

Annual Parish Meeting **Chairman's Report**

29th April 2017

Introduction

Once again it has been an eventful year for the Parish Council.
I have provided a review of 2016 below, followed by the challenges we face in 2017.

Our year 2016...

We have three new council team members to mention this year.
I am pleased to confirm that our new Clerk is doing an excellent job - Mrs Joanne Askin has been with us since the month of November.

Generally speaking, the role of Parish Clerk in any Parish Council is of key importance. Ours is no exception. Some have likened the role to being the 'CEO' of the team!

The Council has decided to increase the Parish Clerk's 'paid hours' from 12 to 15 hours this year – already proving a wise move, as Joanne is spending more than her allotted hours to fulfil her duties. This workload will decrease slightly as the year goes on and Joanne becomes more experienced – so far she proving to be a gem.

We also say a fond farewell and thank you to both Tony Cotton, Terry Ryan and Viv Mitchell. Both Tony and Terry served for many years – Tony in particular serving as Chairman of the Finance and Staffing Committee, Vice Chairman and latterly the Chairman of the Parish Council during his 8 years service. Terry in turn, was instrumental in initiating plans for the Junior Playground – see our achievements below. Terry retired after 5 years service. Viv, although only with us for 18 months, made a very positive impression with all who used the Pavilion, as she performed the role of Chairman of the Sports Pavilion and Field Committee.

As a reminder I would like to mention that all Parish Councillors serve on a voluntary basis, we earn no salary.

So on this note, I would like to say a BIG thank you to the team who give up so much of their time.

We have received one or two letters during the year 'demanding' more action in some areas. If there has been any lack of action it is probably because Parish Councillors are busy elsewhere. The solution here is to 'step-up' and support us by providing the extra resource to get more done in the community, and there is plenty to do!

Some parishioners understand this and have kindly volunteered during the last year to serve the community. Cllr. Joe Berger has recently joined – a qualified Chartered Accountant he has accepted the role of Chairing the Finance and Staffing Committee (vacated by Tony Cotton). Cllr. Jenni Wood has also accepted the Parish Council challenge! Jenni has a lifetime of experience serving in the community – in many different parts of the world. In her career, Jeni has served as both District Councillor and Town Councillor – during which time she was Mayor of Henley.

Some of our Achievements...

- Recruitment of a new dynamic Parish Clerk
- Recruitment of two new Councillors
- Successfully blocked (with SODC) two large house-building applications in the village. Parishioners voiced their strong distaste and un-popularity with one of these applications in Wyfold Lane. Well done to our Planning Committee and team! Many man-hours went into compiling our response
- Completed two surveys on the Sports Pavilion (Asbestos and Fitness for Purpose)
- Concluded a 'Rabbit reduction' plan (for PSR Cricket Club).
- Completed a village litter-pick and "Great British Spring Clean" campaign. A quick thank you to all who attended!
- Initiated a much improved 'Top Common' and 'Road Verge' cutting plan with NDCC (Nettlebed and District Commons Conservators)
- Contributed to the Queen's 90th Birthday celebrations and Peppard Revels
- Successfully completed an informative 2016 Annual Parish Meeting - with two very good guest presentations!
- Progressed the Junior Playground scheme and successfully located a good site at the Memorial Hall (...supporting the PWMH charity)
- Initiated a 'Community Speedwatch' scheme (alongside the Thames Valley Police - Henley division)
- Completed a Traffic Analysis Survey on one of the Parish's roads
- Attended and supported the installation of our new Rector - Reverend James Stickings
- Attended and supported the Remembrance Day memorial service(s)
- Attended a meeting with Better Broadband of Oxfordshire (BBfO) to support and speed-up the roll-out of 'Superfast' to northerly areas of the village. (I estimate 75% of our dwellings are now served by or have access to Superfast Broadband)
- Attended many SODC Planning Application meetings (Didcot)
- Appointed a new Sports Pavilion cleaner
- Appointed a new Village cleaner (temporary contract)
- Resurfaced and enhanced the Sports Pavilion car park (along with resurfacing other car parks in the village)

The Parish Budget (Precept) – benchmarking with others...

Parish Council Tax - year	2016/17	2017/18
Henley on Thames	(1) £87.00	(1) £87.00
Cholsey	(2) 69.89	(2) 74.08
Sonning Common	(3) 64.99	(3) 64.73
Kidmore End	(4) 53.05	(5) 54.10
Stoke Row	(5) 51.76	(10) 31.64
Checkendon	(6) 47.39	(4) 55.67
Rotherfield Greys	(7) 38.61	(9) 38.53
Binfield Heath	(8) 38.23	(8) 38.57
Nettlebed	(9) 36.53	(6) 40.74
Rotherfield Peppard	(10) 34.98	(7) 39.74
Shiplake	(11) 28.71	(11) 28.68
Harpsden	(12) 26.53	(12) 25.96
Highmoor	(13) 24.94	(13) 24.78
Bix and Assendon	(14) 21.77	(14) 21.79

Fig. 1 – Band D rates for 14 Parishes in the South Oxfordshire region

(Source: SODC website Apr 2017)

The table above (Fig. 1) provides an overview of what Parishioners pay towards the Parish Council 'element' of Council Tax. These figures are based on a '**Band D**' house – which is taken as 'county-wide' average.

Our precept has risen 13% this year. Two significant expenditure items dominate the increase: (i) provision for improving the Sports Pavilion (ii) provision for Junior Playground equipment.

Rotherfield Peppard is almost exactly on the median chart position for 2017/18.

2017 and Future Challenges: (i) The Sports Pavilion and (ii) Unitary Councils.

Sports Pavilion

Cllr. Tony Rancombe will be speaking in more detail during his report. Two surveys conducted this year suggest that we are going to need to improve the facility. In short, the surveys suggest that it is not 'fit-for-purpose'. The Council (with Charity and our largest user the Cricket Club) are currently considering either a 'repair' type of strategy or the alternative 'replacement' – and considering the cost implication of each.

This is not an urgent problem – but if we were to consider replacing the Pavilion we will need to 'factor-in' several years to raise funds.

Unitary Councils

One significant change coming down the pipeline is that of a Unitary Council for Oxfordshire.

The concept is to do away with the current 6 administrations: County (1 administration) and the District Councils: (South, Vale, West, Oxford City and Cherwell – 5 administrations) and replace with one new single Unitary administration. The proposal entitled 'A Better Council for Oxfordshire' has been submitted to central government and outlines how £100m may be saved over 5 years.

RPPC is as keen as any Council to make real cost savings – however we would like to understand better exactly 'how'. We have written to our County Councillor asking for a detailed breakdown of the budget saving detail. There is a danger that Parish Councils will be asked to do more – but with less financial resource.

Given that Parish Councillors work on a voluntary basis, this may not be a very wise approach! So, if budgets are cut further for the 'Parish', the real victim will be our 'Parish Community' !

A summary is provided below in Appendix 1. The full proposal will be found on this link:

<https://www.better-oxfordshire.org/the-proposal>

Simon Crouch
Chairman RPPC
22 April 17

Appendix 1

What will a new unitary council mean for me?

For residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More efficient so more money spent on frontline services• One website, one phone number, one council for all services• Single customer account so you give your details once• Councillors who can be held to account for all local authority issues
For businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single voice for Oxfordshire nationally and internationally• More investment in infrastructure• Joined-up business services: planning, licensing, public protection• Business account manager for all council services
For councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear mandate as the representative of the single principal authority for your area• Residents welcome accountability for all council services• Greater influence over area and county decisions• Joined-up support from council staff to help residents
For public sector partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single point of contact and decision-making• Boundaries that make sense (e.g. NHS, Police, OxLEP)• Single strategies and policies for whole county• A strategic partner with more influence on government
For parishes and town councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A real voice for your community which is listened to• Better support for neighbourhood planning• The opportunity for more devolution of powers for those that want them
For central government and regional partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A coherent vision for Oxfordshire with accountable leadership• A financially resilient council managing budget pressures• Infrastructure investment partner focused on housing and sustainable growth

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional leadership for the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge growth corridor
For the voluntary and community sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more stable funder and commissioner • Improved partnerships at community and strategic level • Single organisation focusing on improving lives of people
For staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a greater difference to people and communities through joined-up services • Greater financial stability enables innovation and long-term planning • Pride in working for a new, vision-led organisation • Clearer lines of accountability and responsibility