

Ashbury Parish Council Chairman's Report for the year 2014-15

From a Parish Council perspective, this has been a somewhat disappointing year, with delays over which we have no control frustrating the desire to complete the handover of the Community Open Space with a maintenance contract in place and see the lease and opening of the Shop to its new tenants, before the end of the outgoing councillors' term of office.

As I write, the landscaping is progressing near the houses, though the rest of the field is a mess; the path and trees have been placed and the playground awaits completion. The 106 agreement stipulates that the handover of the Public Open Space from the developer will be within 6 months of the date of completion and that will be once the 10th private sale dwelling is completed. We are still just within that six month period.

I would like to thank those sharp –eyed residents who have pointed out errors and omissions of all kinds during the development of Wixes Piece (I think the no-access fenced garden to the front of the shop is my favourite), as our resulting emails have been heeded and the mistakes rectified.

Also delayed: the plans for Traffic Calming funded by the developers' contribution have been stalled at Oxfordshire Highways for the last three months. Unfortunately it seems likely that hopes for the Idstone Road on entry to the village are going to be stymied by lack of space. If this proves to be the case, there is the option via NAG/NW and the Thames Valley Police, of volunteer training in the use of speed guns, which other villages have taken up.

An unexpected reduction in traffic numbers, if not speed, was the consequence of the much heralded closure of the A420 Shrivenham bypass last summer. Far from bringing a great increase in traffic through the parish, there was a noticeable quiet. While this was welcome, it serves as a reminder of the importance of that traffic artery in determining our traffic levels; the busier it is – the busier our rural roads.

Traffic and congestion on the A420 will increase markedly in the next few years with the Eastern Villages development now approved and the planned housing numbers for Shrivenham, Watchfield and the Vale communities accessing the road. An increase in rat-running is inevitable. For this reason alone I strongly recommend that the new Parish Council continues to keep its membership of and links with the Western Vale Villages Consortium, as they have proved our best advocate with the County, District and Unitary authorities in making our voice heard over transport, and formerly, planning concerns.

During the last year the Parish council has responded to a number of consultations on the working of the NPPF, the Eastern Villages Expansion and the VWHDC new Local Plan 2031 Part One dealing with strategic sites and policies, which is currently before the Inspector. Part Two, which deals with development in smaller communities such as ours, will be based upon the success and adoption of Part One.

The western end of the Vale is changing and we need to be involved. In the past, Ashbury has been relatively isolated from such changes but this is no longer likely to be the case. As I am sure you know, ward boundary alterations within the District have meant that we are now included within

Shrivenham and Watchfield, which are only too aware of the pressures of development. Forming stronger links with those parish councils seems a sensible idea.

In other matters, the bus service is still dependent on Berkshire's contribution to the subsidy but Oxfordshire has confirmed its continuation for this year.

The PC has continued its membership of the CPRE, and support of the Royal British Legion by presenting a wreath at the annual Service of Remembrance on behalf of the Parish. We are grateful to Sarah Loney for her continued voluntary upkeep of the flower beds on the green and to those who turn out to litter pick in the spring, few in number but much appreciated.

Thanks to some volunteers and equipment, Miller's Hill, long the source of justified complaint, has been tamed for the time being. This work is the responsibility of the county but the fact of the matter is that complain as we like, there is not the money to do work that will always be low priority. Some weeks ago we were informed that budget restrictions mean that the usual three cuts a year to grass and verges on the works list have been reduced to two.

At the Parish Council meeting in January of this year the councillors asked for a considerable increase in the parish precept to £4860 p.a., with this situation in mind. Not only does the parish need to provide for the future maintenance costs of the Open Space and playground as the accompanying fund is used up but it would be of benefit to the community to employ a lengthsman to carry out essential work as and when it needed doing.

To end with the positive: the community has benefited greatly from the restoration of the village hall to and beyond its former glory, thanks to the efforts of its committee and many others; I hope that the PC has been supportive in that. The Community Art project that has resulted from the Wixes Piece developer contribution has I think, surpassed everyone's expectation, both in the wonderful result and in the enthusiasm and community spirit engendered in its making.

We have been fortunate in the past financial year to receive £650 from the O.C.C. Communities Fund, a donation of £100 from the film company making the drama for Channel Four and £500 from Redcliffe, which latter has been a particularly welcome contribution towards legal fees incurred in the transfer of the land for the Community Open Space.

The village now has a new face to the world with its reconfigured website, thanks to Steve Treadwell. Do take a look at it if you can ashbury.org.uk and also ashburyshop.co.uk; the website for the new shop and tea room

I would like to thank my fellow parish councillors for their work over the last term, welcome our new District Councillors Elaine Ware and Simon Howell-Yvonne Constance remains our County Councillor.

We now have a newly constituted Parish Council, with fresh blood and some continuity, which is a good mix. It's particularly pleasing to have Idstone represented. They are in good hands with James Greenham as clerk. We could not have better.

Marion Turner 15th June 2015