

2014 –P C Chair's Report

Despite the ease of travel, the proliferation of T V channels, the relative improvements in personal finances for many, and the continuing growth in the variety of ways in which leisure can be pursued, there are still a goodly number of people prepared to volunteer for roles which benefit their communities. It is certainly so in Quainton where there is a good deal of quiet, unassuming public service undertaken, without hope or desire of any reward. I am certainly not just thinking here of Parish Councillors but rather of the whole range of volunteers who keep our village societies, sources of information, clubs and teams, places of worship, community spaces, social and fund raising events, alive and functioning. There are also many individuals who look after less fortunate villagers, showing good neighbourliness in practice. All of these active people make our village a community which people want to join.

Little wonder then that the present providers of social housing, Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust, find that those rare commodities, Quainton residences of theirs which become available for reletting, are in such high demand. VAHT would like to build more homes in Quainton, a move which the Parish Council, in the two schemes in Station Road, has readily supported. However, while acknowledging that Quainton can not stay remote from new housing, we believe that any new developments must be limited in number and placement, whether for private purchase or public letting. This is why we have a group preparing a neighbourhood plan, without which we could find our village rich for exploitation by those myriads of developers seeking to make a quick buck, with the encouragement of national government whose declarations on localism have proved so far to be not far short of being a sham.

We had hoped our neighbourhood plan might have been further advanced than is presently the case but an inspector's rejection of the Vale of Aylesbury's plan, with which our plan must synthesise, has led to caution and delay. Certainly we will need such a plan to protect Quainton's future so we are anxious to make progress on the issue and are grateful to those progressing it.

So far we have fought shy of taking on devolved services since we have neither the finance nor the personnel to deliver. Additionally offers to take over responsibilities like the maintenance of footpaths have been accompanied by such slim financial support that we have unhesitatingly turned them down. However we suspect that there will be more pressure for Parish Councils to take over functions which are presently the responsibility of higher authorities.

Naturally, with continuing cuts in government grant and the blocking of rises in council tax, local authorities are struggling. We have battled hard, and will continue to press, for the necessary repairs, let alone improvements, to be made to our roads, our drains, gritting of essential roads not yet covered by County schedules, and ditch clearance. In this latter category it was ironic that the County Council should ask Parish Councils to urge local farmers to clear their ditches when the greatest problem we have with uncleared ditches in this parish is from those belonging to the County Council itself. We are very concerned at the number of accidents occurring at the two crossroads in our parish but response so far from the responsible arm of local government has been desultory. In face of these disappointments the speedy provision of a kissing gate to replace a stile in Church Field, New Road, was a distinct plus.

Using our own resources, and noting that the Quainton precept rose by only 2% this year which was the first rise for several years, we are intent on improving our streetlighting, whether we do it en masse or in stages, by ourselves or in partnership with other villages. There are plans to extend the sports pavilion in Lee Road but there was little support for a multi use games area so that idea was shelved. Two new grit bins have been sited on The Green, and because of demand 3 of our 4 dog bins will now be cleared twice a week instead of once. New Christmas lights have been purchased for the tree on the Green; insurance under the aegis of the Parish Council's policy has been provided for community functions on The Green and we hope to assist the Bonfire Committee in similar fashion. At last we have a Post Office facility, back in the village since September, and renovation of the Cross has been completed. Plans are afoot, thanks to volunteers, to enhance and increase the spring-flowered areas in the village, and we are still hopeful of providing some homespun parking provision by the rear church gate in New Road. Thanks to a volunteer we now have a long desired village correspondent for the Bucks Herald. Thanks to further volunteers, the financing of extensive repairs to the windmill, a major village landmark, is being pursued. We were pleased to be involved with a suitable tribute to the service of those killed in a 1944 plane crash near Quainton Station. There is now a memorial plaque at Westcott airfield and a framed montage in our Memorial Hall. The Speedwatch Group has continued to monitor, and educate by its presence, those who would endanger the safety of residents. Members would welcome more volunteers in order to extend the number of monitoring sessions mounted.

Thanks again to a group of committed volunteers the registration of the Swan and Castle as a community asset is being pursued and questions over its sale are still being explored. The Council has nominated the George and Dragon also to be listed as a community asset and we will be questioning if we should do the same with any other village facilities and services. Interest in a small portion of land at the entrance to White Hart Field is being registered by both the Council and a resident in order to secure it for community use. A new 'No Parking on The Green' sign is being prepared and a footpath map is to be exhibited at the top of The Green thanks to the Jubilee Committee. We are seeking a new leader for our Youth Café from September, and our expectations of a new First Responder have still to be fulfilled. Plans for an official opening of the refurbished play area for children were delayed for good reasons and it may be that it is now too late for such an event.

There have been few contentious planning applications this year, although a house in Sawpit Yard is again being proposed, having been originally turned down at appeal. We still await the verdict on an application for development on the Swan and Castle site. The Calvert incinerator, which we are convinced will turn out to be a white elephant and a considerable drain on future County spending, is, despite our objections, being erected. We believe this will prove detrimental to local traffic movements and local ecology; we are also unconvinced by assurances of it being no risk to health. On that latter score the re-emergence of a problem for some residents experiencing kerosene smells in their homes, forcing some to seek temporary alternative accommodation, has been most disturbing, especially as no source has yet been discovered despite Environment Agency involvement.

The proposals for HS2 have proved a major sapper of time and energy. A small group, including two members of this council, has attended each local forum and numerous other meetings on this project. It has proved a disheartening and debilitating exercise. The project is supported by very few locals, brings barely any benefit to our area yet will cause unbelievable disruption to local lives during construction, as well as blighting surroundings for ever. Despite the commitment of extensive time and energy our efforts to effect change or secure mitigation have proved largely fruitless. We are now faced with the daunting and likely expensive course of petitioning a parliamentary select committee. We will continue to seek for a solution to problems of access for Bucks Railway Centre without necessitating major changes to the present route of Station Road.

Last April Richard Goldsmith's departure from the village left a vacancy. This was filled, thankfully without the expense of an election, when Mrs Emma Phillips was co-opted.

We can not anticipate any lessening of the issues and problems which will face the Parish Council in the future. It is likely there will be an increasing workload. Thanks to the voluntary efforts mentioned at the start of this review the burdens will be shared and Quainton will, despite the obstacles, continue as a largely happy community which people wish to join. Thank you all.