

Grendon Underwood Parish Council, Chair's report dated 29 May 2018

I have been the Chair of Council for one year now, the time has literally flown by. I had not truly appreciated just how much work and commitment was involved but with the support of our amazing committee and our stand in Clerk, Barry Martindale I am proud of what we have achieved and the “team ethos” we have adopted.

I would especially like to mention Cllr. Benfield my Vice Chairman for making my transition to Chairman seamless and for his continuing efforts in bringing the MUGA project to fruition over last year and on into next year; Cllr Jackman for his support with the MUGA and as the Council representative on the Village Hall and Saye & Sele Charitable Trusts – Paul's guidance has been invaluable to me, he is well respected in our community and I am proud to work with him; Cllr Hedgecox for his Chairmanship of our new Personnel Committee and the enormous amount of time he has spent working on personnel matters.

Our temporary Acting Clerk, Barry Martindale has been in post since January 2018, his support has been an asset to our community and I am delighted to report our recent internal audit went without a hitch and Barry was awarded a “gold star” for his reporting and transparency with the auditor commenting that it was one of the most professional and easy audits encountered. Barry has been tasked with reviewing our systems, Policies & Procedures not only to reflect risk but also to reflect the size and nature of the Council and its place within our District and County governance structure. We now also include changes in legislation, especially the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that came into force on 25th May 2018. This has resulted in several changes to our governance going forward; all councillors now have and are happy to use their own council email address for all council business and the clerk has a generic email address which will be consistent independently of the individual holding the post. This should also prevent the need for any protracted or complicated hand over between individuals, the extensive, multiple revising of contact details with suppliers and the setting up of multiple new web accounts with new names as well as minimising risk to business continuity.

We now have a quick broadband connection and Council will carry out as much Council business as possible electronically for speed of response, transparency and accountability.

Thanks to the transparency funding our Clerk has been provided with a Council owned laptop & printer and a 'Council' designated place of work so all Council business can be transacted securely and without the added on-cost of maintaining an office facility elsewhere.

As well as maintaining any legally mandatory hard copy document holding facility on designated secure 'Council' premises, the Council now has its own secure 'cloud' based file holding and backup system so all Councillors can access support documentation, minutes, agendas, policies and guidance at any time and from anywhere.

We have reviewed all of our 14 Policies, Procedures and Protocols to reflect a new approach to our dealings with our residents, Regulatory Authorities, local organisations and suppliers.

We now have a purchasing protocol using Purchase Orders signed by at least two Councillors and minuted.

Effective January 10 this year we moved to Lloyds internet banking and our suppliers are paid by Direct Debit, Standing Orders or by direct BACS transfer. All suppliers have been keen to support this which has led to quicker, more transparent and controlled payment transactions without the delays and risk of error. This has also saved much time on administration.

We continue to grow as a community with an additional 14 homes in build at time of writing and, whilst we do not blindly object without good reason to all housing growth, we hope our preferences for where large scale development is located remain a high priority for the Planning Authority.

After a flurry of large scale, speculative Planning Applications throughout last year, we are not yet aware of any major housing prospects descending on the parish this year. Whilst some large proposals remain 'live', with Council support some applications have been refused and two Appeals to government rejected.

Our Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) next to the Village Hall continues and we now have concept plans and quotes with approved funding. We hope to see our community enjoying the new facility before the year is out.

Our finances remain healthy and, in spite of rising costs everywhere, we have been able to hold our Precept request in line with a minimal effect on residents' Council Tax bill as apportioned to Grendon Underwood by AVDC.

We now have full CCTV coverage of the Village Hall, car parks and play area.

Our web site is now updated regularly to provide legally mandatory publication as well as notices of events in the Parish. We have a social media presence on Facebook for more informal matters.

Community meetings in the Village Hall have been generally well supported especially for planning considerations of large scale development. We also have representatives of Thames Valley Police local community team, HS2 & EWR, Energy from Waste offering to come along or set up open days and visitor tours, given enough interest.

Sadly, our local, the Swan, closed its doors earlier this month but there has been a remarkable response to a call for its preservation as a pub in the village thanks to Cllr. Shepherd. At time of writing, a working group is to be set up to explore options with CAMRA, AVDC community grants, Lottery funding etc in an effort to bring it back as a thriving village asset. We wish them well. In the meantime the Football Club has very kindly offered to run a bar on Friday evening at the Village Hall from 5pm until 9pm.

Sadly, Bucks CC have withdrawn all mobile library services throughout the County. It will be up to us to organise voluntary support if enough are interested.

The Royal Wedding Party held on 19th May was a very friendly community based affair with a super party held at our Village Hall. It was good to see so many of our organisations support this event - the Village Hall, the Football Club, WI, Scouts, Quainton Players, Frogs, St Leonard's Church and our Councillors - all pulling together in common cause. Everyone had a good time be they wedding fans or football fans!

Finally thanks go to our County Councillor, Angela Macpherson and Councillor Cameron Branston who's support and professionalism are second to none, both are always on the end of the phone for guidance, encouragement and advice, thank you.

On behalf of the full Council, I wish our residents a wonderful community based year.

Kim Moloney, Chairman of Grendon Underwood Parish Council