

Chair's Annual Report, Quainton Parish Council, April 2017

I wish to begin by paying tribute to the commitment shown by you councillors, and not just in the sense of the time you give, but also on account of the practical work which you all undertake in the community, using your variety of talents and knowledge for the benefit of Quainton residents. I am very aware that being a councillor is no bed of roses for it can often lead to conflict which none of us wants, but on the odd occasion, when we have to give bad news to some of our fellow residents, the reception can sometimes be frosty or even confrontationally unpleasant. Thank you for the sacrifices you make in order to serve this parish.

I think, however, that Brian, our highly valued Clerk, probably has the most difficult moments with which to deal and it would be absolutely unfair and unforgivable if mention was not made of his sterling contribution to Council work. His efficiency, knowledge, tact, diligence, wisdom and thoughtful advice are invaluable. Brian's voluntary and successful pursuit of CILCA qualification was admirable. His vigilance over our financial affairs, the construction of a revitalised website, his expertise in dealing with the general public, local authority bodies and many other agencies, ensure that Quainton Parish Council is, thanks to his efforts, respected and effective, and well on the way to achieving Quality Council status. Thank you, Brian.

Now what has engaged your Council during the past twelve months since last April? Probably the top issue has been the uncertainty over how much additional housing the village is expected to take. To begin with it looked as if we could anticipate having to find space for over one hundred housing units. Since then revised figures have seen the number decrease but later came central government's new Housing Bill and other neighbouring authorities' declarations that they cannot find room for their allocation, meaning Aylesbury Vale will have to take some of their share. Thus our share of new housing has fluctuated and, even now no one can say categorically what our final allocation will be, although it is no longer to be based on a percentage increase but, it seems, on having suitable sites for development. Whatever the figure, there are plenty of landowners and developers hovering over every open space, each avowing that they can come to the rescue of central government and those seeking homes while also claiming to improve the village's sustainability, when one suspects most of them are just out to increase their own personal wealth in as short a time as possible, with no real regard for the environment or the wishes of those already in residence. We accept the village must grow but we want to have some influence over where housing will go and how quickly we expand, so ensuring that Quainton remains a rural community and not the refuge of those intent on purely seeking personal gain or a rural dormitory with no commitment to community life. This preservation of all that is good about Quainton lies behind the formation of our Neighbourhood Plan which a

small number of residents, to whom we all owe a great deal, successfully invested their time and effort to produce a superb document. We are optimistic that this plan will protect those village features we wish to preserve. The bonus of securing a second conservation area and the extension of the original should further prevent the village being despoiled by badly sited and poorly designed developments. Our hope is that the plan will curtail the higher echelons of local and central government from their worst excesses. Unfortunately these authorities have a high powered engine and the steering wheel firmly in their grip but we will do our best to prevent them driving roughshod over residents' wishes.

Talking of engines brings us to another threat to rurality, HS2. Here we have fought a largely unsuccessful battle to lessen its impact. I freely admit, despite prolonged, time consuming efforts and great frustration, we have failed to wring any major concessions or mitigation. I guess, no I assert, that we are in for a pretty miserable decade or more, watching our countryside being ripped up and scarred on the pretext of increasing the country's wealth and welfare. We intend to be vigilant in monitoring the project but the omens are not good. At a County Council introduction to lorry routes likely to be used by HS2 traffic, held in this very Hall three weeks ago, we learnt how restricted the County are in determining which roads cannot be used. I anticipate some years of annoyance and confounding frustration.

Then we have changes in local government organisation coming our way. Parish Councils are allegedly to be untouched by whatever system is declared for Buckinghamshire but we suspect that will not be the case. We have voiced our opinion that we would prefer to see the county split in two, with the north being based on the present AVDC area and the south the three other districts combined. Now we await the Secretary of State's decision which was originally anticipated by the end of March. Well, we are still waiting uncertainly.

Improved broadband speeds have come to most of the village and we continue to battle on behalf of those Station Road residents who have still not benefited, despite it looking an extremely simple task to bring them up to speed. The village streetlighting has all been upgraded to LED and the skatepark repaired. Funding was secured to extend and repair the sports pavilion and to assist the tennis club's plans to resurface their courts. The children's play park continues to be well used and regarded. The sub-committee looking after these recreational facilities is much appreciated. A defibrillator has been purchased and, after a few hiccups, should soon be operational. We are also pleased to hear of a resident volunteering as a First Responder. Should an unexpected calamity occur in the village, thanks to Councillor Lucas we will now have a plan enabling us to react appropriately to ensure the safety and well-being of any in need.

We try to be constantly vigilant about any defects in our roads and footpaths, ensuring, as far as we can, that repairs are carried out promptly and efficiently. We share with residents frustration at the slow pace of some of these repairs but appreciate the lack of ample

finance often leaves our officers feeling even more frustrated. We will continue to press for improvements at Station and Blackgrove crossroads where, too frequently, there are traffic accidents.

We are grateful to all who enhance our community by their voluntary efforts, such as the Firework Committee who not only fund raise and arrange the November 5th celebrations but have now also taken on the securing, decoration and erection of a Christmas tree on The Green, as well as responding positively to requests for commemorative beacons. Thanks also to Sandra and Tony who keep our verges clear of litter. Mention too should be made of those volunteers intent on refitting the sails on our major landmark, the windmill. It is incredible that by the year end they anticipate having the sails back in working order. We also owe gratitude to all who organise village clubs and societies, supervise our public meeting places and unassumingly offer opportunities for cultural, social and leisure activities.

The village is about to be invaded by Thames Water as they renew water mains in much of the village. Their preparation and planning augurs well for the work not causing as much disruption as it might, fingers crossed.

You can be certain there will be plenty to occupy us in the coming twelve months. We know that we will be very heavily reliant on the Planning Section of AVDC, particularly when it comes to enforcement. The officers in that department are besieged by mounting demands for their attention, with villages such as Aston Clinton and Weston Turville about to be smothered by housing. However we insist that we need their attention as we have ongoing and increasing concerns over unauthorised residential settlement, where we see occupants showing complete disdain for regulations and continuing, apparently successfully, to mock those who respect the Law and apply via the proper channels for permission, rather than selfishly ignoring regulations and encouraging others to exhibit similar disdain and disregard for local feeling. We must also be vigilant about creeping industrial expansion where previously agricultural buildings are inappropriately transformed into commercial premises to the detriment of residents' quality of life and to the destruction of our farming community.

What of the future? Could the next twenty years see Quainton and Waddesdon splurge across the intervening fields to meet in a conurbation split by HS2, a railway line running from Winslow to Aylesbury and a Waddesdon bypass? What a pessimistic picture that paints. Can we prevent it happening? Those of you still moving in earthly form in 2037 will

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