



OAKLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Parish Meeting 2022 Chairman's report: 2021/22

Welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting (APM) of Oakley. Every parish in England MUST have such a meeting between 1 March and 1 June each year. The APM is the relatively informal meeting where the Parish Council invite the public (and press) to hear reports from the Parish Council Chairman and County Councillors; also reports from any organisations, clubs and charities within the village. There is an opportunity for the public to express their opinions on what the council are doing. No votes taken at this meeting are binding on the Parish Council, although it may wish to consider any comments at the next Parish Council meeting (7th June).

Next month, there was the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council (AMPC). This is a formal meeting of the Parish Council where it elects the chairman and vice chairman, make other annual appointments and review their insurance, risk management policies, etc.

The Parish Council sits on the first Tuesday of each month. Last year the average meeting lasted two hours, and on average there were 55 minuted items per month – that is 30 minutes extra and 20 extra items over the previous year.

Our annual funding for 2022-2023, called the Parish precept, has been set at £22,650, this is a 10% increase on the previous year. The reason for the hike is cover increases we are seeing in electricity, mowing and wages, as well as devolved services costs. Because of the involvement of the two Community Benefit Societies (CBS's), we do not currently believe the Chandos Arms or the Community Shop will drastically affect our running costs.

This time last year I mentioned in my address the bombshell of the possible de-licensing by Punch Taverns of the Chandos Arms. Over the last year, we have had a year like none other! I've been on the Parish Council for 28 years; in that time, I had only known one extraordinary Parish Council meeting before. Last year we had four!

Obviously, THE priority for the Parish Council was to save the Chandos Arms from being closed. As you all probably know, we secured a Public Works Loan to buy the pub. Sounds simple, but anyone who has bought a house will know nothing is simple, not everything goes to plan, solicitors often do not have priorities as you do and things crop up. However, together we managed our way through a very tough four months and by the end of September we owned the pub. That was not the end of the story. That was the start, Parish Councils do not run pubs, we had to set up a (CBS), Oakley Village Pub Limited, whose *raison d'être* is to manage the pub. You will hear a bit more on that later. There are leases and contracts and more solicitors! During the year there have been 115 minuted Chandos items on our agenda and there have been over twenty votes on the way forward. The good news is Brandon and Matteo opened the Chandos a few weeks back.

Whilst the Chandos project has taken a lot of our time, there have been other projects the Parish Council has been involved with.

- The Community Shop is another CBS-managed scheme, and this is also moving forward, although with the Chandos purchase, the foot had to be taken off the pedal for a few months. You'll hear more on this later.
- Gigaclear were engaged over a year ago with the promise of bringing superfast fibre Broadband into Oakley. At a meeting last month, Gigaclear have said by the end of June 2022, all homes will be ready to be connected to that superfast network.
- The Community Bus service, which has been a great success and even running at a profit. More on this later.
- The Playing Field Development Project (2022) is set up to use S106 money (which is given to the Parish Council by housing developers) and a grant from SITA/WREN. From this picnic tables will be bought for various parts of the Playing Field, new play equipment will be purchased and we are planning for a perimeter path around the playing field.
- A flood relief scheme in Little London Green was also undertaken in the later months of 2021.
- The Playing Field ditch has been cleared

With all this happening, the Parish Council have kept on with the day-to-day work of a 'normal' parish. Our interaction with Transport for Bucks (Highways) at Bucks Council is one of our main challenges, there have been few road defects, however non-road defects have soared. Since the Unitary authority of Bucks Council came about, Transport for Bucks have not been as reactive as they used to be, are often incommunicative and can be very negative to the village's needs. At least three issues with TfB today which are outstanding have been outstanding for over a year.

Overgrown hedges have been a big issue this year, with residents failing to cut their hedges, we have to spend time sending letters, chasing and then referring to the local Council to cut them (and charging the resident).

We have also found that since Bucks Council was formed, the Planning department have been slow to turnround of applications and made judgements contrary to earlier decisions. We DO need consistent judgements and planning enforcements that are enforced.

Over the next year, those vital assets of the community the Shop and Pub will be up and running, and so the Parish Council's focus will hopefully be on 'traditional' Parish Council matters – the Playing Field, mowing, dog mess, street lights, etc.

Finally, I'd like to extend thanks to ALL my fellow members of the Parish Council, for all the support and work they have done in the last year. My predecessor as Chairman, Roy Fennell, always said when thanking the group do not name names – you will forget someone or something and someone will take offence. Despite that wise advice, I must mention both Jo and James for the outstanding work they have done in the Chandos purchase over the last year.

Also, a thanks for the sterling work done by Trish Pointer, the Parish Clerk. She has been on the sharp end of a lot of the work coming out of the Chandos with little or no notice and we would have been in trouble if she had not stepped up to keep the wheels moving.

I would like to give special thanks to the Bucks Councillors Michael Rand and Angela MacPherson for all their help and support they have given over the years.