



Alderbury Parish Council

Report of the Chair to the Annual Parish Meeting

2020 was election year and I am pleased that all 11 serving councillors agreed to stand again and were elected unopposed. Alderbury is very lucky to have a non-political council and, while we might disagree from time to time, generally we tend to get on very well. Congratulations to Richard Britton who was returned with another healthy majority too. As a past Chair, Richard always takes a keen interest in Alderbury matters. He attends all our meetings and has fought many battles on our behalf over the last 12 months. Thank you, Richard.

May also saw completion of the village hall after its £450 thousand pound facelift and it was officially reopened on 7th August. I think we can all agree, the builders, Greendale, have done a brilliant job and the new facilities are really a credit to their professionalism and the excellent plans drawn up by local architect's Barclay Phillips. A big 'Thank You' to John Fuller for leading the project on behalf of the village and bringing it in on-time and on-budget. Just brilliant, thanks John.

As a little aside, the Village Hall was first mooted in 1933 but due to the war it was not actually completed until 1959. The social club came 20 years later in '79. The original part, the bit with the round roof, was built by a company called REEMA – who specialise in pre-cast concrete buildings. Believe it or not, the recent works have cost 100 times more than the original building. The hall cost £3,500 to build and over £350,000 to refurbish. But I have to say, it is now a real credit to the village and a vibrant hub for so many community activities.

Last year's Annual Parish Meeting was devoted to the launch of the 'Wildlife Friendly Alderbury' project and I am delighted to report that a lot has happened since then. In the Autumn the volunteers helped to plant a community orchard with 10 fruit trees under the expert supervision of Wiltshire Wildlife. Despite the best efforts of Storm Eunice, the trees are now thriving thanks to the TLC provided by Mel Lawrence and the volunteers. In spring this year, the volunteers were back out on Waleran Close with rakes and watering cans to start the first phase of the orchard wildflower meadow. The second phase will follow on in the Autumn, when we will also be looking to start a rewilding project at Oakwood Grove open space and do some tree planting at Spider's Island. Over the last few weeks, the volunteers have been setting up a cocktail bar for our nectar loving pollinators at the Community Resource Hub on the Rec where they have planted up the new raised bed with wildflowers and native perennials. Thanks Mel and the volunteers.

We did grasp the nettle (quite literally in places) and sorted out the pavements along Southampton Road. The banks and hedges had grown out so far that the pavement was almost impassable in places - it really was getting dangerous. Our excellent ground maintenance team, Hurdcott Landscapes, chopped back the encroaching banks and weeds from the top of the village right through to the business park at Whaddon. They did a great job too. Thanks to Simon and his trusty team.

In September, we were notified by Longford Estate that it was set to sell the pasture behind Junction Road to a developer. The land includes the site of our allotments, and we were all relieved that the new owners agreed to honour the terms of the licence, enabling us to provide allotments on the existing terms for tenants until at least 2026. The sale has caused uncertainty for the allotment holders, and they presented a petition to the Council asking for the allotments to be retained. The Council has agreed to back the tenants call for the retention of the existing site, access, and car park. Negotiations with the new owners are now underway.

Phil Spooner and the Alderbury Footpath Volunteers have continued to work hard looking after the village footpaths and particularly the very popular circular walk. We were delighted to learn that the permissive path by the side of Crossfields has been re-routed to dryer ground nearer to the orchid field and remaining roots above ground level have been removed. The valley towards Greenset House is still 'work in progress' but farmer Franklin White has placed metal sleepers to act as a bridge crossing over the wet area in the dip. This is a temporary measure until he's able to drain the site and complete work to establish a better route alongside the fence. During the wet weather the team put down two dozen bags of wood shavings on muddy sections of the footpath in the valley area to reinforce and assist path drainage. Finally, we were thrilled to hear that two new volunteers have joined the group. Our hearty thanks go out to Phil and his crew of volunteers.

It was super to see the lovely Christmas tree twinkling once again on a frosty Waleran Close Green. Warm thanks are due to everyone involved, Nick Ludlow for donating the fabulous tree, Marcus and Charlie Light, and Andy Cole for their technical wizardry and the Mernagh family for the beautiful decorations. After two years of a joy-stealing pandemic it was lovely once again to join the scouts, cubs, beavers and brownies for mulled wine and a good old festive sing-song around the tree. Thanks to everyone involved.

We started the new year in a frugal state of mind and agreed to peg-back our spending. Household incomes are under such a tight squeeze that everyone on the Council agreed that another tax-hike was just not on. So, the parish tax increase is less than 50 pence *for the whole year!* The money the parish council receives is only a tiny fraction of your annual Council Tax bill – the vast majority goes to Wiltshire Council, the Police, and the Fire Service. The money you pay us covers:

- Maintenance of the recreation ground and other parks and open spaces.
- Provision of allotments, bus shelters and grit bins.
- The cemetery, war memorial and the Fountain
- Play equipment, outdoor gym, skatepark, noticeboards and signs.
- Emptying of the litter bins.
- Footpaths, fences and hedgerows.
- Local projects – such as the local wildlife group and the gardening club.
- Emergencies – floods, storms, snow and accidents
- Finally, we pay our Clerk to keep things ticking along on the straight and narrow.

Alderbury and Whaddon really made the big time in March with a star appearance on the BBC One Show – the daily 7.00pm show with Alex Jones and Ronan Keating. Featuring the wildlife and footpath volunteers, the film crew took a stroll around the village to see the Green, the new community orchard, and the spanking new Village Hall. Presenter Matt Allwright was very impressed with the village and wished us well with our entry in the Best Kept Village Competition. Sadly, the parish council cannot organise litter picking again this year because of Public Health England's rules on the Novichok incident. It's a blow, but we fight on and there are so many good things to showcase this year – the newly refurbished village hall, the community orchard and wildflower meadow, plans for Oakwood Grove and the mini-forest project at Spider's Island. Add to that the amazing work of the volunteer groups – the wonderful footpath, wildlife, gardening, litter, snow, speedwatch and allotment volunteers. They all give so much to village life – a HUGE thank you from the Council. The village now has a superb new football facility down at Firs Road. So, things are on the up.

The parish council continues to review local planning applications on behalf of residents, and we do our best to make sure new building is in keeping with the village. It's a constant battle. We keep an eye on crime too. PC Pete Jung and the team at Wiltshire Police do a great job and are always keen to take up issues raised by the Council.

I have looked back over the year, but looking forward, there are a number of new things on the horizon. The Wildlife Project I have already mentioned, but also there are plans to develop new activities for young people during the holidays and to launch a climate change project, maybe even sticking some solar panels on the roof of the village hall. So, lots to be getting on with as always.

And a quick plug before I finish, the Council is supporting the 'Picnic in the Park' event that will celebrate the Queen's Jubilee. The fun family event will take place on Saturday 11th June 2022 – pop a note on the fridge, I hope to see you there.