Annual Parish Meeting – PC Chair’s Report - Pippa Dennitts 2023

Firstly, apologies for not being there in person – I’m sure you will enjoy the evening & the prosecco in my absence.

We finished last year with great progress in the Parish Council in terms of getting our staffing right after a period of instability and now with Jen as our Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer and Byron as Assistant Clerk we are able to really focus on delivering exciting things for the Parish. This is particularly relevant as we start the new term with 3 new Parish Councillors.

Sadly we say goodbye to Roger Adams, Alison Clarke and Luke Edwards from the Parish Council. Each contributed hugely during their time as Councillors and we’d like to thank them for their time in service of the Parish and wish them all the very best with their next endeavours.

The recent election brought our 3 new Councillors, which along with a contested co-option meant we were over-subscribed for Parish Councillors. This is a wonderful sign of the commitment local people have to our parish as it is not uncommon for Parish Councils to struggle to fill seats. Having a full complement of Councillors enables us to provide our best effort to the parish. So we say a massive welcome to Frances Edwards, John Wharton & Julian Jepson. All three have already joined into different aspects of the Parish Council’s work through the various committees, working groups and other roles so we look forward to supporting their efforts and impact in their new roles as Councillors.

Another area of transition has been our footpaths representative. This is a key role which supports the Parish Council by reporting and progressing works needed to keep our local footpaths in good condition for the enjoyment of all the parish. David Gollifer has stepped down from this role after 17 years so we say a huge thank you to David for all he has done over that extensive period. We welcome our new Footpath Representative Mel XXX who, along with her spaniel Floyd, will be ensuring our footpaths remain in good working order.

To continue a focus on our wonderful outside spaces, I’d like to also thank our volunteer tree wardens - Sue and Faris Shimali - who ensure all of the Green’s trees remain healthy & safe. This year they have completed the massive task of assessing and documenting all of the trees for our register and they continue to work on behalf of the parish.

We also enjoy consistent and positive support from both our District Councillor, Lynda McWilliams and our County Councillor Alan Goggin, so again thanks to them.

As a Parish Council we continue to work hard to address ongoing challenges for the parish. These include the Southside Track, traffic issues in the village and maintaining & protecting the Green and its facilities for everyone’s enjoyment. I am particularly pleased that over the past year we have created a very passionate and proactive Environment Working Group who are working on a number of different areas. They have worked with Parish Council to establish increased biodiversity on the village green and have also instigated a partnership with our wonderful Primary School to deliver an OBE program for the children. That’s the Order of the Bentley Environment and the inaugural cohort for this is underway.

Since the last Annual Parish Meeting we have had the joy of a jubilee, the sadness of the passing and funeral of Queen Elizabeth 2nd and then the celebration of the coronation of King Charles 3rd. On all 3 of these significant national occasions the residents of Great Bentley have come together in a manner which is absolutely awe-inspiring to behold. Our thanks go out to the volunteers, committees and organisers of these occasions which really bring out the very best of our village community.

Of course, a very large feature of our day to day village life is centered around the village green and it has been fantastic to see so much activity here with the football club and the cricket club on a regular basis. Also we very much looking forward to the Carnival and Village Show. Thank you to everyone who involves themselves in the committees and organisation for these and all off the other events, groups and clubs which make our village life so active & enjoyable.

Finally, I would like to thank my vice chairman Peter Harry and those of my fellow councillors who I have not already mentioned along with Jen & Byron our very hardworking staff who each contribute a considerable amount of time and efforts to support the parish.