

SHRIVENHAM PARISH ASSEMBLY

Chairman's Report 2021

Good evening everyone. Thank you for coming to the 2021 Shrivenham Parish Assembly.

This should have been my fifth report to the Village Assembly, but, as you know, last year's Assembly was cancelled due to the Lockdown. I am so pleased that things are improving so much that we have, at least been able to have this Zoom meeting. Though, I look forward to a time when we will all be able to meet again in our lovely Memorial Hall.

Since I last spoke to you there have been some changes in the composition of the Council with John Lloyd and Chris Hand leaving us and Lucy Brown, Stuart Coffey and Chris Taylor volunteering to join us. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who have left us for their hard work during their time on the Council and also to thank those joining us for coming forward to help on the Parish Council.

Inevitably, it is dealing with planning applications that has taken up much of our time since I last reported to you. In my efforts to increase the expertise of Councillors, I asked Julia Jones to take over as Chair of the Planning Committee in May last year. This is quite a challenge for anyone and, we have worked together on some of the more difficult speculative applications in preparing the Council's response to various attempts to build in the village. Recently, I unsuccessfully opposed an application to build houses in the garden of April Cottage, appearing before the Vale Housing Committee in a Zoom type meeting.

Though I was not too surprised at the outcome, I was very annoyed at two of the comments made by the

Planning Officer who said that the Vale were looking for windfall sites and that the number of houses allocated to a given area in the Vale Local Plan was *the minimum number*. Given that we were allocated 500 houses in the Plan, this seemed to leave Shrivenham in a very precarious position. So, I wrote to the Head of Planning at the Vale and asked for an explanation. Though, I am still not completely satisfied with the response, the Vale Planners have looked in more detail at another application to build 10 houses on the site at the end of Townsend Road where the old garage used to be. The developers have now been asked to show how their application actually meets a need for more housing in Shrivenham.

We 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.

As you can imagine, the other matter that has been at the forefront of our work 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.

Councillors have been involved in a number of projects during the year and I suppose that the most important one has been the planning and financing of the new Sports Pavilion. In the next few days, you will see work beginning on the north side the Hall Car Park which will now be out of use until mid-December. But I do not want to steal Bjorn Watson's thunder here, as I am sure that he will want to tell you more about this exciting project when he gives his report as Chairman of the

Viscountess Barrington's Trust. But, I would like to say a few more words about Bjorn's sterling work around the village on environmental matters. In particular, his latest venture in which he has managed to acquire over 100 trees from the Countryfile national challenge. Children from the school and members of the community will be planting these trees in Coppidthorne Meadow shortly. Given the very dry weather recently, this may present more of a challenge than we anticipated so, we may be asking for volunteers to water the trees once they are planted.

A number of us have also been working on another environmental matter along with Bjorn and that is the restoration of Tuckmill Meadow. This is the Site of Special Scientific Importance up Pennyhooks Lane near the Shrivenham Park Golf Course. For various reasons it has become overgrown and I have been pressing The Vale of the White Horse Council to fulfil their statutory duties and both carry out the necessary repairs and introduce a programme of regular maintenance. Bjorn on the other hand has been working with interested villagers to form a group to undertake regular work to improve the state of this important nature reserve. And here I must thank Nan Pratt for all her hard work in getting this group together.

Other Councillors have also been working hard to improve things in the village. Cllr Gerard Pearson has taken over the reins from me for the Community Speedwatch project. Some of you will remember that I complained about the lack of support from Thames Valley Police for our efforts and things have still to be sorted out satisfactorily though, recent communications from the police seem to indicate that they have finally

decided on the most appropriate equipment and will be distributing it shortly. Gerard has helped in this matter not only by writing to the appropriate authorities but also by joining the local Neighbourhood Action Group which is an organisation for community/police liaison.

Some of you may not know that money is provided by developers for improvements in the village to mitigate the effects of their developments. A sum of money has been made available for art work to be commissioned to enhance the surroundings of the village. Cllr Liz Jenkins has been working with a local artist to produce some original wrought ironwork. Each piece has some significance to Shrivenham and they will be placed at each of the entrances to the village. Now that the lockdown is easing, we are hoping that these pieces of work will be soon in situ.

Though I haven't time to comment about the work that each Councillor has been involved in, I hope that these examples of the work that has been carried out during the lockdown will have given you a flavour of what the Parish Councillors have been doing. Since I became a Councillor, the workload has increased considerably. So much so that I wonder how Councillors who have jobs manage to find the time. 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.

We are very lucky to have some extremely good members of staff to support us. They have been working hard during the last year in very trying circumstances both from home and, when the occasion required it, from the office. Aably led by Julia Evans, the Clerk to the Council, Lyn Frape and Julie Sarsons have managed to

keep everything running, as far as possible and to make sure that we have continued to have monthly Council meetings and have met all our legal obligations. In addition, all of the subcommittees dealing with such things as planning and finance have also been organised and run very efficiently. I would like to thank them for their efforts.

Those of you who read the Parish Jottings in The News can't have failed to see how many times I have written about littering, vandalism and fly tipping. I walk round the village every day and, since the pandemic began I have seen an increase in the amount of rubbish left in the street and on the Rec. Similarly, we have been plagued with vandalism that seems to get worse by the day. The general feeling is that this is being caused, in the main by young people. Maybe it will get better now that they are back at school. But, I do not know what we can do to improve matters except to help the groups of litter pickers who go round from time to time clearing up after these vandals. Any sensible suggestions are welcome. One thought, of course is to contact the police. We all know that there is a distinct lack of a police presence in the village. In the past, I have spoken to the Deputy Chief Constable about this and was told that we are a low crime area and that the police have to concentrate on areas in which the crime rate is high. After the One Stop Shop was ram raided and it took the police 40 minutes to get here, I wrote to both Thames Valley and Wiltshire police to ask why it had taken so long when there is a massive police station no more than 5 minutes away. I did not get a satisfactory answer from either of them. What needs to be said is that if you do not report

things to the police, they do not know what is going on and will continue to deploy elsewhere.

I would like to finish on a up beat note and send my thanks to two unsung groups of people in the village. First, on your behalf I would like to thank those people who have kept the shops open in the village during this very trying time. We tend to take these members of our community for granted yet, they are risking their lives every day serving us in the shops and providing us with our daily essentials. And finally, I would like to thank Chris Hand and the resilience teams who have looked after so many of us during the lockdowns by keeping in touch with the sick and vulnerable and organising a food bank for those in dire need. This is a fine example of the wonderful spirit that exists in Shrivenham and what makes it such a great place in which to live.