

Chairman's report March 2020

Cllr Dr Wendy Matthews

I am delighted to report that we have been really busy this year and made progress on a number of long standing projects. Our focus is on what we can deliver locally.

Community Activities

Our community hub is continuing to be well used with expanded library sessions for children at the Infants school and popular CAB sessions. We are now looking to run a knit and natter session there once a week and other possibilities include a repair café. We are displaying items rescued from The Bull before it closed and other old scenes of Iver as well as the poppy community art panels. We would love to host other local groups in the hub so do let us know if you are interested in using the space.

The Christmas lights were a wonderful display this year and we were very pleased that the local shops and businesses were involved in the switch on event – once again the ponies with their lit up tails were the stars of the afternoon! The school choir and Iver singers really started off the Christmas season as well as our very own Master of Ceremonies, our interim Clerk Mike Kennedy. We were able to make a donation to Thames Valley Heartbeat and the local Evreham Youth Club. Thanks are due to the working group of Cllrs, officers and the representatives from the Residents' Associations for all their hard work in putting it together and on the day as well as our many sponsors. Put the date for this years' event in your diaries – Sat 28th November.

Our seniors coffee morning held once a month goes from strength to strength with a trip to the seaside last summer and a wonderful Xmas lunch as well as several other activities. This is open to all so if you know anyone who would like some convivial company please encourage them to come along.

We have been continuing our work with Keep Britain Tidy who are being sponsored by Heathrow to carry out beautification projects in the area and this year we have worked with them and the Iver Village Junior School to design and paint another amazing mural on Iver Recreation Ground. We have also lobbied and finally achieved the provision of a new bus service from Heathrow which services Richings Park and Iver. We are pressing for it to include Iver Heath as well.

This year we held a very successful hot and sunny Funday on Iver Heath Recreation Ground to showcase all the local groups that offer activities including the library, scouts, youth club, drama club, mother and toddler group and the football, tennis and bowls clubs that operate at the pavilion. Many thanks to our team of Cllrs, officers and volunteers who worked so hard on the day, and our sponsors for the event.

We have a small fund to enable us to support local groups with grants and this year we have been delighted to be able to support among others Iver Heath Drama Club, Richings Park Residents' Association, Iver Heath Residents' Association, Iver Heath Bowls Club and Richings Players. Please apply using the forms on our website.

On behalf of all our Councillors, I would like to say a big thank you to all our staff for the hard work they do to ensure that the Parish is running smoothly day to day. Our grounds team are out in all weathers ensuring our open spaces are kept in good condition and taking on a wide range of maintenance tasks. The hard work and dedication of our teams enable us to deliver projects to enhance our parish and support the community spirit across the parish.

Their collective efforts are supported and enhanced by the many unsung heroes of the parish who volunteer to conduct the Community Speedwatch, act as river wardens, pick litter, clear overgrown footways and generally help to improve our street scene and organise community events. To all of you who take a pride in our patch and make a difference thank you.

Finally, as there will be Parish Elections on 7th May, I would like to thank all my fellow Councillors for all their amazing contributions during the last 5 years of this Council session.

As you will know, the new Buckinghamshire Council will come into place on 1st April to replace the current 4 District Councils and Bucks County Council, with elections to the new Council taking place on 7th May. There will be 3 councillors representing the ward of Iver which includes Iver, Iver Heath, Richings Park and Thorney on the new Council. Residents in Shredding Green and Wood Lane will be represented by Councillors who also cover Wexham and Stoke Poges.

We have had a presentation from Steve Bambrick the current CEO of South Bucks District Council and Director of Planning in the new Unitary Council who has explained the new Community Access Points and Community Boards.

Policy and Finance Committee

Chairman Cllr Dr Wendy Matthews

The details of our current income and expenditure for this year until the end of February have been circulated. These demonstrate the focus of our work on the recreation grounds, open spaces and street lighting. The funds that we have been building up over recent years have now enabled to deliver a number of significant projects this year and several more are now in the pipeline.

We have this year been able to keep the increase of the Parish element of the Council Tax to 2.9% in line with the other authorities to enable us to continue to meet

the rising costs including that relating to the Bucks CC local government pension deficit.

South Bucks District Council have recently introduced a Community Infrastructure Levy which will apply to building work in our area and the Parish Council will receive some contributions from this which will increase when we have our Neighbourhood Plan in place.

We have reviewed all our policies this year and have amended our standing orders and financial regulations as changing legislation has required us to do. We continue to ensure that we are in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations and looking at any additional measures that we need to take. In all of this we obtain guidance from the National and Buckinghamshire Associations of Local Councils.

We publish information relating to our and other agencies activities on our website, including the minutes of meetings from the last 12 months and these cover the range of issues which arise. All meetings of the Council and its Committees are public meetings and we encourage residents to attend and ask questions.

Amenities Committee

Chairman Cllr Ann Mayling

This committee focuses on open spaces and management of the burial ground. Maintenance has continued on all sites delivered by Groundworks South and our in-house team. In addition, Groundworks manage the Hardings Row volunteer group.

The programme of tree surveys and tree work has continued and will continue to ensure we continue to fulfil our responsibilities. Issues within our area include ash dieback which is a particular issue at St. Leonard's Mound and the presence of oak processionary moth adjacent to Swan Meadow. Trees are only removed from our green spaces when recommended by Groundworks for the benefit of other trees, there is a danger to the public or the tree is diseased.

Following a tender process, new 5 year management plans were commissioned for all sites. These have been delivered and were accepted at the last Amenities meeting. The reports will form the basis of maintenance programmes and development priorities. The Council will be seeking funding opportunities to deliver these development projects on a site by site basis. Maintenance costs are covered within the core budget. There is a small regular team of volunteers who work each month at Hardings Row clearing, cutting back and helping to maintain the site for wildlife. We would like to expand this to other areas so please contact the office if you would like to volunteer to join.

The weather has proved challenging for management of pitches at both recreation grounds and the grounds team have continued with the pitch improvement programme which includes slitting, sanding and re-seeding.

At Iver Heath Recreation ground the Bowls club were granted permission to extend their boundary by 6 feet. This was to enable them to create an outdoor seating area. As part of the plan the existing hedge will be removed over time and some green screening put in place within the boundary fence.

At Iver Recreation Ground the disabled car park was delivered and new street lights placed along the path. The low level hedging will be put in place when weather permits.

Two further projects have been put out to tender and suppliers selected.

Both are at Iver Heath Recreation ground.

The first is the refurbishment of the children's playground area. Some of the existing equipment will be retained and refurbished and new equipment will be added. Two replacement benches will be put in place. The work will start this Spring.

The second project involves the refurbishment of the interior of the Pavilion. The changing rooms will be replaced and re-configured and the other areas will be updated. In addition, there will be work on the heating system, a fire alarm system will be installed and electrical work will be undertaken. There is a working group been established to deliver this project which includes the users of the Pavilion. The work will begin at the end of the football season and take approximately 10 weeks. Exterior work to the Pavilion will be done separately – budget permitting.

Iver Heath allotment holders approached the Council in late 2019 with a request for the Council to support the allotment holders moving to a self-managing model. The committee supported the principle subject to further discussions and approval from the landowner (Bucks. County Council). The land is leased on a 7 year lease. A working group was formed and discussion around work which could be undertaken. However, no permission was given to undertake the work which has since been begun. An instruction to cease and desist has been issued and to remove all equipment, materials and waste arising from the work.

A communication has gone to all allotment holders and a meeting will be held with the committee whom it is understood represent the majority of allotment holders and a meeting of all allotment holders will be called once this meeting has taken place.

Highways & Infrastructure Committee

Chairman Cllr Dr Chris Jordan

This Committee has direct responsibility for:

- Streetlights on most residential roads throughout the parish and the recreation grounds;
- Street furniture (village gates, benches, litter and dog waste bins and parish council noticeboards).

We also monitor applications for HGV Operating licences.

We maintain a watching brief on the status of the highways, footways and rights of way, although maintenance of these is the responsibility of Bucks County Council as the Highways Authority.

A substantial part of our work is in the review of proposals for large infrastructure projects such as Heathrow expansion and the Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH).

Status of Highways & Footways

During the past year we have seen major improvements through the resurfacing of a number of roads including parts of Iver High Street and Langley Park Road and a number of residential roads. The new pedestrian refuge on Langley Park Road will provide safer conditions for pedestrians when crossing the road. However, promised resurfacing of the remainder of Langley Park Road and Pinewood Road were deferred until the next budget year and other roads such as Wood Lane remain in a poor state of repair. We have registered strong complaints about these deferrals.

A current major concern is erosion of the road surface at the Black Horse roundabout on Slough Road caused by an underground water source. This remains under investigation.

The use of 'plane and patch' has improved the quality of many minor repairs to roads, but much remains to be done, and we encourage all residents to report road defects via the FixMyStreet website.

We provide a weekly update of forthcoming roadworks on the Parish Council website which gives news of potentially disruptive events.

We have been vigorous in lobbying Bucks CC to upgrade the footway on Thorney Lane South that provides a key link between Iver Village and Iver Station. Some improvements have been made to drainage and the path surface but more needs to be done.

The footways on Somerset Way were relaid at the end of 2019 and the Pinewood Road cycleway has been completed.

Street furniture

One of the bus shelters on Bangors Road made redundant by the regrettable, partial withdrawal of the No 3 bus service has transferred to the bus stop in front of the Iver Village Hall. This is also one of the stops for the recently-introduced 459 bus route to the airport, the result of much lobbying by your councillors.

The Parish Council has been working hard to encourage and facilitate a greater sense of community across the parish. The former police noticeboard in front of the Parish Offices has been refurbished and we shall offer this as a 'Buzz Board' for local community groups to display items of interest or to advertise their activities. Our Grounds Team has refurbished a number of benches around the parish and, as one of a number of initiatives to help tackle loneliness, we plan to install a 'Happy Bench' in front of the Parish Offices. This brightly decorated bench will provide a safe and welcoming place for residents to sit and chat.

Once the weather improves, we shall see further improvements when the clock tower is refurbished.

HGVs

Excessive numbers of HGVs continue to blight our roads. We have made numerous attempts to persuade the planning authorities to take a more pro-active role in opposing the issue of O-Licences, in refusing planning permission for new sites and taking enforcement action where no planning permission exists. However, so far, this has been largely unsuccessful. Decisions in the past 18 months by both county and district planning authorities have resulted in approvals for more than 500 additional HGV movements per day along North Park alone. Of particular concern is the increasing use of farm sites across the parish for HGV-based activities.

HGVs are a major source of atmospheric pollution. We are pleased that a parish wide Air Quality Management Area has been declared and we are seeking greater urgency and commitment to the Air Quality Action Plan recently being consulted upon by the district council.

Relief Road

Provision of a relief road system has been a decades-long priority for the parish. We are active members of The Iver Members Liaison Group (IMLG) which brings together councillors from the parish, district and county councils and business representatives alongside relevant officers to address matters of transport and infrastructure of critical importance to The Ivers. A positive development is that The Bucks Local Enterprise Partnership has provided funds to support a detailed assessment of the feasibility, design and costs of phase 1 of a relief road routed

across Thorney Business Park, and this is work in progress. Funding for construction of the road would be contingent largely on contributions forthcoming from housing developments and infrastructure projects.

In a further development, planning permission is being sought for an upgrade of Sevenhills Road to be funded by Pinewood Studios.

Parking

Inconsiderate parking creates problems throughout the Parish. Construction of the new station car park in Thorney Lane South has not yet begun and so introduction of the controlled parking scheme across Richings Park has been delayed. As an interim, temporary parking restrictions have been imposed at key points as a safety measure.

Streetlights

The Parish Council is responsible for more than 560 lighting columns on residential roads across the parish and on the Iver and Iver Heath Recreation grounds. Over the past two years, we have been upgrading the lighting stock with new, LED lanterns which have an improved light output for greatly reduced electricity consumption. We aim to replace around 100 more new lanterns in the next budget year, taking us to more than 60% of the total being upgraded.

The programme has been helped by grants from the Local Area Forum which enabled us to improve lighting for the footpaths at Iver Heath Recreation Ground and shortly, at Iver Recreation Ground, including the car park. Together with the new lights installed as part of the improved access to the Jubilee Pavilion, this should greatly enhance facilities for all users of the recreation ground.

We have suffered a number of losses of streetlights through road accidents, vandalism and even theft. Wherever possible, we recover costs of replacement through insurance claims.

Infrastructure Projects

We finally have our enhanced train service in place which includes Sunday services and the new station building opened today with tap in access. Lifts provide a step free access to the platforms and there will be staff available to help passengers. There will be a formal opening of the station shortly, keep an eye out for details of this.

Infrastructure projects continue to impact us and the M4 smart motorway work has started which is causing issues for some residents in Richings Park with HGVs and night working. The Old Slade Lane bridge has now been demolished and a new one will be gradually constructed over the next year or so.

Consultations on the other projects abound - The Western Railway Access to Heathrow (which will close Hollow Hill Lane permanently) is due for consultation later this year. The biggest impact on our Parish will come from the Heathrow expansion plans, as well as the separate Heathrow West proposal. There is yet another consultation planned for mid April when we will get to learn more about the local flood control areas that are proposed to be constructed here and the gravel pit at the bottom of Old Slade Lane. All of these will add yet more HGVs onto our already overloaded roads. If the expansion goes ahead we will suffer a significant increase in noise from aircraft flying over us and for those nearer the airport there will be a constant noise from take offs and landings. The current proposals offer us no respite at all. In addition the Grondon incinerator is currently being proposed to move nearer to us at the end of Old Slade lane to make way for the runway. The recent court of Appeal ruling sheds some doubt on if and when the new runway will go ahead but we will continue to ensure that any impacts on us are fully taken into consideration.

The Slough expansion proposals are still being pushed and we have the the Cemex site on North Park in operation. The Link Park application in Thorney was approved despite the vigorous representations we made, which will add another 204 HGVs on our roads and now the County council has just proposed a motorway service area to be located on Mansfield Farm with more impacts on our area.

The Parish Councillors spend a great deal of time to attending meetings, reviewing documents, lobbying the District and County Councils and our Member of Parliament and responds to all of the many consultations which can often be very technical. Our policy of objecting to all HGV generating proposals is central to our responses and lobbying for the provision of a relief road and other mitigation measures.

Planning Committee

Chairman Cllr Carol Gibson

The Committee continues to meet on Tuesday, every 4 weeks. We have seen about 260 planning applications since March last year. This is a welcome decrease since last year as there have also been appeals for representation and consultations on infrastructure proposals.

The PC can comment on design and layout, impacts on neighbours and traffic but decisions are taken by the planning authority, soon to be the unitary Buckinghamshire Council. There will be 5 area planning committees that will deal with most applications. Iver will be in the current South Bucks area and represented by elected councillors at area committee. Parish councils remain consultees, may speak at committee and public speaking will also be allowed. The details have yet to be published.

Most applications we receive are for smaller extensions but back gardens continue to be divided to create new plots for small homes. Some small homes are extended to the limit and some single properties demolished and 3-4 new homes built on the same plot. These situations cause distress to neighbours but are hard for the Council to defend. Space for parking is always an issue, even where it is possible to park on driveways this often means the entire front garden is paved over, altering the appearance of roads and contributing to the degradation of the local environment.

Quick summary/update of some sites:

Kebbell Homes has recently begun excavating to create underground parking for the 39 apartments to be built at the junction of Bangors Rd South and Evreham Road. .

The development at 19-21 Bathurst Walk is almost built.

Both Tower House and Mead House have recently been granted permission for demolition and building of houses on those sites. There will be a mix of affordable homes and open market homes.

Indian Nights restaurant on Slough Road is to be used as an office with 2 apartments above and five new flats at the rear.

100 High Street, Evreham Lodge, gained permission at appeal for 8 homes plus conversion of the coach house to an apartment. There was strong local opposition but that was discounted by the Inspector. There are ongoing efforts from the Iver Residents' Association to overturn his decision.

The approved development of the motor showroom at the junction of Leacroft and Langley Park Road has yet to start.

Land in and around The Ivers remains under consideration for unspecified "airport related and/or airport supporting development".

Enforcement

The continuing unlawful use of fields for airport parking and vehicle storage has caused great concern for all of us. Enforcement is controlled by law and has to follow due process. The offenders are aware of this and prolong the process while making a profit on their operation. Evidence must be gathered to make a case and cannot be disclosed. We rely on the Enforcement team to inform us when possible.

The Local Plan and The Ivers Neighbourhood Plan

The Chiltern & SB local plan is due for examination in March. Iver councillors will be attending the hearing and have raised questions about the amount of development proposed for the Ivers.

The Neighbourhood Plan has stalled and will be rebooted when the new parish council is in place following the elections in May. The questionnaire responses are still valid to inform the policies in the plan.

Colne Valley Regional Park

The Council actively supports the Colne Valley Park and Cllr Gibson represents us on the Colne Valley Park Community Interest Company. The Colne Valley Regional Park includes beautiful areas, the parks, and also many hidden gems. It has great potential to give people opportunities to get close to nature on their doorstep but is under enormous pressure from every side. It is sandwiched between the two biggest civil engineering projects in the country, HS2 and proposed Heathrow expansion, and is also impacted by the Western Rail Link to Heathrow, the Energy from Waste incinerator relocation and other major development proposals.

The huge cumulative effect of this is greatly underestimated; it is the most threatened landscape of its kind in the country. If this one area is to host so many developments 'in the national interest' and we estimate lose 10% of its green belt then National Government and local partners must respond by creating the conditions for a Regional Park that functions properly, offering a high quality green resource for local residents.

It was in recognition of these threats and the existing fragmentation of the CVRP that the Landscape on the Edge project succeeded in gaining funding from the National Lottery to form a landscape partnership and raise awareness of the CVRP. The Landscape Partnership projects are on-going. In The Ivers new signage is being installed, invasive plants are being removed from our rivers, ecological surveys are planned and the Colne and Crane Green Infrastructure Strategy has been published. This strategy is a call to action for all of us to make fundamental changes in how we protect and enhance our precious environment. Local Authorities can use it to inform responses to planning applications, and to guide sensitive mitigation from any developments that are permitted to help reduce the fragmentation of the CVRP and GB. In addition, local authorities can draw upon the Strategy when it comes to formulating planning policy.

The Colne Valley Regional Park CIC is determined to raise the profile of the park. With the help of everyone, including the Parish Council and local residents, we can make the case to local and national government for investment in our precious countryside. The quarterly CVP newsletter is available from the Council office if you've not found one yet. It has suggestions for getting out, exploring and links for twitter or joining the Friends of the CVRP.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

A new plan is being produced and there may be opportunities to improve how paths connect and integrate with pedestrian and cycle routes to make it easier to leave the car behind and explore the Parish and the wider area.