

Hemingford Abbots Parish Council

Chairman's Report: October 2020 – May 2021

Introduction

This Chairman's Report is not for a full year – but only for the 6 months from November 2020 to end of April 2021. This is due to the disruption to 'normal' times by the Covid Public Health Emergency of 2020/21. The Annual Parish Council Meeting was not held in 2020 when the Parish Council cancelled all scheduled public meetings for 3 months from the Lockdown of 23rd March. National guidelines were later received requiring Annual Parish Meetings to be held by September. So I took the opportunity to produce the HAPC Chairman's Report for that meeting and its contents covered 16 months from May 2019 to September 2020.

Chairman and Vice Chairman

With no Annual Parish Council Meeting in 2020, it was advised that the Chair and Vice-Chair should continue in post for a further year, unless changed at a monthly meeting. Hence I have continued as Chair and John Peters as Vice-Chair. I thank John most warmly for all his support during the last 2 years. He generously gives considerable expertise, knowledge and experience to the Council.

Parish Councillors

Chris Nicol, Zoe Ryall and Marcus Whewell have continued as Parish Councillors. Each brings their own skills and talents to the work of the Council, and on behalf of the community I sincerely thank them for their time and efforts for this village.

Despite regular notices and enquiries within the community, the two vacancies on the Council remained unfilled. However in March this year, Peter Keen came forward and was co-opted to the Council. The Council welcomes Peter - a long-standing resident in first Hemingford Grey, and now the Abbots - who brings financial and business skills, but above all an enthusiasm to get things done. I hope the last vacancy will soon be filled, so that the work can be shared. Please be in touch if you think you could help.

The Clerk and Meetings

In September 2020 HAPC appointed Maxine Blewett to the post of Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer. In a very short time Maxine has determinedly achieved a high standard of proficiency and has ensured the smooth running of the Council. On behalf of all Councillors I can confidently say that she is a pleasure to work with and we feel very fortunate to have her as part of the team. During the last 6 months HAPC has been very active, with an impressive list of achievements and this is in no small way due to having an efficient Clerk at the helm.

The Council has continued to hold all its meetings by *Zoom*. This changes the dynamics and pace of a meeting, but it has allowed the required business to continue with public accessibility.

The Annual Parish Council Meeting of May 4th 2021 looks to be the last virtual meeting under the current restrictions. The May monthly meeting and Annual Parish Meeting will be held in the main room of the Village Hall on Wed 26th May, starting at 7.00 p.m.

County and District Councillors

The three District Councillors who represent Hemingford Abbots – Sarah Conboy, Mike Grice and Sarah Wilson – have shared their attendance at HAPC meetings, and provided a written report keeping the Parish up to date and fully informed on matters at HDC.

Ian Bates, County Councillor for Hemingford Abbots, has likewise served the Parish very well and worked hard to liaise effectively on highways and waste & minerals matters. At the April HAPC meeting HAPC said goodbye to Ian as a County Councillor. He is retiring from political life after well over 20 years of being a District and County Councillor. The Council will welcome his successor after the elections of 6th May. Ian will be a tough act to follow!

Community Representatives and Helpers

Thank you to those members of the community who help the Council: Ted Burleigh as a Trustee of the Peace Memorial Playing Field: Ken Martin making a regular check on the village Playing Field. Iain Muspratt liaising with the Environment Agency to report on river matters: Zoe Brown managing the Community Facebook page: Iain Muspratt chairing the Hemingfords Action Group and providing regular reports to HAPC on matters relating to the old Golf Course site.

Erika and Johnny Brown moved to Northamptonshire in March and the community immediately felt the gap they left behind. On behalf of HAPC I thank them for their outstanding contribution.

Sue Henderson has taken on the circulation of the weekly St Ives area Policing reports. Through her village email she sends out occasional notices and information. If you would like to be on this list, you must 'opt in' and email news@hemingford-abbots.org.uk

The Council has yet to find someone to take on Johnny's work with the website and the VAS signs. Can you help?

Village Projects and Maintenance

The Splash has been dredged, the surrounding vegetation cleared and the road side posts re-painted. The Village Signs have been completely restored and refurbished by Glyn Mould and Paul Wiitten will put them back in place this week. They now look superb. (The delay in the work was due to Lockdown forcing the closure of Glyn's studio).

The streetlight on Common Lane adjacent to the entrance to Hemingford Park was completely destroyed by a 'hit and run' accident. Fortunately the majority of the replacement costs were recovered through insurance – but the insurance cover had to be rescheduled and the annual premium has now risen. The new light has been sited further within the verge for its safety.

The sunken manhole covers to the sewer system on the High Street have been lifted and replaced by Anglian Water.

The Clerk has liaised with HDC to have fly-tipping quickly removed. HAPC is trying to contact the owner of the Shell garage site to reposition the barriers on the A1307 after they were removed to allow a stolen caravan in to the area. This derelict site continues to cause concern.

The safety barriers on the south eastern approach to the Rideaway flyover await repair despite continuing correspondence from the Clerk.

There has been much negotiation to achieve the installation of the 20 mph speed restrictions in the village. I thank Councillors Marcus Whewell and Zoe Ryall for their persistence with this project. HAPC has been assured that the work will be done within the next 2-3 months, along with the resurfacing of the 3 rumble strips.

The Council has approved a replacement to its website which will be fully compliant with new accessibility requirements. Thank you to Zoe Ryall for leading on this project.

Playing Field

Several of the trees on the Playing Field have been pruned and trimmed. Also some of those on the verge of Royal Oak Lane. A 2-year grass cutting contract was awarded to Bradgate Fencing Ltd, and the grass will now be cut weekly, rather than fortnightly, during the summer.

Dave Cook has undertaken hedge and grounds maintenance work on the field and around the Village Cross site.

The Annual Safety Inspection of the field and equipment was carried out in October by Wicksteed Ltd, and their maintenance recommendations were then done. HAPC remains concerned that dogs are often let on to the field and is considering an increase in signage to advise dog owners of their responsibilities.

Floods in December 2020 – Jan 2021

The village was fortunate that the floods at Christmas and New Year did not affect any properties. The Flood Defence System safely contained the river waters which were close to the height of the 1998 floods. I thank the District Councillors who were quick to contact the village should any help be needed. HAPC sent a report to the HDC Flood co-ordinating committee in which it gave details of the overflowing ditches from Moats Way to the A1307 (which caused the slip road and the A1307 to be closed) and also surface water flooding along Rideaway and at the Splash.

In conclusion

Since October 2020 I think everyone in the UK has felt an increased weariness from the Restrictions and Lockdowns for Covid. This has affected people personally, but has also changed how work is done. For so many employees, Working from Home, with often Home Schooling at the same time, has made life much more difficult. We have all had to adapt – and adjust our normal expectations. In relation to HAPC, for instance, queries to HDC or CCC are taking longer. Several members of staff have left their posts and their replacements (where these have been made) need time to get to know their roles when restricted to electronic and virtual working. For example, a correction by SSE to the HAPC direct debit for the energy for the Street lights has taken months to sort out. County Council budgets have been significantly impacted by Covid expenditure. So thank you to everyone involved with HAPC for doing the very best they can with good humour, tolerance and respect in these extraordinary times. And now we all look forward.

After 3 years as Chairman from May 2018, and a previous 6 years from 2000-2006, I am standing down on May 4th. It has been a privilege to lead HAPC and I wish my successor all the best.

Bridget Flanagan
May 4th 2021