

Chairman's Report to Annual Parish Meeting

24th May 2023

Introduction

It is my pleasure to make my 2023 report to you as Chairman of Shinfield Parish Council.

Although it has been a challenging year for the country in many ways with recovery from the pandemic and inflation, the parish and Shinfield Parish Council have performed well.

General Power of competence

Due to the Parish Council election in May 2023 and the completion of the CILCA qualification by the Clerk Shinfield Parish Council retains its General Power of competence to act as it sees fit within national legislation.

Finances

At a time of double-digit inflation and in particular significant increases in energy costs, I can report that the final outturn for the year was an overspend of just over £6,000 against the budget which was set in January 2022. This shortfall will be covered from existing reserves.

The parish precept for Financial Year 2023/24 rose by 4.9% to £599,570 (at £78.75 for a Band D property based on the equivalent of 7,613 Band D properties) which places Shinfield in the middle of the 17 parish councils within Wokingham with three parishes applying double-digit increases.

Green Items

A significant factor in managing the energy cost rise was the decision taken early on to include solar panels on the roof of this building. These panels have contributed approximately 30% of the total energy consumption of the building which reduced our expenditure by £7,800. Solar panels are also installed on the new Manor Ground Pavilion.

Further energy savings were also made by our programme of having converted the streetlights provided for by the council to LED lighting.

We are also operating an electric van which you will see around the parish.

Support for the Community

Another source of pride is the work that the council does to support the local community:

- In the past year we made grants to 20 different organisations to a value of £23,700
- We provided a warm hub over the winter months at the School Green Centre
- We organised an event to raise funds in support of Ukraine
- We acted as a distribution point for Wokingham Borough Council's initiative to encourage tree planting with over 200 saplings issued
- We changed the day of the annual litter pick to encourage more people to take part and saw a doubling of participation with 28 families taking part
- We continue to support events of significance in the parish such as Remembrance Sunday and the Shinfield 10k. We also maintained our financial support for Spencers Wood Carnival which was unfortunately affected by the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth

Royal Events

It was an honour to host a book of condolence for her majesty and to read the Royal Proclamation announcing King Charles III coming to the throne.

We were also happy to create a photomosaic of King Charles for his coronation made up of pictures of people and places from the parish. The photomosaic is still available on our website if you haven't seen it.

School Green Centre

It was only 13 months ago that the School Green Centre was formally opened to the public. Since then it has become home to a wide range of regular bookings and hosted wedding receptions, children's parties and many more activities. All told in the last year there were over 9,000 hours of bookings in the building.

As well as being an operational success the building has also been recognised as an architectural one having featured in the Observer.

Other Physical Improvements

In the last year we have renewed the outdoor gym equipment at Spencers Wood Recreation Ground and installed a brand-new Multi-Use Games Area there.

On Sunday I was at the formal opening of the Manor Ground Pavilion. Built by the University of Reading the building will be operated by Shinfield Parish Council and will be the new home of Shinfield Cricket Club.

We are also very happy to be hosting a dementia care group there 4 days a week which means that the building is already having a positive impact on our finances and means the building is not left empty during the week.

Officers

Throughout the year we have steadily been establishing a new team of officers for the council and having recruited Bruce Winton as Clerk last April we have since added Paul Gudge as Facilities Manager and Sally Herring as Deputy Clerk.

Those of you who frequent the School Green Centre will also be familiar with the Customer Care team on reception.

The Future

Those officers are working with your council members to continue to seek improvements for the residents of the parish.

In January we ran two consultation exercises covering Traffic and Sports:

The **Traffic Consultation** has resulted in a viable plan of modest but important improvements which seek to:

- Reduce speeding in the parish
 - From our own speed recording devices we know that 1 in 7 cars exceeds the speed limit by at least 5mph
 - And of course there is a much higher proportion at night-time
- Reduce unnecessary vehicle traffic
 - This is not an attempt to stop people who live in the parish from using their cars
 - This is aimed at drivers who find it easier to use the parish as a cut through rather than using main roads such as the A33

As a result we hope to see walking and cycling become much easier in the parish which will benefit everyone:

- Those who want to cycle, or walk will be able to do so more easily and safely
- Those who need to drive will encounter less traffic

Our **Sports consultation** has taken longer to come to fruition, but we feel that:

- We have been able to highlight the legitimate concerns of residents regarding what are referred to as the northern pitches
- We now have an exciting plan to bring new sports to Millworth Lane and we look forward to sharing these with you in the coming months

We are also looking to encourage and promote arts, culture and events throughout the parish and starting next month we have a new committee whose remit is to focus on this area.

Partnerships

As a parish council we know that we can be much more effective by building effective partnerships and the most obvious of these is with Wokingham Borough Council.

Where we have common ground, we will work with them to ensure that we see the best outcomes for our residents. And where we disagree, we will make the case for our residents as best we can.

We are finding however more common ground than before.

In the past year we have:

- Begun to develop better links with Wokingham's Anti-Social Behaviour team (and the police and PCSOs)
 - Anti-social Behaviour is something that is not specific to our parish, but we do believe that we can do more to provide facilities and services that reduce the impact

- Begun a dialogue with Wokingham on Education services for students of the parish. This includes:
 - The number of students that need to travel to schools outside the parish and
 - The problems with access to out of school clubs and activities this causes

- And most importantly we have continued to work with Wokingham Borough Council to ensure viable bus services within the parish.

We will continue to take forward these and other partnerships to help achieve the best outcomes for our residents