

Calvert Green Parish Council

Chairman's Report 21st May 2024

It has been another busy and challenging year for the parish council. Our local area continues to be impacted by the HS2 construction which has taken its toll on our roads and inconvenienced parishioners with the endless road closures and diversions - which has isolated our community. A reduction in Buckinghamshire Council services has exacerbated this situation resulting in delays to road and other infrastructure repairs and to date, we are still awaiting our first verge cut of the year which has led to many complaints and a general untidy look to the village.

I'd like to thank our Parish Clerk, Tracy Horsfield who handles day-to-day parish council matters and keeps the parish council on track. 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. While Tracy is the only paid employee of the parish council, she goes above and beyond to ensure things happen.

In this last year, we sadly saw Cllr Adele Decent move away from the area and Cllr Liza Thompson also step down from the parish council. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank both councillors for their time as parish councillors. Both have made significant contributions and they will be missed.

For most of this last year we have carried two vacancies, but I am pleased that Cllr Gary Atkins joined us and quickly picked up liaison responsibilities for both CGCA and the Claydon Solar farm project.

Cllr David Russell carries out our weekly safety checks, but also makes himself available to many other contractors to ensure that works get carried out correctly at the village hall. Cllr Russell also arranged for the remedial works to be carried out to the hall ceiling and fire safety monitoring equipment to be successfully installed. He has also taken the lead representing the parish council at FCC community liaison meetings and the allotment project.

Cllr Carl Blakely has continued to handle local infrastructure which has been a challenge given the number of issues and the lack of focus and time to fix by Buckinghamshire Council. Cllr Blakely recently attended a meeting with the Buckinghamshire Council Local Area Technicians where significant progress was made. This included identifying new bus stop markings, replacing damaged bollards, a new waste bin, and identifying a damaged grit bin. Areas that are adopted, but were not identified as such were also highlighted.

Cllr Colin Sharples has worked tirelessly on our Neighbourhood Plan, working with, and taking over from Cllr Thompson. While this process has taken many years to date, Cllr Sharples has recently engaged with adjoining parish councils and is about to do the same with local landowners and parishioners as we finally start the formal referendum process.

With all the land around us owned by developers, I'd like to thank Cllr Kirsten Gittins for her work liaising with developers. This is a challenging process, and I thank her for her continued commitment to this. Cllr Gittins was also involved with our review of the CGCA lease and liaison meeting.

I hope that we are able to recruit an additional councillor to complete our quota and help with workload share this year.

It's disappointing 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

many 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 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.

It's encouraging that the CGCA is now regularly attending our parish council meetings and I was invited and attended one of their meetings. In addition to this, we have also met with the CGCA to discuss the lease. The Parish Council looks forward to working more closely with the CGCA throughout this coming year.

Observations and Main Achievements

After several years of freezing the parish council precept, we took the difficult decision to increase the council tax contribution this year. This is mainly to fund replacement services to mitigate reducing service levels.

The face-off between HS2 and Buckinghamshire Council regarding the repair of haul routes has led to road disrepair and dangerous driving conditions and the parish council has rallied with other local parish councils to expedite action. However, these discussions are subject to non-disclosure which is concerning although we are now starting to see some movement.

The HS2 works have really ramped up over the last year and Cllr Russell, Cllr Blakely, and I attended a site visit earlier this year to see the piling work for bridge infrastructure in our area. Another issue arising from these works is compromised drainage which is identified by FCC and the Environment Agency but contested by EKFB. Sadly, this has led to the flooding of two properties and the gardens and garages of several other properties. The Parish Council has purchased two flood defence kits comprising of petrol water pumps, hoses and barriers to be held in a publicly accessible area and available to parishioners who are under threat of flooding, although we do hope they won't need to be used.

Over this year, we have used a local contractor to tidy up the area around the village hall, including the remembrance garden. He was also contracted to tidy up the overgrown area by the village shop.

The remembrance garden now has new metal railings installed and we have acquired 4 of the original coping bricks from the now demolished railway bridge, which will also be incorporated into the garden.

The Parish Council is under some pressure to take on more devolved services from Buckinghamshire Council, including grass cutting. The currently supplied financials show that we would not get very much funding to cut the green areas, given the amount of grass we have in our village. That said, we are investigating the purchase of a ride-on mower which our contractor would be insured to use. In advance of this, we now have agreement from EKFB (HS2's main contractor in the area) for a £2,000 grant towards a second hand 10' shipping container which would be located next to the gas compound to the rear of the village hall.

Because we were not happy with the HS2 noise mitigation for our area, which has increased significantly from the original plans, we managed to get support from Buckinghamshire Council to

reject the proposed noise barriers in the Schedule 17 design plans. This is still outstanding and sits with HS2 for review and resubmission.

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.

We are now in the process of getting a formal license for the tarmacked former play areas and we are hoping to secure funding to provide some large planters and seating.

I'd like to thank Cllr Angela Macpherson and Cllr Frank Mahon for their support to the parish council.

Although I have mentioned all councillors above, I really do appreciate the time they invest, and recognise that this short report mentions only a few of the activities they are involved in.

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 parish clerk.

Phil Gaskin

Chairman, Calvert Green Parish Council