

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT ON 2020/21 – Ian Glyn

This report is unusual for several reasons.

It is written and delivered in September 2021 rather than May and covers a period of 16 months rather than a year. For those reading it in future years, I need to explain that the Covid pandemic which struck the UK in March 2020 continues to persist and influence our lives. While several restrictions to our normal way of living have been lifted by today's date, we have been unable to meet in public forums till recently and so our Parish Meeting scheduled for May 2021 suffered the same cancellation as that due to be held in May 2020. Hence it being held in Sept 2021.

Furthermore, all Parish Council meetings since March 2020 have been held remotely through the internet rather than in public forum. We were, however, able to restart physical meetings in the village hall in July.

Nevertheless, life in the Parish has gone on and I report on it herein.

1.1. Planning issues

Nineteen Planning Applications required our attention during the year. Of those 2 were withdrawn. We recommended 11 for approval and 6 for refusal. In 3 instances SODC overruled our objections and, at the time of writing, decisions from SODC on 2 Applications are outstanding.

The outcome of some significant Applications remains unclear at the time of writing, and I report on those here.

1.1.1. Chalgrove Airfield

This one has been ongoing for several years. The development of up to 3,500 houses on the Airfield is included in the current SODC Local Plan (which was approved by an Inspector during the period). But the Applicant has recently withdrawn the Application in the face of stiff opposition (on safety grounds) from the Civil Aviation Authority. We suspect that the Applicants will resubmit having made arrangements to reposition the runway that triggered the CAA's objection on land recently acquired (acquired, presumably, for that purpose). We are informed that SODC's supply of land for its housing needs for five years is robust enough to withstand Chalgrove dropping out of the equation, and this is important because, as things stand at the moment, absent a proven five-year supply of land for housing development, SODC effectively loses control of its planning decisions. Your Parish Council remains totally opposed to the development of Chalgrove Airfield believing that it is a completely unsustainable location for a development of this nature and scale.

1.1.2. Land North of Fairfield in Roke

This one has been on our agenda for a long time. The original Application for a house on this plot was refused by SODC. The applicant appealed and lost that appeal too. Meanwhile the applicant installed a mobile home and associated facilities on the site in an action that is described in planning jargon as an "intentional unauthorised development". He subsequently applied for retrospective planning consent for this arrangement and this Application has been refused by SODC. We are maintaining regular contact with SODC about what actions they propose to take next. My report in May 2020 referred extensively to this unsatisfactory position, and I refer the reader to that report for the detail of the PC's view on this Application.

1.1.3. Land adjoining The Orchard in Rokemarsh

The Parish Council has also taken a robust position in relation to the proposal to build up to 19 further houses adjacent to Rokemarsh and the fledgling development of 240 houses approved and known colloquially as Ben 3/4. Ben 3/4 was approved on the understanding that the continuing separation of Rokemarsh and the sprawling Benson was “dialled in”. This Application flies in the face of that principle and commitment and the Parish Council will continue to resist it for that (and other) reasons.

In general, your Parish Council’s decisions re Planning Applications before it is informed and directed by the Berrick Salome Neighbourhood Plan and driven by the belief that homeowners should be permitted to improve and alter their property so long as, by doing so, there is no detriment to the community.

1.2. Other Matters

1.2.1. Thames Water

The foul drainage arrangements continue to concern us when the water table rises. We are finally getting some traction from Thames Water in terms of their commitment to remedy the various faults in the system and it remains to be seen how successful the remedial work recently undertaken will be. Thames Water assure us that if it were not for the ingress of water from rising ground water levels, the system is adequate for evacuating the sewage from all houses in the Parish - so their task is to ensure that the system is sealed as effectively as possible from ground water.

1.2.2. Increasing Traffic Volumes and Speed

We remain extremely concerned that local developments will further exacerbate the volume and speed of traffic using the lanes through our Parish and a “traffic group “ has been working on the issue for some time. It is a laborious process involving OCC Highways, but much progress is being made. The traffic group has made a recommendation to Councillors which will be discussed directly after this Parish Meeting. Your PC will then circulate a recommendation to all parishioners and seek views on the proposal before the process of pursuing the proposal through the various consents procedures is started. I urge each and every one of you to take this issue seriously and let us know what your views are on the matter. The proposed solutions may well be controversial to some and there will certainly be a significant cost of implementing them. Your Parish Council will want to be certain that they are supported by most parishioners - so the expression of your thoughts on the matter will be very important.

1.2.3. Village Hall

Progress on regularising the ownership structure of the Village Hall and, also, on implementing the improvements for which we have got planning permission have been affected by Covid but will re- emerge on to our Agenda as restrictions continue to abate.

1.2.4. PAGE

There was good and bad news from PAGE during the year. The immediate threat of gravel extraction right on our doorstep was removed but there remains a risk that it might re-emerge on a site between Newington / Stadhampton and Drayton St Leonard. So, your Council decided to continue to support PAGE (in its new guise as PAGE 2020) as they seek to persuade others that there is no need for new extraction facilities and that the local site is not appropriate.

1.2.5. Oxford Cambridge Expressway

The immediate threat to the Parish seems to have gone away as the project falls off central government's agenda.

1.2.6. Tree Planting

We are proposing to plant a copse of trees on the recreation ground. The saplings are being donated by the Woodland Trust and the Parish Council are pleased to support this environmentally friendly initiative. The current uses of the recreation ground will be unaffected by the initiative which we hope will improve the appearance and biodiversity of the area.

1.2.7. Gigaclear Cabling

We discovered during the year that the all-important Gigaclear cabling has not been installed as reflected on their map, so we have produced on the PC website a definitive map of the location of the cables. I urge all Parishioners to study this map and to ensure that any work being undertaken in the roads or verges close to their houses is done in the full knowledge of the existence of the route of our all-important broadband internet supply. The cables themselves are installed remarkably close to the surface in many locations.

I finish this report by thanking my fellow councillors, on behalf of all parishioners, for the time and effort they have put in to managing the Council affairs during this very strange and difficult time. And most particularly to our Clerk (Chris Cussens) who continues to do the most extraordinary job on our behalf keeping us in order and keeping everyone informed.

Before I sign off, I'd like to tell you a story.

It's a story about a community of approx. 130 households and approx. 300 people.

It's a community that rejoices in its inclusivity and its welcome to all.

It's a community that benefits from a church, two pubs and a village hall.

It's a community benefitting from plenty of local activity throughout the year.

It's a mixed community with some working - some not - some busy - some not- some young - some not!- some boisterous - some not.

It's a community which suffers remarkably little dissent.

It's a great place to live.

You may recognise it!

I have a good insight in to this community and my story goes on to tell you that, if this community is to retain its special place in our hearts it is going to be necessary for members of it to volunteer to do the things that bind it together and make it our special place.

Those who have done so in recent years are getting older and, in any event, new faces, new ideas, new momentum is to be encouraged.

My insight also tells me that several of the organisations on which we depend need volunteers to keep them going and that simply relying on the same old faces to carry on is not going to work - or be acceptable.

So, in order to give my story a happy ending, I ask each and every one of you to consider how you can help. There will be vacancies on the Parish Council, on the Village Hall management committee and as trustees of the two charities that so benefit us. The teams that run the events we so enjoy will need rebuilding. And we should crave the new ideas that fresh faces can bring.

Our website now carries a page indicating the help our organisations need and boasts a way that Parishioners can offer to volunteer. [Click here](#) to access that page and make this storyteller a happy man - Please!