

Chairman's Annual Report for the 2008/9 Council year.

The Little Chalfont Parish Council has had a busy and successful twelve months.

At the beginning of the year, in April, our new Clerk, Janet Mason, began work. This is proving to be a very successful appointment and I am grateful to Janet for the hard work and commitment she puts into all that she does.

The Parish office now operates very well and has all the necessary equipment to function in a world mainly dominated by email and the internet, although the office still receives a great many phone calls. A great deal of what we do is carried out via the computer, including all our agendas, minutes and much of the day to day communication between Councillors and the Clerk's office. Our website continues to develop and will be further expanded to contain as much helpful information as possible, together with all our meeting minutes and other relevant documentation.

In early December we welcomed Karen Sterling as Assistant Clerk and she is providing excellent backup and support to Janet Mason. The office is open every weekday, not only giving the public good service by this availability, but also by being on hand to all the users of the Village Hall, which in turn makes them feel more at home and comfortable with the facilities.

The biggest project of the year has been the refurbishment of the Hall. We have spent a figure approaching £17,000 on getting the building back to an acceptable standard, replacing the chairs and tables, as well as upgrading the kitchen. Our users seem to be very pleased with the outcome. The last item left to be done was the kitchen floor and this has just been completed.

Throughout the year discussions continued with Amersham Town Council over the division of the reserves held at the time of the setting up of our Council. Whilst we were unable to prevail in gaining the full amount of our claim, we did agree a compromise and that figure now forms the basis of our reserves. We need to have a sizeable sum in our reserves to begin the funding process for future projects, the more so as grants can often be obtained on a 'matched funding' basis.

Much time was spent on our first full year set of accounts. Our Clerk also has the role of 'Responsible Financial Officer' and there was a lot of work needing to be done to ensure our first year account was ready for the external auditors. Now that this is in place our second year's accounts will be easier to prepare and hopefully easier still with the third and consecutive years. Equally, budgeting has not been easy as we had no history on which to base our estimates, but I am pleased to be able to report that we came in well under budget in our first year. We are likely to be under budget again in our second year, which finished at the end of March, albeit coming in much closer to target this time round.

Staying with our finances for a moment more, two matters of importance are under way. First of all we are now fully responsible for all our street lights – there are 328 of them, whereas previously this was subcontracted. We believe we have an improved arrangement in place which will ensure a better standard of maintenance and repair. Secondly we are in the process of opening up for tender all the arrangements for looking after Westwood Park, the Village Green, Finch Lane Pond and the other areas in the Village under our care. Although any new arrangements will not come into place until the start of the 2010 financial year (April 2010), we are hoping to get a better deal, the more so in the current financial climate.

The second biggest project of the year has been the refurbishment of the Pavilion at Westwood Park. The Pavilion has been physically deteriorating over the last few years and was in serious danger of being closed down. Whilst it is now no more than adequate for the job, it is clean and functional, providing four changing rooms and a tea room for users. The building has been a target for vandalism, so we have improved security, with metal plates on the doors, reinforced glass on the windows and improved locks.

Our Planning Committee, under the very able Chairmanship of Chris Ingham, has been no less industrious than the Council as a whole, its priority being to approve reasonable development while firmly defending the green belt and the semi-rural nature of the Village. The Committee reviewed 130 applications at 15 meetings, making written recommendations to Chiltern District Council on every application. The Chairman spoke twice at meetings of the District Council's Planning Committee. Written comments were made to the Planning

Inspectorate and the Department for Communities and Local Government about appeals where the Committee believed there was a strong public interest - in one case these comments helped bring about a more generous commitment by the developer to fund additional school places in connection with a large housing project. Members attended training with the Chilterns Conservation Board, and a further training evening was held at which Carol Castle, Head of Planning Services at Chiltern District Council, kindly gave her time to brief the Committee. The Committee also welcomed the frequent help and advice of our two district councillors, Don Phillips and Mike Smith, and County Councillor Martin Tett.

At the start of the Council year Gary Smith was co opted on to the Council and he has played a full part in all our work. In particular he has been our representative on the Neighbourhood Action Group, the NAG, which is the local liaison group with the police in Amersham. We have not found this to be a successful arrangement as the turnover of police manpower is rapid, leaving them unable to gain familiarity with our issues and us frustrated at the continuing problems of vandalism, speeding and illegal parking.

In February this year, following the resignation in December last year of Councillor Don Marshall, Lesley Hunt joined the Council as a co opted member and I am grateful to her for her contribution since then and also to Don Marshall for all that he did in his 18 months, especially his work on our website. He continues to act as our consultant for the website, www.littlechalfont-pc.gov.uk . Being a Councillor involves giving up a fair amount of time, for the good of the Parish and I thank all of our Councillors for their interest and support in making the Council work well.

There are a number of calls for financial support from the Council. During the year we established a process for considering requests for funding and we agreed to several. The largest amount went to the Community Library, which we feel does a tremendous job for the Village and long may that continue. We also supported the Good Companions, Dial a ride, the Village Day, the Hanging Baskets scheme and the Christmas Lights.

New Village entry signs have been put in place in four locations and we expect to have two more installed this year. One of the biggest issues for all road users has been the huge number of potholes throughout the area, something we have continued to press the County Council about at every opportunity. Some repair work has been completed, but the situation is still far from satisfactory.

In looking ahead to the rest of 2009 and the first part of 2010 our aim is to build on the achievements of the first two years of our existence as a separate Parish Council. In particular we have to prepare a Parish Plan and in doing this we can make good use of the excellent work the team that completed the Market Town Health Check has done. I am looking forward to the installation of the cycle racks in Chenies Parade and I also look forward to the completion of initiatives to improve the look of the centre of the Village. In all of this we welcome comments from anyone living in the Parish. You can write, phone, email or call in to the Parish Office. Additionally, all our Planning and Council Meetings have a ten minute opportunity for any members of the public to address Councillors.