

SHRIVENHAM PARISH ASSEMBLY Chairman's Report 2024

Good evening, everyone. Thank you for coming to the 2024 Shrivenham Parish Assembly.

First, I am pleased to announce that we have a full complement of Councillors. At this time last year, all that we knew was that only 8 candidates had followed the process laid down to be nominated for election to the Council. As there are eleven places in the Parish Council, we did not have an election and the eight candidates were automatically selected for the Council. Subsequently, we had four more people nominated to fill the remaining three places and I'm pleased to confirm that, following due procedure, Elaine Ware, Simon Howell and Nathan Woodhouse were confirmed as Councillors at the September Council meeting.

Last year I spoke about the workload of Parish Councillors which continues to grow every year. I do not

know how today's Councillors manage to hold down a job, look after a family and work as Parish Councillors and it doesn't get any easier. Therefore, I would like to thank all my Councillors for all their hard work and dedication and to remind you that they do not get a penny for this voluntary work.

I will be talking about the finances of the Council later in the meeting but I would like to remind you about the circumstances in which we find ourselves with regard to the amount of money we need to run our affairs. First, unlike most Parish Councils, we do not directly run the Memorial Hall. Nearly 100 years ago, when the Hall was built, a Charitable Trust was set up to run the Hall with Councillors acting as Trustees. This has carried on until today. So, we still have to run and finance the Hall but through a separate organisation The Viscountess Barrington's Trust in which we all are members. This means that instead of budgeting for the Hall in the Parish Council's accounts, as most Councils do, we have to

support the Hall by making grants from Parish Council funds to ensure that all bills can be paid. The Trust then runs its own accounts a report on which you will hear later tonight. Because of the massive increases in energy costs, we continue to have to support the Trust more substantially than we did two or three years ago. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Clerk to the Council – Julia Evans and her deputy Lyn Frape – for all their very hard work in keeping the finances of the Council and the Trust under control. The regular external audits have always shown how well these two valuable members of staff have served the Council.

As many of you will know, the other main area of concern for the Parish Council over the past year has been Planning.

Councillor Julia Jones has continued to be Chair of the Planning Committee and she has assiduously dealt with the many applications that keep coming in for extensions and major house alterations. There have not been as

many large applications in the past year as previously, thank goodness, but there have been a number of areas of concern. First, I am pleased to announce that our objection to the application to build a 68 bed care home on Townsend Road was turned down at appeal. You may wonder why we opposed this application given that there is a need in the village for some accommodation for elderly people. The answer is the scale of the application and the lack of facilities on the site such as parking places. This was an application to build a large nursing home for people needing full-time care. This would have a major impact on the medical support in the village.

We also successfully opposed another application from the Gladman organisation to build 90 houses above the existing development to the north of Townsend Road.

Last, but certainly not least, is our continued battle about the 10 houses being built on the south side of Townsend Road. This has been going on for nearly a year with the developer wanting to dispose of sewage from the 10

houses by means of a treatment plant, with the treated sewage being discharged into a ditch to the south of the site. The Vale Planners did not accept this and informed the developer that he should connect to the sewers in Townsend Road. The Developer was advised to stop building but they appealed to the Environment Agency over 8 months ago to try and get permission from them to dispose of the treated sewage in the ditch. The developer has continued to build the houses on the site. In the last year, I have written numerous letters of complaint to the Vale Planning Department, our District Councillors and even the CEO of the Vale without any action being taken. Indeed, they seem to have washed their hands of it now that the developer has appealed to the Environment Agency. The developer appears to have completed some of the houses and is now advertising them for sale. So, it seems that no-one cares that part treated sewage is going to be disposed of in a ditch that doesn't even have running water in it when there is a perfectly usable sewer

close to the site. I will continue in my battle to ensure that the site is connected to the main sewers on Townsend Road.

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.

As I said, 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. But more of that when I present the finance report following this report.

Your Councillors continue to work on projects that will be of benefit to the community.

Councillor Howell and I have been working with Oxfordshire County Council Highways Department to try and solve the parking problems in the High Street. We have arrived at a plan that was agreed by the Parish Council at the last meeting and this will now be going out for consultation with residents in the High Street and the

owners/managers of the shops and businesses.

Obviously, as this plan is still to be confirmed with residents, I cannot go into too much detail but, fundamentally, it will consist of a maximum three hour parking limit in the High Street between 8am and 6pm from Monday to Friday. Residents will have permits to park for 24 hours with extra permits for visitors. There will be an increase in the number of disabled parking places especially near the doctors and the pharmacist. Traffic Wardens will visit from time to time and ticket people overstaying the 3 hour limit.

You already know about the 20mph speed limit throughout the village and, though this has caused a certain amount of controversy, it did not make sense to have a 20mph limit in the High Street and then have drivers speeding through the rest of the village, especially in Vicarage Lane, Station Road, Highworth Road and Fairthorne Way. The Speedwatch team have now been working for two full years and tend to have about 15 sessions per month.

Thames Valley Police have approved 18 sites in the village and the team cannot use any other places to monitor traffic. In the last year 5,172 vehicles have been reported to Thames Valley for breaking the speed limit. They include cars, vans, buses, coaches, lorries and motorcycles. The fastest speed in the 30mph zones was 55mph and in the 20mph zone, 45mph. In addition to speeding, on some occasions, reported vehicles may be subjected to an MOT or Road Tax validation. Indeed, in the last year alone there were 81 vehicles without MOT, 98 without Road Tax and even 7 that had been registered with a Statutory Off Road Notification, commonly known as SORN, which means that they shouldn't have even been on the road.

A few motorists are abusive to members of the Speedwatch Team, even complaining that they cannot be seen by drivers. Some have been reported to the police for further action. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Cllr Gerard Pearson and his team for all their hard

work in all weather conditions, trying to make our roads safer for us.

Some of you may have seen our new addition to road safety, the mobile Speed indicator Device – also known as a SID. There are a number of sites around the village where poles have been introduced so that this mobile device can be moved every six weeks. It gives a bright, immediate message to drivers and encourages them to slow down. The batteries are quite heavy and need to be charged every 2 weeks so, the Council have purchased some solar chargers so that moving the SID should be much easier.

Two other Councillors have been doing specific work on behalf of the village and I would like to thank Councillors Ware and Coffey. Councillor Ware has been liaising with the Defence Academy and the Vale District Council about the Afghan refugees that have been housed in some of the quarters in the Academy. This is an ongoing situation in which we were originally given very little information or

help in trying to welcome these families that had risked their lives helping British service personnel in Afghanistan. Councillor Coffey has been the driving force in setting up a committee consisting of representatives of local Parish Councils and volunteers from Shrivenham, Watchfield, Longcot and Bourton to organise a sustainable transport scheme. With grants from OCC they will be buying a mini-bus to transport local people to hospital appointments and other meetings for which they have no transport.

The Council has been working on other areas to improve the village. For example, we have signed a contract for a tree survey to be carried out on the many trees that we are responsible for in the village. There are so many tree diseases at the moment that can cause serious damage to trees and then threaten people passing by that we need to know whether we need to take action to protect members of the public. In the Defence Academy, for example, they are having to fell hundreds of trees suffering from ash die-

back which can result in large branches falling from trees without warning.

We are also working on the Cemetery to make improvements and to repair wear and tear. Marker posts have been placed at each site and, although recently damaged and removed by clumsy workmen, they will soon be replaced by our Council staff. They should help in the future to better identify plots. In addition, a new cherry tree has been recently planted to replace the one that died. It has been planted in memory of Julie Sarsons, our assistant Clerk who died last year and we shall be having a small ceremony in the near future when we place a commemorative plaque for her by the tree. Other work being carried out includes painting the railings and adding gravel to the entrance area.

It is the 100th Anniversary of the building of the Memorial Hall next year and I am sure that Bjorn Watson will be telling you all about the arrangements to celebrate the event. So, I do not want to steal his thunder. I'd just like to

say that we are very lucky to have such an amazing building for the village even if it is such an expensive asset to keep running.

This will be my last Annual Report for the Council as after 8 years as Chairman of the Parish Council, I have decided to step down and someone else will be elected to take over from me at the May meeting. I shall stay on as a Councillor until the end of this term in May 2027 and I shall continue to work on behalf of the village especially in the areas of Planning and Finance.

Richard Bartle

April 2024

Chairman,

Shrivenham Parish Council