



Pirton Parish Council

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Annual Report 2017 - 2018



Pirton Parish Council Annual Report gives a review of the activities of the Council and the financial report for the year ending 31st March 2018.

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www.pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk

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Chairman's Report

This report covers the period from May 2017 to April 2018.

Another busy year has flown past, during which the Parish Council has been very active, dealing with all manner of issues – planning, the MUGA project, drainage problems, ongoing works to Blacksmiths pond and The Bury, dealing with queries from residents. I would like to express my thanks to my fellow Councillors and the Parish Clerk, for their support since I was elected Chair and for all their hard work and enthusiasm.

We currently have 3 vacancies for Councillors – it really isn't all a hard slog, it is very rewarding and we do manage to have fun along the way! If you would like to join us and help to support your village, please contact the Parish Clerk – his email is parishclerk@pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk. Alternatively, you can contact any of the Councillors for further information. The more of us there are, the more we can achieve.

Planning

The Elm Tree Farm application is still unresolved. As we speak, the Construction Traffic Plan is at the appeal stage. The Inspector came out to site at the end of May and we should hear the outcome within the next couple of weeks: hopefully we will have more information by the time of the Annual Meeting.

The application for the 2nd site at Elm Tree Farm, from Gladman Developments, has also gone to appeal. The date for the hearing isn't until September, but the Parish Council, along with many other concerned residents, lodged their objection to this application by the deadline, which was the end of May. We received sound advice from our planning consultant, and the Parish Council together with the Pirton Action Group will be registering to speak at the Hearing.

We have seen outline plans for 24 homes at the top of Priors Hill, but no further details so far.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan has now been formally adopted; the Referendum in the village was a great success, a high turnout and an overwhelmingly positive response. Many, many thanks to the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group; this was a long and complicated project, brought to a very successful conclusion. So much so, in fact, that our NP Steering Group have been asked to advise other villages who are just starting out with their own Plans. Trailblazers one and all!

The NP will now be used as planning guidance for all applications within our Parish Environment.

Other Village Environmental Work

We continue to monitor the state of the water in Blacksmiths pond, treatment is ongoing. So far this year we haven't had the usual problem with Canada geese, but can we remind everyone please don't feed the ducks with bread, it hinders our efforts to improve the water quality.

We recently met with officers from The Countryside Management Services (CMS), part of Hertfordshire County Council, to look at a long term project to improve Toot Hill. The project could include funding to completely restore Jacks Path, replacing gates,

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cutting back overgrown trees and vegetation. We hope much of the work can be carried out by volunteers from CMS, but we will also be organising working parties in the autumn to start things off. Please keep an eye on the Parish notice board and the Parish Council Facebook/website for further information.

Several of the most worn road name signs were replaced at the end of last year and we continue to monitor all street lights, signs, potholes and footpaths but if you notice any problems with these, please report them to the Clerk.

Communications

Our main sources of communication are the monthly Parish Council meetings, the Parish Council website and Facebook pages and the newsletters. Each monthly meeting begins with a 15 minute public session, this is your chance to come along and talk to us. The minutes of every meeting will be published on our website and also displayed on the notice board in the Church porch. We try and keep everyone up to date by posts on the Facebook page – if you would like to join in these conversations, please bear in mind our usage policy which is posted at the top of the page.

Speed Limits

Following the positive response from parishioners to a potential 20mph speed limit, Hertfordshire Highways conducted a speed and volume survey throughout the village during April. We await the outcome of this.

The MUGA

The resurfacing project is nearing an end, there are a couple of issues to iron out but we hope to have the work carried out this autumn.

General Data Protection Regulations

These new Regulations, which came into force in May 2018, mean we have to have your permission to retain any information about you. Everyone who was on our mailing list will have received an email asking them to confirm they are happy for us to retain their contact details. If we didn't get this confirmation, we will have removed your details – any queries regarding this please contact Steve Smith, Parish Clerk, who is also our Data Protection Officer.

Grants

During the year we have assisted St Mary's Church with their tree maintenance work, donated some money towards the Essex & Herts Air Ambulance, assisted the Football Club with the installation of a defibrillator at the Sports & Social Club and made a contribution towards an extension of the War Memorial (the work hasn't been carried out yet).

Alison Smither



A Report from our Member of Parliament

Firstly, I would like to say what an immense pleasure it has been to represent Pirton as your MP since June, and it is fantastic to have the opportunity to contribute to your annual report!

Pirton is a beautiful village, and I know you are all incredibly proud to live here. However, I also know that residents are very concerned about plans to build a number of houses in the area, as North Hertfordshire is earmarked for thousands of new homes to cope with the population growth in the South East.

I have read the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan, and I really admire the work of the Steering Group to ensure any new developments have input from the local community and reflect concerns of the village. I have previously met with the Steering Group to learn about what the aims are and how the process has worked. This is an area I am especially interested in, and I am currently working on ideas that will make it easier for local communities to have a say on how their area is affected when new developments are proposed. Having this neighbourhood plan considered alongside the district local plan is a great step, and I hope your lead is followed across other areas of North Herts.

Not being protected by the Green Belt does put Pirton in line for development, and I see in the Neighbourhood Plan that there is an acceptance of that. I think most people accept and agree that the UK needs many new homes, but building on the Green Belt is not the first option. It is a last resort, as we need to protect our countryside at the same time as providing good quality, affordable homes.

Pirton's proximity to Hitchin, and therefore to train services to London, brings me to another issue that I have been focusing on recently – the changes to services between Hitchin and London being introduced by Govia Thameslink Railway.

I have had a huge number of letters and emails from constituents concerned about the impact of these changes, and the impact on their lives, in particular worries around childcare. Another point often made is that people chose to live in and around Hitchin because it provided fantastic links to London while also being in beautiful countryside. Pirton is especially lucky to be on the edge of the Chilterns and only four miles from Hitchin. It would be incredibly disappointing if people felt it were not sustainable to continue living in such a wonderful village if their lives are going to be disrupted. I will be writing to the Secretary of State for Transport to raise the concerns of my constituents, and hope this issue will be taken seriously by both the Department and Govia Thameslink Railway.

Bim Afolami



County Councillor's Report

Last year has been a busy year (again!), and I have cherished the privilege of representing you at County Hall.

Many of the County Council's responsibilities have been under financial pressures, and it has become necessary, after six years of holding back increases, to make small increases to the Council Tax, in order to maintain essential services.

Hertfordshire is committed to premium Adult and Child care services.

Adult care costs us £371.2million per annum. Child care costs us £198.8million per annum
3,000 miles of roads in Hertfordshire,.....10,000 potholes filled! ...and still fighting to catch up.

Even with a further £1.8million of new grants to add to our £5million already committed to road repairs alone, it will take some time to make our road surfaces acceptable.

Roads and waste disposal costs the taxpayer £115.8million per annum.

I'm not going to bombard you with the massive cost of our other services, like education, fire, public health libraries, and so on.

Libraries are a good news story. Whilst other Authorities cut back and close their libraries, Herts. Library Service opens new facilities, and has recently totally refurbished Hitchin's library.

Personally, I have been pleased to support the Parish Council and community with grants, which I am sure help to support residents in the area.

Our Police and Crime Commissioner, David Lloyd has committed to support our hardworking, and much appreciated PCSOs. He promises more Officers in our areas, and a focus on community safety. Hertfordshire is a safe county, where people want to live.

We were saddened to lose our County Council leader, Rob Gordon, earlier this year. He worked tirelessly for Hertfordshire, and concealed his illness from us, as he worked for us, up to the end of his life. David Williams is our new leader, and whilst he has big shoes to fill, we know that he will confidently carry the massive responsibility of guiding our County into a secure future.

I am here to help you in any way I can, and I know that by working alongside your District Councillor, and your dedicated Parish Councillors, you can be confident that this Parish is in good hands!

Thank you

David

David Barnard

Rural Police Report



Hitchin Rural Police Report for 2017-2018

Following a number of staff changes last year due to retirements and staff moving to new roles within the organisation, we are pleased to have completed a year with no further changes to the Rural Safer Neighbourhood Team. It has been reassuring to hear from the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner, David Lloyd, that the current local policing model, which includes the Safer Neighbourhood Teams, will continue to be supported in its current format.

The team based at Hitchin Police Station is headed up by Inspector Richard Lilley and Sergeant Stephen Oliphant.

PC Keith Harding assisted by PCSO Phoebe Coates continues to maintain prime responsibility for CODICOTE and KNEBWORTH wards.

PC Dave Hine assisted by both PCSO Heather Burrows and PCSO Phoebe Coates continues to maintain prime responsibility for HITCHWOOD and CHESFIELD wards (Whitwell, St Pauls Walden, Bendish, Kimpton, Blackmore End Peters Green, Wymondley, St Ippolyts, Graveley and Chesfield which includes part of the Great Ashby estate in Stevenage).

PC Matt Jenkins assisted by PCSO Heather Burrows continues to maintain prime responsibility for OFFA, HOO and CADWELL wards (Pirton, Offley, Hexton, Lilley, Cockernhoe, Tea Green, Ley Green, Kings Walden, Breachwood Green, Preston and Holwell).

Community engagement is a key part of neighbourhood policing and over the years the team has arranged numerous events such as community engagement meetings to set local policing priorities, street meetings and police surgeries as well as being happy to attend village events such as fetes, village days and festivals. Experience has taught us that our rural community is generally more inclined to approach and speak to members of the team at organized village events and with that being the case we encourage event organizers to inform our team of any upcoming events and wherever possible we will be happy to attend. We had an extremely busy two days at the Whitwell steam fair last year that proved to be the perfect event for us to engage with the farming and game keeping community and we are looking forward to attending the fair again this year.

Unfortunately there has been a marked increase in recorded crimes across the whole of Hertfordshire from **72,515** to **81,371** comparing all crime types recorded between 1st April 2017 to the date of this report being generated (25th March 2018). Crimes in North Herts for the above recording period have increased from **6371** to **7375** which equates to a rise of 15.8%. Of the 7375 recorded crimes for North Herts , **937** crimes occurred in our villages compared to **751** for the same period last year.

'Safety, Justice and Reassurance'

www.herts.police.uk

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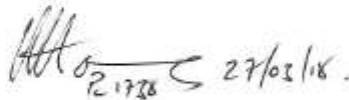


Being mindful of the marked increase in recorded crime we are keen to encourage our rural communities to continue to assist us wherever possible and thanks to local campaigns by existing Neighbourhood Watch members and the Safer Neighbourhood Team we now have approximately eleven thousand Neighbourhood Watch members in North Hertfordshire who receive crime prevention advice and notifications about local crime reports via the Online Watch Link (OWL) system.

We reported last year that there had been a notable increase in crime associated with poaching and hare coursing including the criminal damage and anti-social and threatening behavior that is so often attributed to those that take part in that type of activity. Following the success of the previous year's operations to combat this type of criminality, further resources were made available leading up to and during this year's shooting season. The result of the extra resources being made available along with dedicated poaching and hare coursing patrols has been a significant drop in reported incidents from **83** leading up to and during the 2016/2017 shooting season to **38** reported incidents this season.


Thank you for your continued support.

PC 1738 Keiths Harding



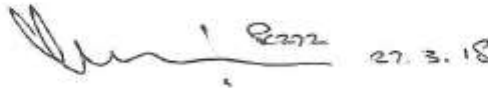
27/03/18.

PC 2750 Dave Hine



27th March 2018

PC 272 Matt Jenkins



27.3.18

PCSO 6510 Heather Burrows

PCSO 6274 Phoebe Coates

Hitchin Rural Policing Team

'Safety, Justice and Reassurance'

www.herts.police.uk

Financial Report

Village maintenance was one of the largest items of expenditure this year, as usual, with just under £1,900 being spent on our excellent new Street Cleaner, Tony Smart, £2,400 being spent on keeping the village greens cut and £600 on General Maintenance, most of which was incidental repairs to play equipment, benches and noticeboards. More work is needed to renovate our play areas, but costs are high and the Council will need extra funds from grants or S106 monies.

Salaries and office expenses accounted for just over £9,500, although of course the Councillors themselves receive no remuneration for their work. Subscriptions to professional bodies and publications cost around £950 and the allotments in Little Lane cost us around £150 to maintain. The Council was delighted to make the final payment on the loan it took out to purchase The Bury in 2002. Other expenditure on things such as the Neighbourhood Plan has all been funded from external grants. The Sports & Social Club carried out further improvements and maintenance but all of the cost was raised by the Club itself from its social events and was at no cost to the Parish Council.

Money has been set aside again this year to ensure that Blacksmith's Pond is well maintained. Regular treatments are applied to the pond, following professional advice, and measures will be taken to reduce leaf litter and other detritus from entering the water.

The Council spent money this year on the fight against excessive housing development in the village. Just under £3,000 was spent on a traffic survey and the Council employed the services of a planning expert to assist in their objections to unwelcome Planning Applications for large numbers of houses.

The Council awarded some grants this year, including £200 for the Herts & Essex Air Ambulance and £159 towards a defibrillator for the Sports & Social Club. As always, the Council was pleased to support the Royal British Legion by placing a wreath during the annual Remembrance Day Service.

On the income side: virtually all of the Parish Council's income is derived from the Annual Precept, which this year brought in just under £32,750. Grants were at a premium again this year with the only income being the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Grant, paid with the precept. This year that grant was worth £650 to the Council.

Village organisations are encouraged to apply to the Parish Council for grant funding, if their operations improve the life of Pirton residents. Interested organisations should go to the Council website and download an application form: www.pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk/documents and look for 'doc019' under 'Standard Documents'. Applications need to be made in advance of the Council's Annual Budget Meeting in November/December.

Parish Council finances are subject to local accountability and audit controls. The council employs the Parish Clerk as its Responsible Financial Officer (Local Govt. Act 1972 s151) to carry out the day-to-day administration and to prepare the annual accounts for audit. An independent internal auditor verifies the Council's financial procedures and processes with the annual accounts approved at the Parish Council meeting held on 12th April 2018. The Annual Return for year ended 31st March 2018 will be placed on notice boards and examined by the External Auditor, PKF Littlejohn.

Steve Smith

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Annual Accounts Year Ended 31st March 2018

	2016/17	2017/18
Balance B/Forward	62,956.51	53,465.20
RECEIPTS		
Precept	31,145.26	32,745.66
Grants	8,571.29	654.34
Donations	11,558.94	9,436.85
Rental Income	1,381.00	1,373.00
VAT recovered	6,410.42	5,125.44
Bank Interest	25.54	0.00
Miscellaneous	101.13	20.00
TOTAL	59,193.58	49,355.29
PAYMENTS		
Staff Costs & Expenses	9,119.12	9,655.27
Loan repayments	693.20	346.70
Council Expenses	3,922.01	3,674.73
Village Maintenance	9,960.65	6,886.22
PSSC/Recreation Ground	4,755.19	6,123.70
Allotments	162.51	152.63
Subscriptions	944.77	948.73
S137 Grants	1,300.10	0.00
Other Grants	1,047.00	1,035.00
Village Projects	30,005.09	16,483.23
VAT input	6,775.25	4,450.52
TOTAL	68,684.89	49,756.73
Increase/(Decrease) for the Year	(9,491.31)	(401.44)
Balance Carried Forward	53,465.20	53,063.76
Bank Balance at 31 March 2018		
Unity Trust Account		53,063.76

Stephen Smith, B.Sc., PSLCC
Responsible Financial Officer
Date: 14 April 2018

North Hertfordshire District Council Report

NHDC COUNCILLORS' REPORT....2017/8

Another busy Civic year closes,...and a new one starts! On personal notes, Faye has given birth to William, and that means that I've become a grandfather again!

The Council has been heavily engaged with the production of an acceptable Local Plan. The existence of a Local Plan is obligatory, and essential to prevent "hostile" planning applications across our District. The process is approaching the end, with the amendments to the submitted proposals having been scrutinised by the independent Government inspector through visits and weeks of public hearings. Faye and I attended several days of hearings, and made representations on behalf of our area. Mostly, we presented our researched evidence against development to the east of Luton, which would have a marked detrimental impact on our lanes and communities. We expect to see the final recommendations in a short while.

The new District Museum at Hitchin Town Hall is "partly" open now, and we expect that protracted negotiations between parties will enable full access shortly. This will be a super facility, for the benefit of all.

Financial cuts from Central Government causes an ongoing headache for the accountants at NHDC. There has been a small increase in Council tax, and other small charges, in order to meet inflation increases, and the need to maintain essential statutory services.

We have been pleased to make small grants available to communities. and we are delighted that we have retained our "Area Committees", which keep in touch with our communities, and retain small grant pots for community groups and clubs.

Our Ward includes numerous Parishes, and it is inevitable that some meet on the same evening each month. This, including NHDC meetings, means that attendance at Parish Council meetings is not as regular as previous. However, we are available 24/7 (nearly!) to talk and work with our communities.

We have been very active in supporting our Officers and the Police to control the ongoing criminal scourge of fly-tipping. Indeed, last week an offender was jailed for 2 years for a series of anti-social incidents. We will continue to prosecute offenders.

Luton Airport, through its owners Luton Council, have announced that it wishes to expand up to 18million passengers per annum. That produces millions of pounds in extra income for Luton.... but Luton refuses to accept any responsibility for the upkeep of our country lanes adjacent to it. We are lobbying, with our Member of Parliament to restrict the uncontrolled expansion next to our borders.

Please don't hesitate to contact us at any time, if you have something that we can help with.

Councillors Faye Frost and David Barnard

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