

Message from the Kim Moloney, Chairman of Grendon Underwood Parish Council

22 May 2020

It is with great sadness, that I have to write this in the middle of a devastating pandemic sweeping our Country and across all Communities the length and breadth of our Land. Our lives, professional and personal, have been dealt a blow of unprecedented severity that it will take some time to recover from. My heart goes out to all of you who are suffering loss, tragedy and grief at this time.

Yet, even in the midst of all this fear, worry and desperation, I see in our community daily acts of kindness, compassion and selflessness that lift the spirits and confirm we will get through this and we will do it together.

I know many of you have volunteered to support those relatives, friends & neighbours less able to cope themselves. You know who you are and I thank each and every one of you most sincerely. It just goes to show what I have felt all along, when the need arises, that we are so lucky to live in our little patch of Buckinghamshire.

I would just like to mention our wonderful village shop & post office and how grateful we all are that they remained open and well stocked and will pack parcels for volunteer delivery. They are a vital asset to the sustainability of our community and we wish them well. Also, many thanks to Wendy our dear post lady. She has maintained her sense of humour throughout in spite of the additional burden of increased online order deliveries.

We were delighted when the Swan re-opened last year after extensive renovation works. Sadly, they have had to close for the pandemic but we hope to be supporting them soon.

So my third full year as Chairman, whilst closing on a sad note, has seen much activity and the achievement of many objectives and projects. See below.

Again, I am indebted to my fellow councillors who have taken lead roles in a number of Council initiatives. I never cease to be amazed how they volunteer so readily while holding down jobs & careers as well!

Especially, my thanks go to Cllr Benfield for his support as my Deputy in many fields especially with his freely given maintenance work all around the village; Cllr Jackman as the council's lead on the MUGA project & its representative on the Village Hall Committee and at the Saye & Sele Foundation; Cllr Hedgecox heads our Personnel Committee; Cllr Mackenzie who, in collaboration with the Go30 resident group, is championing our efforts to stamp out speeding through the village.

I would also like to put on record the Council's, and my personal, thanks to BC Cllr Angela Macpherson who remains a faithful friend of Grendon Underwood and its residents, even as Buckinghamshire Council beds down as a brand-new Unitary Authority. Similarly, Cllr Cameron Branston in his new position as a Councillor for the Grendon Underwood Unitary Ward. And, behind it all, our highly efficient Clerk, Barry keeps us on the straight and narrow. He has gone beyond the call of duty and worked tirelessly especially with grant applications and refunds bringing in substantial sums for the Parish. I thank them all.

Locally

Our initiative started last year, to ensure all Council business is open, transparent and subject to regular scrutiny, is now bedded down and working well.

I continue to push for more collaboration with village stakeholders wherever possible and hope to seek meetings when we are all able to get back to normal.

Planning

A number of large-scale developments have been refused at Appeal and several have been completed. The net effect being Council needing to decide where a significant sum of S106 money should be allocated by the Bucks Authority. We are committed to building the MUGA on the playing field as soon as conditions allow and other projects are under consideration.

Whilst a proportionate & sustainable growth rate has always been acceptable to residents, aggressive, inappropriate, non-sustainable large-scale developer proposals remain a concern. I remain convinced, for a village of our size, Grendon already makes its fair contribution to housing need. But we know the pressure for large scale development will only continue to grow as HS2 and EWR and maybe the OxCam Arc become reality.

HS2 and EWR depots construction work has already started and we are already seeing significant increases in HGV traffic along Broadway & Edgcott Road. With Government now having given the go-ahead, I fear the best we can hope for is to get some local community funding for road improvements. We continue to battle for it.

The OxCam Arc [with a million homes concentrated in a small area], is still not finalised and is still worth doing everything we can to prevent it happening. Our MP is supportive and hopeful.

Finances

I refer to the RFO Annual Report which shows continued progress on the pledge made last year to oversee a controlled, progressive, but prudent campaign to gradually reduce reserves with the aim of getting more of this money back into the community.

Community

At Christmas we were presented with the most wonderful Christmas tree from K & Z Sheds Limited, the tree stood in pride of place in our Village Hall. There are now three Memorial Benches in the village - a Community Project initiated directly in the community and supported with funding from AVDC, the Scouts, the Alastair Haddow Memorial Fund and the Council. The groundworks were completed by Haydon Hill Paving Limited and Cllr Benfield on a voluntary basis. We have seen the completion of the toilet upgrade at the Village Hall, a most welcome improvement. Also, the completion of a capital project to upgrade our Footpath and Street Lights to LED. None of these have any effect on Council Tax. I refer you to the RFO Annual Report for more detail. We also have our new web site on www.gupc.org.uk

Our plans for next year include speed reduction signs by school, church crossing beacons, litter bins at the Memorial Bench locations, digitisation of a village archive, collaborations with school & other community cohesion ideas. Council will have some difficult decisions to make and inevitably some will be disappointed. Council will always prioritise on its statutory duties, including safety issues and then discretionary projects as money allows.

The MUGA project is ready to go once conditions allow. The project is funded by S106 money which comes from levies on developers building in the village.

We requested a bigger precept this year to reflect the growth in population in the village and this will go towards community projects as well. Again, no effect on Council Tax.

Crime

Thankfully, we enjoy relatively low crime rates but, staggeringly, there are those who would seek to take advantage during the lock down. Unbelievable! Do take care online and be cautious should anyone you don't know offer help.

County

The new Unitary Authority came into being on 1 April. We continue to be a Planning Consultee. Waste services and Highways services remain business as usual.

The VALP is still 'live' and awaiting the Inspectors finalised comments. We concur that growth in a particular location should be sustainable and driven by need - not developer profit. Our Planning Response Policy reflects many of the principals outlined in the Plan. How development required in the Plan is incorporated in the OxCam Arc development proposals remains open,

I do commend reading the other reports from our community stakeholders - BC, TVP, VH.

On behalf of the full Council, we wish you every good fortune. Take care. Stay safe; Stay well. Good luck.

Kim Moloney, Chairman of Grendon Underwood Parish Council