



Pirton Parish Council

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Annual Report 2020 - 2021



Pirton Parish Council Annual Report gives a review of the activities of the Council and the financial report for the year ending 31st March 2021.

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www.pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk

Chairman's Report

The past year has been a challenge to us all in so many ways. Covid-19 has affected each and every one of us in very many ways. I shouldn't think there is anyone who has not known someone who has had it. It has been so hard not seeing family and friends, but with the success of the vaccine programme and the lifting of some of the restrictions, let's hope we can get back to some sort of normality and start enjoying visiting family and friends.

The Parish Council have had their challenges too. Getting to grips with Zoom meetings was rather fun - I am sure that all of you who have had to use the format have become used to yelling 'You are on mute again' while the offender merrily carries on talking to no-one! We did get used to the platform and I think we are all grateful that we did nothing that was considered interesting enough to go viral as Handforth Parish Council!

I would like to thank all our councillors for their hard work and commitment over the last year. They are a fabulous group to work with and have such enthusiasm and love for our village. Carol-Anne McConnellogue resigned from the council earlier in the year. She had worked tirelessly on the recreation development group. She was instrumental in the design and build of the new play area at the recreation ground and I think we can all agree that it was job well done. We will miss her at Council meetings and wish her well in all that she does. Also Tom Gammell, who has served tirelessly as a councillor for many years retired recently. We shall all miss his wise counsel but wish him well for the future. He was greatly enthusiastic about our environment and was involved in many projects. He was instrumental in the making of our neighbourhood plan which is used in all planning considerations and helps shape the future of Pirton.

A big thank you must also go to Ted, our clerk who keeps us on the straight and narrow, reminding us of the standing orders when required. Another big thank you goes to Tony Smart, our street cleaner who keeps the village clean and tidy. I'm sure you will all agree with me that he does a fantastic job. Steve Kitchener keeps the village looking good too by keeping the grass down along many of the village footpaths and looking after the trees.

In Pirton we were luckier than most in lockdown as we live in a village with a fabulous community spirit. Joycare organised a veritable army who have collected prescriptions and shopped for those who have been isolating. It was so heartwarming at Christmas to see villagers taking lunches to people who were alone on Christmas Day.

We also have access to some beautiful countryside to enjoy. One of the tasks of the Parish Council is to maintain and improve the environment of the village. I hope you agree we have succeeded in some part. Some of the projects we have undertaken during the past year are included in this report.

I was privileged to be re-elected as Chairman of the Parish Council at the Annual Parish Council Meeting last week and I look forward to the year ahead.

Jill Rogers

Parish Council Round-up

Annual Pirton Parish Council Report additional information April 2019 to March 2021

Village Environment

Work began in 2019 by way of “walkabouts” to inspect the village environment, with a view to drawing up a priority list of improvements. This had to be abandoned due to Covid 19 restrictions. Nonetheless, it is clear that a combination of wet winter 2019 and 2020, vastly increased construction traffic movement through and within the village, and the shift to on-line delivery services, again a result of the pandemic, has wreaked havoc on already in-trouble verges and roads. Perhaps because of the size of vehicles now coming in to the village, there is a very noticeable increase in vehicles parking on the grass verges. Identifying the problem and the extent of it is one thing; arriving at a solution is another. The Parish Council welcomes ideas from the community.

Parking in the village continues to be a problem, with additional pressure coming from those driving out to Pirton from elsewhere to use the footpaths and cycle routes for exercise during the pandemic restrictions. We would normally welcome all visitors, and hope they would stay for a pint or two at our pubs, and maybe for an ice-cream from the village shop. During lockdown this has not been possible, of course.

Linked to the above issues, and a part of their resolution, is the work we are doing on:

20mph Speed Limit.

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has conducted its speed averages research, and Pirton appears to be on a list for some 20mph zones. However, there is a cost to the Parish, including the cost of HCC formal consultation with the village. Additionally, not all roads were covered by the research, and we are now bidding for funding for a Speed Indicator Device (SID) for Hitchin Road with the Hertfordshire Road Safety Partnership. We are also in the process of starting up the DriveSafe scheme with a group of residents, which had to be mothballed due to the pandemic, so, when we have had training, look out for the Hi-Viz jackets and ANPR guns, checking driver’s speeds along key roads around Pirton!

Travel and Transport

We made use of some Section 106 funds (in short, these are funds that Developers pay via NHDC to ameliorate the problems their development and influx of new residents causes to the infrastructure of County, District and Parish) to refurbish the Bus Shelter at Great Green. Conversations continue with NHDC, HCC Highways and others regarding a bus-stop/shelter nearer to the Comice Meadows development to improve access to the buses for residents there.

Assets of Community Value

Fresh applications were successfully made to designate The Fox, The Motte and Bailey and the Village Stores with its post office as “Assets of Community Value”. Under a statutory scheme, the proposal by the owners to sell a community asset must be notified to the Parish Council who may decide, with the community, to make a bid for the purchase of the asset.

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Planning

We continued to consider all planning applications that NHDC consulted us on. We continue to struggle to get the NHDC Planners to take the Neighbourhood Plan as seriously as they ought, but headway is being made. There was a singular success regarding the planning application at Wrights Farm, which was finally rejected by NHDC in January 2021. Many of our arguments were recognised and used by the Planners in rejecting this application.

Recreation Ground Development

The Council set up a Working Group to advise it on the best way to utilise allocated Section 106 funds that were paid by housing developers. It recommended an upgrade to the playground area and this was implemented in the early Spring. The bulk of the funding is proposed to be used for replacing the pavilion at the Recreation Ground. The current building is an old work site hut and is now about 50 years old. It doesn't have a damp proof course or adequate insulation and the showers and toilets are now very poor. The S106 money will only cover about a quarter of the costs, so the Council will be seeking grants, fund raising and potentially a loan to finance this important project. It is intended that this important village asset will be well used by the community, not just for sports.

MUGA

Following a failure of one of the lamps, the MUGA floodlights have been replaced with more energy efficient LED lights.

Coleman's Close play area

The Council has replaced the safety surfaces, and carried out a number of repairs to the play equipment.

Arboreal Working Group

This recently formed group is looking at ways to help Pirton acquire more trees for planting, and identify areas for them. One initiative is that of North Herts District Council who will provide free trees to North Herts residents in Autumn 2021, subject to availability. We have already had a few residents contact us to have a tree, and we will hope more will want to take up this offer in the autumn. We also aim to work with environmental groups such as WildaboutPirton to help identify suitable land and obtain native tree species for planting in areas outside resident's gardens.

Communications

Formed in January 2021, the Communications Working Group is currently actively creating a new Pirton Village Website, which is due to launch by late Summer 2021. We have been posting more information on the Parish Council Facebook page to engage more with local residents and as part of our review of the Social Media & Electronic Communications Policy we will look at other methods of communication and engagement, along with more opportunities for face to face talks.

Look out for our stall at the Summer Fair, and come and have a chat with us!

Parish Councillors continue to give service to the community through supporting village organisations and Independent Trusts. Three Councillors are Trustees of the Bury Trust; a Councillor also sits on the Village Hall Committee and the Rands Trust.

A Report from our Member of Parliament

I would like to thank you again for providing me the opportunity to contribute to the Pirton Parish Council Annual Report.

This last year has been the most extraordinary in memory. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted our lives in a countless number of ways.

Nationally, the Government's efforts have focused mainly on how best to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, whether that be through protection against the virus or supporting jobs, businesses and the economy. As we move further along the Government Roadmap, I am hopeful that a sense of normality is returning whilst we continue with the vaccination roll-out.

Through it all, it was heart-warming to see how the community of Pirton came together once again to support those in need and provide support to each other. I would like to personally thank those who volunteered for Pirton JoyCare, the Parish Councillors at Pirton Parish Council and to Sonia Fenner and all the staff at Pirton Primary School who have offered a fantastic education to local students even in the most demanding of circumstances.

Pirton, like all the villages throughout North Hertfordshire continues to show the value in our village communities. I was pleased to see that Cllr David Barnard and Cllr Claire Strong were re-elected as Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo's County and District representative, re-joining Cllr Faye Frost as our elected officials.

I know that road safety remains high on the agenda given the tranquillity we experienced during the national lockdowns with fewer cars on the road. I remain committed alongside our local councillors to ensuring that Hertfordshire County Council continues to explore feasible solutions to increase road safety in and around Pirton.

This year alongside the Woodland Trust I have started a new tree-planting scheme designed to increase our local efforts to off-set our carbon emissions. Three Parish Councils joined up to the scheme this year which involved the planting of over 400 trees on marginal areas of land. These trees will improve the aesthetic environment of the villages, deter development on the land, increase biodiversity and contribute to natural flood defences. I am hopeful that Pirton Parish Council will join the scheme as well next time.

I will continue to support the interests of Pirton and if there is anything that you require assistance with collectively or personally, you are more than welcome to get in touch at any time. I look forward to visiting Pirton very soon and I wish you all the very best.

Bim Afolami MP
Member of Parliament for Hitchin & Harpenden

Councillor's Reports

Hertfordshire County Council and North Hertfordshire District Council

County Council Report from Councillor David Barnard. 2020/2021

First of all. Thank you for your support in the recent elections.

Undoubtedly, this has been the hardest and most challenging year of my life, both personally and as your Hertfordshire County Councillor and NHDC District Councillor.

This awful pandemic of COVID 19 has claimed many lives, and it seems that most of us have been affected by the loss of somebody dear. Through the tragedy, there have emerged new practices, and "ways of life".

Our Government has provided massive support to our communities, both by paying 80% of "Furloughed" employees incomes, supporting businesses and self-employed people.

Community groups and buildings have received many thousands of pounds of support grants, and reliefs. Your Councils have worked hard to service these grants, and identify local needs.

I have been delighted to support a local "Community Larder", set up in Ickleford, with a valuable "dual-purpose". People and families who have a need for support have been able to collect essential nourishing support, and those who can afford a donation, will do so. The result also helps reduce the cost of sending residue to "landfill". All that, and making friends with wonderful selfless volunteers!

Highways repairs and improvements across the 3,000 plus miles of Hertfordshire's roads is a constant ongoing practice, and the results are there to see, although there's still so much more to do!

Our village roads need to be regulated, and I am pleased that Hertfordshire County Council has allocated £7 million to survey and make recommendations to the Parishes who ask for 20 mph limits, etc. There is nothing to be gained by just sticking up 20 mph signs. They have to be effective, maybe by physical highway constraints, or other means. The Police and Crime Commissioner supports the "Drivesafe" scheme, where local residents volunteer to record speeding motorists.

There are many other projects that I have been involved with; sometimes helping with education needs, housing queries, and so on.

As we, hopefully, emerge from the pandemic, we must remain cautious and mindful of our responsibility towards others. Keep the good habits of sterilizing, hand washing, and respecting others distance.

I, and my District Council colleagues, Claire Strong and Faye Frost, will always be here to support you and our communities. If you have a Council problem, or would like advice on grant aid available for your club or organisation, please contact us. We are here to help!

David Barnard

Rural Police Report



Hitchin Rural Police Report April 2020 – March 2021

There have been a number of changes within the rural Safer Neighbourhood Team that continues to be based at Hitchin Police Station.

Chief Inspector (CI) Jon Roche based at Hitchin Police Station having taken over from Chief Inspector Sally Phillips at the beginning of 2021.

CI Roche is responsible for all of the Policing teams based in North Herts.

The Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) is headed up by Inspector James Lant.

Guy Westwood is the SNT Sergeant based at Hitchin Police Station, with responsibility for the day to day management of the Hitchin Rural team of three Police Constables (PC's), and two Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's).

PC Johnie Streeter replaced PC Matt Jenkins following his retirement and has prime responsibility for OFFA, HOO and CADWELL wards (Pirton, Offley, Hexton, Lilley, Cockernhoe, Tea Green, Ley Green, Kings Walden, Breachwood Green, Preston and Holwell).

Heather Burrows continues to support OFFA, HOO and CADWELL wards.

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PIRTON

Burglary	3
Criminal Damage	4
Theft	2
Violence & Public Order	19
Vehicle crime	11

TOTAL **39**

HOLWELL

Burglary	3
Criminal Damage	1
Theft	1
Violence & Public Order	4
Vehicle crime	2

TOTAL **11**

Financial Report - Ted Roberts Clerk and RFO

The council finances are still in a strong position, despite some relatively large expenditures in the last financial year. Major sums have been spent on the play areas at Middle Green/Coleman's Close and on the refurbishment at the Recreation Ground. The monies spent for the latter will be mostly reimbursed by Section 106 funds held by NHDC, but the Parish Council has made a contribution of about £1000 towards the project. There are still outstanding VAT repayments to HMRC. These are being dealt with in a controlled manner, the council having come to an arrangement with HMRC.

From 1 April 2020, the council adopted a web-based commercial accounts package. Whilst this does cost more than the old Excel system, it is reliable and well supported and ensures that the required checks and balances are maintained. The council has renewed its insurance for another 3 years through Came & Co, who came up with an excellent value deal, meaning that the premium for 2020-21 is almost £1000 less than was paid for 2019-20.

Council expenses were slightly down, with savings for meeting costs, as Covid meant that all meetings to date were held via Zoom. Website and IT expenses were up significantly this period, but the council had been working with a non-compliant and outdated website which needed updating. Payments were made for website migration, hosting and enhancements such as the interactive planning page. The vagaries of the accounts also meant that two payments were made for the accounts software, which will settle down to one annual payment from now on. The council has also committed funds towards the proposed new sports pavilion build, including the payment of an architect to produce the initial concept drawings.

Village maintenance costs were similar to last year. Our excellent street cleaner was given a well deserved pay rise. Grass cutting and strimming contracts were renewed for 3 years at the previous costs, while for the Recreation Ground a 2-year arrangement at a slightly higher cost is now in place. The bus shelter at Great Green was refurbished with a Section 106 grant from NHDC. No expenditure on the maintenance of Blacksmith's Pond has been necessary this year, as the pond is currently in a good state. Training costs were up both for councillors and the Clerk, who is now qualified with the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA).

Salary and office expenses accounted for about £10,000, slightly up on last year. This is partly due to the Clerk's extra overtime while completing the CiLCA qualification and the subsequent automatic pay increase. Councillors themselves, of course, receive no remuneration for their work. Subscriptions to professional bodies and publications were on a par with previous years.

The Council awarded some grants, including £200 to Essex & Herts Air Ambulance and £250 to the village hall. The Council supported the Royal British Legion, providing a wreath for Remembrance Day. Village organisations are encouraged to apply to the Parish Council for grant funding. Application forms are available on the Council's website under Parish Council/Policies.

Parish Council finances are subject to local accountability and annual audit. An independent Internal Auditor (IAC Audit) verifies the Council's financial procedures. The annual accounts were approved at the Parish Council meeting held on 8 April 2021. The Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2021 will be placed on notice boards and examined by the External Auditor, PKF Littlejohn.

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Income and Expenditure 2020-21

	<u>2020-2021</u>	<u>2019-2020</u>
Balance B/Forward	57,722.73	50,734.00
RECEIPTS		
Precept	37,334.58	35327.85
VAT Recovered	4837.08	2574.97
Rental Income	2538.16	3216.64
Grants	31,074.60	672.15
Donations	99.83	1000.00
Miscellaneous	1.00	3687.87
TOTAL	<u>75,885.25</u>	<u>46,479.48</u>
PAYMENTS		
Staff Costs & Expenses	9962.84	9133.52
Youth Council Transfer	0.00	3187.00
Council Expenses	5200.96	5468.06
Pavilion valuation	0.00	750.00
Grants	674.50	597.00
Village Maintenance	8755.60	6902.32
Recreation Ground	4993.58	5039.46
Allotments	183.06	161.29
Subscriptions	776.62	742.43
Play Areas	31,629.18	487.50
Project Pots	7558.49	5087.45
VAT to HMRC	3425.01	0.00
VAT Input	8885.14	1934.72
TOTAL	<u>82,044.98</u>	<u>39,490.75</u>
Increase/(Decrease) for the year	(6159.73)	6988.73
Balance carried forward	51,563.00	57,722.73
Bank balance at 31 March 2021	51,563.00	57,722.73
Unity Trust Account		

Edward Roberts
Responsible Financial Officer
Date: 8 April 2021

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Contact Details

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PARISH CLERK

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