

Annual report by Kim Moloney, Chairman of Grendon Underwood Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting – 28th May 2024

The past year has been one of the most active years I have encountered as Chair. I'm grateful for the continued support of my fellow Councillors and the exceptional support of the Parish Clerk.

Councillors Vice Chair Cllr Benfield thank you for the errands you carry out that go unnoticed by many. Cllr Jackman remains our representative at the Saye & Sele Foundation and is an encyclopaedia on all things Grendon Underwood. Cllr Fealey is Trustee representing the Council on the Village Hall Charity Foundation. Cllr Maker joined us last year and has made an enormous difference to our Council and community. He has outstanding credentials and is a massive asset to any local authority. We're in a much better place as a direct result of his continued efforts with biodiversity plans, drainage, flooding, equipment, highways and so much more. Cllr Scanlon was Chair on the Springhill Residents Group before stepping down a couple of months ago and we now wish her well in her recent appointment as Village Hall Chair. Exciting times ahead and we look forward to hearing about the future plans for this much loved facility. Thank you to each of you.

This year we hope to co-opt another Councillor. We'd love someone to join us that is active and can spare the time to support our various planned initiatives. Speeding comes to mind which was overseen by Cllr Harris who stepped down due to work commitments. If you're listening to this or indeed reading this report please consider the role if you think you'd like to get involved in our great community and make a difference and if not as a Councillor then as a valued volunteer. Training and ongoing support will be provided. We're all volunteers on the Council, governed by a code of conduct and laws, there's a lot of red tape that we have to wade through, there's no pay, no perks, just the joy of making a difference. That's it!

I had been asked to cover off "interests" and I am happy to do so. The majority of our Councillors are active members and Trustees on other committees and Charities, some related to the PC and some not. You often find it's the same people doing the voluntary roles in any community. This means they sit on several groups, quite simply nobody else steps up or applies for the role although the critics are very happy to dictate order from a distance. The PC have set out to ensure transparency and committed fully to all that entails. Our Clerk has ensured all outside interests are declared and these can be found in the public domain on our website.

I would like to put on record the Council's, and my personal, thanks to our three Ward Councillors at Buckinghamshire Unitary Council, Cllr Angela Macpherson, Cllr Frank Mahon and Cllr Michael Rand for their support. I cannot leave it there as this year, more than ever we have called upon them with various requests, some have been completed in a timely manner and others remain outstanding. It's been an extremely frustrating process for all of us quite frankly. Of course, we complain to them, we complain a lot to be honest, lack of resource, wasting money, too many workers on small jobs and much more beside. Communication can be lacking and that adds to our frustration. Of course they listen, they try again but they too are restricted by red tape and resource. It's the bane of our lives. At the end of the day, we all want the same things. We need to remain a team which means working as a team and being respectful of challenges and constraints that we all face. We continue to work hard to save on costs, we all can. We'll hopefully see our local authority thrive. If they do, perhaps we'll see vast improvements especially with our highways but it's a very long way off. We're lucky they haven't filed for bankruptcy as so many other authorities have so, please hold that thought.

We have our Clerk who manages the purse and ensures we remain legal. We were sad to say goodbye to Barry Martindale after seven years. He moulded us and dished out plenty of red tape at

the same time! He won't mind me saying that he was the inventor of big words! We as a community owe him enormous gratitude. However, with every ending comes a new beginning and we're delighted to be working closely with Liz Maker, our new Clerk. She has taken over a big role. She has dealt with all challenges head on in a peaceful, professional and timely manner putting in many unpaid hours and going above and beyond her remit. We've had many requests over the years to simplify things and cut through the legal speak that we all struggled to digest. Liz has successfully brought this change about. Thank you Liz, we're very grateful and feel extremely lucky to have your support.

Community – following on from delivering the Multi-Use Games Arena (MUGA) and the under 7s toddlers Play Park we have a new tarmac path leading to these areas. With thanks to EKFB for their work that came in at no cost to our community. Yes, it did take longer than expected to complete but the finished product is far better than anticipated.

The War Memorial was cleaned and tidied this year. Quite a process we learned due to certain chemical reactions. The contractor has kindly taken on the role, at no charge to the community of cleaning it twice a year commencing in November ahead of Remembrance Sunday.

Cllr Maker and I are working to formulate an evolving bio-diversity policy for the community. Cllr Maker started by planting approx. 5000 tulip bulbs late last year with the help of Cllr Fealey and Scanlon and some younger members of the community. We also took delivery of two new planters at either end of the village that Cllr Maker has kept in bloom at no cost to the community. We've received such positive feedback. We plan to continue planting more bulbs in the autumn and make announcements of our bio-diversity plans which all Councils, local and otherwise are required to comply with.

We were gifted two shiny new benches from Bucks Recycling and two plaques from a private donor. The benches were dedicated to Paul Jackman and Andrew Benfield not as Councillors but as outstanding community members who between them have amassed over 100 years of community service. They are sited on the playing field.

Concerns continue by the amount of litter in the village. Although not part of a Parish Council remit Cllr Fealey organised several Community Litter Picking days throughout the year. Thank you to all who supported and to Patrick Fealey for organising the equipment and to Cllr Scanlon for providing the refreshments. We've installed signage around the village encouraging people to love the village just that bit more and to clean up after their dogs!

Each year mention is made of our wonderful village shop & post office which continues to provide essential services throughout the year. They are a vital asset to the sustainability of our community, and we wish them well. We were all so saddened about the recent break in and proud of the way in which Kavit and Kaye dealt with the aftermath.

The Football Club continue to run the bar at the Village Hall on Friday evenings. A great asset and frequented by many.

We're delighted The Swan will reopen next month. Extensive research has demonstrated twenty-three percent of house buyers thought that having a decent local formed an important part on their decision making process and worthy of note is that house prices decrease by ten percent at the loss of a village pub. Use it or lose it comes to mind. We wish the new team the very best of luck and thank you for taking it on.

Planning Applications We continue to work with Edgcott Parish Council on the new mega prison. Sadly, it did not go our way and now it comes down to the finer details of access, visual, noise, lighting and much more. For the record Grendon Underwood and Edgcott receive zero financial reward. Nothing! There is no benefit whatsoever to our community. Rumours abound that great payouts would be forthcoming. If that had been the case, we had hoped to address the dreadful roads and lighting at Springhill and a crossing at Broadway to the Church. It's not to be. From the outset there were going to be no winners, not us, not Edgcott, only the fat cat developers and any commercial agreements directly to Buckinghamshire Council. Without a doubt our lives in the village will change considerably. We already have HS2, EWR, Solar Farms and battery storage in the making, Energy for Waste, Thames Water and Electricity companies destroying our roads and ripping up the countryside. We have made extremely strong representation that we have become a dumping ground for any ridiculous development the government may choose to conjure up. The whole debacle has left a very bitter taste. For it to be approved in the manner which it was is a travesty and an injustice. Thousands of hours of volunteers' time for almost three and a half years and now we continue to slog it out over reserved matters and conditions. We are informed the build may not commence until mid 2025 with first residents in situ three years later. Could we have done more, absolutely not! Could you? We will always be grateful to Edgcott Parish Council, Dr Rod Baker and The Prison Working Party especially Roger Behagg for their commitment and taking on the "big boys".

Defibrillators – we have two in the village. One located at the school and one on Springhill. Inspections are carried out on a monthly basis with findings recorded and filed to the central defibrillator register.

Play Equipment – all play equipment is inspected on a monthly basis with any defects recorded. Unfortunately, some of the equipment is now dilapidated and has been removed by Parish Council volunteers. We are exploring grant avenues in the hope we can buy new equipment. The Parish purse simply does not have enough in the kitty to pursue. Anticipated replacement value is in excess of £200,000 as a starting point.

Finances – RFO to report

Crime – whilst we continue to enjoy relatively low crime rates, we are aware there have been various reports of drug taking which has been swiftly dealt with by our local police force. We as a PC are receiving more and more scam emails and phone calls. At a recent meeting the Clerk and I were horrified to be informed by an official that somebody had tried to gain favour by falsely claiming to be a Parish Councillor.

Stakeholders I thank those stakeholders who have submitted their annual reports as tabled on the agenda.

We've worked very hard to form excellent relations with community groups. It's essential we continue to build on this theme and each favour transparency, respect others, demonstrate integrity at all times and are accountable for our actions. This Community belongs to all of us, we can all do our bit. We've welcomed many fantastic, wonderful new families to the village who want to be a part of the wider community and get involved. It's so encouraging. The motto for next year is "we can all do our bit"

I'm very grateful to the Prison Governor for welcoming us and giving her valuable time to formulate exciting plans with her team to support our community. This really is fantastic news for us. She is committed and passionate about her role and sets a great example of working as a team. This has

been demonstrated to us time and time again with the team members she has put us in touch with. Exciting time ahead. Thank you.

Thank you to the School Head for going the distance and talking through ideas and aspirations. The next generation is in her hands and that is a big job!

Thank you to the Springhill Residents Group for allowing us to make good any misconceptions and talk things through instead of listening to the ill-informed. We welcome our new beginning, thank you.

To our local Police Force who have an enormous patch to cover and yet always have the time to support our community. We currently await the speed trap project in the village to be actioned and overseen by TVP.

To St Leonards Church for the birth of Grendon 800 and for working hard to bring the community groups together, setting the bar and leading by example. Something for everyone. For this we have Geoff Lumley to thank. A lesson to all regarding inclusivity no matter age, race, religion, disability – the doors are always open. The announcement of Rev Angela Mann's retirement this coming September after some 15 years of extremely loyal service to our Parish is a tough pill to swallow. Without a doubt she has been unwavering in her community work as has her husband, Charlie. We wish them both a long and happy retirement and we will miss them enormously.

Thank you to Lindsey Fealey for setting up Leonard's Larder at the Church. A food and essential items facility free of charge for anyone in need. It is very welcomed and frequented by many. Thank you.

On behalf of your Council, thank you to each and every one of you.

Kim Moloney, Chairman of Grendon Underwood Parish Council