

HARPSDEN PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Report for the year ended 31 March 2022

1. Your Council's main concern is the protection of Harpsden as a small village. As you will be aware this is no easy task, even though much of the parish lies in the Chilterns Area of Natural Beauty, or AONB for short. This does not mean that we are against all new building or the replacement of older buildings, like poor Mr Hiscock's ancient barn, with new ones; but it does mean that we are opposed to speculative development for which there is no local need and to the imposition of mass housing schemes, since both spoil the very attractive character of the area. Under current planning law the best available means of opposing undesirable developments is provided by neighbourhood plans and our membership of such a plan in partnership with Henley should, on balance, continue to help us if it wins public support in the referendum to be held later this year. I do hope you will all make the effort to support it when the time comes.
2. No neighbourhood plan can stop all development since the number of houses to be built in any planning area is ultimately dictated by central government, but a fully validated NP does give locals the chance to direct their positioning and to safeguard particular fields and woodland, mainly because only developments included in such Plans have a clear way ahead through the planning system. The advantage of the plan shortly to be put before you is that none of the green field sites put forward for development by their owners have been included in the text that you will be asked to vote on. The concession we have had to make to achieve this is further building on Highlands Park: this was forced on us by the housing targets demanded by Government policy, but since this site has already been compromised by the previous development there, we see it as the least bad site for the mix of affordable social and market-priced housing required, while it also has space for some employment land.
3. Thames Farm at the other end of Harpsden is another matter because the main reason for the site having planning permission is what we see as a serious flaw in the Government's planning legislation. This, as you may hear later from David Bartholomew, is fiendishly complicated but the long and the short of it is that local opinion, though united at parish, town and district level, can be set aside by a Planning Inspector ultimately for a reason that is irrelevant to the arguments on the merits of building on a particular site, namely that the District Council has failed to achieve the target number of dwellings imposed on them in a given period (5 years, or 3 years for areas with an up to date Neighbourhood Plan).
4. Turning to the future, it seems to me that you would want to know about 4 matters : The first is Sheephouse Lane, that is the single-track road with passing places between Harpsden Court and the Henley/Reading road, the A4155. Ever since Tesco's supermarket was built a little way along the A4155, this lane has been under pressure and this pressure has been increased by traffic from the estate at Highlands Park. While we have, I think, had some success in calming the traffic down as far as the bottom of Gillotts lane, Sheephouse lane remains very much in need of restoration, which I am glad to say should happen this year

with David Bartholomew's help and the availability of our CIL money, - that is the Community Infrastructure Levy payable to District and Parish Councils by developers.

5. The second matter is the possibility of extending the AONB to include more of Harpsden. Naturally this seems an excellent idea to us, especially if the extension can take in the bottom half of the north side of Harpsden valley below Rotherfield road as well as the green fields between Harpsden Court and the A4155. This will not be easy to achieve, nor will a decision be made quickly, but we, and I hope our successors, will do what we can to bring it about.
6. The third matter is the celebration of the Queen's platinum jubilee and as I hope you all know, this will take the form of a garden party on June the 5th at Harpsden Court, the place where Harpsden began over 1,000 years ago, by kind permission of Ian and Gigi Wason. Details will be circulated very shortly but I can say that all residents will be eligible, as will their children even if they have grown up and moved away. So too, will those on the Electoral Roll of Harpsden church even if they live outside the parish.
7. The fourth matter is that the Golf Club are about to reconsider their plans to rebuild their Clubhouse. This certainly needs doing but apparently they have revived the possibility to sell the present site for housing and place the new building in the AONB at the top of Chalk Hill. In our view this is a dreadful idea that would increase congestion on the road to Binfield Heath and damage the AONB. Please let us know if you agree with us.
8. Finally, I should not like to end without thanking my colleagues for their support during another demanding year. Two of the 5 members, Matt Leeman and Dominic Day, joined the Council during the year and I thank their predecessors, Hilary Andrews and Sara Langton, for their help. I am also grateful to our Clerk, Anne Marie Scanlon, who has had to battle with a lot of ill health as well as the more detailed accounting required to deal with the advent of CIL money, welcome though that is.

Kester George

27 April 2022