homes and consequently lead to more active and parked traffic on our roads so that most parts of the village suffer from a lack of parking provision. Our Neighbourhood Plan, on which a small band of people have willingly set aside their own interests and given hours of their own time, skills and talents on our behalf, to ensure, as far as possible, that future village development will be in keeping with residents' desires and expectations. Finding the happy medium when frequently presented with conflicting views is arduous and unrewarding but we are grateful for, and appreciative of, your sacrifices.

On other matters – road safety, improved leisure facilities, preservation of our fauna and flora, protection of our public rights of way and conservation areas, oversight of planning applications, repair of our infrastructure, a successful establishment of our Neighbourhood Plan, broadband improvement, enhancement of public service provision – your Council has sought, and will continue to do all in its power, to further the wishes of residents.

Despite all our efforts there are still a number of projects which will require progressing by the new Council and, of course, several issues still to be resolved.

This is my final annual report. I wish to thank all my fellow past and present councillors with whom I have served for the past couple of decades or so. We have had some healthy exchanges of view, as one should expect in a democracy. Any rancour has been short lived, cordiality and respect for each other have remained, and each councillor has given his/her best for our community. It has been an honour to work with you and your predecessors. I wish you all well for the future. I also wish I could predict that your tasks will become easier but that would be pushing the bounds of credibility too far. However, do please keep your spirits up and remember that your community places great faith in your judgements and your work on their behalf. May you and this community continue to be fully appreciative and appreciated.