

Hemingford Abbots Parish Council

Chairman's Report: May 2022 – April 2023

Introduction

I am pleased to say that the Parish Council can report another busy and generally successful year; whilst much of our time was occupied dealing with a major planning application we have also achieved good progress on several important issues, such as mapping the condition of the footpaths and gates and resolving the future funding of the streetlights (which the parish owns).

Chair and Vice Chair

Zoe and I continue to work diligently to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council, and also to encourage a broad representation of the parish within the team. We have both been in our current roles now for two years, and it is gratifying to see our joint vision taking shape and gaining momentum. I am once again very grateful for her sound advice and steadfast support.

Parish Councillors

I am pleased to report that we have expanded the number of councillors. Glen Perrott is completing her first year on the Council, and we are benefitting greatly from her high energy and organisational skills - and just last month (March), Shaun Reinson has joined us, bringing a host of new ideas and valuable IT expertise. Both Shaun and Glen live on Manor Lane, so we now have direct representation from most areas of the village.

We have added the Parish Councillors' contact details to the Parish website together with a brief biography, which hopefully will help parishioners engage with the most appropriate member of the team should the need arise. The website also includes the details of Anne-Marie Farmer, who is doing excellent work as our Footpath Warden, Iain Muspratt our River Warden, and our District and County Councillors.

I am sure that you will want to join me in thanking all the councillors who have served the parish so professionally in the last 12 months and contributed to our positive progress. The village is very fortunate to have such committed and diligent supporters.

The Clerk and Meetings

Maxine Blewett continues to perform superbly as our Clerk, and all the Councillors are always grateful for her consummate care and diligence on all parish matters.

Over the 11 months we held almost a dozen meetings (9 ordinary, 1 extraordinary, and an Open Evening), with one cancellation due to the sad death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. We have also commenced a programme of visiting other neighbouring Parish Councils to encourage positive relationships and identify ways we might work together. A great example of this was the joint Sports Sessions organised with Hemingford Grey Parish Council, held last summer at The Pavilion for children of the two parishes. This was a considerable success (booking numbers and feedback from attendees) and plans are underway to repeat this in the summer.

We are grateful for and encouraged by the excellent turnout at the recent Parish Council Open Evening, which importantly gives us direct feedback on what issues need addressing and new opportunities for us to improve the amenity of parishioners.

County and District Councillors

The Council is very grateful for the excellent support received from our County and District Councillors – we know that Hemingford Abbots is a small parish and their time is very precious, yet Sarah, Debbie, Brett and Doug have always made themselves available to offer their advice and guidance.

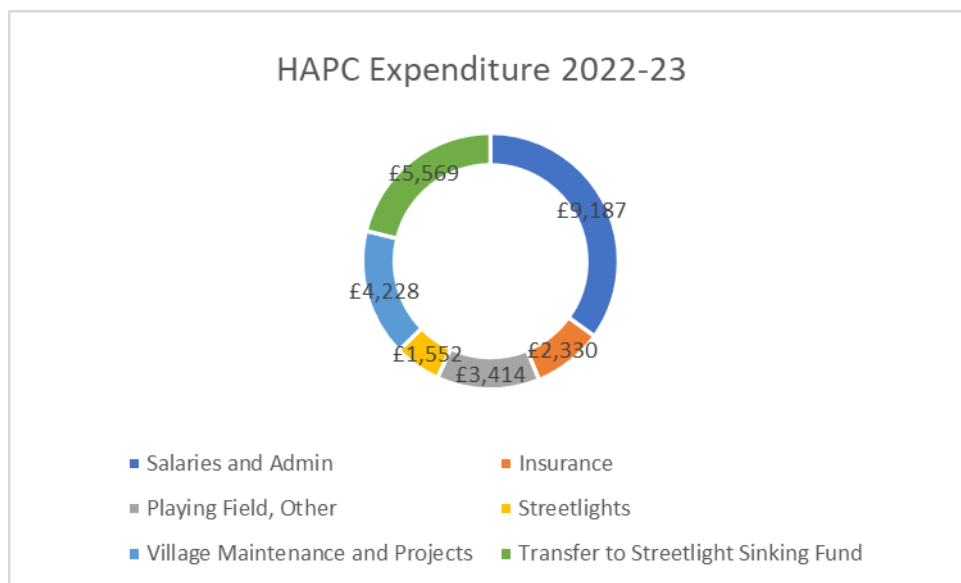
Community Groups

On behalf of the community, I want to say a big ‘thank you’ to the numerous individuals who selflessly offer their time in support of the parish: 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), Susan Painter and Audra Green for their leadership of PROVE), Anne-Marie Farmer for her excellent work cataloguing the footpaths, Sue Henderson (distribution of the Parish magazine), and all those parishioners who help keep the village tidy. It is almost impossible to name everyone who contributes to the upkeep of the village, but we are grateful to you all!

A special word should be made for Sue Henderson, Pam Bartlett, and their wonderful committee for organising such a wonderful jubilee celebration in the summer – I am confident that the village will enjoy two more fabulous events when we commemorate The King’s coronation in May and then the Flower Festival in June

Finances

Across the year the Parish Council had an income of £26,280 and spent £20,711, the balance being placed into the streetlight sinking fund. A summary of our main areas of expenditure can be seen below; -



The Council has transferred the majority of its reserves into a higher paying interest savings account, and we have also fixed our utility prices for 2 years to help mitigate against rising electricity costs.

Village Projects and Maintenance

The Parish Council spent considerable time and effort addressing the proposed commercial development of Hemingford Park, and establishing a plan for the future maintenance of the streetlights.

On the former, we represented the Parish on multiple occasions with HDC regarding the various planning applications submitted for the property; we then also shared our views and concerns with the Planning Inspectorate when the ‘C3A Application - Change of Use’ went to appeal, and recently engaged with Jonathan Djanogly our local MP. At the time of writing the 2021 application had been withdrawn from both bodies, but we understand that work on a new pre-application may be underway.

With the streetlights, the Parish Council was aware of a potential funding shortfall and so an external audit was undertaken to ascertain their condition. This allowed us to build a financial model calculating the likely ‘gap’ in

finances, and the results were presented to the village at the Open Evening in March. Helped by the judicious use of reserves, we believe that suitable funds can be secured via a reasonable increase in the precept. Full details of the audit findings and calculations are available on the Parish website. We are very grateful to Peter Keen in particular for his excellent work on this project.

On other matters, an application has been submitted for the former Little Chef site on the A1307 to become a motor repair centre. The Parish Council has requested via HDC that the site is kept safe and tidy at all times, and that some screening is introduced to improve the visual appearance from the North.

Mick George Limited, who owned the old Golf Course, reported at the end of 2022 that it was being purchased by Heidelberg AG, a cement company based in Germany. This is expected to complete this summer when more will be known regarding future plans for the site.

We continue to encourage the Environment Agency to seek a clean-up of the old Astro turf site and are very grateful to Dr Anna Willetts, a specialist solicitor who is assisting us 'pro bono' in holding the landowner(s) to account for this chronic issue.

Anne-Marie Farmer, our new Footpath warden has been busy recording the condition of each of the footpaths and associated gates which will help us greatly in scheduling future maintenance. We are also now trying to ascertain who owns each piece of street furniture, so we can better understand where the responsibilities lie.

After the installation of a new 20mph zone throughout Hemingford Grey, several parishioners have once again asked whether our own zone could be extended to the end of the High Street (to make it continuous), also to include the residential part of New Road. The Parish Council are currently seeking information of the best way to progress this and hope to report back shortly.

Playing Field

Some repeated, anti-social behaviour involving visitors the village was observed in the summer of 2022 who were using the field, but fortunately this was successfully resolved with the help of the HDC Community Protection Team. Many thanks to the residents who reported this issue, and who keep a watchful eye on our behalf.

Following the annual audit and inspection, parts of the safety floor have been repaired and we are planning to repaint some of the equipment, in particular the slide.

Priorities for 2023-24

At our second Open Evening in March, the Council reported back on the various suggestions and also invited new ideas and comments. We are in the process of assessing these and where appropriate, will add as new items to the actions list - a copy of which is always available from the clerk.

The question of whether the parish wishes to construct a neighbourhood plan remains on the table. Some parishioners have recently put their names forward to assist, so the project may start to move forward in 2023.

In conclusion, all of the Parish Councillors feel very fortunate to live in such a wonderful village, of which we serve purely as custodians. With your help and support, we will continue to protect and enhance the attributes that make the parish such a special place for us all to enjoy.

Marcus Whewell

Chairman