



## Chairman's report to the Yaxley Annual Parish Meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Good evening everyone, welcome to our Annual Parish Meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to update you on what we, as your Parish Council, have been up to in the past 12 months, it also gives you an opportunity to ask questions about the services we provide, or to raise any other matters that fall within the Parish Council's authority. It is now my pleasure to present the Annual Report on the activities of Yaxley Parish Council for the Local Government Year 2021/22.

Covid continued to cause havoc during the year but having been through the previous 12 months we were well prepared to deal with it. Yaxley Parish Council is fortunate to have a dedicated team of Councillors and Staff working together to fulfil our obligations to the village.

During 2020 Local Councils were given the ability to meet online during the pandemic. After a few teething problems, the practice of meeting online worked well. However, the Government failed to extend this law resulting in Councils having to meet in public from 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021. To ensure that meetings could be held safely with some form of self-distancing, meetings were moved from the Council Chambers to the Austin Hall and then later to Queens Park. We will shortly hear the annual reports from our Standing Committees Chairman, so I won't go into detail here, but I will say that over twenty face to face meetings were held since May.

We were delighted to welcome back the Yaxley Age Well Group and the Welcome Club to the Austin Hall in September and November respectively. Their return felt like confirmation that things were getting back to normal. Other groups that have been supported by the Parish Council during the year include the award of grants to the Library reading challenge, Yaxley Countryside Volunteer, Yaxley Royal British Legion Social Club and Fourfields School for family cookery classes.

Sadly, in August we heard of the passing of former Parish Clerk Michael Windle. Michael joined Yaxley Parish Council as Clerk in 1982 and retired in 2002 having worked tirelessly in his role to oversee many changes and important events in the village. Michael previously had a long and distinguished career in the RAF. Councillors and staff, past and present, expressed their thanks for the dedicated service of our former Clerk, with our deepest condolences being sent to Michael's wife Sue.

The Parish Council currently has a vacancy, unfortunately, Sheila Wayland has left the role of Councillor and I take this opportunity to wish her the best for the future.

Before I move on to the individual Committee business activities, I would like to take this moment to offer my sincere condolences to everyone that has lost a loved one or friend. The past two years have been devastating for families especially with the additional restrictions on how we say our goodbyes to those lost through natural causes, accident, or illness, including covid-related deaths. My thoughts are with you all.

In addition, special mention should be made of the various groups and individuals who make Yaxley such a special place to live, thank you to everyone who has played their part in keeping us all safe during the pandemic.

## **Personnel Committee** – Chairman Cllr Andrew Wood and Vice Chair Cllr Kevin Gulson

This committee meet quarterly dealing with matters relating to our work forces safety, training and development etc.

The pandemic continued to bring challenges to the workforce. Thank you to our Clerk, Helen Taylor, who ensured that everyone was working in a covid secure working environment. Helen's team in the office once again ensured that the office remained manned throughout the pandemic to ensure that residents' concerns and enquiries were dealt with quickly.

The Office Administrator, Michelle Darbon, as well as overseeing the covid regulations regarding the hiring out of facilities also launched the Parish Council's Community Litter pick project which has been very successful. Whilst, Holly Fieldson, the Bookings Clerk, has been inundated with party and football enquiries which snowballed once the restrictions eased in the summer.

Beverley Porter continues to provide the council with accounting services, ensuring that Full Council and our related Committees are provided with the high standard of reporting that we have become accustomed to.

The warmer wet weather during the summer resulted in a number of difficulties for the Grounds Team and it felt at times that the grass wouldn't stop growing. With the Grounds Supervisor Andy Wright, being away on an agreed sabbatical it was down to Ray Allen and Michael Tesloff to hold the fort and they did this superbly with help from Chris Chandler and Kathryn Taylor who joined the team on a temporary basis.

Andy returned in September, just in time to oversee the successful planting of the new trees planted as part of the Green Canopy project celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Clark Sidaway left the Parish Council's employment in August and was replaced by Freya Harold who has previously worked for Hinchingsbrooke Country Park in Huntingdon.

All through lockdown the grounds team have continued to cover a wide range of work for the village from grass cutting, emptying 70 bins twice weekly, play equipment safety inspections, sports pitch maintenance and line marking, upkeep of the cemetery and ongoing upkeep and redecorating of our buildings. Thank you to each one of them.

Beryl Maltby continues her many and varied duties within the Council, looking after the cleanliness of our halls and offices in addition to the work she does every weekend setting up the football nets and changing rooms for the teams to enjoy.

## **Community Facilities Committee** - Chairman Cllr Jayne Lusted and Vice Chair Cllr Gavin Needham

This committee meets up to five times a year and has a wide range of responsibilities including cemeteries, street furniture, play areas, pitches and allotments.

The Committee's biggest project to date has been the refurbishment and extension of the skate park area. This was anything but straight forward but with a lot of perseverance from all involved the work was completed in January and has already brought a lot of joy to the youth in the village, particularly those just starting to learn the art of skateboarding.

The Community Fridge continues to go from strength to strength with a strong group of volunteers overseeing the distribution of over 19 tonnes of food and drink. Operating every Wednesday and Friday morning between 10.30 and 11.30am the Fridge is now handing out around 120 bags of food each week. Four years ago when the fridge opened we were supporting 10 -15 people each week taking 2 – 2.5 kg of food. Now the average parcel is 5 to 6kg of food. We are extremely grateful to the volunteers who give up

their time to collect the surplus food and then bag and distribute to those attending. Our thanks goes also to Food for Nought for their weekly deliveries and to all the local suppliers who have kindly donated food including Produce World, the Central Co-op, Tesco's, M&S, Riverford Organic Farms, Waitrose, Fieldings Dairies, Barnack Distributions and Conquest Farm.

Demand for the football pitches and the 3G pitch remains high with over thirty teams playing with us and the 3G being in use from 5pm to 9.30pm most evenings. We continue to make sure our grass pitches are well maintained including a period of rest during the summer months to allow for goalmouth repairs to be made. The 3G pitch has its own maintenance programme with twice weekly brushing and regular rubber refills, we recognise that the pitch will at some point require replacement and have built in annual payments into the earmarked reserves to cover the cost of this.

Playground maintenance is also very important and when the annual inspection showed up the need to replace the rubber services under the swings and see-saw at Middletons Road Recreation Ground we arranged to have this done. Unfortunately, there have been ongoing issues with the disabled roundabout which saw the unit being returned to the manufacturer for further investigation into issues with its bearing.

A new project to emerge in 2020 was the creation of the Yaxley Litter Pickers, a group of volunteers giving up their time to create a better environment. Anyone interested in supporting this group, be it by giving a few hours each month to litter pick their local area, can find out more information by contacting the office or by visiting the group's facebook page.

The Middle Ground Coffee Club managed to reopen in the autumn and work is going on behind the scenes to relaunch the Repair Café in March.

We continue to collaborate with local groups, such as Yaxley Community Allotment and Yaxley Countryside Volunteers. Again these groups are made up of residents willing to give up their time and expertise to help others and improve the local area. Yaxley Countryside Volunteers continue to do important work to maintain and protect many areas in the village including the community orchard in the Recreation Ground and Pound Lane. The Parish Council worked alongside them to plant the wildlife area next to the Pavilion in the Recreation Ground, its splendid display of colours and textures was a sight to behold. I am very pleased to report that Willow Pond in the Recreation Ground was deepened in the autumn and work continues to introduce new wildlife in the area. Our thanks goes to Des Watt and his son Calum for doing the work.

#### **Property Committee** - Chairman Cllr Mark Oliver and Vice Chair Gavin Needham

This Committee meets quarterly and is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of Yaxley Parish Council Buildings and the facilities within them.

The Parish Council is responsible for a number of halls from the modern Queen Park facility to the older grade two Owen Pooley Hall in the Amenity Centre, all of which bring with them different maintenance issues. Wherever possible general maintenance is done in house and the Grounds Team look after the internal decoration of the halls.

Following interruptions in the red care phone line, a dual com system has been installed in the Austin Hall along with a new fire door bar and two new external lights have been installed at Queens Park.

#### **Planning** - Chairman Paul Russell and Vice Chairman Mark Oliver

The committee has reviewed over 60 planning applications in the last year, ranging from landscaping applications for the Great Haddon development, to outline planning permission around Hampton Waters to local individual developments, domestic extensions, industrial use applications and Tree Preservation Orders.

We strive to ensure all approved plans are in keeping with the needs of the village always bearing in mind a development's neighbours and the effect on the village – visual impact; traffic concerns; avoidance of overdevelopment; and public safety.

Members of this committee also have to regularly attend District meetings to put our case for rejection of a planning application (when necessary) – so we a very busy team of Councillors...!! We are not always able to get the result we want, but we keep trying.

### **Looking forward -**

As you are no doubt aware, local elections will be taking place on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2022 and all 17 seats on the Parish Council will be up for re-election. The term is four years, and anyone interested in standing should contact the elections team at Huntingdonshire District Council.

May will be a busy month with the Yaxley Festival from 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> and the Pensioners' Afternoon tea on 6<sup>th</sup> May.

### **Review –**

There were so many things that I could report, but the list above demonstrates the wide range and extent of the works carried out by the Parish Council. Even with covid measures being implemented throughout the year, the business of the Council has continued to function efficiently and professionally, I have been extremely proud of the way our staff have conducted themselves, despite some difficult times. I hope that, as residents, you are confident that your Parish Council has looked after the needs of Yaxley as best it can. Please do let us know if there are areas within our responsibility that you feel could be improved or changed.

If you are interested to understand more of how or what we are doing, then you can go to our notice boards, web site, Facebook page or even pop along to one of our meetings where you can have up to 15 minutes to discuss items on the agenda or something you would like to bring up at a future meeting.

Finally, I'd like to thank all the Councillors for volunteering their time not only for Council meetings but for giving your time freely to help at the Community Fridge, undertake litter picks. assist with cemetery inspections, allotment inspections etc. Thank you to each of you.

Rodney Butcher

Chairman

Yaxley Parish Council

Mark Oliver

Vice Chairman

Yaxley Parish Council