

Shillington Parish Council

Annual Report 2013/2014

Chair's report

This is our sixth published annual report and gives me the opportunity to take stock of parish activities over the last twelve months.

It's been a mixed year with two developments taking place at opposite ends of High Road at the same time and in winter. Not only have these been nightmarish in terms of traffic congestion at New Walk/Marshalls Avenue by contractors working on the Bloor Homes site, but also for the courtyard development at Ansell's Farm behind the Village Stores. We've managed to deal with the dangerous parking situation from the Bloor Homes site ("Wilson's Close") in conjunction with the Village Hall Management Committee, who kindly agreed to permit the contractors to use their car park from 7.00am to 4.00pm for a weekly rent.

Not everyone will be aware, but the Village Hall is facing a financial crisis and the renting of the Car Park is a real saviour at the moment. There has been some criticism by local residents, who felt permitting the contractors to use the car park was very unfair as they had previously been requested not to use it overnight (which could impact on Village Hall users hiring both hall and car park in the evenings). The Village Hall Committee would be happy to consider applications for overnight parking from residents for a fee.

Much debate/discussion has taken place regarding 'the Village Green' over the years. Yes it is currently an eyesore with a second lot of contractors' vehicles overflowing onto it. Most of whom choosing to ignore the 'no parking signs'. Again we have had to consider community safety in terms of these vehicles parking on the highway by a blind bend. As soon as the courtyard development is complete, we will be completing our plans to erect bollards to prevent vehicles blocking the bridleway and also down the sides of the central access, to stop random parking on the grass, as well as re-seeding and restoring the churned up areas.

Since the last annual report, there have been two public meetings by Rowan Homes/Optimis Consulting enabling residents to view plans for a proposed new community building, to be built on the Playing Fields. This of course would have to come on the back of further development on land behind and including the Village Hall site. There have been regular 'working group' meetings of village organisations currently using both Village Hall and Football Club, which have taken into consideration their needs and wishes. We understand that the developers have also been in discussions with local residents to see what improvements could be made to the area to lessen the impact of the housing development.

A new traffic scheme is proposed for High Road, including an informal crossing to the Village Stores. Also proposals for further Village Green improvements. Extra parking is being considered for Greenfields residents. If the scheme for the new Community Building goes ahead both existing buildings (Village Hall and Social Club) will remain in place until completion of the new build. An improved parking scheme has been drawn up for the Playing Field and proposed

movement and improvement to the children's play area. We are in discussions with Central Beds Council to ensure that any Section 106 monies arising from the development will come directly to Shillington, as we would like to see a new/refurbished court surface to enable netball/tennis to resume as well as a hard surface for additional youth football training. The whole process has been a unique experience for Shillington and one which is unlikely to be repeated. Two old buildings (Village Hall – 1920s and Pavilion – 1947) both struggling to survive with high maintenance costs and insurance – to be replaced with one modern community centre bringing with it so much more for our growing village.

Meetings have been taking place with Central Beds planners and officers and a planning application is due to be submitted shortly. As soon as Parish Council receives this for consideration, a public meeting will be called, so that Parish Councillors can hear your views.

On the community safety front, we have very been concerned at recent reports through 'Ringmaster' (police incident reporting system). We would ask elderly residents to keep their doors locked even when in their properties and not be too trusting of strangers, who will not hesitate to force their way in to steal your valuables. Never accept offers of work from 'cold calling' contractors. If you need work doing – call trading standards, who have a list of acceptable contractors. Being a rural community we have had several recent thefts of expensive farming equipment from what were thought to be secure buildings. Residents' property also continues to be targeted from sheds and garages. Remember to keep side gates, sheds or garages locked. Consider forming a local 'NEIGHBOURHOOD/FARM WATCH' scheme in your area. Be neighbourly and look out for each other.

Yet again a few dog owners need to be reminded of their duty to the rest of the parish. Please be more community spirited and take your doggy bags with you, collect any deposits and place in one the bins provided, or take home and double wrap into your dustbin. Don't just leave it to be walked through on our network of footpaths and pavements, or sprayed across the Playing Field when our grass cutters are out at work, or even hanging in our hedgerows in plastic bags – hardly suitable material for nesting birds.

We are very fortunate to have the benefit of local shops offering a host of services as well as post office, garages and pubs/restaurants. Local businesses are being run from home and offer local employment. We have a number of village groups offering fitness, interest and wellbeing, all counting on your support to ensure their sustainability. Hopefully you will continue to use them to the greatest benefit. Thanks to those making the commitment to provide these services.

On a final note thanks to the Clerk for her hard work on behalf of the Council. Grateful thanks also to fellow Councillors, whose support and efforts on behalf of the Parish, continue to enhance Shillington's reputation as a progressive and dynamic community.



Chair Person

Introduction

This Report describes the main achievements of Shillington Parish Council during the year ending 31st March 2014. It also gives details about the services provided by the Council.

About the Parish

The parish of Shillington includes the communities of Shillington, Pegsdon and Higham Gobion. Located at the north east end of the Chiltern Hills, part of the parish lies within an area of outstanding natural beauty. The parish is located in Bedfordshire although it has a Stevenage postcode and uses a Hertfordshire postal address. It is a parish with a history. People have lived at Shillington for over 1000 years and during that time it has been sustained by farming, sheep, straw and fertiliser. As in all parishes, change has always, and still is occurring. Farming has diversified within the parish, horses having become a leisure feature and new small home based businesses and enterprises have started up. The parish is still very much alive and has maintained a character of its own.

The parish has a population of 1,842 (2011 population estimate, published by the Office for National Statistics).

Shillington Parish Council

The Council's address is: 20A Vicarage Close, Shillington, Near Hitchin, Herts, SG5 3LS.

Tel No: 01462 713567

Fax No. 01462 713567.

Email address: shilling1@talk21.com

Web: <http://shillington.bedsparishes.gov.uk>

Shillington Parish Council was created under the Local Government Act of 1894. In 1964 it was divided into two wards and thereafter known as Shillington and Stondon Parish Council. On 1st April 1985 Shillington and Stondon were divided and became separate Parish Councils.

The Council and its Committees

The full Council oversees all the activities of the Council.

The Council meets at 7.45 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month at Shillington Congregational Church. Additional meetings are held when necessary. Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings. During 2013/14 the council met on 11 occasions and the finance committee met once.

As well as fulfilling the requirements for regular meetings, councillors received invitations to attend numerous other meetings and events representing the residents of Shillington parish including those organized by the Central Bedfordshire Council and other partner organisations.

When necessary Councillors and the Clerk attend training courses. During the year the Clerk to the Council undertook training organised by The Bedfordshire Association of Town & Parish Council in partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council to help councillors understand their responsibilities under the new Code of Conduct arrangements brought into force by The Localism Act 2011.

Parish Councillors

Shillington's ten parish councillors were all elected on 5 May 2011 and will remain in office for a period of 4 years, the next election being in May 2015. The Parish Council operates under a strict code of conduct which all councillors must abide by.

Councillor Sue Chalmers

Contact via the Clerk to the Council

Councillor John Clark (Tel No: 01462 711446)

Hillside, Hillfoot Road, Shillington

Councillor Alison Graham (Tel No: 01462 713543)

21 Church Street, Shillington

Councillor Tony Howells (Tel No: 01582 881611)

Chapel Cottage, Pegsdon Way, Pegsdon

Councillor Dr David Middleton

Contact via the Clerk to the Council

Councillor David Mott (Tel No: 01462 711222)

Pump Farm Lodge, 141 High Road, Shillington

Councillor David Simkins (Tel No: 01462 711209)

Rose Hill Farm, Shillington

Councillor Helen Smith (Tel No: 01462 711714)

19a Hanscombe End Road, Shillington

Councillor Sally Stapleton (Tel No: 07711 504489)

26A Apsley End Road, Shillington

Councillor Derek Turner (Tel No: 01462 712462)

54 Bury Road, Shillington

Offices

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the council are elected annually in May. During 2013/14 the following Councillors held office:

Chair: Cllr. Sally Stapleton
Vice-Chair: Cllr David Simkins

The Chair of the Council receives an annual allowance to cover expenses incurred whilst carrying out her duties (currently £200) but other councillors do not receive any payment or allowance for attending meetings or for carrying out any Council business.

Staff

The Clerk to the Council: Mrs Karen Cousins

The Clerk to the Council has been employed by the parish council since 1996 on a part time basis working 42.5 hours per month. In March 2010 she was awarded a Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) the professional qualification for local council clerks and has also completed additional modules since that time to ensure the qualification remains relevant and reflects current legislation.

Council Facilities

The Parish Council is custodian trustee of Shillington Memorial Playing Field although the day to day management of the facility is the responsibility of a management committee. The Parish Council owns the neighbouring field known as Horns Pasture which was purchased in 2003. The Parish Council also maintains the Village Green and is sole trustee of the War Memorial and the car park opposite All Saints Parish Church.

The Council provides and maintains street lighting in some areas of the parish (Central Bedfordshire Council being responsible for the remaining lighting) as well as road side seating and bus shelters.

Planning

The Parish Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications. As such it is responsible for commenting upon all the applications which fall within the parish. During the year those comments were passed to Central Bedfordshire Council who took them into account when reaching planning decisions.

The Parish Council was consulted on 24 new or revised applications during the year.

During the year the parish has seen work on the erection of the previously agreed 20 new properties at the rear of 50 High Road (Bloor Homes) and 3 new

properties at 59 High Road (Rowan Homes) commence, with some of the properties already being occupied.

Two public meetings were held by Rowan Homes during the year to consult with parishioners on the proposal to erect new homes in High Road and provide a new community building at the Memorial Playing Field. A planning application is expected to be submitted to Central Bedfordshire Council in 2014.

The Parish Council continues its discussion with Central Bedfordshire Council regarding the use of s106 contributions which Central Bedfordshire Council receive from developers towards the costs of providing, community and social infrastructure, educational provision, open space/ play equipment, transport or healthcare. The Parish Council strongly believes that an element of those monies should come directly to the parish and will continue to pursue this with the council when suitable projects arise.

Promoting Shillington

Shillington parish is a thriving parish with a great sense of community and is fortunate to have residents who give willingly of their time and energy. The Parish Council web site (<http://shillington.bedsparishes.gov.uk>) provides important information to residents and visitors to the parish and the Shillington village website (<http://www.shillington.org.uk>) is also seen as a valuable resource.

The Parish Council regularly contributes to the bi-monthly 'Parish News' magazine which is distributed free of charge to every house in the parish.

Residents can also sign up to the 'Parish Email Service' so that they can be kept informed of matters affecting the parish such as road closures, warnings about criminal activity in the area, local services affected by adverse weather conditions, etc.

The Civic Function

The Council has continued to play an important Civic role. The Remembrance Sunday service was held on 10 November at The Congregational Church followed by the Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial and was very well attended by residents as well as several serving members of the armed forces.

Highways, Traffic and Transport

Central Bedfordshire Council is the Highways Authority responsible for highways matters but the Parish Council takes an active interest in traffic issues advising Bedfordshire Highways of matters of local concern.

During the year the Parish Council raised numerous issues with the Bedfordshire Highways including road safety and maintenance issues.

As part of Central Bedfordshire Council's Local Area Transport Plan improvements to bus stops in the parish were carried out in December including provision of bus stop flags and timetable cases.

A new parking area at the entrance to Vicarage Close has also been provided during the year by Aragon Housing Association as part of its commitment to provide additional parking when the Scyttels Court site was redeveloped.

Quality Council

The Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme, launched in 2003, to provide benchmark minimum standards for parish and town councils is currently under Government review. The Parish Council hopes to work towards accreditation once the new scheme is launched.

How your money is spent.

Each December, the Parish Council sets a budget for the next financial year. For 2013/14 £35,000 was raised by a precept to meet the budgeted expenditure. The money was collected from 796 properties in the parish by Central Bedfordshire Council as part of the council tax, with band D equivalent properties paying £43.97 to the Parish Council's expenditure.

Grants and donations

Organisations benefiting from donations made by the Parish Council this year included Whitbread Wanderbus, Mid Beds Link-a-Ride, Victim Support, The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Citizens Advice Bureau, The Police Partnership Trust, Shillington Lower School PTFA, 1st Shillington Rainbows and All Saints Church.

Summary of the accounts for the year ended 31st March 2014

The Parish Council opened the year with a balance of £39,484 and closed with £53,533 of which £7,955 are restricted funds. The major receipt was the precept which is the local charge on the Council Tax.

A summary of the unaudited accounts for 2013/14 are opposite.

RECEIPTS	
Annual Precept	35,000
Council Tax Support Grant - CBC	4,822
Parish News	1,575
Grasscutting subsidy – CBC	1,129
Loan repayments received	1,200
Bank Interest	317
VAT reclaimed	2,532
Rental Income	500
Other Income	928
	48,003
PAYMENTS	
Staff	7,381
Chairman's Allowance	200
Administrative expenses	3,764
Donations	2,016
Upkeep of roadside verges	2,114
Street lighting	3,137
Upkeep of Bus Shelters	140
Road Side Seat Maintenance	59
Playing Field expenses (inc Play Area) including litter cleansing	3,530
Horns Pasture expenses including Litter cleansing	4,829
War Memorial expenses	195
Signs	395
Tree Maintenance	1,265
Printing Parish News	2,050
VAT on payments (to reclaim)	2,880
	33,955

Comments

The Council welcomes views from residents and people working here on any aspect of life in the parish. Please contact your Councillor or the Clerk to the Council at: 20A Vicarage Close, Shillington, Near Hitchin, Herts, SG5 3LS.

Tel/Fax: 01462 713567

Email address: shilling1@talk21.com

(Large Print copies of this report are available on request from the Clerk to the Council)