

2020-21:

REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL (Part 3) (With due deference to Ian Dury)

In a truly unique year it has been a source of great comfort to know that Great Gransden Parish Council has been functioning at all. This has been in no small part due to the magnificent work of our clerk in organising Zoom sessions for meetings, keeping all Councillors informed of the many happenings through minutes and emails; in short making sure that life goes on in the Parish in spite of the pandemic.

At the start of the year in May 2020 it was agreed that all Officers of the Parish Council remain in their current roles, to ensure continuity until such time as face to face meetings could be resumed. This 'Old Guard' has presided over a momentous year in terms of achievements and improvements to the Parish whilst pushing, unsuccessfully, in some cases for more.

With Lockdown in place at the beginning of the year, the Bluebell-19 Group were given great assistance by Cllr Catmur in setting up a database to render support to the village. During the year there have been numerous notices on Touchbase offering help and assistance to parishioners. Mercifully Great Gransden has thus far avoided the worst excesses of the Covid pandemic due to the community spirit displayed by all. The Basras and all their staff get a special mention for the way in which they have provided for village needs during this time.

The Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group has continued working hard throughout with monthly meetings, updates to Parish Council and now most of the written sections of the report are available to read on the website. There has been an inevitable 'slippage' in the timetable for completion of the Plan but there is hope that by the fourth quarter of 2021 it should be ready. David Prest, the Chair of the group and Anne Constantine, the Secretary have been the driving forces but the whole group has worked hard towards its goal.

A survey undertaken by the NDP Group had shown that residents were keen to see improvements to road safety within the village, improved sports and leisure facilities and better access to open spaces. With the enforced hibernation of Speedwatch it has become vital to improve road safety and to that end Cllr Scott produced a compelling application for Local Highways Improvement Funding this year. The bid made the case for priority narrowing measures for both Ladies Hill and on Caxton Road. The Council is still pushing for safety signs along Meadow Road to moderate speeds.

This year the Parish Council decided to raise the precept by £10,000 to allow for similar improvement measures to cope with an anticipated increase in traffic generated by the A428 upgrade and also greater usage of village facilities generated by the changes in working habits.

Flooding has been a popular theme at meetings due to one of the wettest winters in the recent past and some progress has been made on drains in Middle Street, East Street and Church Street although drains in general around the village still remain a problem with many being completely blocked. The Parish Council continues to press for a 'village-wide' clearing on a regular basis.

During the year the long-time caretakers of the Reading Room retired necessitating the appointment of a new tenant for the cottage. Georgia Yarrow accepted the role of Caretaker at the Reading Room, effective 1st November, and signed a new tenancy agreement. The Reading Room Committee requested that the Parish Council consider resurfacing the car park to the rear of the Reading Room. However the overall cost is outside the Parish budget at this point, although low level lighting is being considered for the future.

Other improvements noted this year have been:

- Cllr King did sterling work on the MUGA & Playing Field risk assessments as well as the installation of plastic grass protector around the entrance to the field from Little Lane.
- A Grazing Licence for the Cemetery Extension was signed.
- No Cycling signs were placed on Doctors Lane.
- Various repairs were made: a broken swing and see-saw at the Park, the sign was replaced at the entrance to the field and opening & closing times have been posted on the gate.
- The introduction of BACS and Automated payments by the Parish Council.
- Support for improved facilities at the Sportsfield and Tennis Club. It was noted during the year that the Sportsfield is in excellent condition, with grass cutting being performed regularly and well, due to the lockdown and lack of use.
- The renewal of the licence for the Sportsfield between the Parish Council and the GSRA in March 2021.
- The opening of the winter walk in Gransden Woods due to pressure from a group formed for the purpose of ensuring that the woods remained partly open for use by the village.

As usual there are many things that are ongoing, yet to be concluded and some have not gone so well:

- The conclusions of the Government's White Paper on Planning are as yet unknown.
- In the latter category the Sand Road development now named Dutton Gardens has been a constant source of nuisance for the Council and the village in general. Enforcement action has been imposed on the developer, Hayfield Homes, by HDC for frequent breaches of the Planning Agreements.

The number of Consultations seems to have proliferated this year, all of which are of vital importance for Great Gransden:

- A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet,
- East West Rail with the route corridor.
- The holding/stack consultation for Luton airport.

The Tree survey, now done annually, was undertaken in early 2021 and the results possibly herald the end of some elm trees in Church Street. Cllr Capps, as usual has taken the lead in checking the works needed.

Thanks:

- To County Councillor Julie Wisson who has always been extremely informative and helpful in opening doors for the Parish Council on County matters such as Highways & Drains.
- To District Councillor Richard West, who has fielded a tide of complaints about the Planning at HDC with great forbearance. His wholehearted support for this village is well documented and very much appreciated.
- To all my fellow Parish Councillors, especially our retiree Cllr Gorton, who have worked so very hard all year to maintain the very high standards of this Council and village, during a difficult time.
- To our clerk, Catherine Fox, who has been fastidious in her constant improvements, always looking to streamline the system and undertaking training for that purpose. To have been in place for only 16 months and yet achieved all this in such difficult circumstances says it all.