

SHRIVENHAM PARISH ASSEMBLY Chairman's Report 2022

Good evening everyone. Thank you for coming to the 2022 Shrivenham Parish Assembly.

This should have been my sixth report to the Village Assembly, but we missed one in 2020 due to lockdown and even last year's Assembly was held by Zoom. I am so pleased that things have improved so much that we have at last been able to have this meeting in our lovely Memorial Hall.

Last time I spoke to you, I announced a number of changes in the composition of the Council whereas in the last year we have had only one change and that was the inclusion of Bob Sheldon who brought the number on the Council up to the maximum of eleven. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those on the Council for their hard work during the past year. It has not been an easy year with many of our meetings having to be held online.

Inevitably, it is dealing with planning applications that has taken up much of our time since I last reported to you. You may remember that last year I announced that I had asked Julia Jones to take over as Chair of the Planning Committee and I am pleased to say that she has risen to the occasion and between the two of

us we have had some success in dealing with some of the more difficult, speculative attempts to build in the village. In that respect I am delighted to announce that the planning application submitted by Gladman to build 100 houses above the Bovis development off Townsend Road has been rejected by the Vale of the White Horse Council Planning Department. This is not over yet, as they may well appeal. This is what has happened with another application to build 26 houses off Townsend Road. We vigorously opposed this application as it was unnecessary in our, already over developed, village. So, we will await the result of this appeal which could take a long time.

On your behalf, we will continue to try to prevent the village growing out of all proportion but fear for the worst with speculative developers still looking at possible sites on the periphery of the village.

The other matter that has been at the forefront of our work during the past year has been finance and the balancing of the budget. In particular, the lack of income from the Hall has challenged our two financial wizards Julia Evans and Lyn Frape. But, more of that later when I present the accounts.

Last year I reported on the beginning of the project to build the Sports Pavilion and I had hoped to announce the completion long

before now but delays in obtaining construction material caused by Brexit and Covid have meant that it is still not completed. But more from Bjorn in his report on the Barrington Trust. What I was hoping to do was have a grand opening of the Pavilion on the 9th of March when we were honoured by a visit from HRH Princess Anne to congratulate the Shrivenham Resilience Team on their work in the village during the lockdowns. But this was not to be. However, the visit was a great success. Princess Anne was terrific, she spoke individually to each and every person who was there including a small group of people who had benefited from the impressive work of the Resilience Team under Chris Hand's splendid organisation. The sad thing was that we couldn't share this with all the village. In the year that it took me to organise this, I had visions of the village turning out en masse waving flags and cheering the Princess as she made her way to the Memorial Hall. But this was not to be. I was told, in no uncertain terms, by the security people, that if word got out to too many people before the event, it would be cancelled.

Your Councillors continue to work on projects that will be of benefit to the community. Last year I mentioned the art project using money donated by developers to enhance the village. This has almost reached fruition and I would like to thank Liz Jenkins

and Julia Evans for all their hard work with this. Provided that all goes well, you should soon see these art works at each entrance to the village. Indeed, we are trying to organise a grand opening for them, so keep an eye on social media and the village News for more information. Less success has been achieved with our attempts to introduce Speedwatch to the village. You may probably remember that I spent three years trying to get the necessary equipment and training for the village but was halted by the lack of cooperation from Thames Valley police who couldn't make up their minds which equipment to authorise. It was worse for Watchfield Council who had bought the equipment before the police began to constantly change their minds. Having asked Gerard Pearson to take on the task of sorting this mess out, we were stymied once more when Thames Valley Police decided that Community Speedwatch schemes could not be run by the Parish Council but must be run by the community. Fortunately, a member of our community - Neil Platten – has come forward and taken on this task. First of all, I would like to thank him for doing this and secondly, I'd like to congratulate him on making more progress than either Gerard or I have made in the past. Not only has he managed to find out what equipment we can now use, he has crowd funded the purchase of one machine and also the signage

which you may have seen around the village. The Parish Council has bought another machine, but we are still being held up by the slowness of Thames Valley Police in organising the necessary training for the volunteers from the village who will operate the machines. Maybe by next year I will be able to report that this scheme is finally up and running. I should warn you though, that Neil has unofficially tried out his piece of kit in the High Street and almost everyone he measured was over the 20mph speed limit. I would like to thank both Gerard and Neil for their hard work and persistence in trying to bring this project to a satisfactory conclusion.

The restoration of Tuckmill Meadow has progressed well despite the reluctance of The Vale of the White Horse to meet its statutory obligations to maintain this Site of Special Scientific Importance. The village team, ably led by Nan Pratt and Bjorn Watson, have learned to use scythes to clear away the vegetation that was overwhelming the site and after lots of very hard work, they are now bringing the site under control. It still needs more hard work and more volunteers, so, if you fancy some hard but rewarding work restoring a very important nature site, you could speak to Bjorn after this meeting.

As I have already mentioned, we now have a full complement of Councillors, which is terrific and helps us to achieve a quorum and hold our meetings. Since I became a Councillor, the workload has increased considerably. So much so that I wonder how Councillors who are in full time employment manage to find the time to attend meetings and take on the extra work that being a Councillor entails. Parish Councillors are unpaid volunteers who work for the good of the community and I would just like to thank them all for their hard work and perseverance. Indeed, when a recent message was sent to us by Oxford Association of Local Councils informing us that Parish Councillors could now be paid for their work it was unanimously voted down at the next Council meeting. People have said to me that they do not know who the members of the Parish Council are. We do not have a full complement with us this evening, but I would like to ask those of you who are here to stand with me to be recognised and to be congratulated on your contribution to the community.

This last year has been a very difficult time for our staff. Not only have we had a number of people sick with Covid, but we also now have one member of staff who will be on long term sick leave. The extra pressure on staff has been considerable, but they have risen to the occasion magnificently. Inevitably, they have had to work

from home at times, but they have also worked whenever possible in the office and have continued to provide a service for members of the community. As a result, we have maintained our regular schedule of monthly Council meetings so that we have met all our legal obligations. In addition, all of the subcommittees dealing with such things as planning and finance have been organised and run very efficiently. So, I would like to thank all of the staff very much for their efforts during the past year.

Many of you know that I walk round the village every day and, I continue to be appalled by the amount of rubbish left in the street and on the Rec. We do have a Village Lengthman who tries his best to keep the main areas of the village tidy. And, we also have the litter pickers organised by John Lloyd who try to keep ahead of the never-ending mess, but it is a thankless task. I do not know what the answer to this is except to keep going on about this in the hope that the young people, who I believe are the main offenders, and their parents will take some action.

To finish on a high note, I would like to praise two new organisations in the village. First of all, the Sustainable Shrevenham group who are making a great effort to improve sustainability in the village. As far as we can, the Parish Council have helped them with their endeavours and we managed to

persuade the Midcounties Coop to allow them to use the old Lloyds Bank building for a period of time as a Sustainable Hub which they are now preparing for an opening in June.

We also have a very new group in the village that has arisen from the need to help refugees from the dreadful war in Ukraine – the Shrivenham Refugee Support Network. This has been set up under the auspices of the Parish Council and has already provided some much needed medical and personal supplies donated by members of the community. Last Monday evening we had a meeting that was attended by two lots of people who were already hosting Ukranian families plus two more families who were going through the process of applying to host families. Much useful information was shared and the support network has offered to be a central hub for assistance to refugee families in the area. Just two wonderful examples of the ways in which the members of this community are working together to make Shrivenham the terrific place it is in which to live.

Richard Bartle

April 2022

Chairman, Shrivenham Parish Council