

Broughton and Milton Keynes Parish Council
Chairs' Annual Report 2018/19

28th May 2019

Introduction

The Parish Council is involved with a broad range of actions and activities from Allotments to Youth activities. This year has been a busy one as we have settled into our second full year at our office in Atlas Way, Oakgrove Village. We have continued to prepare the Council for inevitable changes in Local Government which are already underway. Standing Orders, Regulations, the Local Government Act and new legislation (GDPR) absorb much more time than we would like but these are largely non-negotiable responsibilities that all Parish Councils must manage. In particular, we have made major improvements in moving our systems to 'cloud' based operations that provide more modern, resilient and accessible resources for the future. All councillors and staff now use email accounts and information data bases that are readily accessible and properly protected to the extent practical and affordable. This has reduced the print burden for meetings and made filing and archiving almost automatic.

Devolution

This term has moved into the mainstream of our responsibility as Government continues to squeeze the grants and budgets made available to our Borough – the Unitary Council of Milton Keynes. Over the last 5 years or so the Borough Council has made substantial cost savings by reducing staff and services. Milton Keynes Council key focus areas are Child/Adult Social care and homelessness, to name a few. These reductions show up in many areas but one of the first to feel the effect is in landscaping. We are being offered part of the current landscaping budget if we agree to take on the responsibility ourselves. The challenge is that the amount of money is insufficient to maintain current standards that have already reduced. This budget is also not inflation-linked and thus seems something of a poison chalice. Parish Councils are not normally resourced to do landscape work so although the issues of choice are more open, the impact is on the inevitable increased costs that will be required. We shall be battling with this dilemma in the next year but have already made provision in our accounts to handle increased costs moving forward.

Landscaping

Our new landscaping contractor, who started 16 April 2018, has performed well managing our public estate. This work can be divided into two areas – allotments and public realm. Our allotments have previously been managed with a relatively light touch approach. At face value this suits some users but builds a longer-term issue when sites are not properly maintained - accruing rubbish and public health concerns. We have revised our rules and regulations and are applying more rigorous practices to make the land better kept for everyone. However, maintenance and general upkeep continues to challenge our resources and runs in financial deficit despite increased ground rents imposed more than a year ago.

We currently have five allotment sites. Our Middleton site is on heavy clay infill soil and regularly floods. We have considered the work required to remedy this situation. So far, the costs are not affordable nor the result guaranteed. We have therefore decided to close the site and leave it fallow while we consider alternatives. There is no intention to release this land for building. We have also been troubled with overflow flooding at the Kemsley Crescent allotment. Following engagement at the highest level with Anglian Water we are hopeful that reserve pumping capacity at the Pineham treatment plant will have fixed the problem in high rainfall situations.

The Parish also carries responsibility for health and safety issues in the areas of Public Realm. Following an extensive tree survey, we have conducted substantial remedial work throughout the last year. The Milton Keynes Village Garden has been tidied of dumped debris and this work will be completed once the bird nesting season is over. A team of residents are renovating the old phone boxes in Broughton and Milton Keynes Village in an effort to preserve the area's old-world charm.

Consultation

In this last year we have completed our first on-line survey to find out what our taxpayers see as their own priorities. It is clear to us that the divisions of public responsibility between National, Borough and Parish organisation structures is far from clear. This is not surprising as many categories of public ownership overlap. To address this lack of knowledge, we have invested in two communication vehicles this last year. Firstly, a quarterly Newsletter which is delivered to every household and secondly, a rewritten website for those with internet access and interest.

It is our intention to make a major boost in the use of these tools so that people know what the Parish Council does and what they would like it to do and fund in the future. We have also created a Media & Communications working group.

To this end we have restructured the office administration function to become a Community Engagement and operations function. This adds human resource to provide a total of two full-time Officers. We hope to fill this position in July.

In summary, we expect to be listening and communicating more often and more clearly so that we can provide the services that people want and are prepared to fund.

Planning and Licensing

All applications for planning and licensing are passed to the Parish Council for input before consideration by the Borough Planning Authority. This work is now delegated to a Parish Committee that considers each application. These meetings like Parish Council Meetings are open to the public. We have supported the Borough's position to restrict the licenses of Ice Cream Van operators in the immediate area of schools at certain times.

Residents of Ferry Meadows Close have raised major concerns about the impact of the Community Centre of the MK Hindu Association regarding traffic congestion when events are being held. This is a work-in-progress with the Borough's Highways Department. Various possible solutions are being considered.

A major potential development (c5,000-8,000 homes) to the East of Willen and North of the M1 is being planned by the Borough Council. This will potentially have significant impact on our parish and we participate in Stakeholders consultation meetings together with our Ward Councillors to ensure our concerns are understood.

People

The Parish Council continues to be challenged with recruiting Councillors. Pressures of work and family life and changes of circumstance make it difficult for volunteers to sustain their contributions. We currently have three vacancies in the Broughton and Brooklands Ward and are actively looking to fill these vacancies to ensure our representation is well balanced geographically.

Our thanks go to Alison McNaughton who has served the Council for four years in a part-time capacity. Alison left at the end of April.

Facilities

Middleton Pavilion is now in its third year of operation by the current leaseholder. The Pavilion continues as home to Milton Keynes Cricket Club and Aspley Guise Football Club. The Pavilion provides a very popular weekend venue for families hosting various events. This summer it will host the MK Food Festival which will bring a number of visitors on September 14th.

Our office block in Atlas Way has been identified by the owners as needing fire safety improvements. This has been a concern of residents in similar blocks in Oakgrove. These blocks are all being modified by their owners to improve fire resistance. Our own involvement has been helpful to understand the concerns of residents to get the work done with minimum impact to their lives and pockets.

Grants

The Parish Council has made several grants to community-based organisations enabling children to take part in organised activities both home and away.

Funding support to the Citizens Advice Bureau was provided to support residents needing this service. We provided funding support for the MK Village Firework Display in October.

Youth Engagement

One of our identified projects this year is to provide support for Youth Engagement. We have budgeted £10,000 to support organisations that are helping young people to use their lives productively and happily. This was flagged as a priority in our recent survey and we want to deliver on this expectation building up on an annual basis if possible. We provided sponsorship support to the new YMCA building in Milton Keynes along with other Parish Councils.

Travellers Encampments

Travellers illegal encampments raise community anxiety immediately. Last year there were two incidents within our Parish although none on our owned land. Nonetheless we work with the various authorities to deal with the situations as efficiently as the law allows. These episodes can require expensive bailiffs only to find that the offenders move somewhere else locally. We had great support from Ward Councillors on these two occasions.

David W. Monk

Chairman, Broughton & Milton Keynes Parish Council