

Bierton with Broughton Parish Council – Annual Meeting 2013  
Chairman's Report for Year Ending 31 March 2013

The Parish Council has met formally 10 times during the year; agendas and minutes of all meetings have been published and displayed on Notice Boards. It is disappointing that so few residents attend our meetings, so everyone can better understand both the Council's responsibilities and the extent of its authority. There are widespread misconceptions about what we actually have power to do – many of the matters of complaint (eg: pot holes, road safety, hedges and verges, rubbish and recycling) are the responsibility of either AVDC or BCC to rectify; the Parish Council can only act to support residents – it is a matter of influence rather than authority.

No complaints have been made against the Council, or against individual Councillors, by members of the public or by AVDC as the Relevant Superior Authority. Councillors are volunteers and have not been paid any allowances for their work; they have received reimbursement of expenses incurred in discharging their responsibilities, such as postage, printing, e-mails and phone calls and for travelling expenses to meetings outside the Parish at the approved mileage rate.

The Clerk to the Parish Council is the Council's Principal Accounting Officer and maintains the Council's accounts. Cheques are drawn by the Clerk and signed by two authorised councillors against the relevant invoices. This procedure may change nationally during the coming year to allow Councils to adopt modern financial management practices to allow payments by electronic transfer. In this coming year, it will be necessary to review our Standing Orders and Financial Procedures to ensure they are still consistent with the wide range of changes that have been promulgated by Central Government.

Salary and allowances paid to the Clerk are in accordance with nationally approved rates and the amounts claimed are regularly scrutinised by Councillors and the Council's Internal Auditor. The Council's accounts are regularly examined by the Internal Auditor and have to be submitted to the Authorised External Auditor shortly after the end of each financial year; last year's accounts were accepted by the Auditors without comment or qualification, which reflects well on the procedures we have in place for managing our financial affairs and especially for the work done by the Clerk in keeping the accounts in order.

Councillors and the Clerk have attended meetings of, and held discussions with, various outside bodies, including groups and committees of AVDC and BCC, the Greater Aylesbury Local Area Forum, North Bucks Parishes Planning Consortium, Parish Liaison Group, Neighbourhood Action Group, BALC, AVALC and other Parish Councils on matters relevant to the Council's responsibilities.

The Council has followed a programme for inspecting its assets and has carried out preventive and repair actions where appropriate. Fortunately, there was a lower level of vandalism last year. The Sports Hall is now 13 years old, so it is not surprising that some significant maintenance was required here, and during this past year, two major projects were undertaken. First was to replace the central heating boiler to improve efficiency and to ensure compliance with the latest safety regulations. We also refurbished the kitchen; the Council would like to thank members of the reincarnated football club for providing much of the labour for the task, which was carried out under supervision of a qualified installer. In return, the Council wrote off the debts incurred by the football club under its previous management, and we wish the new club every success. Over the years, the Council had established a "Sports Hall Reserve Fund" to cover the costs of such work; therefore relatively little money had to be taken from the Current Account.

It was necessary to replace some loose tiles on the Pavilion roof, and during this work it was discovered that more extensive work may be required to maintain the integrity of the building. We are currently investigating the full extent of the work required. However, it must be recalled that the Pavilion is in fact a War Memorial (presented by one of the Rothschild Trusts) and the Parish has both moral and legal responsibilities to maintain it. The work is likely to prove costly, so one aspect of our investigation is to find sources of grants for projects such as this.

The Council had set aside some money for Road Safety and Traffic Calming measures and has bought a Speed Indication Device that can be moved around the Parish to inform motorists of their speed and hopefully encourage

better compliance with the speed limits. It will also help us to collect other traffic data to support our requests to BCC for other safety measures.

The Parish Council has a role in planning matters, but responsibility lies with AVDC as the Local Planning Authority. This is true for both small applications like building extensions (and we considered many of those during the year) and large-scale developments. AVDC are obliged to consult us, but have no obligation to accept, or even to respond to, any comments we make. Everyone will be aware that, following the response shown both at two public meetings and during our attempts to produce a Neighbourhood Plan, the Parish Council continued to fight throughout last year to prevent development at Broughton Crossing (Aylesbury East, or “the Barratts Development”). I regret to inform you that WE FAILED, despite bringing the illogicalities and inconsistencies of the Application, and the anomalous positions of both AVDC and BCC over their approach to this application compared with others, to the attention of the Secretary of State both directly and through the good offices of our Member of Parliament (and I would like to thank Mr Bercow for his support throughout our campaign). We must now see how we can work with AVDC to get the best deal we can for the Parish.

Unfortunately, that is not the end of the matter, as there is now an Application for some 1700 homes in the Parish between Bierton and Watermead. The Parish Council considers it still has a mandate to oppose such development and I will ensure its voice is heard when this application appears before the Strategic Development Control Committee on 29 May.

A draft of the new Vale of Aylesbury Plan has just been published for comment by 18<sup>th</sup> June, and we will have our first discussion on it during our regular Parish Council meeting which follows later this evening. This is the document that has been prepared to replace the Core Strategy Document which was withdrawn following the Examination in Public some two years ago.

It is disappointing that the expectations raised under the banner of “Localism” have not materialised and that there is still no firm guidance about what funding Parishes can expect under the New Homes Bonus or whatever other scheme replaces the current Section 106 procedure.

Last year’s Precept was held at the 2011/12 level and has similarly been frozen for the current year. It is not clear whether we will be allowed to raise it next year; if not, then (to coin a phrase) “we will have to make some difficult decisions”!!!

I would like to thank our District Councillor (Mrs Julie Ward) for her support during the past year; Julie is of course continuing to serve and we look forward to seeing her at our meetings. Thanks also go to our former County Councillor (Mrs Jenny Puddefoot) for all her work on our behalf, and we welcome Mr Bill Chapple as our new County Councillor, noting that the County Divisional Boundaries have changed so that we are now associated with Aston Clinton and Weston Turville. We look forward to Cllr Chapple’s support in all our endeavours.

Finally, I would like to thank all my colleagues on the Parish Council for the work they have done. The Council would not function without the work that they do. I hope that their efforts are appreciated by the community at large.

Brian Robson  
Chairman  
20 May 2013.