**Stantonbury Parish Council Chairman’s Report April 2021**

**Electors’ meeting Tuesday 20 April 2021**

**Introduction**

This report covers the period from February 2020 to April 2021. The period from April 2019 to February 2020 is covered by a retrospective document and can be found on the Parish website.

The Covid regulations introduced in March 2020 prevented formal face to face meetings with the public and so the Electors’ Meeting (Meet the Councillors) and the Annual Meeting of the Council were not held. The provisions and decisions made in May 2019 including forward actions of the Parish Council were carried over into the last year.

**Overview of the last year**

Covid-19 has both devastated communities and changed the way we live life now and inexorably for the future. Our community like others have endured lockdowns for most of the last year or so.

As many of you are aware the Parish Office in Kingsfold was closed in March 2020 to the public and remains so until June 2021. The Parish Council has successfully maintained its interaction with the community by significantly changing the way we work. The staff implemented a system of working from home and maintained contact with residents by telephone as normal but with a heighted notification process through our website, e-newsletter and social media. Zoom meetings became a major mechanism in maintaining contact between the public, staff and Councillors.

A consequence of the remote meetings for us and Milton Keynes Council was the facility for members of the public to participate in Council meetings without leaving home.

At the earliest opportunity allowed by the Government Restrictions, we asked our Parish Rangers to recommence work around the Parish. We relocated them to the under-used Wylie Centre in Crispin and now this has become the centre of operations for their work, freeing space for when staff return to the office.

However, like other employers, the Parish Council is aware of the benefits of working from home and we will be considering flexible working arrangements as a permanent feature of the Council.

Specific highlights from the year.

**1.0 Crime**

Fly tipping, speeding and drugs use are frequent comments made to Councillors and as a Council we felt it was necessary to introduce measure to tackle these issues. We opted for a multi-focus approach. The Speed Indicator Device, many of you have seen around the Parish, has confirmed the need from stronger measures. There are many instances of 50-60mph speeds in 30mph limit areas and unfortunately 70mph outside a local school.

We opted into the Speed Watch initiative run by Milton Keynes Council and Thames Valley Police (TVP). In doing so we purchased our own speed camera. Teams of PCSOs, Parish Guardians, Councillors and staff now undertake spot checks around the Parish. Speeding offenders are reported to TVP for further action.

To tackle fly tipping and drug use we have employed a surveillance company (Crimewave), to undertake surveillance in known hotspots of this type of activity with fixed and mobile cameras. To date there have been numerous offences captured across the two remaining types of crime noted. Our aim is to drive this type of behaviour out of the Parish.

**2.0 Planning**  
 As a Council we lost a great deal of momentum with the Neighbourhood Plan when last year’s elections were cancelled and with it our Referendum. The Government legislation however, stated that main Councils were to adopt the requirements of the Neighbourhood Plans as though formally endorsed by the public through Referendum. As a Council were diligent in ensuring this was done. I have to report that acceptance of the Plan’s requirements by Milton Keynes Council has been patchy.

The completion of Aldi was not without planning setbacks which the Parish Council robustly challenged. We await further applications for high rise residential flats, offices and multi-storey car parks in Linford Wood. Of course, we also await the outcome of the Referendum in May.

**3.0 Financial**

For a period in February/March we were without a Responsible Financial Officer. This aspect of the Council work was undertaken by Councillors and a new RFO joined us in June. I’m pleased to report that the Independent Annual Governance Review (AGAR) confirmed the finances of the Parish to be in good order.

Our reserves remain very strong and consequently we are able to move forward to next year without increasing our precept to parishioners. As previously planned, we intend to join with our neighbouring parish councils with a view to sharing resources to introduce further cost savings.

Regrettably, we have had to suspend the issuing of grants. In their place, as a Council, we felt it necessary to provide support to those organisations working in the community and we made a number of £1000 payments to organisations supporting isolating vulnerable and individuals and families in the community.

In a similar way we have agreed to continue the contract with Citizens Advice Bureau for the oncoming year for our residents.

**4.0 Devolved Services, Parish Guardians**

For most of the lockdown period our Parish Rangers have been out and about. Their regular liaison with the Parish Guardians has had to be curtailed for Covid-19 reasons and many residents have noted the increase of general litter around the Parish. I am pleased to report that many residents have approached the Parish Rangers for litter picking equipment and whilst group activity has not been allowed, individuals and couples have undertaken some mammoth litter picks. The Parish Council is very grateful for their civic responsibility and help.

Over the next two years we are co-operating with Milton Keynes Council with their Landscape Transformation Programme which initially will commence with Stantonbury, moving into Bradville in a year or so. We acknowledge that some residents are distressed at the severity of some of the pollarding, but would point out that much of the Parish has not been properly maintained for very many years so it may come as a shock, and a great deal of this work has been carried out by SERCO (not the Transformation Team) catching up with their own backlog.

**5.0 Social Events and Support for our Senior Residents**

We had intended to provide the normal excursions and Party in the Park throughout the summer of 2020. At the moment they are provisionally on hold until we have clarity regarding what happens after June 21st 2021.

We were successful in providing Christmas hampers in conjunction with Aldi who generously donated 23 very large hampers for our residents to enjoy at Christmas. The Parish Council still has in place the objective of providing free Silver Surfer advice and training as soon as practicably possible. It was the intention of the Council to be more community focused with support in different ways. This is still our objective.

**6.0 Parking**

Some time ago we undertook a pilot survey of parking on Bradville. Out of this we constructed, in conjunction with Milton Keynes Council, a parking strategy for the Parish which went to public consultation. Some areas remain negotiable, but the intention was to start introducing parking measures in March 2020. Unfortunately, this is on hold and despite constant chasing we have had no indication from Milton Keynes Council when the works will recommence.

**7.0 Waste Collection**

Commencing in 2021 we are re-introducing the waste skips that we used to have in the 80’s. Throughout the year we will have controlled skips at various locations throughout the Parish. Please review the website for details.

Graham Davison

**Chairman – Stantonbury Parish Council**