

Hemingford Abbots Parish Council

Chairman's Report May 2019 – Sept 2020

Introduction

This Annual Report covers the activities of the Parish Council over a period of 15 months, much of it in unprecedented times. The Covid pandemic has shaken the world in 2020 and we have all had to adjust rapidly to new ways of living and working. At the time of writing, in September 2020, the Public Health emergency continues and there is no way of knowing when 'normal' life can resume.

I will report on the structure and working of HAPC during these 15 months in two sections – before Lockdown in mid-March 2020, and after that time.

The Council

In May 2019 the Parish Council elected Bridget Flanagan as Chairman and John Peters and Brian Parsons as Vice-Chairmen for the coming year. The other Councillors comprised Chris Nicol, Zoe Ryall, Marcus Whewell and Josephine Wills. Georgina West was the Clerk and RFO.

During the year, there have been several changes to the Council. In October 2019 Chris Nicol resigned from the Council but returned in January 2020 when she was co-opted. In November 2019 Brian Parsons resigned and in January 2020 Josephine Wills resigned – both for personal reasons. These two Councillors brought considerable energy and skills to the Council and I thank them for their significant contributions.

The Council now has two vacancies and feels it is important to fill these as soon as possible – so the load can be shared, and more importantly, so that new energy can be introduced for the future.

Hemingford Abbots is a vibrant and active community in which its Parish Council plays a central role.

The Clerk

Georgina West took retirement in December 2019; she had been with HAPC for only 14 months but had worked hard to learn about the village and ensure the smooth running of the Council. The role of Clerk is complex and requires a far greater level of professional expertise than is often appreciated. I thank Georgina for all her work with HAPC and the Parish – always done with her kind good nature. HAPC counted itself extraordinarily fortunate to appoint Ramune Mimiene as Clerk in January 2020. She came on recommendation from our Internal Auditor, and was already Clerk to several other Parish Councils.

County and District Councillors

Ian Bates has continued as County Councillor for Hemingford Abbots. He has attended meetings regularly and is always very helpful on all matters under the CCC jurisdiction such as highways, waste and minerals, schools etc. The three District Councillors choose one of their team to attend HAPC meetings – and they too can be relied on to liaise for the Parish at HDC. After David Underwood's resignation as HDC Councillor, Sarah Wilson took his seat in the by-election to work alongside Sarah Conboy and Mike Grice.

Community Representatives and Helpers

On behalf of HAPC I sincerely thank those members of the community who help the Council. Ted Burleigh is a Trustee of the Peace Memorial Playing Field. Ken Martin makes a regular check on the village Playing Field. Iain Muspratt liaises with the Environment Agency and reports on river matters. (HAPC continues to look for a new Footpath Warden – Iain has done this job for many years and would like to hand on to someone new). Josephine Wills joined the Hemingford Hub Good Neighbour Scheme when it was set up in September 2019. Johnny Brown is the IT expert who manages the village website and helps with the HAPC email system. He presents a quarterly analysis of the traffic data from two VAS (Vehicle activated signs). Erika Brown circulates the weekly St Ives area Policing reports. Through her village email she sends out occasional notices and information. If you would like to be on this list, you must 'opt in' and email erikabrown97@gmail.com

Zoe Brown manages the Community Facebook page. Iain Muspratt chairs the Hemingfords Action Group who give HAPC regular reports on matters relating to the old Golf Course site.

The Annual Litter Pick in February was twice postponed due to dangerous weather conditions. Thank you to the stalwart team who, on the third attempt, collected, unfortunately as ever, a considerable amount of rubbish from our roadsides. Thank you also to the quiet individuals who collect litter from the meadow, common and riverside walks on a weekly basis throughout the year.

Finance

The Precept for 2019-20 was set at £21,748 and this represents an annual Band D property charge of £65.51. The main expenditure of the annual budget is for administration of the Council – Clerk's salary, meeting room hire, training, insurance etc. Then there is the maintenance of the Playing Field and its equipment, and also general village maintenance and repair. HAPC is mindful of the need for the street light 'sinking fund' to ensure the future cost of replacing the lights can be met when necessary.

Village Projects and Maintenance

The two Village Signs, designed by the late David Peace and given to the village by the WI and public subscription, are currently being refurbished and repainted by Glyn Mould a specialist woodworker. HAPC has been successful in a second bid to the CCC for funds under the Local Highways Improvement Scheme. The project is to implement a 20mph speed limit in the centre of the village and to create a buffer 40 mph zone on part of Rideaway.

HAPC has asked CCC to repair the damaged rumble strips in the High Street by covering them completely with smooth tarmac.

The contract for street lighting energy has been transferred to SSE Co Ltd after the CCC relinquished their provision of this across the County.

Discussions are continuing with HDC to apply for the former Golf Range to be registered as an Asset of Community Value.

Representation

HAPC has continued to make recommendation on all Planning Applications within the parish. Extra public meetings are held when necessary to meet the HDC time schedules. HAPC comments on most tree applications, and is increasingly concerned that HDC do not require replanting schemes for trees that are felled in the Conservation Area. HAPC is seeking clarification and more information on HDC policy on this matter.

A further (third) response was submitted to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste draft Local Plan.

After submitting a response to the Combined Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Authority's (CPCA) draft Transport Plan, HAPC was concerned to see that despite this parish's and many others' objections, the potential for a 'Huntingdon Third River Crossing' – possibly across Godmanchester Eastside Common – was included in the Plan. A Feasibility Study was commissioned by CPCA into the Crossing. HAPC was delighted and relieved when in June 2020 the Study reported its findings and definitively scrapped all plans for such a crossing.

HAPC has made strong recommendations against proposed amendments of Planning permission for the old 'astroturf site' adjacent to the former Golf Course Site. This application is yet to be determined.

March 23rd 2020 and onwards

From Monday March 16th the nation was asked to 'stay at home' and the following week the country went into Lockdown to combat the spread of the Covid 19 virus. Events were so rapid and the future situation unknown, so Parish Councils were advised to put Emergency Measures in place. Notices were posted and began:

*Hemingford Abbots Parish Council recognises and agrees that no business, meeting, service provision or service delivery of the Authority is of any importance **above that** of public and personal safety. As such the following resolutions are made:*

AGREED: *all scheduled public meetings will be cancelled for an **initial 3 month period until 22nd June 2020** (or as circumstances dictate).*

At the time there was no legislation for the provision and continuation of local government under such circumstances, but slowly new laws were enacted. The monthly March and April HAPC meetings

were not held. A new way of working emerged – virtual meetings by Zoom. At the May meeting all payments and business that had been conducted by email were ratified.

Meetings have continued by Zoom. National guidance allowed for delay to facilitate completion of the audit. The Annual Parish Meeting was delayed but had to be completed by September. The Annual Parish Council Meeting was not held and so the posts of Chairman and Vice-chairman will continue unless changed within a monthly meeting.

The HAPC meetings continue to be advertised on the noticeboards and website, and any parishioner wishing to join the Zoom meetings can contact the Clerk for the link and password

We have all had to adapt our ways of working and communicating. Virtual has many benefits, and although it is currently in place of Reality it certainly does not replace it. HAPC will return to public meetings in the Village Hall as soon as it is safe to do so.

The Hemingford Hub which formed in the autumn of 2019 proved itself to be a beacon of the communities in both Hemingford villages from March onwards. Under the chairmanship of Josephine Wills, and now Tish Peek, they stepped up to co-ordinate a superb team of volunteers to deliver food, medicines, help and friendship to all those who were shielding, isolated and vulnerable. Both Parish Councils gave financial grants – but these were small compared to the generosity of goodwill, time and effort from the volunteers.

An unfortunate casualty of the Lockdown period was our Clerk who found the burden of home working and home schooling to be too onerous and so resigned in July 2020. HAPC was sad to lose such a vivacious and capable team member such as Ramune and wish her well. In September HAPC appointed a new Clerk, Maxine Blewett, and look forward to working with her.

The pandemic and resulting necessary Public Health restrictions have considerably changed and curtailed our lives during the last seven months. There are many more months of uncertainty ahead. I trust Hemingford Abbots and HAPC will return to an open way of living and working in 2021. Until then, stay safe.

Bridget Flanagan