

ANNUAL REPORT TO BLOXHAM PARISH COUNCIL APRIL 2021

This seems like a very strange way to give my annual report to the parish council but at the moment it is the only way that 'normal' things can be done although I do hope to be able to speak to you all on-line on the actual day of the Annual Parish Meeting (this of course depends on the reliability of the internet).

This last 12 months have been a very strange time for everyone and for some a very sad time. Who would have thought you could have held all meetings on line - which includes all parish council meetings, all Full Council meetings, all Planning meetings and so on. It has certainly taken some time to get used to it all, remembering which buttons to press and which not to press and also remembering to 'unmute' yourself when wanting to speak. One of my problems has been trying to keep my cat from taking over the screen as for some reason he is fascinated when I go onto these meetings!!

It has also been a very different way of working with the council for me, as living so close to the council offices, if I needed to speak to several officers about any problems, it was easier just to get in the car and drive to Bodicote and sort out any problems (usually planning) face to face which was usually quite a quick process but with all the officers working from home, it can take me 2 or 3 days instead of 2 or 3 hours.

The first month of this council year (May 2020), we were in full lockdown and everyone was still trying to get their heads around the new way of working - April had been particularly quiet as I don't think anyone quite knew what to do or not to do, but problems started to arise and we just had to get on with it.

One of the main problems at that time was the Country Park at the Miller Homes site on the Tadmarton Road, where there were major problems with works which had not been completed or which had not been done correctly and also unauthorised access from this park into the Slade Nature Reserve. After a lot of emails, backwards and forwards between the developers, the parish council and the District Council, it was decided that the only way forward was to have a site visit with all the parties and concerned - this turned into THREE site visits, along with Steve Phipps of the Parish Council (I think at that time we were the only people who did a site visit of any kind) of course they were all socially distanced and it was quite hard shouting comments and questions with several people spread across a large area of the park.

The first site visit gave us some misplaced confidence as the developers made notes about all the problems that needed fixing and even gave us timings when the work would be done, with health and safety problems being the most important aspects to be done. However this confidence did not last long when we realised that nothing was happening and within 3 weeks we had to have another site meeting. A few things were done in the next week or so but we were still having problems with the perimeter fence and the unauthorised access to The Slade. This seemed to go on for a very long while and during this time both Steve Phipps and I did various walks around the park trying to check on what had been done and not been done. We did finally manage to get most of the things sorted out although I understand that there are still some outstanding matters which are being looked at by Cherwell officers.

The next few months passed in a bit of a blur, luckily there were no more large scale

planning applications, I don't know how we would have coped with one of those! There were certainly a lot of planning applications for extensions to existing housing, I think everyone must have decided they needed extra space if they were going to have to work from home, and this continues at the same pace. I even managed to sort out a litter problem in Banbury (definitely not my area), which had been reported to me by a Bloxham resident.

I do think we need to give our refuse collectors a pat on the back and a big thank you for all their hard work during this very stressful year, they never failed to turn up and do their job brilliantly and I know that they have had a lot more waste to deal with because of everyone being home all day and also a huge amount of cardboard recycling from all the on-line shopping, and that is without everyone seemingly having a massive clear out of their cupboards etc.

It was pleasing to see that we finally got the remaining bit of the A361 (from Strawberry Terrace to the Warriner) resurfaced (thanks to our County Councillor, Kieron Mallon who has pushed to get this done since they finished the other part last year) and it is a big improvement.

Finally, I am not sure that everyone knows that this will be my last Annual Parish Meeting, as I am standing down from the District council this year, after 11 years. I should have finished last May (that being the end of my 4 year term of office) but the pandemic put paid to my retirement as all elections were cancelled and rather than leave the Ward with one less councillor, I said I would stay on for one more year, hoping this would be all over by then. Obviously it is not all over, although things are looking a lot brighter than last year, and the elections are going ahead this year. You will still have the other two councillors - Cllr Mike Bishop and Cllr Andrew McHugh representing Bloxham, Bodicote and Adderbury but you will be asked to vote for someone else at the election on 6th May.

I have really enjoyed being your councillor for the past 11 years (not quite so much this last year with all the problems it created) and I am sure I will miss the whole business of the council and the contact I have had with so many of you. I do wish everyone all the very best, stay safe - stay well and give me a wave or a toot if you see me in the village.

Kindest regards to everyone.

District Councillor Christine Heath