

North Crawley Parish Bulletin - February 2021

Hi Folks, Steve here with another summary of what's happening in the background to keep things ticking over. I'm pleased to say that someone has indicated their interest in becoming a Parish Councillor. Assuming all goes well it still leaves us with one vacancy. We are keeping open our offer for a role as a Councillor "without portfolio" which should only take a couple of hours a month. Please give it some thought.

Still no news about the review of the conservation area but we are hopeful Milton Keynes Council (MKC) will respect our views to leave well alone! If anything we'd like to see Nixey's Walk added into the conservation area as there are some lovely views as you walk up toward the High St.

I was delighted to present a newly refurbished notice board to the Village School which they will no doubt use to great effect. Thanks go to Ollie Rose for refurbishing the board and, as always, to Sheila, our Clerk, for organising things behind the scenes!

Our PCSO Arlene reported two crimes that took place in January - the theft of a catalytic converter from someone's car, parked on their drive, in Orchard Way and the theft of oil from a property in Little Crawley. Our thoughts are with anyone affected by crime.

We continue to see drains blocked which then result in flooding following heavy rains. We are keeping the pressure on MKC, who have done some work, but still have more to do.

Still on the subject of MKC, they tell us they will soon be putting a sign up at the car park in Bryan's Crescent confirming it is for residents of the Crescent only.

Work continues on the Neighbourhood Plan. We reached a crucial point recently where we had to determine which sites would be considered "viable" for modest development before asking residents to vote on which of these they prefer. It's fair to say the Steering Group were not totally in agreement on the definition of "viable". Basically a report produced by an expert team of consultants had reviewed all the sites and, based on National and Local planning policy, their objective view was that 5 sites were viable. Unfortunately that meant that some sites favoured by some members of the group were not included. We had to vote on whether we based our recommendations on the expert report or the views of the steering group members - and our vote gave a clear majority in favour of the expert report.

By the time you read this you should have received a booklet that shows all the sites we looked at and the reasons why some are suitable and some are not. In March we will be asking you to vote on which of the suitable sites you feel we should include to give us the 30 to 35 houses we need. The sites you choose will then be included in the final draft of the Neighbourhood Plan. You will then have the opportunity to read that plan and vote for or against it in a referendum to be held later this year.

We now have a Village Warden!! Kevin Bates has joined us to work a couple of hours a week helping to make sure the village is kept neat and tidy as well as helping with the many odd jobs that seem to crop up all the time. Welcome Kevin and we wish you every success in your role with the Parish Council.

Terry Smith and I had the pleasure of presenting the Village Champions awards for 2020 to Pardeep at the Village Shop and Tracey and Gary at the Chequers. They have been a lifeline for so many of us during these seemingly endless restrictions. Thank you so much for giving such brilliant support to our community. The 2021 nominations will be open during November this year so keep your eyes peeled for residents who have gone the extra mile for our community. Don't worry, we will give you reminders during the year!

MKC will no longer be providing subsidised bus services and will be replacing them with an "on demand" service. We don't believe it affects us as the C10 service is not subsidised by MKC. We are keen to establish exactly how this "on demand" service will work and whether it will be available to North Crawley residents. As soon as we know we will publicise it to you all.

The Parish Council is going to offer subsidised IMC hire costs for any village based event or activity starting April 2021. As long as anyone from the community can attend the event there are subsidies up to 100% of the cost and there will be no deposits to pay! I will put a separate notice out explaining the scheme in more detail so, come on the School, the Church, ladies groups, men's groups - indeed anyone, this is your opportunity to stage events, fetes and fairs at the beautiful Institute in 2021 at subsidised rates with no deposit required! Terms and conditions will apply.

Well, that's it for February's news and now I will hand over to another of our Councillors, Derek Harpur, who will explain a bit more about his role on the Parish Council.

My name is Derek Harpur. I am not going to blow the doors off, just open a window into my Parish Council journey.

I made a go of being a BT engineer for over 27 years and then managed to escape, voluntarily may I add. I had enjoyed my time working in telephone exchanges installing many different incarnations of telephone equipment and have seen the technology move forward from clockwork to electronic. Towards the end of my career I branched out into climbing poles as well which allowed me to travel around many different parts of the country installing telephones. There was never a dull moment. I needed something to do to pay the mortgage so I ran my own one-man-band carrying out property maintenance, (still trying to catch up with work on my own house since retiring). Being a qualified electrician, something BT trained me to be competent in doing, and gaining a plumbing qualification as a mature student over four years of night school and always doing my own work at home, I had a good enough skill-set to keep my head above water.

Having made it across the border from Cranfield 39 years ago and settling in the back water that is East End, for many years I never seemed to have the time to get involved with village matters. But after slowing my work down and finally calling it a day, work wise that is, I started to attend the Parish Council meetings once a month, usually barracking from the front row with the odd awkward question, and after being an audience member for some time I became interested in how the council worked from the inside so rolled up my sleeves and took the plunge with my eyes open, or so I thought.

It quickly became apparent that there was a lot more to just sitting round a table once a month and going to the pub for a drink afterwards. (This social aspect has for the moment been hijacked by an annoying little bug so the banter with people after the meeting is something that I miss the most. This was one of the most important aspects for me personally as not being in the centre of things it is rather isolating at the moment. You lose touch with grass-root conversations and the pub is where people were used to getting things off of their chest in a much more relaxed atmosphere than in a draughty village hall). We are here to support the interests of the whole community and support the democratic process. Being the authority closest to the people, we are invariably the first port of call people come to with their concerns. It is about seeing the community change for the better as a result of decisions we make, giving a sense of achievement and pride. Coming up to my fortieth year here I would hate to see things happen to ruin the rural nature of the village. There are brick-bats and occasional bouquets but you have to take the rough with the smooth.

You have heard from the other members over the past months what their individual roles are and mine are planning, highways and trees as well as being a member of the steering group for the new neighbourhood plan.

We have to be notified of any planning applications in order that they can be discussed and to decide if we consider a site meeting to be appropriate. We do not have the power to make planning decisions and can merely discuss what our individual thoughts are, but in an objective way. (Councillors have to declare any personal or pecuniary interest in a particular application at the start of any meeting). There will obviously be subjective reasons for someone's opinion but we can only object, should we feel that the application warrants it, to a proposal on legitimate planning grounds. There are a number of official publications where

the guidance can be found to help us put a case forward such as Plan:MK and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Having ploughed through these documents it has helped with understanding the complexities that come with trying to formulate a neighbourhood plan that works for everyone and is best for the future of the village.

Trees are very important in a community and we are lucky to have so many mature specimens around the village. We should also be planting new ones to keep our environment healthy and to provide habitats for our wildlife. A mature oak tree will support over 280 species of insects and supply many birds with a food source in autumn. It will supply mammals such as squirrel, badger and deer with acorns. Not only that but trees are good to look at and are the lifeblood of a community but in many parts of the country they are being felled by the thousand. Trees supply us with life-giving oxygen by utilising carbon dioxide and grow much better when there is an abundance of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Sadly we have lost many of our mature trees recently so whenever there is a danger that trees are likely to be felled we try our best to keep as many as possible. Sadly we don't always succeed. Trees often come up in planning proposals because we have a conservation area in which *any* work on a tree in that conservation area, from an apple tree to a statuesque oak, has to have planning permission. This applies to any pruning work and not just the felling of any trees. There are many trees around the village which have tree preservation orders (TPO's) on them. They don't have to be in the conservation area but having a TPO on a tree has legal implications and can incur severe penalties if any work is carried out without having planning permission. Should any issues arise where people consider a tree needs attention we have contractors that we can call upon to do the work in a professional and safe manner and we welcome being informed of these issues by residents.

Highways are a complex subject and there is a limit as to what we can do as a parish council. We are not travelling around as much at the moment so we are relying on residents, if they can, to report any issues with potholes etc. on the Milton Keynes "Report It" page on their website. If an issue is not remedied in a reasonable amount of time we may be able to investigate and get the problem resolved. Certainly let us know if there are any other issues with roadside furniture such as signposts etc. or anything which may be considered dangerous and we will do our best. As you know our village is on a busy rat-run to the university in Cranfield. Traffic over the last year has been a lot less due to the situation with lockdowns but hopefully life will get back to the old normal and that traffic will increase. There will be a potential for a lot more traffic when the new developments at Tickford Fields and Milton Keynes East are built so we are monitoring the situation and making sure that those involved consider the negative impact on our conservation area and the old buildings in the High Street which are susceptible to damage from heavy lorries. There is also the danger to children using the school which also has to be considered. Not only that, there is the added pollution and noise aspect as well.