

Shillington Parish Council

Annual Report 2020/2021

Chair's report

This is our thirteenth published annual report and gives me the opportunity to review parish activities over the past twelve months.

Since the onset of the COVID pandemic in March 2020 we have all been going through the most challenging of times with everyone having to adjust to huge changes in personal circumstances. Over the year we've found ways to work from home where possible, home-school our children and be confined with some family members and not be able to visit others, who we love and miss dearly. We've also discovered new ways to communicate and meet by computer, ipad or iphone.

As a Parish Council we've been holding our monthly meetings by ZOOM and even our older members have embraced the technology. Most village organisations are also communicating with their members by various online meeting rooms, or regular phone calls, keeping in touch to ensure everyone is ok.

From the outset of the pandemic, we were very fortunate to see a rise in community spirit with many younger members of the parish volunteering to help the more vulnerable with various tasks like food shopping, collecting prescriptions, dog walking, letter writing, gardening, etc. SHILLINGTONHELP continues to tick along in the background and is there, should anyone in the village need to make use of voluntary help. Indeed, some initial volunteers are continuing to shop or collect prescriptions for those they supported from the beginning.

SHILLINGTONHELP runs alongside SHILLINGTON CARE – a village organisation that has been in operation over many years and overseen by John Whitehall. Extra demands during the pandemic put pressure on John's group of volunteers – a few of whom fell into the 'vulnerable' category. We thank all involved for providing these invaluable services to the wider community.

The village shops have certainly stepped up to support us – supplying essential items which the larger supermarkets were unable to provide. Thanks to all for serving the community so well and going the extra mile. Please continue to support them when this is all over.

Our local pubs have also reinvented their businesses by offering takeaway and delivery services with The Crown still able to offer the same tasty meals, also providing soup to anyone in need in the village. The Musgrave was taken over in November by an Italian restaurateur and managed to open for just one week, before having to close along with every other business. It is very pleasing to see they are also offering a takeaway/delivery service of great Italian fare for the community.

There has been much work at The Live & Let Live with new owners, however this pub remains closed for the renovations and we wait to see if it will reopen.

The Social Club has unfortunately had to remain closed. We eagerly await its reopening once restrictions are lifted.

The Village Hall has been closed throughout, although the Hall Committee have followed recommended guidelines and have all necessary safety procedures in place ready for re-opening as soon as permitted.

Both churches have been offering spiritual guidance in some form or another when both buildings had to be closed. Regular food collections have been delivered to the Bedford Foodbank. We give thanks for the continued support of our clergy. We did manage to distantly celebrate both VE and VJ days and mark Remembrance Sunday with outside services at the memorial, albeit with limited attendance – special thanks to Revd. Nick for leading these occasions.

With the vaccine programme now gathering momentum, we sincerely hope to see everyone resume business/religious/social activities soon as we return to some sort of new 'normal'.

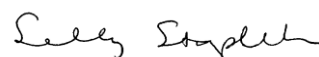
Sad to report there has not been any progress on the new community building – activities have ground to a halt although we continue to press Settle Group for action. Through our solicitor we have been trying to sort out the Charity Commission as the merging of the two existing charities into one new one for the new building, has proved challenging.

The two play areas are now completed, albeit the one for the older children proving a lot more difficult than anticipated. With the driest of summers when the grass seed was spread.; to the wettest of winters when the contractors finally came to install the equipment. We had hoped to be able to host a 'grand opening' but COVID put paid to that idea. However, it is great to see so many young people enjoying the new equipment.

We are now looking at the installation of benches/seating in conjunction with the Playing Field Committee, so that families can sit and enjoy watching their children at play, or have a picnic in the fresh air. If you would like to sponsor a bench in memory of a loved one, we would be pleased to hear from you.

Since 2019, the SPEEDWATCH group have been active around the village and have now been told they can expand into Upton End, although had to cease covering Marquis Hill as the police advised "it was too dangerous". It was also very encouraging to see a good turnout for the launch of "STREETWATCH" on 5th December. Great to see village volunteers taking the initiative to support community policing.

On a final note – grateful thanks to our hard- working Clerk and Councillors for their support over the last year and we look forward to the challenges that 2021 has in store for us.



Chair of Shillington Parish Council

Introduction

This Report describes the main achievements of Shillington Parish Council during the year ending 31st March 2021. 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. It is located in Central Bedfordshire although most homes have a Stevenage postcode. Shillington is attractively located with extensive views to and from All Saints Church and part of the parish at Pegsdon lies within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

It is a parish with a long history. People have lived at Shillington for thousands of years and for much of that time, farming and related work kept most people busy. Although much land is still farmed, most people earn a living in other ways, travelling elsewhere to work or, increasingly, working from home. The parish retains many facilities including a school, shops, pubs, garages, churches and a host of clubs and voluntary groups. The community 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: 11 Hillside Close, Shillington, Hitchin, Herts, SG5 3NN.

Tel: 01462 713224

Email: clerk@shillington-pc.gov.uk

Web: www.shillington-pc.gov.uk

Shillington Parish Council was created under the Local Government Act of 1894. The full Council oversees all the activities of the Council.

The Council meets on the first Tuesday evening of each month except in August when there is not usually a meeting held. Additional meetings are arranged when necessary. Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings. Meeting details and agendas are published in the noticeboards around the Parish and on the council's website during the week before the meeting.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic the government introduced legislation in April 2020 allowing parish council meetings to be held remotely. During 2020/21 Shillington Parish Council has held 12 parish council meetings and one finance meeting using Zoom.

Parish Councillors

The last Parish Council elections were held on 2nd May 2019. Nine of the ten Councillors took office at the elections with the tenth being selected by a process of co-option on 3rd September 2019. The next Parish Council elections are due to be held in May 2023.

The Parish Councillors during 2020/21 were:

Councillor John Clark

Councillor Tracey Petrie

Councillor Alison Graham

Councillor Tony Howells

Councillor Angus McCormick

Councillor David Mott

Councillor Sally Stapleton

Councillor Derek Turner

Councillor John Hyde

Councillor Mark Thyne

The Parish Council expresses its thanks to John Clark who resigned from office on 31st March 2021 after 28 years of dedicated service to the community as a Parish Councillor, including periods as the Vice Chair.

Contact details for the Councillors are published on the Parish Council website, on the noticeboards around the Parish and in the Parish News magazine.

Offices

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Parish Council are elected at the annual meeting of the Parish Council in May. In 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic there was no annual meeting and the Chair and Vice Chair elected in May 2019 remained in post:

Chair Cllr Sally Stapleton

Vice Chair Cllr John Clark

The Chair of the Council receives an annual allowance to cover expenses incurred whilst carrying out their 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 parish council has only one member of staff, the Clerk to the Council and Responsible Financial Officer. This is a part-time role of 42.5 hours per month and is currently held by Mrs. Helen Smith who joined the Council on 1st October 2017. The Clerk holds a Certificate in Local Council Administration.

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 the Playing Field Management Committee. The Parish Council owns the neighbouring field known as Hornes 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 for planning applications and is entitled to comment upon applications which fall within the parish.

During the year comments were provided to Central Bedfordshire Council on 33 new or revised applications relating to properties within the parish, a decrease of 31% on the number of applications received the previous year.

The majority of these applications were for residential extensions, although a small number of applications were received for the erection of new dwellings. Applications were also received for works to trees protected by preservation orders or located in the conservation area.

Central Bedfordshire's Local Plan

The purpose of the local plan is to protect Central Bedfordshire's communities against speculative development and ensure that growth is delivered in the right place and is of the right character and quality. It also ensures that the supporting roads, schools and services such as health, as well as retail, leisure and community facilities are provided.

The Central Bedfordshire Local Plan was submitted on 30 April 2018 and has been undergoing examination by the Planning Inspectorate since then.

During 2019, hearing sessions were held after which the Planning Inspectors gave their initial findings. Central Bedfordshire Council produced additional information in response to the issues raised by the Inspectors and further consultation and hearings took place during 2020

One outcome of the process has been that the proposed development site next to Dawes Garage on the High Road in Shillington (Site HAS45) has been reduced in both area and number of dwellings.

Promoting Shillington

The Parish Council shares key information and messages with residents via its website www.shillington-pc.gov.uk and Facebook page @shillingtonparishcouncil.

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. Any resident wishing to be part of this service can sign up by emailing clerk@shillington-pc.gov.uk and including 'Parish Email Service' in the subject line.

A Village Welcome Pack is available to all new residents on request or can be viewed online on the Shillington village website <http://www.shillington.org.uk>.

Shillington is a thriving parish with a great sense of community and lots going on. Local news and details of community events can usually be found on the community facebook page @shillingtonvillage.

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

The Civic Function

The Council has continued to play an important Civic role.

A minimal socially distanced outdoor Act of Remembrance was held on Sunday 11th November at the War Memorial. There were also outdoor services to commemorate both VE and VJ day during 2020.

Highways, Traffic & Transport

Central Bedfordshire Council is the Highways Authority responsible for matters relating to the roads and footpaths, however the Parish Council takes an active interest in these areas and reports issues of local concern to the Central Bedfordshire's Highways team.

During the year the Parish Council reported various road safety and maintenance issues such as potholes, and damaged street signs. The Covid restrictions resulted in higher numbers of pedestrians using the local walks for exercise and we also received a number of reports regarding obstructions to the footpaths caused by overgrown hedges. One hedge on the High Road was of particular concern to residents and following much chasing was eventually cut back by Central Bedfordshire Council.

Community SpeedWatch and StreetWatch

The local SpeedWatch has been running since 2019 and the parish was pleased to welcome a new community StreetWatch group in December 2020. These are both groups of local volunteers.

Achievements during the year

Work was undertaken throughout the summer to remove the old hard tennis courts at the playing fields and grass seed the area in preparation for the planned second play area for older children. Due to the extremely dry weather in the summer, the grass seed required daily watering which was undertaken by a team of volunteer Parish Councillors and residents. The dry spell was followed by very wet weather during and after the installation of the new play equipment, which resulted in ponding and some very muddy patches. The Parish Council will consider if anything can be done to address this issue before next winter.

Three items of outdoor gym equipment have also been installed near the play areas for use by those aged 14 and over.

Overall, the new provision and installation of the play areas and gym equipment cost £69,980. Most of this amount was funded through "section 106" money collected by Central Bedfordshire Council from housing developments in the village granted between 2008 & 2013. The remainder was from Parish Council funds.

Sadly, the younger children's play area had to be closed in March during the first national lockdown and again in because broken glass was found on the safety surfacing. This was very difficult to remove and was eventually cleared by two Parish Councillors who spent several hours of their weekend on their hands and knees removing the glass shards from the surface by hand.

How your money is spent

Each December, the Parish Council sets a budget for the next financial year. For 2020/21 £38,000 was raised by a precept to meet the budgeted expenditure. The Tax base for the year was 853 with band D equivalent properties paying £44.55 to the Parish Council's expenditure. This represented an increase per dwelling of 1% on the previous year.

Grants and Donations

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. Organisations benefiting from donations made by the Parish Council this year included Autism Bedfordshire, Marie Curie and All Saints Church.

Summary of the Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2021

A summary of the draft accounts for 2020/21 is below.

The Parish Council opened the year with a balance of £71,769 and closed with £82,133 of which £9,628 are restricted funds. The major receipts were the precept (which is the local charge on the Council Tax) and the S106 contributions allocated for children's play which were claimed to pay for the new play area.

RECEIPTS	
Annual Precept	38,000
Parish News	1,905
Bank Interest	453
VAT reclaimed	18,311
Rental Income	750
S106 contributions (for play area)	14,312
Other Income	2,799
	76,530
PAYMENTS	
Staff	12,616
Chair's Allowance	200
Administrative expenses	4,077
Donations	860
Upkeep of roadside verges	4,767
Street lighting	6,501.24
Upkeep of Bus Shelters	56
Seat Maintenance & Purchases	0
Playing Field expenses (inc Play Area)	22,222
Horns Pasture expenses	1,641
Litter Picking	1,768
War Memorial expenses	361
Village Green expenses	0
Tree Works	510
Community Defibrillator costs	176
Printing Parish News	3,118
VAT on payments (to reclaim)	7,292
	66,165

Comments

The Council welcomes views from residents and people working within the parish on any aspect of life in the parish. Please contact your Councillor or the Clerk to the Council at:

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Tel/Fax: 01462 713224
Email: clerk@shillington-pc.gov.uk

Published May 2021