

Shillington Parish Council

Annual Report 2014/2015

Chair's report

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

Since the last annual report, we have been awaiting the submission of a planning application by Rowan Homes/NHH Homes for the proposed development to the rear of the Village Hall, which will contribute towards a new Community Centre on the Playing Field and improve High Road traffic and parking both for residents and High Road Stores. The developers/consultants have been working with a village working group to ensure that the new building encompasses everything needed for local activities, together with any future expansion.

The application will be submitted to CBC planning authority towards the end of April and plans will be available for interested residents to review with the Parish Council once received. This project will also enable us to move and improve the play area and create more parking in the existing Playing Field car park, with a revised entrance at the top of Greenfields, not only to benefit the users of the new building, but also alleviate parking issues for nearby residents and the school.

We have also received confirmation that we have £54k of Section 106 monies for community sports usage on the back of earlier village developments and this has to be used for sporting projects, so we look forward to resurfacing and improving the netball/tennis courts for these clubs to be able to use them again. Over recent years we have been trying to get funding together from the various granting authorities to carry out these improvements, but it has proven difficult with so many of these bodies now only providing a proportion of the total sum needed.

We are all concerned with thoughts of any large scale housing developments being forced upon us by the local authority, as passed down from Central Government, to meet their housing targets, but by accepting smaller scale projects, as we have for Wilson Close and Chapel Barns, and more especially the new proposal of 19 dwellings behind the Village Hall in High Road, we can bring huge benefits to the village in terms of improved road schemes, traffic and parking as well as amenity buildings like the proposed new Community Building for all the parish to enjoy. Unfortunately this is the way forward, unless we have a benefactor who would provide us with land/buildings as the Hanscombe family did 80-90 years ago. Yes we all love our green spaces, which many residents have moved here to enjoy and the Parish Council will strive to hold on to as much as we can for the enjoyment of all.

On the community safety front, we remain concerned at regular 'Ringmaster' reports of thefts from sheds and outbuildings and would ask residents to make sure these are secured to make it more difficult for the thieves to access.

Also to remind our elderly, more vulnerable 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 any 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. Also beware of all those irritating phone calls – again 'cold calling' by telephone. Never give out personal details (particularly bank accounts, etc. to strangers).

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 obligations to the rest of the parish. Regular notices appear in the Parish News, particularly of the latest dog control orders now in place for offenders. If you consider taking on a dog, there are various responsibilities involved in its upkeep, particularly regular walks across our network of footpaths and playing fields where, by being thoughtful of other residents, you take your doggy bags with you, collecting any deposits and placing in the bins provided, or taking home and double wrapping into your dustbin.

We are extremely fortunate to have local shops offering a wealth of services including post office, news agency, fresh bread and snacks and cleaning. We are also lucky to have four pubs/restaurants within the Parish as well as two garages with car sales. All of these need your support to ensure their sustainability.

Local businesses are being run from home and some offer local employment.

We have a number of village groups offering fitness, interest and wellbeing, also counting on your support so they can continue. Hopefully you will use them to the greatest benefit. Thanks to all those making the commitment to provide these services.

Thanks to the Clerk for her hard work on behalf of the Council and for ensuring we are operating legally and efficiently. 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. We say goodbye to two councillors who have supported us over recent years but will be standing down at the election and look forward to another interesting four years for those remaining.



Chair Person

Introduction

This Report describes the main achievements of Shillington Parish Council during the year ending 31st March 2015. 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 2014/15 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 in Risk Management and Governance organised by The Society of Local Council Clerk and the processes to handle Councillor Code of Conduct Complaints organised by Central Bedfordshire Council.

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. Councillors during 2014/15 were:

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 2014/15 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 34 new or revised applications during the year.

The majority of the applications considered by the parish council during the year were for residential extensions. 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) completed, with the majority of the properties now being occupied.

The parish council believes that an application for the erection of new homes in High Road and the provision of a new community building at the Memorial Playing

Field will be submitted to Central Bedfordshire Council in the near future. This is somewhat later than anticipated.

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. It was pleasing to receive notification in January that a s106 contribution of almost £55,000 to be used for leisure recreation and open space purposes will be available to the parish, and the parish council will be carefully considering over the coming year how this money will be best spent.

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. Anyone wishing to sign up to the service should do so by emailing shilling1@talk21.com and including 'Parish Email Service' in the subject line.

The Civic Function

The Council has continued to play an important Civic role. The Remembrance Sunday service was held on 9 November at The Congregational Church followed by the Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial. The event 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 has raised numerous issues with the Bedfordshire Highways including road safety and maintenance issues.

Funding has successfully been obtained from Central Bedfordshire Council's Local Transport Plan Rural Match Funding Scheme for road safety improvements in Bury Road and Hanscombe End Road and subject to consultation it is hoped that these measures will be implemented in 2015/16.

Local Council Award Scheme

The new 'Local Council Award Scheme' (previously the 'Quality Council Scheme') was launched in January 2015. The scheme offers councils the opportunity to show that they meet the standards set by the sector, assessed by their peers, and to put in place the conditions for continued improvement. The scheme offers three levels of award and the parish council will shortly be making a decision as to which level of award to apply for.

Achievements during the year

During the year the parish council in partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council and the Community Heartbeat Trust have provided a community defibrillator on the outside wall of Shillington Village Hall. The defibrillator requires no training to use and is accessible when dialling 999.

How your money is spent.

Each December, the Parish Council sets a budget for the next financial year. For 2014/15 £35,000 was raised by a precept to meet the budgeted expenditure. The money was collected from 784 properties in the parish by Central Bedfordshire Council as part of the council tax, with band D equivalent properties paying £44.64 to the Parish Council's expenditure. This was an increase of 67pence per property (2%) on 2013/14.

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 and the Mid Beds Citizens Advice Bureau.

Village non-profit making organisations are reminded that the parish council has a grant awarding policy and grant application forms are available on request from the Clerk to the Council.

Summary of the accounts for the year ended 31st March 2015

A summary of the draft accounts for 2014/15 is opposite.

The Parish Council opened the year with a balance of £53,533 and closed with £67,532 of which £8,844 are restricted funds. The major receipt was the precept which is the local charge on the Council Tax.

RECEIPTS	
Annual Precept	35,000
Parish News	1,988
Grasscutting subsidy – CBC	1,129
Loan repayments received	1,200
Bank Interest	413
VAT reclaimed	2,880
BT Wayleave	820
Rental Income	500
	43,930
PAYMENTS	
Staff	7,174
Chairman's Allowance	200
Administrative expenses	3,215
Donations	767
Upkeep of roadside verges	2,593
Street lighting	3,116
Upkeep of Bus Shelters	112
Road Side Seat Maintenance	26
Playing Field expenses (inc Play Area) including litter cleansing	4,804
Horns Pasture expenses including Litter cleansing	2,667
War Memorial expenses	169
Village Green expenses	40
Defibrillator costs	290
Printing Parish News	1,868
VAT on payments (to reclaim)	2,890
	29,931

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)

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