

MILCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – 7 May 2019

The Chairman's report gives the public an idea of the workings of the PC over the past 12 months.

Seven Councillors were nominated for election in May 2018 and consequently no election was required. There have been no changes during the year. The PC therefore consists of Peter Booth, Marlene Cowell, Michael Haynes, Alex Honey, Clare Jones, Mandie McCullagh and Myra Peters. All Councillors signed their Declarations of acceptance of office and Registration of Interest forms.

There is much admin and red tape involved for Parish Councillors, such as Risk Management, Data Protection, Freedom of Information, Standing Orders, Asset Register and Financial regulations are just some of the items to which PC's have to adhere, not least being the Code of Conduct. The majority of the public are unaware of how a PC works and we rely heavily on our Clerk to keep us updated.

I would therefore like to thank Theresa, our Clerk and Responsible Financial officer, along with all Councillors. MPC holds seven meetings a year, but there is something to deal with nearly every day. As well as village matters, the PC has to respond to District and County consultations.

Mandie, Michael and Myra have attended various meetings during the year, Mandie and I have attended Parish Liaison meetings and I attended a meeting at Jubilee Hall on Community Infrastructure Capital Grants. Michael and Myra turned up for a meeting in July organised by OCC at Banbury Town Hall which was to hear how they could better engage with PC's, only to find out it had been cancelled at short notice! It was re-scheduled for October.

It is possible for parishes to pay their elected Councillors a small remuneration. Milcombe is Band 3 and the entitlement is £228 per annum. Councillors again agreed not to accept the allowance and consequently this is a considerable saving for residents.

In November the Precept for the current year was set at £13,200 which is £500 more than in the previous year to allow for increased costs.

I would like to thank our County Councillor, Kieron Mallon, and our District Councillor, Hugo Brown, who both attend the majority of our meetings and have been very supportive to this Council during the year.

- 2 -

With the demise of S.Northants Council last year with whom CDC had been working and sharing services for a number of years, it was necessary for CDC to re-think their situation and felt their best option was to join forces with Oxfordshire County Council. The two Councils now share a joint Chief Executive, Yvonne Rees, with shared 'back office' administration and, hopefully, improved frontline services; all with the promise that residents would notice very little or no difference in services provided.

The following are just some of the items with which MPC has been dealing with over the past year.

PLANNING – As usual there has been a mix of applications such as replacement windows at Manor Farm, one replacement window at Bay Tree House, minor internal alterations at Milcombe House, all of which are LB's, front extension at Combe House, alterations at Fieldside, Paradise Lane, extensions to Holly Cottage on the Main Road, rebuilding of existing north boundary wall of the Churchyard, and three applications by Mr. Facon at Lessor Grange for straw and machinery storage barn, cattle shed and manure store and outline for an agricultural workers dwelling. The PC had no objections to any of the applications, but did make observations on some.

Oak Farm Phase 2 had received outline planning for 40 dwellings about two years ago and detailed application of the site and dwellings was put in to CDC at the beginning of this year. Beech Grove Homes (a subsidiary of

Sanctuary Housing) invited the public to view their proposals and make their comments at an exhibition in September 2018. The Clerk, Chairman and Myra Peters have attended meetings with CDC planning officers responsible for this application. As there is already a small play space on Oak Farm Phase 1, it was not felt necessary to include a second one on Oak Farm phase 2 and the PC requested that the money which would be spent on this would be better spent on improving the present Play Area in the village, particularly as the village was not receiving any s.106 monies.

Beech Grove Homes (Sanctuary) and CDC officers are both in agreement for this to happen and the hope is that this Condition will be removed from the application. However, there is a problem with the PROW at the rear of Nos.7-11 which is in the ownership of the residents. OCC is insisting that this should

- 3 -

be a walkway from the development site to the Main Road to avoid residents having to walk the distance through the Oak Farm Phase 1 development to the bus stop or down through the village. Apart from the fact that it is in private ownership, it is also narrow with a concrete step at the end and would not be accessible for buggies or mobility scooters. A small allowance from developer funding of £1000 has been set aside to make improvements to this footpath along with a sum of £8000 for a new bus shelter on the opposite side of the road. We await the outcome!

It has to be said that all s.106 funding from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 developments at Oak Farm have been allocated to Bloxham and so Milcombe has received NO benefits to enhance the village in any way whatsoever and this has been stressed to Planning officers.

The PC has also responded to the consultation on the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan with regard to its impact on a rural county with expected housing levels to increase by around 40% by 2050. We have agreed with the response produced by Bloxham PC as our closest neighbours despite no longer being in the Bloxham ward. Milcombe is still part of the Bloxham Benefice and any plans for Bloxham can significantly affect Milcombe with regard to schools, Doctors, etc.

We have recently responded to the application for a Special Educational Needs School on the Bloxham Grove Road, just past the Warriner Farm. Whilst we are in agreement that such a school is needed for pupils in the Warriner catchment area with special educational needs and feel they rightly deserve such a school, the PC was concerned about the additional traffic and parking spaces as there is already much congestion around the Warriner school area and the splay from Bloxham Grove Road to the A361 needs to be widened to produce safer and better visibility.

PLAY AREA – The Play Area on Bloxham Road is owned and maintained by the PC. There is an annual service by RoSPA which is a legal requirement and Peter Booth oversees the area with weekly checks and carries out minor repairs. Mowing is carried out every two weeks during the growing season.

Some parents of young children formed a Committee under the auspices of the PC to entirely refurbish the Play Area. After public consultation, it was decided to go with a quote from Trevor Stewart for £58,872 + VAT (which the PC can

- 4 -

re-claim) who produces wooden play equipment locally plus some additional pieces by another play company. It is still hoped that there will be some funding from the Oak Farm development instead of the small play space on that site. This would be in the region of a commuted sum of approximately £29,000 together with capital costs plus a sum for future maintenance (figures as yet unknown).

Last year the fete committee offered £1000 to the project, CDC's Community Infrastructure Capital Funding has offered a grant of £25,000 and the Tesco community fund has also offered a grant of £1000.

(Theresa will confirm that I have the correct figures.)

The project is slightly in limbo as we await confirmation that OCC/CDC have sorted the problem with the PROW. There are some drawings for you to look at.

DOVECOTE SITE – The Dovecote site is in the ownership of CDC who received commuted sums of £24,592 and £41,447 from Tay Homes, the original developers of the Dovecote development, in 1999. This was for future maintenance of the Dovecote and surrounding site. CDC continues to maintain the site and carries out the mowing. Some remedial works have been carried out to the Dovecote, such as re-pointing, and the front dry stone wall was re-built about two years ago. However, the side wall was not re-built and became quite dangerous in places where it had fallen. It took almost twelve months for CDC to locate the monies they were holding for the site and to eventually get the work done which has only just been completed.

The Millennium soft floodlighting of the Dovecote is the responsibility of the Parish Council and new lamps were fitted last year.

CUCKOO WALK still contains one of the original blue brick paths. Although this is not the responsibility of the PC, it has taken on some of the responsibility over the years of clearing the path twice a year. This work is carried out by Barry Giles who is also employed to carry out weed control along the verges and footpaths in the village.

SPEEDING through the village always seems to be an issue despite VAS signs at each end of the village warning drivers of the 30mph. Data from the VAS by the Horse & Groom has yet to be analysed. There is a supply of 30mph

- 5 -

wheelie bin stickers which residents can pick up from the H&G to fix to their wheelie bins.

The 30mph signs on the Hook Norton road are to be moved 60m further along the Hook Norton Road due to new builds along this stretch of road and the village gates moved as these abut the new driveways to the newly built houses on either side. This work should be carried out by OCC in the not too distant future!

Although not specifically affecting Milcombe, there have been some road safety improvements to the A361 at South Newington and it is understood that further work is planned between Banbury and Chipping Norton.

OCC has confirmed that the Milcombe to Wiggington Heath road is to receive routine surface dressing and the road will be closed for about three days commencing June 5th.

GRASS CUTTING - Nigel Prickett has again been appointed as the contractor for mowing the grass verges throughout the village on a three/four weekly cut, depending on growth. He is also the contractor for the Play Area and this is cut every two weeks during the summer and the Churchyard on a three/four weekly cut. The PC is responsible for the Churchyard extension.

CHURCH TOWER CLOCK is also the responsibility of the PC which holds a 3-yearly contract with Smith's of Derby for annual service and maintenance.

DOG BINS are emptied on a regular basis by CDC for which the PC has to pay a charge. Unfortunately not everybody cleans up after their dogs which could lead to a fine if caught. There is always a supply of free CDC dog bags which can be picked up from the Church or the village shop. These should be dropped in one of the many dog bins around the village or taken home and placed in the green bin – definitely not to be thrown in the hedgerows as is often the case.

THE ANNUAL VILLAGE LITTER PICK was successfully carried out the first weekend in April and there were more volunteers this time. We would like to thank all the volunteers who included most of the Councillors as well as residents. The PC did offer hot dogs in the Village Hall at lunchtime as an incentive, but not all came.

STREET LIGHTING IN PORTLAND ROAD – After a very long wait and with much persistence and perseverance by Mandie McCullagh and help from a friendly person at OCC, lamps 2 and 3 were finally replaced and are lighting up a dark corner of Portland Road once again.

NEW BUS SHELTER IN NEW ROAD – At the last APM, we reported that the PC had been requested to look into a bus shelter for New Road. We are very happy to report that, after sourcing quotes, the PC went with the County Council who were able to put in the concrete base and supply and erect a bus shelter at the site of the bus stop opposite New Road Stores. Unlike many projects which turn out to be so lengthy, this all happened fairly quickly and we were awarded a grant by CDC from their Community Infrastructure fund for 50% and the other 50% was provided by County Councillor Kieron Mallon from the monies which County Councillors are awarded to assist with community projects. Consequently, this project did not have to be paid for by the PC. We are very grateful to Kieron Mallon for his help with this.

FLYING THE FLAG is one of Peter Booth's duties and is flown for official dates throughout the year.

REMEMBRANCE AND CELEBRATION OF THE CENTENARY OF THE END OF WW1 – Poppy wreaths were laid by Peter Booth at Bloxham War Memorial and at the plaque in Milcombe Church porch on Remembrance Sunday, November 11th.

The Woodland Trust had offered all villages a sapling together with a commemorative plaque supplied by OCC. As they were unable to confirm the species, which could vary from a hawthorn to an oak and the PC were unable to find a suitable site in the village, it was decided to request the plaque only and then to obtain permission from the Vicar and PCC to remove a dead hawthorn at the front of the Churchyard and to plant a wild cherry tree. Unfortunately, the space available did not permit this size of tree and so a miniature cherry tree was planted which is thriving and has already produced blossom.

The PC declined to place a silent soldier in the village as again a suitable site could not be found.

The PCC laid on a community tea in the afternoon to mark the occasion followed by a special Service.

A donation of £100 was made to the Bloxham branch of the RBL.

VILLAGE WEBSITE AND MILCOMBE NEWSLETTER – Amy Jackson of Newcombe Close is getting to grips with the village website and we are grateful to her for volunteering to take on this task.

We are also extremely grateful to Mark Boardman who voluntarily publishes and prints the Milcombe Newsletter which is now delivered to every household in the village. The PC Chairman collects together the information and passes it all on to Mark who puts it into the format which comes through your door. It is open for local businesses to have a free printed advertisement as well as the local village news. We also include some of the events held in Bloxham which are open to Milcombe residents such as The Cherry Tree Centre and the St. Mary's Thursday Club, both of which receive grants from MPC. The Bloxham Community Christmas Lunch is also open to Milcombe residents and received a donation this time.

Last – but not least – we thank the 10 distributors who ensure that all households receive a copy of the Newsletter.

Whilst we are on the subject of *thanking people*, I would like to thank Brian French for keeping the pump site tidy as this is a village feature – again, as with Cuckoo Walk, not exactly the responsibility of the PC but something the PC does to enhance the village. Also, thank you to Peter Booth for purchasing and planting daffodil bulbs around the village. He usually manages to get some help with this so thank you to John Ellison who helped him this year. The display of daffodils grows year on year and is becoming really impressive.

VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS are invited to this meeting to make a presentation or to send in a written report.

There is no longer a Conservation group. The PC is now responsible for the Milcombe Newsletter which I have already covered with all the thanks I can muster to Mark Boardman for his help in producing it.

- 8 -

I understand that there may not be anybody from the Village Hall Committee available to attend this meeting so I will include some information in this report.

MILCOMBE CHARITIES – MILCOMBE VILLAGE HALL – At their AGM in May of last year, then then Committee all stood down, but agreed to wait 6 months whilst the problem was advertised in order to form a new Committee.

No advertising took place and it transpired that the Social Committee had taken over forming the new Committee with the addition of Richard Hazel as Treasurer. Caroline Willoughby is the Chairman, Natalie Brady, Secretary, and Sarah Dowling the bookings secretary. The Committee is hoping to make internal improvements to make the Hall more user friendly for hirers to help increase bookings. They run a Coffee Morning on the first Friday of each month to help boost funds.

In accordance with the Charity Commissioner's Constitution for the running of the Hall, the Committee should consist of 5 elected members appointed at the AGM plus representative members of village organisations. At present the two representative members are Rev. Dale Gingrich for St. Laurence's Church and Marlene Cowell as the PC representative.

In accordance with the Constitution, the AGM should be held in March of each year. The Committee had been unable to arrange the AGM until May 23rd, but this date may have to be re-arranged if the UK takes part in the European elections as the Hall will be in use.

The Social Committee, who now form the VH committee, had previously organised two successful village fetes but, due to amount of work involved and lack of helpers, had decided not to hold a fete during 2019.

It is interesting to note that 2019 is the 60th year since the Charity Commissioner's scheme came into operation (1959) and the old village school could officially be turned into our present day Village Hall.

I do urge the Parish Councillors and residents to give their support to the Committee and attend the AGM if you possibly can.

Theresa is our Responsible Financial officer as well as our Clerk and she will be presenting the accounts to the meeting.

- 9 -

I have covered as much information in this Report as I can possibly think of. If anybody can think of anything I have missed, or would like to ask any questions, please do so. If we don't know the answer, we will do our best to find out.

All Parish Council meetings are open and members of the public are very welcome to attend. There is always a 10-minute slot for residents' questions on the agenda.

Please stay for a glass of wine and a chat with Councillors after the meeting.

Marlene Cowell (Chairman)

6 May 2019