

Annual Parish Meeting – Chairman’s Annual Report (Tuesday 02 March 2010)

In my report I shall raise several issues which I hope are worthy of further discussion and I would welcome comments during the Open Forum.

Firstly, a reminder for everyone that the Parish Council is now at the end of its 3rd year and the next scheduled election will be in May 2011.

Last year, I mentioned the formation of a new Unitary Authority and the speculation and conjecture that this might have on the Parish Council’s role and responsibilities. The Unitary Authority has formed, a new Mayor has been elected and I think it would be fair to say nothing has materially changed which has affected this Council. Yet, potentially, decisions made by the new unitary authority could have significant effects on this Parish. That is, we retain a watching brief on the effects of any change to a 2 tier education system in this area, particularly as to how this would affect the position of Pinchmill Lower School. At present we appear to be spectators, but at least 2 connected issues have potential for concern. The first is the Parish Council remains committed to support the Village Hall and are aware of the complications arising from joint provision with the school over the hall. The second issue is vehicle parking in the vicinity of the school/village hall both during the school day and particularly before and after school – this is a perennial problem and is getting worse. The Parish Council perhaps needs to discuss if it is time for us to seek funding for better off-road parking in the Old Road.

In my opinion the major issue affecting the Parish in the past year has been a wave of attacks on persons and property both in Felmersham and Radwell. In this respect we acknowledge the efforts of Special Constable Robert Edwards who has had considerable success in concluding many investigations. The consequence of these events has left many in the community much more aware of potential dangers and at the same time a lot of parishioners are now left very nervous. The community needs to support the re-launched Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

On the subject of expenditure, last year the Parish Council gave approximately 25% of the current annual Parish Precept to the Village Hall Committee towards the refurbishment of the playground equipment in the children’s play area. This year, replacement of half the roof on the Felmersham bus shelter for safety reasons has been an unexpected cost to the Parish. Despite these planned and unplanned expenditures, the precept at £12,500 remains the same for the 4th year running. However the Parish Council’s bank reserves are diminishing and will limit the scope for further expenditure in 2010.

The volume of and speed of traffic continues to be a major concern to parishioners and to this end the Parish Council has given this issue high priority, not missing any opportunity to register our desire to see measures taken which would reduce the need for traffic to rat run through the villages. Similarly, we have registered proposals for slowing traffic particularly at the danger points in the villages. We remain committed to a universal 20mph speed limit in Felmersham and in Moor End Road, Radwell.

Despite numerous requests to the Borough Council for action, the roads were only swept twice last year instead of 3 monthly, drains are often blocked for months and the litter bins do not get regularly emptied. Roadside litter is never removed by the Borough Council and we have to rely on our local volunteers. I would like an answer from the Borough as to why these things do not get done – is it to save money or do they deem it unnecessary, or if they do not do it are they hoping we will do it. If you take a walk around the Parish you will see many examples of things needing doing. Some you could argue should be done by the Borough, others by nearby homeowners, either way they do not get done. I do not see why the Parish Council should not pay someone to do it, for example a willing individual who has not got a job. Let us discuss.

The Parish Council continue to support planning developments within the villages which preserve the character of our villages, which improve the immediate environmental impact, do not over-develop and have minimal detrimental effect on neighbouring properties. There is an ageing population wishing to remain within the Parish yet wanting to downsize their property, which has in many cases become an increasing burden and liability. There is a need for quality properties within this parish which takes these new requirements into account. This would release larger family homes for the younger population. This new type of property need is however, not cheap low cost housing, neither is it 5 bedroom executive properties with 3 bathrooms, but it is high quality, 2 bedroom and low maintenance.

We continue to fully support the Villager Bus organisation as a valuable community asset.

As I close, can I take this opportunity to thank all the other Parish Councillors and the Clerk for their help, support and wisdom in undertaking these responsibilities on behalf of the community.

PJH – 02 March 2010