

# Calvert Green Parish Council

## Chairman's Report 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021

With the impact of the global coronavirus pandemic on the community, the last year has been unprecedented for the parish council. We started on a high by recruiting Tracy Horsfield as our parish clerk. Tracy took over from Angie but at that time with no face-to-face meetings, Tracy was very much left on her own with no formal handover for several months. I'd like to thank Tracy for the great work that she continues to do for the parish council.

It was also very encouraging to have had a full quota of parish councillors with Cllr Sheila Thiyagarajah joining at the start of the last annual session of the council.

Having to adapt to virtual parish council meetings has also presented its challenges and I'm pleased that as a parish council we managed so well and continued to get public attendance from parishioners, while thankfully avoiding the same media attention as other parish council Zoom sessions.

Despite the pandemic, lockdowns and other restrictions, the parish council has managed some key achievements throughout the last year which I will touch on briefly in this report.

Parish council elections were rescheduled to 2021 and Calvert Green parish council was uncontested. Sadly, councillors Sheila Thiyagarajah and Thelma Watson both chose not to stand again for their own reasons. This is a great loss to the parish council and I thank them for their support and achievements throughout the last year. The parish council now consists of 5 councillors and I'd like to thank Councillors Liza Bangham, Carl Blakely, Adele Decent and Kirsten Gittins for their continued support. This leaves us with two vacancies which I hope we are quickly able to fill with so many pressing items appearing on our meeting agendas.

It's frustrating that many members of the community still don't realise that parish councillors are unpaid. It is not easy finding the additional time necessary to dedicate to helping our community – we all have a thousand and one other pressing matters to attend to, and when we finally do find that small window of relaxation time, it is very difficult to share that time between family and community, so I want to thank my fellow Councillors for all their help and support to the parish council.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank those members of the parish who have made the effort to attend meetings during the year. Not only are these parishioners a good source of feedback from the community, but equally as important, their presence is a sign of support for the parish council and it is really appreciated by us all. I'd like to make a special mention and thank you to David Russell, our neighbourhood watch co-ordinator who attends most parish council meetings and assists the parish council.

### **Observations and Main Achievements**

Due to a change in legislation, our parish council website had to be changed at short notice to provide accessibility. I'd like to thank Tracy for handling this as one of her first tasks as parish clerk.

Although other councillors have also been involved, I'd like to thank Liza and Sheila in particular for

their help with the neighbourhood plan. We were successful in gaining agreement from Charndon parish council to include additional land alongside Calvert Green into the designated area for our neighbourhood plan scope. The designated area request was successful and we have recently had our funding confirmed to cover consultancy costs for the neighbourhood plan which (when in place) will undoubtedly enable us more influence in future planning applications.

Although we are only just starting the neighbourhood plan process, a lot of work has already been done to support it. Liza compiled a very comprehensive survey which was distributed with a good response rate. Sheila did a great job of analysing the data and presenting it in a much more useable format which will help the neighbourhood plan steering group which includes members of the community.

Throughout the year we have seen a range of planning consultations and applications ranging from affordable housing alongside the village to a solar farm and prison expansion in the local area. The parish council continues to represent the views of parishioners, but is restricted on grounds to object and final decisions are made by the Planning Authority,

The biggest impact by far to the community over the last year has been the major projects on our doorstep. It was great that the OxCam expressway project has been cancelled, but we are seeing the start of the major impact and blight from the HS2 and EWR projects which will continue to provide challenges in the local area over the next decade. The parish council voted to oppose HS2 many years ago and has petitioned in parliament and continued to fight for the best we can get for the community. We do have £250,000 available for environmental mitigation projects which we need to seriously consider, but until the full detailed design of HS2 is published, it is difficult to know how best to use this.

Surreptitious changes made to HS2 under the HS2 act have seen huge additional changes, including a concrete batching plant, line height increases, mass vegetation destruction and prolonged drilling into Calvert Green – all of which severely impacts our community and is something we have little control over but do continue to fight.

I'd like to add thanks to our MP Greg Smith who managed to give our local community the opportunity to provide oral evidence to the transport select committee in January. I represented 5 local parishes and the appearance was widely reported and has made a difference – with the introduction of marshalls by Buckinghamshire Council and a renewed focus by HS2 and EWR in the area. I'd also like to thank Cllr Angela Macpherson for her continued support to our parish on HS2 and all other matters.

In 2018 it was agreed that the pétanque pit would be converted to a tranquil community garden. This work was agreed to be undertaken by HS2 as a community project. Plans were agreed and work was scheduled in September 2019. However, HS2 pulled out and while it remains a commitment from them, unfortunately the area sits in an overgrown neglected state. We are chasing HS2 again and I'd like to see this area transformed during the coming year. Thanks to Adele for organising the new oak benches – made from HS2 felled oak trees which I hope to soon see in the new community garden.

Adele has also been instrumental in liaising with Buckingham Council and engaging with the community on the new play parks in the village. It's great that through community feedback we were able to retain and overhaul the Rustic Close play area specifically for younger children with the focus now being on a new consolidated play area for a wider age group on the village green.

Carl in conjunction with David Russell are also looking into replacing and installing new bollards and other funding options available to us for the upkeep of the parish.

While we are still in discussions with Buckinghamshire Council about the ongoing leasing agreement for the hall extension, I am pleased to report that this is now nearing completion. Unfortunately, we had to make some compromises, but it should be formalised very soon. We are also pleased that the formal handover for operation of the village hall has now been agreed between the parish council and the CGCA. Hopefully, with coronavirus restrictions starting to ease we will see increased use of the village hall and bar facilities during this coming year.

## **Summary**

Last year was a challenging time for the parish council, but uplifting that we had such a good, positive group of councillors. As a parish council, we have to work more effectively over the coming year if we are to get the best for Calvert Green. If there are any residents who would like to help us to manage or improve our village, we would welcome any help that you can give.

**Phil Gaskin**

Chairman, Calvert Green Parish Council