

Hemingford Abbots Parish Council

Chairman's Report: May 2021 – May 2022

Introduction

After the disruption, stress and hardships endured by the parish as a result of Covid, it is very pleasing to be able to physically meet once again for our annual parish meeting.

Chair and Vice Chair

I assumed the Chair's role last May when Bridget Flanagan stood down, and simultaneously Zoe Ryall agreed to become our Vice-Chair. Since then, we have committed ourselves to increasing clarity and communication regarding the parish council's activities, such as hosting an Open Evening (held last September) and also improving transparency regarding our intended objectives. I want to thank Zoe for her excellent support during this transitional time.

Parish Councillors

The last 12 months have seen considerable change. Chris Nicol stood down from the Council last Autumn, and then Phillip Cooke and Bob Penney joined us towards the end of 2021 - resulting in us having a full quota of councillors for the first time in many years.

Then in April, after many years of exemplary service, Bridget Flanagan and John Peters announced that they would not stand for re-election. I am sure that all parishioners will share my immense gratitude for their enormous contribution and leadership. It will be almost impossible to replace their experience, knowledge and expertise, and the Council will always owe them a considerable debt of thanks.

Bob Penny also decided not to stand for re-election, but Glen Perrott, who has lived in the Hemingford for over 20 years applied to become a parish councillor and has now formally joined the team – I have no doubts that her fresh ideas and considerable energy will be a real asset to the Council.

This leaves us once again with two vacancies - so if you care about the village and want to help, please get in touch and we can explain what is involved.

I want to record my thanks to all the councillors who have served the parish so professionally in the last 12 months and contributed to our positive progress.

The Clerk and Meetings

Maxine Blewett has completed her first full year with the Council, having joined us in September 2020. She is performing excellently, keeping us all on track and fully compliant! In addition, she has just commenced training for her formal CiLCA qualification which will strengthen and enhance the Council's standing and expertise. All the councillors would like to thank her for her hard work and support.

Since May 2021, we have once again been able to hold physical meetings at the Village Hall, and all parishioners are always very welcome to attend and share their thoughts and ideas.

Finally, we have amended our standing orders to allow extended discussion with the public at our monthly meetings - the increased attendances meant that we often found ourselves potentially curtailing important debates, but the recent changes will remove any time restrictions so parishioners can share their thoughts and ideas without 'being on the clock'.

County and District Councillors

We have been fortunate to have enjoyed excellent support from the District Councillors, particularly Sarah Wilson and Sarah Conboy, for which we are very grateful. Sarah Wilson stood down at the recent elections (her replacement has yet to be confirmed) - and we want to thank her for her considerable efforts over the last 12 months and wish her a happy and well-deserved retirement!

Doug Dew has been an enthusiastic District Councillor, always available to offer timely advice and he has diligently kept us fully informed on county matters.

We are always grateful for all the DCs' and CC's time and interest, especially in attending the parish council meetings and briefing us on the various district and county initiatives.

Community Groups

I want to thank those members of the community who have supported the work of the Council, including Ted Burleigh (representing the Trustees of the Peace Memorial Playing Field), Ken Martin (inspections of the village playing field), Iain Muspratt (river warden, and for his excellent updates on HAG's activities regarding Mick George's proposed development of the former golf course), Bob Penney (for very kindly maintaining and repairing gates on the numerous footpaths), and Sue Henderson (distribution of the Parish magazine including updates on the parish council activities), and all those parishioners who helped with keeping the village tidy. My apologies if I have missed anyone, the truth being that we are fortunate to have an excellent community spirit, where most parishioners contribute in some way to the health and maintenance of the village.

I am pleased to say that we now have a volunteer for Footpath Warden (thank you to Ann-Marie Farmer) but are still looking for a Tree Warden and also someone to help maintain the VAS signs. Please let Maxine or me know if you think that you can help.

Village Projects and Maintenance

It has been a busy 12 months! The Parish Council continues to wrestle with the Environment Agency over the large quantities of potentially hazardous waste being stored at the old golf course. We have built and populated a new website for the village, which is much simpler to use and offers considerably more information (thank you Zoe for overseeing this project,) and work was completed on the new 20pmh zone through the centre of the village, which appears to have generally slowed down the traffic. However, speeding remains an issue for many, and the Parish Council is considering what else could be done to continue the progress including support for a Speedwatch Group (if sufficient interest exists).

In addition, the Parish Council voiced its unanimous opposition to the proposed commercial development of Hemingford Park and is continuing to request that a biodiversity report be produced and considered before any decision is reached by HDC. Protection of the parishioners' amenity is one of our most important responsibilities, and regular, large-scale events could pose a serious risk to these rights. Concerned parishioners have formed a group (PROVE) to continue to oppose this application, illustrating again how much the village values its peace and tranquillity.

We are about to commission a full audit of all our streetlights, to ascertain their condition and likely maintenance requirements. As you may know, we took ownership of these from Highways many years ago and whilst this has allowed us to retain their considerable character and charm, it represents a significant financial burden for a small parish. This new information will help us set the appropriate precept to properly provide for their future.

In addition, we have been in discussions with several neighbouring parish councils (Houghton and Wyton, Hilton, Fenstanton, Hemingford Grey) to offer our assistance on any projects that traverse common boundaries. We have already successfully co-operated with neighbouring councils over phase 2 of the Houghton Grange development, and on the current Hemingford Park planning application. Also, Hemingford Abbots and Hemingford Grey Parish Councils have agreed to co-fund a summer sports programme, free for parishioners' children (primary school age), to

be held at the Pavilion through July and August. Working together allows HAPC to achieve more than it could on its own, and also to share valuable information and learning.

The old Shell garage site remains a source of concern; works have commenced in the previous little Chef building and the installation of new gates suggests that the owner(s) are planning new activity. We are actively seeking clarification from HDC over what is planned for the site and the likely timings.

Playing Field

Following the annual audit, several pieces of the equipment have been repaired, and also new picnic tables installed. Work is underway to install a new sign on the field to provide useful information regarding the parish and its attractions, including wildlife and notable trees.

We are also delighted that the field will be used as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in June, for a local picnic and traditional games. Thank you in particular to Sue Henderson and Pam Bartlett for organising this fun event in the centre of the parish.

Priorities for 2022-23

The Open Evening highlighted over a dozen matters that the attendees felt should be considered by the Council - including speeding, flooding in the centre of the village, supporting the Jubilee celebrations, cycling on pavements, and installing a Neighbourhood Plan. Following this valuable input, we are in the process of establishing a three-year strategy to offer greater clarity over our intentions, including how we can better report our progress, and encourage even more interaction with the parish. All the Councillors are very aware that we are only temporary custodians of the village, and that we are spending your money!

A significant question facing us in the next year is whether the parish wishes to construct a neighbourhood plan. This would be a sizeable undertaking but would offer considerable protection for the village in terms of influencing and potentially restricting future development(s) within its boundaries. The Parish Council is conducting further research over what would be involved, but it would likely require a committed team of volunteers working together over a two-year period.

Marcus Whewell

Chairman