

Calvert Green Parish Council

Chairman's Report 31st May 2021

Although not quite as bad as last year, the pandemic has impacted parish council meetings which have been a blend of virtual and face-to-face meetings. Thankfully, with restrictions removed, we are now meeting monthly in Calvert Green Community Centre for our parish council meetings again.

I'd like to start by thanking Tracy Horsfield, our parish clerk for all her hard work. Tracy handles day-to-day parish council matters. With most parish councillors working full-time, and all the projects in our area, Tracy has a heavy workload and works full time in another job too.

We started the year with two parish councillor vacancies, and I'm pleased that Cllr David Russell and Cllr Colin Sharples have both joined the parish council, so we once again have a full complement of councillors. Both Cllr Sharples and Cllr Russell have become an active part of the parish council and I thank them for their commitment.

I'd also like to thank Councillors Adele Decent, Carl Blakely, Liza Thompson and Kirsten Gittins (Vice chair) for their continued contributions.

It's frustrating that some members of the community still don't realise that parish councillors are unpaid. It is not easy finding the additional time necessary to support the 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, both virtually and face-to-face. Not only are these parishioners a good source of feedback from the 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

Given the increase in the cost of living, the parish council took the decision to freeze our precept – the income we receive from a small percentage of council tax payments, despite our own increasing costs.

Calvert Green's neighbourhood plan process has been a big project for the parish council, and I'd like to thank Cllr Thompson for all her work on this. Over the year, Cllr Thompson has organised community engagement sessions (virtual and face-to-face) and formed a steering group made up from members of the community. This is still an ongoing project, and Cllr Sharples joined the parish council following one of these engagement sessions and has gone on to take an active role in the neighbourhood plan project which has been a great help and already very productive.

After several years of waiting, the former petanque pit has been converted into a garden of remembrance. While this was funded by HS2, and based on a design the parish council chose, the work was undertaken by a local garden design company. We were able to incorporate the caterpillar trail of stones which local children decorated and spread around the green during the pandemic. The garden currently looks amazing, and the parish council has replaced the old uncomfortable benches

with hard wood benches. We have also ordered an additional remembrance bench and soldier silhouette which we are hoping to have installed soon.

I'd like to thank Becky Murphy for all her help varnishing the caterpillar stones, forming a community team to maintain the garden, and for arranging to have the benches fixed.

It is also great to see a new play area which is being well used. Although this was carried out by Buckinghamshire council, several parish councillors, led by Cllr Adele Decent were involved in the project – gaining feedback from the community and ensuring we got the best deal for local children. Several parish councillors, county councillors and members of the community attended the formal opening of the play area.

Cllr Blakely has been instrumental in village infrastructure projects, including new (and replacement) bollards at strategic points in the village, and arranging for additional bin installation and repairs. Supply issues have delayed the installation of the bollards, but they are due to be installed soon.

Cllr Gittins continues to handle the barrage of planning applications we receive from developers and projects in the area which is a much bigger task than it should be for a parish of our size.

Cllr Russell has recently taken on fire safety check responsibilities and has investigated funding options available for us.

I'd like to say a big thank you to Tracy Horsfield and Cllr Gittins for organising the Queens's Platinum Jubilee event on Friday 3rd June. It looks to be a fantastic event and I hope the community supports it.

HS2 continues to have a big impact on our community. The scale of the project is now evident, with the works ongoing for many years still. We are already impacted by road closures, road works, traffic delays, increased traffic, and road disrepair. The East West Rail project exacerbates these issues in the local area.

HS2 communication and engagement is desperately lacking, and I have personally spent a lot of time with representatives from other local parishes fighting to improve this process with HS2 and its contactors. Many residents have recently received formal legal notices for work to be carried out on their land and properties. This is an area that has had my focus to ensure it is clear what the impacts will be, and ensure residents know their rights.

We still have £250,000 available for HS2 environmental mitigation projects which we need to seriously consider, but until the full detailed design of HS2 is published, it is difficult to know how best to use this. There are other funds available which are currently being investigated for other community projects.

I was nominated and awarded a "Best in Bucks award" for my community work which I am very appreciative of.

I'd like to add thanks to our MP Greg Smith and who has helped us be heard and given the parish council an opportunity to hold HS2 to task. I'd also like to thank Cllr Angela Macpherson and Cllr Frank Mahon who tirelessly support us.

I'm pleased that we have finally been able to finalise the lease with Buckinghamshire Council for land on which the village hall extension now sits. This has been an arduous process.

Summary

Over the last year, we have seen many positive achievements, and all thanks to the hard work and dedication of our parish councillors and Tracy, our clerk. I'm also pleased we have filled all our parish councillor positions and are back to full strength.

Phil Gaskin

Chairman, Calvert Green Parish Council