

Watermead Annual Parish Meeting

**Thursday 19 May 2016 at 7.00pm
The Village Hall, Watermead**

Attendees: Cllr Severn (Chair), Cllr A Schwab, Cllr I Schwab, Cllr Singleton, Cllr Toler, Cllr Rose, Noreen Shardlow (Clerk), Michelle Jackson (Assistant Parish Clerk), AVDC & BCC Cllr Netta Glover, AVDC Cllr Ashley Bond plus 2 members of the public (Graham Severn, Dot Toler)

- 1. Apologies**
None.
- 2. To agree the minutes of 21 May 2015**
The Minutes were agreed and signed by the Chairman.
- 3. To discuss any matters arising from those minutes**
None.
- 4. Watermead Parish Council**
Chairman's Annual Review May 2016

Introduction and thanks

The past year has been exceptionally challenging for this Parish Council. We have worked hard to build on the work of previous years, to adapt to changes in regulations for local government and to the impact of austerity measures. At the outset I must acknowledge the support given to me by our effective and dedicated team of councillors, all of whom are fully committed to public service.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Noreen Shardlow, our Parish Clerk, who has worked with our legal team, councillors and parishioners tirelessly, on a voluntary basis, to help prepare our legal cases against the crematorium including the numerous bundles of documents. Cllr Irina Schwab has offered legal expertise and professional legal services, charging highly discounted fees and doing much work free of charge, and ensuring our Counsel, Richard Kimblin QC has all the information needed, thus making further savings.

The Village View, a real feature of Watermead of which we are immensely proud, continues to grow, with a highly effective editorial and commercial team in place. We were sad to say goodbye to Paul Wilson, Advertising Manager, but Chris Cooling has proved an excellent successor, continuing Paul's good work in recruiting the advertisers needed to fund the publication we are grateful to them for their continued support. There is always room for more! The whole team continue to do an outstanding job on the View under Mary Singleton's editorship. Thank you.

Roger Cooling has served the community for many years, particularly in connection with the land to the east of Watermead planning application and appeals by Hallam Land. Roger joined the PC last year but I am sorry to report that he has decided due to pressure of other activities he is unable to continue. Thank you Roger for your work in connection with planning which I

know you will continue.

Our list of those to thank includes many volunteers who have helped us throughout the year with leaflet and Village View delivery, the Christmas Fair as well as litter picking. Special thanks to Dave Lang and Graham Severn who have both collected litter on a daily basis from the central area, around the lakes and in other roads; reporting damage and helping us to keep everything in good condition.

The way we work and communicate

Parishes of Watermead's size are not yet required to meet the new Transparency Code for smaller councils, but our Parish Clerk has already put in place many of the requirements since Councillors are keen to ensure that the Council's activities and work is visible to all, conscious at all times that we are guardians of public money, serving our community, always trying to receive best value.

Over the past year we have communicated with residents via a variety of communication channels including our noticeboards and website. Our mailing list of parishioners who have told us they want to be contacted with news and information about Watermead has become a vital tool in disseminating information quickly to a large audience. Our website has been updated and now includes PC policies and other documents, minutes and agendas, as well as information about Watermead and copies of the Village View. We continue to produce leaflets where necessary and have a band of volunteers who will turn out at very short notice to deliver to all homes. We also have a process by which we issue approved press releases in connection with major issues. Councillors are very happy to hear from parishioners and help in any way they can, but communication is best directed through the Clerk's office to ensure prompt action. Audited annual accounts can be inspected on request. A list of all payments made is included within the minutes of each Council meeting. As already stated the Village View is also an excellent way to communicate with parishioners.

The Council has also been keen to communicate with both the District and County Councils and Councillors and the Clerk have attended a number of meetings and briefings covering topics such as Transport, Devolved Services, Planning and Neighbourhood Planning, as well as specific local topics. Our County and District Councillors attend Parish Council meetings to provide updates on their activities. We continue to request representation from the local Policing team at our meetings.

Issues and Challenges

The absence of an Aylesbury Vale Local Plan has been a persistent concern. Put simply it means that planning decisions are largely decided on the basis of national guidelines (National Policy Planning Framework: NPPF), with the onus on planners to approve applications unless there are compelling reasons not to do so. As we have experienced, our voice, as a Consultee and Parish Council no longer carries the weight it might have done in the past. A new Aylesbury Vale Local Plan will be out for consultation later this year but will not be in force until at least 2017.

The most prominent and worrying issue arose around the application approved

by AVDC Planning for a crematorium on the site of the Riviera Restaurant. This appalling planning decision has resulted in a huge amount of time has been spent in fighting to have the permission overturned. Initial application for Judicial Review was refused, followed by an oral hearing which gave permission. The Judicial Review found against Watermead and our Counsel's advice is that we have a good chance of overturning the planning permission at Appeal. After thorough consultation with parishioners we have applied to the Court of Appeal for Permission to Appeal, the decision is awaited at the date of writing this report. We hope that sense will prevail.

The Inspector's report on the Appeal by Hallam Land against refusal of planning permission for 1500 houses on land to the East of Watermead was expected during March. However, the report has not yet been released, it is with the Secretary of State, pending review. We trust that sense prevails. We have considered other planning applications during the last year made by residents for extensions and other alterations to their homes. The Parish Council's is a consultee on planning and is not the responsible Authority. However, we inspect plans, visit application sites if necessary and ensure that we are clear about the application before commenting. The PC is allowed to support, object or be neutral on applications. We can also ask to speak at Planning Committee and Strategic Development Committee meetings either in support or against an application. As we have seen, it is clear that even with strong planning reasons to refuse an application Aylesbury Vale District Council takes some very bad planning decisions. This is most disappointing.

Bucks County Council has been encouraging PCs to take over grass-cutting of verges and related services and we agreed that we would do this last year. Our appointed contractor has done an excellent job and our land and highway verges are now well maintained.

We are frustrated by the appalling condition of roads in Buckinghamshire. The County Council advised they have no money to repair them, recently reducing their services still further meaning that only larger potholes and dangerous areas will be considered for repair. We understand their shortage of money, but can only express regret that the roads, verges, gutters and so on are in such a terrible state. Watermead residents have constantly reported and complained that the rising bollards at the end of Lark Vale have not worked for months. We have been told repeatedly that there are issues with availability of engineers and money. The message constantly reinforced by individuals and this Council is that must be repaired without delay. Please remember it is an offence to drive through the traffic lights on red. It is dangerous and unnecessary.

Our Parish Precept (council tax payable to Watermead Parish Council) was set at £71,000 for the current financial year, an increase of 3.57%, giving a cost for an average Band D property of £1.42 per week. Every effort has been made to preserve and improve the services we offer, even though we have received less money from Bucks County Council to carry out devolved services.

We have the never-ending battle against dog mess, litter, and other anti-social behaviour which means wildlife is disturbed. We would ask everyone to take particular care to avoid causing these nuisances for other residents, particularly during the nesting season for our birds.

Community Activities

Our Christmas Fair and Carol Concert in December were, as ever, a huge success. We raised a significant sum for charity and enjoyed singing carols led by Safe Sax, our new Christmas band. Father Christmas was his usual jolly self, spending a long time handing out presents and having his photograph taken many times, ably assisted by his local Elf, Dot Toler. Our thanks to Mary Singleton and her WI colleagues for organising the carols and the usual delicious snacks and warming mulled wine, such a feature of Christmas in Watermead.

New this year was a Christmas tree recycling scheme which saw large numbers of trees being left at the collection point to be used for environmental projects. We had enough trees to line the outer edge of the copse, providing a natural nesting habitat for birds. We will continue with this initiative.

The Parish Council decided not to hold an event this year, but we were delighted when Kelvin indicated that the Watermead Inn they would like to arrange a May Day fete, (which has now taken place). It was a great success, enjoyed by many visitors and residents who watched our May Queen being crowned, Maypole dancing, Morris men and many other activities throughout the day. Thank you to Kelvin, Ruth Mayhew, Nicky and their team for providing this event which was much enjoyed.

Our allotments continue to be popular, with now let to the keen gardeners in the community. Not only are they now self-financing, the produce is great and sold at occasional sales during the year which benefits all. We now have 55 plots let with only 3 more available.

The Piscatorials continue to rent, manage and bailiff the small lake. They have sought the assistance of the Environment Agency this year to help them to manage fish stocks and the ecology of the water but they do a great job. An environmentalist visiting Watermead told us that he could tell immediately that the small lake was well managed. The Piscatorials do have some memberships available, the joining fee is just £10 and subscription £40 a year. If you would like to try before you join the Parish Clerk has day tickets available.

Fundraising activities took place throughout the year: The MacMillan Coffee Morning, organised by Marcia Lang was, once again, a great success. It has proved extremely popular. As well as raising funds for MacMillan we have the opportunity to meet people and the event is always very much enjoyed by those attending. Another coffee morning was held in aid of Alzheimer's, it was most enjoyable with yet more delicious cake. Another well-attended and much enjoyed event was the fully booked Quiz Night organised by Lythan and her team at Watermead Dental Surgery in aid of Relay for Life.

Our inaugural Christmas Lights competition was great fun. The lights were lovely and the final winners were selected from 3 Mallard Close, 3 Watermeadow, 3 Raven Close and 3 Sparrow Close. 3 Mallard Close was the outright winner, congratulations to Frank and Jeanette Glynn. We look forward to seeing this year's lighting effects.

Community activities are warmly encouraged. They play a large part in making Watermead such a good place to live whether it be the WI, arts and

crafts activities or events.

The Coming Year

In addition to all of the routine work of the council, we hope that we will be able to reach some sort of agreement to return the cricket pitch to the community. We are in touch with our contacts.

Speeding has been an issue for a while and we have now purchased a Mobile Vehicle Activated Sign (MVAS) which will complement our Vehicle Activated Signs in place on the link road. Various sites have been chosen for the MVAS. The machine will be moved round the village and data downloaded to its dedicated laptop, shared with the Police. This will allow us to understand where we do have speeding problems and will help us to decide on suitable measures to discourage speeding. (It is worth noting that most surveys around the country show that the majority of speeding offenders are local residents!).

The MVAS will be reinforced by a new Community Speed Watch scheme. This will require a number of volunteers to be trained by Thames Valley Police to operate hand held speed cameras ('speed guns'). The training is simple and volunteers are warmly encouraged to come forward to help with this important scheme. The work is not onerous and can be done whenever two volunteers are free. It will be useful to be able to carry out checking at different times and on different days, as well as in different locations. Data from these speeding devices is relayed to the Police traffic team who record the details of cars speeding and will initially write to drivers but if they are recorded as speeding again will consider, and take, suitable action. If you would like to help please contact Noreen Shardlow.

We will be sharing the equipment with Berryfields Parish Council where another team of volunteers is being recruited.

Cllr Adrian Schwab – The PC has a tremendous team of Cllrs with support from Noreen Shardlow and Michelle Jackson. The PC has faced many challenges over the year and through this time the Chair has led by example holding meetings with David Lidington, District & County Councillors and even Westerleigh themselves in the fight against the crematorium as well as public consultation days. No stone has been left unturned which shows the strength of character of the Chair. A vote of thanks was given to Cllr Sue Severn for her leadership, commitment and so many initiatives in making a difference to the people of Watermead.

5. Parishioners' Views

Cllr Rose – with regard to the Christmas tree recycling project, whether to continue had not yet been discussed or agreed by the PC. He believed the dead trees to have been non-effective and an eyesore. Graham Severn disagreed saying they have prevented trespassing into the copse area. Cllr Singleton commented that the original plan had been to use to Christmas trees as bank protection around the lakes but were unable to.

Dot Toler asked whether the pub would be permitted to repeat the May Fair in future years given its huge success. The PC agreed that it would if the pub made an application to do so.

It was noted that Mr Pardis has commenced dismantling areas of the Riviera.

It was agreed to extend the meeting beyond 7.30pm

A leaflet had been received by Cllr Rose which included an update on the crematorium quoting Cllr Ashley Bond as having said that AVDC had not been able to refuse the application. This was discussed with Cllr Bond and AVDC's total disregard of the S52 agreement.

AVDC Cllr Ashley Bond - Aylesbury Vale District Council has continued to make significant savings to fill the funding gap created by annual reductions of Government Grants. The figure for the last six years stands at £14m. That savings figure is made up of costs reductions through increased efficiency plus additional income from commercial activities and asset rental.

The work is ongoing because we anticipate that a further £6m will be needed over the next three years until Government Grant disappears altogether.

Cost savings can't be generated merely by cutting out layers of management - that is only a race to the bottom and service provision will fail. What we're doing is creating a completely new organisational structure with just two main departments - Community Fulfilment and Customer Fulfilment.

The same range of services will be provided, plus additional ones determined by our customers, but the myriad of departments will disappear. This commercial approach to running a local authority is ground breaking, but essential to ensure that AVDC survives. Many other authorities across the country have buried their heads in the sand for too long - reluctant to implement changes and hoping that grants will return. They won't, and those councils run a serious risk of going broke in the very near future.

Some authorities have recognised that what we've done at AVDC is worthy of a closer look and 117 delegates attended a conference in February where we gave them an insight into how we've achieved such large savings. That was a free event but at a follow-up event a month later delegates paid to hear more details. We're now working with ten of those authorities who'll be engaging us on a consultancy basis to help them implement some of our ideas.

So what have we done?

We've moved completely to the cloud, using Amazon Cloud Services to store our data. No more PCs on desks and no servers in our offices thus reducing our maintenance costs dramatically. We were the first local authority in the country to go along this route.

We've introduced My Account. This is a facility that enables customers to interrogate our systems, and their personal information, whenever they want. They can set up direct debits to pay for their services, claim discounts on council tax, apply for licences and benefits, report problems with their bin collections - and that list will grow. It means that we can deploy the staff that used to handle these matters on more productive work.

The Vale Lottery was introduced last November - again, we were the first local authority to set one up - and it's already raising £60,000 a year for good causes across The Vale. To date, 111 community groups have signed up and

people who enter can choose from that list where they'd like their money to go. 58 pence in the pound goes to good causes.

We're continuing to invest in commercial property and we've now spent £100m improving Aylesbury Town Centre by way of building the theatre, Waitrose, Travelodge and the new University. Not only will this investment make Aylesbury a better place to visit, improving the local economy, but it'll generate rental income for the Council. The next phase is to build four new restaurants with residential units above. We've just exchanged contracts with our developer partner and we're pressing on with the submission of a detailed planning application.

Aylesbury Vale Broadband was set up last year to provide superfast broadband in rural parts of The Vale. The pilot project in North Marston was successful so we're now pushing on to Granborough and looking for other areas to cover. Over 50 communities have registered an interest which makes choosing very difficult. We intended to provide **superfast** broadband but we are now offering **ultrafast** broadband - speeds of 300Mbps. BT has been extremely unhelpful and is trying to thwart our plans - a sure sign that we're doing things right and stepping on their toes - but we're adamant that we'll push on with our programme.

We've formed two other new companies to further our commercial aspirations. One will seek to provide additional services and products to residents and the other to commercial organisations. I can't tell you what those services and products will be yet because we'll be asking our customers what they want, rather than providing products that we think they want. We'll be sending out regular newsletters to those who've registered an interest to build up a customer relationship and generate ideas. Initially, we're targeting customers who've signed up to our brown bin service because they're already paying for an extra service and the response has been very encouraging.

Council Tax was increased by 1.99% this year - that amounts to £2.70 a year for the average household. Our longer term plan is to do away with a council tax charge altogether, but that will depend on the success of our commercial activities.

And whilst this has all been going on there's been the small matter of preparing our Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan. This will determine the location of housing and economic growth for the next 20 years, with its associated infrastructure. At present we're looking to accommodate around 31,000 new homes - 21,000 for our own requirements and 10,000 for the unmet needs of other authorities. We're insisting that detailed green belt and brownfield site reviews are undertaken by those other authorities to ensure that we're not being asked to take on housing that could be provided locally.

That's a quick run-through of where we are and what we've been doing. There's lots going on and more to come but if anyone would like more details on what I've presented then I'm happy to take questions now or please contact me at home.

AVDC & BCC Cllr Netta Glover -

Money

BCC's council tax was increased by 3.9% - 1.99% of that was to be spent

exclusively on Adult Social care. It won't cover the cost but it will help. BCC gets 9% of the Business Rates retention money despite being responsible for roads, education and social care. The council's government grant will fall from just over £60 million in 2013/14 to £24 million in 2016/2017, £8.1m in 2018/19. After that there will be no government grants.

Education

The government has pulled back on insisting that all schools must switch to Academy status. Only failing or poorly performing schools will be asked to take that route. Most Buckinghamshire schools are classed as good.

To view our Local Offer webpage visit at www.bucksfamilyinfo.org.

Information on childcare and things to do.

Children's social care

There has been a considerable improvement in Bucks county council's performance since the poor Ofsted report. There is a fairly new team running the Department who seem to have got on top of things in rather a big way. One of the improvements has been as a result of MASH – multiple agency safe-guarding hub where social workers, police, gps and schools share information to make sure nothing gets overlooked. This is all done with the permission of those people involved and of course under very confidential cover

The Dept. of Education has recognised that BCC has made significant improvements to its services and our overarching commitment to providing an improved service is showing clear signs of progress. There will be a further review in early summer.

Incinerator – going well. Commissioning is well underway and rubbish is being burnt already. Handover is expected to take place very soon with the formal opening in the autumn. There will of course be plenty of publicity at the time of handover when the opportunity will be taken to point out the many advantages that the incinerator will bring. There will be webpage containing all sorts of information. It is anticipated that the plant will deliver significant savings in the long term. Progress can be followed on line.

Buckscc.gov.uk/environment/waste-recycling-and-treatment/energy-from-waste

Roads and Pavements: Roads will have £15 million spent on them this financial year – Pavements £1 million. Next year it will be £12 million and £1 million respectively and after that £10 and £1 million from then on.

News Business Intelligence Team: The team has been created to bring together people from across the organisation who will be helping us place a stronger emphasis on business insight. We have always gathered a lot of information about our communities but insight is about using this information to get a better understanding of their future needs and expectations, so we can design and deliver services better.

Unitary: Martin Tett agrees with a number of the principles expressed in Aylesbury Vale district Council's recent article including the fact that in the medium term no change is not a realistic option and that unitary councils tend to be more efficient and provide the public with better more joined up and integrated services - for example housing growth, the necessary infrastructure and its funding would be better planned together by one council. Any change

of course means discussing detailed business cases for all potential options and making sure each is objectively reviewed. The key thing is not protecting existing structures whether they are district boundaries or county organisations. We should come together to design an entirely new council structure for the whole of Bucks that delivers the best value to its residents and looks forward to more integrated working with town and parish councils, the police and health while still continuing to protect the most vulnerable. This is potentially an exciting opportunity to replace our 40-year-old structures with new arrangements fit for today's public service demands.

BCC is organising a business case to explore the benefits of a new model of local government for Buckinghamshire. It will invite the four District Councils and strategic stakeholders such as the Bucks Thames Valley LEP to collaborate with the County Council in discussions on how local government in Buckinghamshire might be modernised. Aylesbury Vale has already considered two unitary authorities so this business case will explore the option of a single unitary council for Buckinghamshire.

Watermead May 2016 ordinary

Good News: 6 men have been sentenced to a total of 41 years at Leeds Crown Court after the police dismantled a countrywide bank fraud in which elderly victims including six pensioners from Aylesbury were swindled out of thousands of pounds. The thieves are now all safely locked up. It was a scam where the perpetrator telephones the victim pretending to be from his bank and persuades him to visit the bank and draw out thousands of pounds to hand over to a courier and that's the last sees of his money.

Libraries get residents on the digital journey

More than 400 residents have started their first digital journey through one of Buckinghamshire's libraries in the past year.

The County Council's nine main libraries have been running Learn My Way courses for people with no internet experience, to teach them how to get online. Between April 2015 and March 2016 library staff had helped 427 people through digital inclusion courses.

The sessions offer a wide range of training from learning how to apply for a job online, filling in Government forms, to reading e-books, and even keeping in touch with family overseas by Skype.

Information about the courses is available in all libraries.

16.19 (1) Planning Matters 18 Kingfisher Update

Notification has been received that this application will be discussed at the Development Management Committee on 19th May 2016. We have the opportunity to address at the committee with our views on this application. A similar invite is being extended to any others who made representations. Only a few days notice was given for this meeting and the letter does not state it would be pulled from the agenda if the PC did not speak. The Clerk to email the correspondence to Cllr Bond with a view to a meeting being arranged as soon as possible to allow the PC and residents to have their say.

6. Date of next Annual Parish Meeting

18 May 2017 7.00pm

Cllr Severn thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting closed at 8.02pm.