

# Calvert Green Parish Council

## Chairman's Report May 2020 (4<sup>th</sup> June 2020)

I'd like to start by thanking James O'Rourke who stood down from the Parish Chairman role last year. Jim worked hard for our community and the whole community owes him a debt of gratitude.

This last year has been a rollercoaster ride for the parish council. Initially we started on a low with so few parish councillors that we only made quorum if all councillors could attend a meeting; something quite difficult to achieve when two of the three councillors frequently worked overseas. We were also impacted by the change of parish clerk twice throughout the year. Andrea Curtis stepped down due to work commitments after a few years of service.

But it has been a year of two halves and Andrea was succeeded by Angie Perrett who did an amazing job with very little handover. Angie has since moved away from Calvert, and still helps out with certain activities and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Angie and her husband Colin for all their help and support to the parish council. In recent months, Tracy Horsfield has taken on the role of parish clerk and is doing a great job.

With help from Councillor Macpherson, Calvert Green parish council managed to recruit three additional councillors – Councillors: Thelma Watson, Liza Bangham and Kirsten Gittins who join Councillors Adèle Decent and Carl Blakely. In my many years as a parish councillor, I believe this is the best team of parish councillors we have had and I am encouraged by how everyone gets on, the enthusiasm and how quickly the newer councillors have picked up responsibilities.

It's frustrating that many members of the community still don't realise that parish councillors are unpaid. It is not easy finding the additional time necessary to dedicate to helping our community – we all have a thousand and one other pressing matters to attend to, and when we finally do find that small window of relaxation time, it is very difficult to share that time between family and community, so I want to thank my fellow Councillors for all their help and support to the parish council.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank those members of the parish who have made the effort to attend meetings during the year. Not only are these parishioners a good source of feedback from our community, but equally as important, their presence is a sign of support for the parish council and it is really appreciated by us all.

### **Observations and Main Achievements**

During the difficult times of this parish council year, I found myself desperately trying to find a new clerk and taking advice from a local council support association and other parties. As a consequence of this, I found that my description of Calvert Green parish as a small, quiet rural parish was somewhat out of touch. In fact, it was made quite clear to me that with the construction of HS2, EWR, the proposed expressway, an existing landfill and EfW facility on our doorstep, the ever-present developers seeking to build hundreds more properties around us, and the devolution of many district and county council services – all makes us an extremely busy parish council and a parish clerk for such a parish requires double the amount of hours.

To fund this additional cost, the parish council was forced to raise the precept to cover this cost,

along with a the provision to accrue revenue to fund additional bollards at sensitive areas in the village.

## **Neighbourhood Plan**

To protect the parish by being in a stronger position to influence any further housing developments around the village, the parish council has agreed to create a neighbourhood plan and has instructed a consultant to work with us on this, based on available funding.

It has also become apparent that land owned by a major housing developer to the front of Calvert Green village actually falls in Charndon parish and as such would be outside of the Calvert Green neighbourhood plan, while potentially extending our village. To mitigate this, the parish council has been in negotiation with Charndon parish council who have agreed to allow this land to be included in our plan and therefore influence any potential development. We have also been in discussion with Edgcott parish council too and will consult with both parish councils in the neighbourhood plan process. This is actually very encouraging to me because there hasn't been particularly good communication between parishes in recent years.

Liza and Adèle have taken the lead on our neighbourhood plan with input from other councillors. However, I do want to thank Liza for working so hard recently to compile all the documentation to meet the deadlines for funding and the parish survey.

We will soon be creating a steering committee and will be looking for members of the community to get involved and help shape the neighbourhood plan.

## **HS2, EWR and OxCam Expressway**

The enabling and main works have now started on HS2. The parish council has, in previous years been very successful in winning certain concessions through the petitioning process. However, now that construction has started, our community will suffer huge destruction, blight and disruption over the coming years. Our attempts to thwart a concrete batching plant on the edge of the village have frustratingly been dismissed and enabling work has now started. The diversion of utilities along Brackley Lane and eventual reconstruction of Calvert railway bridge and the Addison road bridge near Steeple Claydon will cause chaos to our community.

We continue to do whatever we can to influence HS2, but with final approval granted, unfortunately it is now a *virtually* unstoppable force.

East West Rail has been delayed, but is another major project in our area. Luckily HS2 and EWR are working together on the railway as it passes Calvert Green which means all construction will be done together, rather than in two separate stages.

We do still have a share of the £1M community environmental mitigation fund available which I'm hopeful will at least provide some benefit to our community.

At this stage, all work on the expressway has been paused and it looks likely that the expressway may not go ahead, but this is not yet certain.

## **Playgrounds**

The Children's playgrounds in the village are in the process of being overhauled. The parish council does not own or maintain playgrounds. However, it was successful in consulting with the community and influencing plans. Consequently, the toddler play area on the corner of Rustics Close is virtually complete and will hopefully be open for use as covid19 restrictions continue to be relaxed.

## **Grass Cutting**

Over the last few years, the number of cuts to the grass verges and village greens have been reduced by the district and county councils respectively. The parish council has been paying for additional verge cuts to improve this situation.

Recently, the district and county councils have merged into the new Buckinghamshire Council and consequently we have seen a much-reduced cutting regime which we are looking into, and hope is just a blip caused by the Covid19 impact.

## **Village Hall**

The village Hall extension has now been open and operational for two years. While owned by the parish council, it is operated by the CGCA. For a small parish council, this has been a huge project and although almost complete, there are still a few outstanding points which the parish council is working on with the CGCA.

The final snagging is now in hand and a replacement entrance mat has been installed to replace the previous mat which became slippery when wet. The Parish Council has funded acoustic panelling which is about to be installed in the bar area to reduce echo from the vaulted ceiling. It's hoped that this will be installed prior to re-opening as Covid19 restrictions ease.

## **Covid19**

I couldn't complete a 2020 report without making reference to the Covid19 pandemic and its impact on our lives. I'm pleased to see so many members of our community adhering to the strict government guidelines and also the community spirit it has encouraged. I hope that Calvert Green parish will be a much stronger community as we return back to normal.

## **Summary**

All in all, last year proved a good year for our community. As a parish council, we have to work more effectively over the coming year if we are to get the best for Calvert Green. If there are any residents who would like to help us to manage or improve our village, we would welcome any help that you can give.

**Phil Gaskin**

Chairman, Calvert Green Parish Council