

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

Personal Perspectives of Roger Beavil, a Parish Councillor 2011-2015.

INTRODUCTION

This article should be of interest to anyone who is considering becoming a Parish Councillor. Although the anecdotes and examples chosen from those published in his mainly-monthly Ward newsletter actually took place in one Parish over the last 3 or 4 years, their relevance can extend to anyone, anywhere.

BACKGROUND

In the build up to the local elections of May 2011, I was asked by two people I knew if I would consider standing for election as a Parish Councillor. My immediate response was rather negative, since I knew almost nothing about what Parish Councils do. I did know that there had been arguments and discussions in the Press and elsewhere about 'affordable housing', and that within Hughenden Parish Council (HPC) such arguments had often been very heated. I was also told, though slightly incorrectly I subsequently found out, that on the particular Ward I would represent, there hadn't been an election for 16 years, which sounded very undemocratic. I later discovered that there was a marked distinction between 'contested' and 'uncontested' elections. When I did look into the background of what parish councils were for, I heard and saw enough to prompt me to put myself forward, and even observed a Full Council meeting in April, at which there was plenty of evidence that the arguments about affordable housing were still dominating Council events.

HPC is a rural parish, to the north-west of High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, with around 3,500 households and 9,000 residents, mainly living in a number of villages. At maximum there are 15 Councillors, with either 3 or 4 in each of four Wards. To help things there is a full-time Clerk plus a part-time Deputy and a part-time Clerical Assistant (a post created only in 2014). In addition to Full Council which meets on 11 occasions each year, together with the odd ECM (Extraordinary Council Meeting), we have three standing committees: Planning (meeting every 3 weeks), Environment & Services (bi-monthly) and Finance & Administration (bi-monthly), together with Working Groups (when required). Some of the services we provide relate to playgrounds, maintenance of allotments, Garden of Rest, open spaces, and some bus shelters, dog bins, and street lighting. Hedge trimming and grass cutting where it is our responsibility makes a huge visual impact, since we are in the heart of the Chilterns.

Like all Parish Councillors, I am a volunteer, and have a life outside of the Parish, with interests that include Church-related music and a variety of sports; and I've had a fiction novel published via Amazon, called 'Uniquely Red Secretly Blue'.

In my particular Parish Ward (for the villages of Naphill and Walter's Ash) there is a magazine/newsletter which is published 10 times each year. I decided early on that I would contribute an article regularly to this 'Gazette', not to describe the main decisions taken by HPC, but to give the reader a 'feel' for what it is like being a Parish Councillor. This article reprints, with some minor changes, many of those articles, in the hope that

the comments might help you to understand what can be involved, and perhaps even to encourage you to stand as a Councillor for your own Parish at the next elections, in May 2015. Each section is preceded with some brief comments. Please note that older references to email or web site addresses and so on may be out of date.

A final comment: these are views of one person, new in 2011 to being a Parish Councillor. They do not necessarily represent the views of others within HPC or indeed within any other Parish Council. However, much of the experiences I've commented on are surely likely to be similar to those of many other councillors!

JUNE 2011

[As a prospective Parish Councillor with a contested election, do expect there to be considerable leg-work in distributing leaflets within your ward, etc. You might also be surprised that unlike District and County Councils there is no marketing/advertising budget. We paid for the leaflets out of our own pockets!]

Each Ward Councillor wants to thank the huge numbers who voted for them as new Parish Councillors. Though independent, we each promised to listen to concerns, and to fairly represent everyone in discussions. Time will be our judge.

Over the next few months I will share some personal experiences to give you a flavour of the impressions and activities as one of the new Parish Councillors.

When confronted with the question 'why don't you stand for the Parish Council', and after looking into it, I couldn't think of any really good reason to avoid putting myself forward! I was encouraged to find that locally there were three others in the same boat. The initial phase was straightforward - find a proposer and seconder, and get the paperwork to Wycombe District Council.

We shared the effort of distributing leaflets (though we still had to pay for printing costs), and my thanks go to the 10 or so friends, family members and locals who gave their time freely. It was so much easier for one person to leave leaflets at 100 or so rather than 1300 homes! If you haven't 'dropped leaflets' before, the main dangers are vicious metal letterboxes and jumping dogs, either of which can snap at the tips of your fingers as you push a leaflet through.

I was also encouraged to knock on doors, and have met many of you who are reading this letter. Apologies to the greater number that were either not in when I happened to go onto a particular road, or to those on roads I never trudged. What was uplifting was the reception I got when I introduced myself. No-one was abusive, many were supportive, and nearly all had remembered the leaflets that had already been 'dropped'. Many intended voting, some using a 'postal vote'.

Everyone I saw was encouraged to give feedback on just one local issue they would like resolved. Top of the list were two items of potentially grave concern: doing something about speeding and parking (particularly at the shops), preferably before a fatal accident occurs. I know that the Parish Council can make decisions on some things and make recommendations on others, and I just hope that the new Council is going to be able to do 'something' before it is too late! I'll keep you posted in future issues of the Gazette.

Some suggestions, like dog-fouling, raise further questions, like why some dog owners do not make the effort to pick it up! With some suggestions, the answer lies in your own hands. A few said they were not happy with the decision on a planning application, yet they had never formally objected to it! Please don't leave it too late to put forward your views - just contact the Parish Council: by letter or email (hughendenpc@btconnect.com).

One other highlight for me was on the day after polling, referred to as 'the count'. This took place at Wycombe Leisure Centre on a baking-hot day. It was interesting to see the process of checking votes and announcing results, though I had to leave before those for our Parish were declared. I spent an enjoyable evening at Naphill Village Hall where a 'Talking Heads' drama was unfolding.

JULY 2011

[It is important for a new Parish Councillor to know the extent both of the Parish and of the Ward they represent. Right from the beginning I've tried to encourage 'members of the public' to attend meetings. Meetings may on occasion be confusing, but it is perhaps the closest we get to 'democracy']

Even before the election one of the first things I realised I'd have to do was to find out which parts of the locality are covered by our 'Hughenden Parish Council', and specifically by the 'ward' of 'Naphill & Walter's Ash'. Perhaps you already know about such matters, but I certainly didn't! The ward includes a few houses in New Road, Walter's Ash, all the houses along Main Road, and finishes about halfway down Coombe Lane; there is a multitude of side roads. There are three other wards in our Parish that cover Hughenden Valley, Great Kingshill, and Widmer End.

Some of the houses on New Road lie within the Parish of Lacey Green, while the riding school and adjacent houses are in Bradenham Parish. Various other Parishes help to surround ours: Great & Little Hampden, Great Missenden, Little Missenden, Hazlemere, Downley, and also High Wycombe (a 'town council')

Did you know that anyone is able to turn up to Parish Council committee meetings if they wish, to watch, listen, and perhaps raise questions during an 'open' session? Such meetings almost always take place in the Parish Council offices, which you may already know are situated at 'The Common' in Great Kingshill. Go up Cryers Hill and beyond for a mile or so and turn right onto a short road that forms the furthest boundary of the cricket ground. You will see a parking area and the council office itself. Why, do I hear some say, should I bother? One important reason is that the Parish Council spends or saves a little under £190,000 of 'our' money each year, to try to help improve things for our locality!

Before the election, I managed stand or hover (since space was limited and no seats were available) throughout the first hour or so of a full council meeting. There was plenty of paperwork to pick up and read, for those who wished, like minutes of the previous meeting and the agenda for the evening. If you don't get in early to the 'L-shaped' area, your seating or standing position may not allow you to see what is going on, but you will certainly hear the comments made by Councillors and others.

Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the very first Council meeting after the election. It is extremely useful to have access to the Internet, especially for checking on the large number of email messages that appear most days, and so far at least it has been the main way to communicate with others.

Each new Councillor received a file of paperwork from our Clerk to the Council, which contained helpful advice about how to behave in meetings (!), policies on using email & on other topics, and a 'Register of Interests' form which we had to complete, to ensure that we declare in advance any potential conflict between our Parish Council activities and any outside interests.

SEPTEMBER 2011

[There is a learning-curve for feeling comfortable at Council meetings, and other events.

Although our first 'surgery' was mentioned, we have since discovered that meetings about a particular issue, like road safety, for instance, generates far more interest than all-embracing surgeries.]

Most Council meetings take place in the Parish Office, though we are looking at the possibility of holding one per year in each of the Wards, hopefully with a room large enough for both Councillors and anyone else to more conveniently see & hear what is going on. It is good to see 'the public' at council meetings, and around 15 minutes is given over for them to comment on issues they would like the Council to subsequently consider. To try to keep some kind of order, anyone wanting to speak should catch the Chairman's eye and wait to be asked to speak! That process has similarities with school or college debates more than bidding at an auction, and usually starts by silently raising a hand and literally making eye to eye contact with the Chairman. The meetings typically last 2 hours or so, followed by a further 30 minutes or so of informal chatting. In Hughenden Parish we have three main committees (Planning, Finance & Administration, and Environment & Services) which do the preliminary detailed work on items, and present recommendations to the full Parish Council. The first of these meets every few weeks, while it is every three months for the others [subsequently becoming bi-monthly], with the full Council meetings occurring mainly once a month. In some smaller Parishes, where there are fewer Councillors, the full Council is able to handle things without the need for extra committees.

At the first 'Services' committee meeting I was elected Chairman for the year, despite my not knowing much about playgrounds, allotments, or 'open spaces', etc.

No-one told me in advance that, as Chairman, I would be one of four judges of the allotments competition. We were impressed by the obvious effort that many people put into keeping their plot in good order, particularly those where it was difficult to spot any weed at all, or where vegetables were growing in neat, straight rows! It clearly takes much dedication, time and effort to keep any allotment plot in good condition.

All the new Councillors for our Ward were pleasantly surprised to be invited to the RAF's Annual Reception. Although we live only a short distance away I for one had not realised that it happens, or what takes place. It is the RAF's opportunity to say 'thank you' to people from the broad locality (people running a business, those involved in charities, or representing local 'services', like the fire service, together with some from various levels of local government, etc), and especially because we help them to feel part of the community. That was a sentiment I had come across when delivering leaflets prior to the election! Drinks and a variety of hor d'oeufs were provided, and there were plenty of opportunities to make new contacts. The Station Commander gave a short speech, before we all went outside for the final part of the two-hour reception: an RAF band, some officers 'on parade', and a low-level fly-past by a Spitfire. The only downside of the evening was the need to stay standing for a couple of hours!

Three of the four Councillors for our Ward recently held our first 'surgery'. We want to offer everyone the chance to bring any issue to us, and chat it over, on a regular basis, probably every 2 or 3 months. That first occasion had a small number that turned up, but please watch the Gazette for details of our next one. We all feel that it is important for you to let us know about community issues that are of interest or concern to you.

OCTOBER 2011

[There is a need for patience and a recognition that we cannot do everything, particularly in relation to District or County Councils. Appreciate the quiet periods when all action is directed in the same positive direction, since we never know when disagreements will occur. The 'Bucks Free Press' mentioned below is a weekly newspaper

for the general locality]

As my early interest was being galvanised I attended one Parish Council meeting (as a 'member of the public') and shortly after the elections in May I was present at the 'Annual Parish meeting'. The contrast between each of those and our most recent committee meetings could not be stronger, in my view. Those early meetings seemed full of acrimony and frustration. I believe that those currently involved in matters affecting us, whether current Councillors or indeed any of our 9000 residents, now look to the future not the past, and seek a spirit of co-operation.

I almost feel sorry for the young reporter from the Bucks Free Press: she attends Council meetings and I'm sure she would prefer to report on contentious issues, but is having difficulty finding any! There will inevitably at some point be some differences of opinion, but the current feeling, I'm sure, is that we will try to achieve a meeting of minds, since many of the broad goals of each of us in the Council are similar (spend or save 'your' money wisely and efficiently, recognise 'your' concerns regarding Affordable Housing on Green Belt land, try to do something about people who by-pass normal planning procedures and just place temporary or permanent living facilities wherever they wish; and let's not forget the Government's high-speed rail project, etc!)

Sometimes, however, we have to recognise that while we can suggest and even fund things (for instance, various initiatives to try to reduce the speed at which many cars career through our parish), other levels of government (like Bucks County Council) can block our path. We will keep persisting with initiatives we believe to be right, however. We are all slowly getting used to the interplay of different levels of local government.

One of our councillors, for instance, is both an elected Parish Councillor for Widmer End Ward, and faced a contested election to become a Wycombe District Councillor for its ward of Hazlemere North. Three other district councillors, for Greater Hughenden Ward, however, did not have to face a contest in May, and were returned 'unopposed'. For the sake of democracy I hope that in the future, and at whatever level, there are always enough people prepared to stand for election. Perhaps it could be 'you' the next time! I mentioned Wycombe District Council because while much of its business is essential but not necessarily spectacular, there are on occasion some 'fireworks'. For instance, two of our Councillors recently went to one of their meetings that considered the 'travellers' occupation of land near the RAF, and I was present (again as a member of the public) when the decision was taken to not develop the Booker airfield site for housing and sports facilities.

Please don't forget that anyone from the parish can turn up to any of our own committee meetings, to see what is going on in 'your' parish!

NOVEMBER 2011

[Look for local walks, particularly where the Parish Council keeps them looking attractive!]

Recently there haven't been too many weekends where my wife & I had spare time on our hands which coincided with decent weather, but it did happen a few weeks ago. So here's one idea for those who want a gentle stroll and some fresh air for an hour or two: We parked in the car park at the Village Hall, and turned onto Downley Road, past the Post Office. Just before the woodland at the end of that road, on the left, are Vincent's Meadow and Pond. The former allows access to the public through two 'kissing gates'. It hasn't the dramatic scenery of more exotic locations, but it is local, and pleasant enough for part of a stroll or picnic in warmer weather. A small flock of sheep was there, which reduces the need for mechanical grass cutting in some months. The Pond is tidied

up during winter months and was a little overgrown when we visited it. From there we skirted the woods and came to Hunts Hill Lane, came past the edge of Hughenden Manor, then walked to Louches Lane, passing the Parish allotments. A few minutes later we were back at the Car Park, and if we had done our short stroll at a different time might well have had a coffee at Bon Ami. Vincent's Meadow & Pond are only part of the 'open space' facilities owned by the Parish. As & when we do further walks I'll try to give you a brief summary.

For nearly 30 years we lived in the Parish and I had no concept of how important the Parish Council is to all of us. So I hope you might also consider coming to one or more council or committee meetings, to see how we come to decisions or recommendations. Just contact the Parish Office for details of what's happening soon!

DECEMBER 2011

[End of an old year, with time to reflect]

Do you have a favourite season of the year? For me, it is probably autumn. At the time of writing, our villages are displaying bright gold, yellow and brown, there is no more than a hint of frost, and while we know that we may shortly have days when snow or ice block our paths and make both driving and walking difficult, spring will be just round the corner. Christmas and New Year are just round the corner, and can give us a feeling of 'rebirth'.

In a similar way, perhaps, the Parish Council seems to be looking forwards! Particularly for new Councillors such as myself we have spent much of the time since May getting used to what we can and cannot do, learning how we can improve the effectiveness of our various committees while encouraging ideas, selecting a new Clerk to the Council, and so on. All these are essential and ongoing, but recently there has been a significant change.

FEBRUARY 2012

[It is easy to get drawn into spending time on a variety of matters, including those where the Parish Council can have a voice but no rights to take a decision]

My best wishes for the New Year to every reader of the Gazette. When I started some musings of a new Parish Councillor shortly after last year's elections, I had no idea of how much time might be spent on Parish matters. Although the only obligation is to attend the mainly monthly Full Council meeting, we all seem to put in much more effort, in a variety of ways. I found it surprising that I needed a break from things over the Christmas and New Year period, although we didn't have a holiday. Luckily there were not many meetings that needed attending, and even the sheer quantity of email messages slackened off significantly. My regular sporting activities, badminton and volleyball, were also discontinued over the period. All this has given me plenty of time to metaphorically recharge batteries.

Most of us have seen on television or read in the papers that the Coalition Government have given their backing to the next stage of creating HS2 - the proposed High Speed rail link, initially between London and Birmingham. Everyone on Hughenden Parish Council believes that the Government's business case is over-optimistic and the environmental harm is under-stated. It does, however, reinforce the fact that any Parish Council has control over only certain issues that affect a locality, though we can try to influence other bodies, like national Government or NGOs (non-governmental organisations). In the case of HS2 we will continue to ask those who make the ultimate decision to

reconsider the facts that have been presented to them by organisations like the Chilterns Conservation Board and HS2 Action Alliance.

MARCH 2012

[Expect to meet moments of frustration, but try to stay positive]

I don't think I'm overly impatient but some recent events have made me feel quite frustrated, and they highlight the limitations we can all experience at some time. The first example has been going on for many months, and is something we are all aware of: the Government's continuing commitment to the High Speed 2 rail link. I'm frustrated partly because, in the view of many, its potential benefits continue to be over-stated and likely economic or business disadvantages do not seem to be given fair weight in the arguments that have raged locally and nationally. I'm particularly frustrated, though, because each of the three largest political parties supports the HS2 proposals, and I wonder who on earth we could turn to at a General Election to get a fairer appraisal of the project. In the end I resign myself to thinking that, whatever the final outcome, and however decisions have been taken, it follows some kind of 'democratic' process.

A frustration of a different kind has come with regard to a local issue. For years most residents of Walter's Ash have been concerned with the accident potential that comes from inappropriate parking at or near the Co-operative store. I'm frustrated that the Highways people seem to give less attention to concerns where there have not yet been any deaths. I'm frustrated that it has been many years since public meetings were held on the issue, with no action taken (yet) on better parking spaces or in determining ways in which the Co-op can be restrained from having delivery vehicles blocking the pathway or sticking out onto the road. On a personal note I'm frustrated that an offer to help with discussions on the issues was received politely, but not taken up. Again, I have to recognise that others, over several years, have been involved, and might not appreciate the offer of help at this stage.

MAY 2012

[Getting used to jargon, and avoiding it where possible; and the need for patient persistence]

It's been just a year since the election for Parish Councillors, and it's useful to be reminded from time to time about the need to avoid or explain various 'jargon' words or phrases that sometimes creep into Gazette contributions.

The term 'precept' for instance, was mentioned in a short article that was actually complimentary of the Parish Council. What 'precept' refers to is the amount of money we request to be passed from Wycombe District Council (WDC) to Hughenden Parish Council (HPC). The phrase 'succeeded in reducing the precept by 2%' might now be clearer to many more readers, since it indicates that we have succeeded in asking WDC for less than in the previous year.

The initials 'SID' and 'VAS' and 'NAG' are often bandied about in the Gazette, and sometimes it is difficult for those not involved in various 'community' groups to instantly remember what they relate to. Unfortunately, the first of those can be referred to as 'Speed Indication Device' or 'Speed Indicator Device' or 'Speed Indicator Display'! 'VAS' is similar, and means 'Vehicle Activated Sign'. Don't worry about the detail: the messages they give ('slow down' or what your speed is or should be), are useful if your foot has inadvertently slipped on the accelerator. You may be pleased to know that we

will shortly be seeing more of these around the whole Parish.

As for 'NAG', that refers to the Neighbourhood Action Group that among other issues looks at speeding and road safety in general, and in particular at where SID or VAS units can best be sited within the Parish. NAG, along with many other groups, rely on the time given by volunteers. If you would like to consider sharing some of your time, go to our Parish website (hughendenparishcouncil) and select 'Your community' then

'Neighbourhood Action Group' itself. If you haven't easy access to the Internet, telephone our Clerk, Charlotte, on 715296, regarding any parish issue.

If the Gazette editor, Clare, is willing, perhaps you could contact her about this month's Gazette where there is jargon you cannot figure out, as a reminder to contributors to always 'keep it simple'!

Speeding is, of course, just one of several matters that are important to us. Another is the business of pot-holes. On other occasions we've all been reminded that we can contact 'BCC' to report any large or otherwise dangerous pot-hole. So I now share with you what happened a few weeks ago when I attempted to report the large number of pot-holes on Coombe Lane. I started, with the website 'www.buckscc.gov.uk', from where I spotted 3 separate ways lodge a report. Unfortunately, there was something wrong with the website since for the best part of a week I simply got a message saying that they recognised that there was an error! I'm not put off by such things, however, and discovered a telephone number to report a road safety issue (0845 2302882), but unfortunately no-one replied by the time my patience had expired. I then spotted an option to send an email to 'Transport for Bucks': tfb@buckscc.gov.uk, and sent them a message. Confirmation of the message came the next day, with a follow-up several days after that. At the time of writing this article I can say that yesterday there were indeed road repairers out on Coombe Lane, which may or may not have been because of my attempts to let them know about the situation. Nor do I yet know how successful they have been in making repairs that last!

My purpose in covering this anecdote is not to scare you off from reporting road problems (or crime, or anything else for that matter), but its reverse. Websites are rarely out of action (or, in jargon, 'down') for a week. Be patient if you cannot get your message across first time. If you are attempting it via the Internet see if anyone else you know is prepared to try on your behalf, since you might have a problem with your own computer! BCC suggest, in any case, that we try the following web page for reporting future pot-holes: 'www.buckscc.gov.uk', then use '/bcc/transport/ea_report_problem.page'

SEPTEMBER 2012

[A summer break can help!]

Much of the previous edition of the Gazette was given over to articles related to the Summer Fete, so it has been several months since a 'personal perspective' of just one Parish Councillor was aired in the Gazette.

Just before the Fete we had a little ceremony on the Crick, to plant a new tree in recognition of the Queen's Jubilee, to fill the gap left several years ago by a tree which had become diseased.

In July four of us went round all eight of the Allotment sites across all Wards in our Parish, in order to choose the winners for each, and across all the sites. It is clear that much time, patience, and effort has to be given to ensure that any plot is kept in reasonable condition, and despite the variety of weather conditions that are encountered. We commend those who also strive for excellence!

August has been a funny month, not just because of the weather - I'm typing this in the

middle of a heat-wave, but it could equally have been prepared during some torrential downpour - but because the pace of life for many Councillors drops off significantly at that time of year. I cannot remember that happening so much last year, perhaps because some of us were heavily involved in the whole process of finding a new Parish Clerk: job advert & background material, agreeing a selection process, deciding who to invite for interview & holding the interviews, and creating a short-list of applicants who came to a meeting of all Councillors. It seems almost like yesterday, not a year ago!

It's worth remembering, especially for those of you who might at some future point want to consider becoming a Parish Councillor, that the extent of the time and effort given is really up to the individual. At minimum we should attend all or most of the Full Council meetings. Whatever is done in addition is up to the individual. For instance, I'm also regularly involved in attending committee meetings which concentrate on 'Finance and Administration' or on 'Environment and Services'. Prior to August I also attended the 'Planning' committee on two occasions, and have been part of several other meetings, including some relating to Allotments. So with the August 'break' came a welcome change of pace.

During August there has been a significant reduction in the number of emails which have to be attended to. We don't make decisions by email, but it is useful to be passed material which can help the process of becoming informed about something, some of which will be discussed by the Council.

OCTOBER 2012

[Sooner or later a councillor will retire, and the appropriate procedures will occur to fill the vacancy]

Elsewhere in this edition of the Gazette you will see that there is a vacancy for a Parish Councillor. Whenever a council has less than the maximum, it adds to the effort the rest have to put in. It's a little like the cycling 'time trials' that I watched for a while yesterday on television: each team starts with 6 members, and each takes it in turn to be in the lead. If numbers drop off, each must take a greater share of the effort of leading.

In our case, it was always highly unlikely that all 15 Councillors elected in May 2011 would continue providing time & effort for all four years of our term of office: there's always the chance of moving from the area, changing to a more time-demanding job, or being affected by other personal circumstances.

In our case we need to replace one of the Councillors elected for the Hughenden Valley ward, but there is no discrimination against someone from within Naphill & Walter's Ash Ward putting themselves forward as a Parish Councillor who would take particular interest in what's happening in Hughenden Valley, in much the same way that one of our own Ward Councillors lives just outside our Ward.

Some of you may already have seen notices across the Parish offering the possibility of a by-election for those interested in filling the vacancy. By the time of the deadline, there were no takers, so we are now at the stage of preparing to 'co-opt' someone. This is likely to be the first experience most of us have had of such a process.

This is definitely not the 'old boys' network'! Whoever puts themselves forward, and hopefully there will be more than one, will be interviewed by our Full Council, probably at its next meeting on Tuesday 9th October. I would be surprised if applicants were not asked questions based on the following: what has prompted you to consider being a Parish Councillor, and what qualities or experiences do you think you would bring to the role?

When I think back to our selection of a new Parish Clerk I remember that we had

guidelines at every stage of the process, to ensure objectivity and fair-play. I'm hoping that we will equally apply suitable guidelines for the selection of a new Councillor. If you would like to be considered - assuming that the Gazette reaches you in time, please pass on your name, phone-number and e-mail address if any to our Clerk.

NOVEMBER 2012

[The selection process at HPC for co-opting a new Councillor]

I make no apology for continuing to mention the ongoing search for someone to replace our Parish Councillor who had to withdraw for personal reasons. Some organisations to which we can belong - perhaps a group that plays a particular sport, like badminton or volleyball, both of which I do, as it happens, or perhaps a group that has shared interests, like rambling or conservation, etc - attract us because we know we will enjoy the experience, not just once but on many occasions. Even when we lose a sporting match or get soaked in some outdoor event, we continue to be part of the group essentially because we know that next time we might win or have a close encounter with another team or the sun may even be shining!

It is different for anyone who is a Parish Councillor. There certainly are times when we can enjoy ourselves, but at heart we are freely giving of our time and abilities in an attempt to ensure that the local community is helped in whatever way seems reasonable. And we have a duty to try to encourage others to be prepared to do the same, when an opportunity arises.

At some point before the next elections, in May 2015, it is possible that there will be another need to find someone to replace a current Councillor; personal circumstances can change for any of us. If and when that happens I'd like to think that some of you reading this article might want to put yourselves forward. In any case, I hope that some readers will be willing to stand for election in May 2015!

As you read this we will have gone through various preliminaries for finding a new Councillor, who could live in any part of the whole Parish but who in this instance would be prepared to take a particular interest in what goes on in the Hughenden Valley ward. I must admit that the initial period of time when posters went out asking for those willing to face an election for the position seemed very short, but I'm sure it satisfied the electoral requirements.

We've drawn up guidelines that appear to be open and reasonable for 'co-opting' someone to fill the vacancy, which will have been put to the test leading up to and during the Full Council meeting on Tuesday 13th November, which any member of the public may attend.

The selection process will last from 7pm to 8pm, prior to the Full Council meeting itself. Each applicant will be able to give a little background regarding why they have come forward, and there will be an opportunity for Councillors to ask them questions. Once all candidates have been separately interviewed, the Chairman will ask members of the public and the last candidate to leave the building for up to 15 minutes so the Council can discuss the interviews and vote on their preferred candidate for the vacancy. Candidates will be notified of Council's decision within 24 hours; and the decision will also appear in Council Minutes and on the HPC website.

DECEMBER 2012

[A full quota of Councillors, and some of the items requiring our attention and time]

It's nice to start with some good news. Once again we have our full quota of Councillors,

who can share the workload at Hughenden Parish Council (HPC).

A few days ago I briefly chatted to a neighbour who said that it's good that people volunteer for things like the Parish Council. I've today received an email from someone who attended a Full Council meeting earlier this week and who said "I was impressed by the dedication and sense of responsibility the Councillors expressed". I mention each of these because the amount of time & effort put in by any one Councillor is up to individual circumstances. Some have full-time commitments - work, running a business, etc - while others are retired. All, as far as I can tell, do indeed feel a sense of responsibility to the Community. We try to ensure that all decisions are made in the best interests of most parishioners.

Three important items are currently 'bubbling up', that relate to different parts of the main road that is at the heart of our Naphill & Walter's Ash Ward, particularly with regard to safety issues. If you have any views on one or more of these items, please forward them to our Clerk. Your views are listened to, as indeed are the views of those who come as 'members of the public' to any of our committee meetings.

The first has been mentioned over many years and concerns road safety issues in the heart of Walter's Ash. The Residents' Association have made great efforts to reach an agreement with interested parties, like the Co-op, the MOD, Bucks County Council (BCC), etc, and various possible solutions have been considered, including a lay-by adjacent to the Co-op. However, to progress things further HPC has been asked to become involved, and initially we are aiming to pay for the 'Highways' authority to carry out a technical feasibility study where all realistic options can be considered. It is hoped that the Co-op itself and BCC will wish to contribute towards the cost of this study, without which we will not be able to gain agreement for action. Even afterwards, if options appear to be impractical or too expensive I for one will try to ensure that we have some 'public consultation', to once again get your views, but this time armed with a detailed report.

The second relates to the proposal by the Post Office to close down postal services at our existing Post Office and to transfer those services to the Costcutter shop. Apart from added inconvenience by moving postal services to one end of the Ward, there are some serious road safety issues with their proposal. By the time you are reading this the period of 'consultation' by the Post Office will have ended, and we might have some idea of what will be happening. I was recently asked what influence HPC might have over a large organisation such as the Post Office. This is part of how I responded: What we don't know is whether they have already made up their mind and are going through the motions or whether they are genuinely seeking the views of the locality. If it is the latter then our view, representing the view of the whole community, is likely to be fairly considered. Even then, however, they are likely to balance opposing views on the matter. This is why in my regular 'Personal Perspective' column in the NWA Gazette I'm keen to encourage individuals to also complain or suggest ideas or give praise to some organisation, in addition to trying to get the Parish Council to express views on behalf of the whole community.

The third issue involves the opposite end of our Ward: the old Shana equestrian site, which actually falls within Bradenham Parish, where there is likely to be a considerable road safety impact not only within Walter's Ash but across the whole locality, as additional large supplier vehicles of the owner and of customers add to the existing traffic problems in the area. It is worth noting that there has been vociferous opposition for many years to the problems arising at their existing site, in Hughenden Valley, but involving a road that is much quieter than that of our Main Road/New Road. The legal experts will be pouring over documentation, and it seems open to interpretation whether the site should only be used for 'equestrian' purposes. In the last few weeks, much earth moving and stocking of products they sell appear to have been happening on

the site, but with no application for change of business use, which is extremely frustrating for locals, and will have safety issues for everyone.

FEBRUARY 2013

[The need for individual action on important concerns; and this time a vacancy for Councillor within our own Ward]

This is being written with snow all around, which reminds me that potholes and gratings are even more of a potential hazard when they are obscured. Last week I informed Bucks County Council (BCC), via their public website, of the various potholes that currently affect Coombe Lane. It will be interesting to see if repairs have been made by the time you read this. Anyone can report poor road conditions, whether they are close to where you live, or on a route you regularly use, for instance. Let's inundate BCC with requests, particularly where we think they might be a danger to pedestrians or road-users! If you haven't got Internet access, just phone the Parish Office on 01494-715296. It's worth noting the website for reporting potholes, if you are able to use the Internet: www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc/transport/ea_report_problem.page

You will see elsewhere in this Gazette an article from our Parish Clerk about a vacancy for a Councillor, which has occurred because our colleague has found it increasingly difficult to balance home, work and Parish activities. She was an enthusiastic, and young, member of the Parish Council, and will be missed from that role.

Since being elected I've tried to give you some idea of what the role of a Parish Councillor is, in the hope that one or more of those living in the area might consider putting their name forward when the time is right, initially by contacting our Parish Clerk. You may recall that you would need to commit to attending all or most of the eleven evening Full Council meetings held each year, and to stay awake during them! There are plenty of things we do apart from that, but these are on a voluntary basis, and it would be up to you to decide how much time to give, so please contact our Clerk on 715296, for further details if you are interested.

MARCH 2013

[Being asked to be Chairman, and a round-up of reasons for Councillors retiring]

Time is very strange. It seems to move at different paces and for different lengths in different circumstances.

Many years ago, for instance, I played golf fairly regularly, though never particularly well. I once had a round with someone who was a far better player than I was. It seems like yesterday, but I met him next during the build-up to the Parish Council elections, almost two years ago, and recognised him immediately. He turned out to have been a Councillor for many years, and the most recent Chairman. It is unfortunate that issues that started years ago, 2010 I believe, escalated and only culminated in his resignation over the conclusions of the 'Standards' Board in the last month or so. It must have felt like decades not years!

Anyone who gives up their time and energy to be involved with a Parish Council should be publicly thanked from time to time, even if their contributions on some items are at variance with others on the Council, and it is surely important for differences to be sorted out in a spirit of co-operation and not confrontation.

For those thinking of whether to apply to become a Parish Councillor yet are concerned that we have lost quite a few Councillors in the last few months, here's the reassuring news: three have had to resign for 'personal/family/domestic' reasons, which can occur

to any of us at any time. They should be thanked for the contribution they were able to make. The remaining two resigned as a direct result of the strains involved with regard to the 'standards' issues, mentioned above. Hopefully we will be able to learn from that period of confrontation and try to avoid similar events in the future.

MAY 2013

[How 'members of the public' can confidently speak at meetings; a general update; and walks you might take involving areas for which HPC is responsible]

The last few meetings of Hughenden Parish Council (HPC) have been well represented by 'members of the public', and it has been good to hear their views on various issues, and to encourage their comments. There is a right for all members of the Parish to attend a meeting, whether of a standing committee (for planning, environment & services or for finance & administration) or for the Full Council itself.

For the latter, and particularly if you haven't been to one before yet want to speak on some issue, you might find that jotting down what you want to say prior to the meeting will be useful, to keep your comments concise but understandable; and please be polite even if you are furious about something! You may wish to stand or sit while speaking. At Full Council there is an item on the Agenda allowing 'public speaking', while at the less formal committee meetings try to catch the eye of the Chairman if you would like to speak at a particular point. There are rules about duration of speaking, but at most meetings we try to be flexible, and to give you a good chance to make your comments. Naphill & Walter's Ash ward is now up to full strength, with four Councillors, though at the time of writing there were still three vacancies elsewhere in the Parish.

All Councillors aim to be at the Annual Parish Meeting, when we bring all parishioners up to date with what we've done on your behalf, and look to suggestions from you for what we might do for the Parish in the future. Please try to get to Widmer End school on Thursday 16th May for an 8pm start. We'd really like lots of people to turn up! We try to use different locations each year; last time it was our school in Walter's Ash.

With Eastertide having come & gone and with hopefully better weather, the next few months might be ideal to explore some of the open spaces HPC is responsible for.

Perhaps add a little extra to your planned walk in Naphill Common by also calling in at Vincent's Meadow and Vincent's Pond. Or you could venture further afield by going to Little Burnham Field (beyond Hughenden Valley allotments), or Primrose Hill Amenity Area (in Widmer End), or Cockshoot Wood (off the Kingshill Road in Four Ashes). Enjoy the walks!

JUNE 2013

[Annual Parish Meeting; confirmed as Chairman; complaints from HPC and from individuals; loss of our Clerk]

Most parishioners never get to the Annual Parish Meeting, like the one held yesterday as I write this article, though it is your right to do so, as it is to attend the more regular meetings of Full Council or committees. The Annual meeting is held in a different part of the parish each year.

As you probably know, for the last few months I have been Chairman of the Parish Council, which has given me additional perspectives on the role of a Parish Councillor, and will now remain in that role over the next 12 months.

The chance to write and present a report on behalf of the whole Parish has been a great opportunity to reflect on what has happened to benefit parishioners, and I was a little

surprised but greatly encouraged when I saw just how much positive action has taken place despite being significantly side-tracked by various legal and semi-legal proceedings, such as the fraud case involving an earlier Clerk to the council.

At one point I mentioned that we had recently sent letters to 'influential' people, like our Member of Parliament and the Transport Secretary, about the declining state of the roads in the Parish, with its impact on road safety as road users try to swerve or suddenly brake, or suffer damage to their car or bicycle, etc. I mentioned, as an aside, that it would be even better if hundreds of people wrote letters or sent emails complaining about this. One person said that within a few hours a damaged area had been fixed, but several others, including myself, said that was not the general response we got from the Highways Authority.

The one downside we have at the moment is that our Clerk has now left us, moving on to Wendover Town Council. While we wish her well we now have to spend time & energy finding a permanent replacement.

Looking to the future we would like to consider ideas of extra 'services' that we might provide for specific groups, like 'pensioners', 'teenagers', etc. If you have any ideas, please forward them to us at the Parish Office (715296 or www.hughendenparishcouncil.org.uk).

JULY 2013

[The importance of email, and of letters. August ought to be relatively calm!]

How did most of us manage without email? Are you someone that might want to use email but you don't know how to use it? We are looking at things which in the future could improve the community in some way. So, please drop a line if you would like us to consider helping those who currently don't use email, or send your thoughts to HPC on any other issue. The address is The Common, Great Kingshill, Bucks HP15 6EN.

Committee meetings during August are very few, in contrast to the many additional meetings needed at the moment for selecting a new Clerk for HPC, and selecting new Trustees for the Allotments for the Labouring Poor charity. All councillors need to balance their work, domestic situation, leisure interests, etc, with their commitment to activities within HPC. So August is often used as a time of mental refreshment, before normal activities are resumed. I hope that you, too, will be able to find the summer a time to recharge metaphorical batteries.

AUGUST 2013

[Expected calm never happened! Effort has been diverted from positive projects for the Parish]

I had hoped that August would be a time when we could relax, spend time with family, and perhaps think of ways in which the residents of Hughenden Parish could have improved services.

However, around 50 incoming emails, mainly from some fellow-councillors, together with phone-calls, replies, etc., on a single topic have dominated my time and that of several other councillors. We also nearly held an Extraordinary Council Meeting on the topic, but I'm glad to say that those who had suggested it decided in the end to withdraw the request. In the holiday season we would have inevitably found that some councillors would have been away on holiday. It is, of course, the right of any councillor (or at least two of them) to ask for an ECM; it is also their right to ask to know about what is happening with regard to almost any aspect of Parish business, though the Clerk

keeps us all up to date at Full Council meetings on a wide variety of matters, the next date being 10th September.

By the way, it is worthwhile noting that in addition to our long-standing part-time Assistant Clerk we now have a full-time Clerk who is still getting used to many of our activities.

The frustration, for me at least, is that more and time and effort seems to have been spent in the last few weeks on matters with an underlying history going back several years, at the expense of ideas and activities that could help the Parish now and in the future. I can only hope that we soon find a more suitable balance of effort. Before our mid-summer break many were involved in projects that will bear fruit over time, not the least of which has been trying to reduce road safety concerns at either end of our Ward, around the Co-op store in Walter's Ash and at what was previously the Costcutter store in Naphill.

I'm looking forward to September, when we might be able to think more of the Parish and Parishioners in general!

For those of you reading this article, I trust that your summer went well. Please do send to the Parish Council your ideas on ways in which groups of residents might be helped.

OCTOBER 2013

[Balancing work, life and Parish commitments; any volunteers? Starting the process of a new Parish Plan]

Whenever we start adding to our existing domestic or leisure interests we have to balance the satisfaction gained with pressures on time. Unfortunately this has meant that three of our Councillors have had to withdraw their services recently, one from Great Kingshill and two from Hughenden Valley, with 'domestic' or 'personal' considerations being the main reasons for leaving the Council. We are, of course, sorry to see them leave, particularly as it puts some added pressures on remaining councillors. After all, we are volunteers, not paid officials.

The longest journeys across our Parish are four miles or less, and I would ask you to consider helping the Parish by being co-opted as a Parish Councillor and being prepared to help particularly with an interest in either Hughenden Valley or Great Kingshill. It is becoming particularly important to maintain the full quota of fifteen councillors as we are entering a more positive phase, with background work already starting to eventually produce a new 'Parish Plan', with input from local groups and residents, to have a clearer picture of where we want or need to be in the next five or ten years, and also with a serious look at how best to communicate with all parishioners and groups, for instance.

So I'd like to invite you to think about becoming a Parish Councillor now! Much of the involvement is optional, and for you to judge how much time is put into things, but we all have to be aware of potential conflicts of time with our other activities. Please consider doing this and putting forward your name, by contacting our Parish Clerk on 01494-715296.

DECEMBER 2013

[Change is often slow]

We are starting to see progress on a number of issues. Those affected by parking at the shops in Walter's Ash, for instance, may have noticed some activity recently, with rubber traffic sensors and even someone in a yellow coat! That's because the Feasibility

Study the Parish Council has commissioned for looking at ideas about how to improve road safety and reduce the likelihood of accidents in that area has started and may even be finished by the time you read this.

That won't, of course, be the end of the matter. We'll need to consider the possible alternatives, discuss these with the Residents' Association, come up with a plan for financing the best ideas, and put them to local residents, before going ahead with any scheme. I'm sure, however, that Hughenden Parish Council will be asked to fund part of whatever work is chosen.

Unfortunately, for those living near the Post Office in Naphill, we are still waiting for Bucks County Council, or Transport for Bucks, to come up with ideas about how to handle the increased road safety concerns arising from the re-siting of the Post Office. We'll keep pressing for their suggestions.

We are also pleased to provide some extra financial assistance to Village Halls across the Parish, primarily to help towards Christmas lights, and suggest using LED lights which are both more environmentally-friendly and should last longer. Let's hope that we are cheered whenever we pass by one of our local village halls.

FEBRUARY 2014

[Exceptional circumstances do occur!]

If you regularly read this article you will know that over the last three years I've tried to paint some kind of picture of what life is like as a parish councillor. Last night was exceptional!

Our Full Council meeting started at 8pm but finished well after midnight, but I trust I'm not putting you off any thoughts you had about putting yourself forward to be a parish councillor. What happened was that we had over 30 separate items to consider, and everyone there wanted the chance to add to discussion or suggest action that HPC (Hughenden Parish Council) might take. What made it exceptional in a positive way, however, was that everyone stayed awake, there were no shouting matches or use of offensive language, and everyone really wanted us to finish what was on the agenda. The reason behind this is that each councillor wants to do the best for around 9000 people in the area, and sometimes that all takes time, which is probably the main commitment anyone becoming a councillor has to make, together with the certainty that we will never please all of 'the people' all of the time, to use a well-known phrase. We are, as you probably know, all unpaid volunteers. We were in a warm room, had water to drink, and someone had thoughtfully provided some Maltesers, and we had the opportunity to influence things for the community's benefit.

Sometimes in small groups and sometimes in larger committees we discuss specific ideas regarding the future, and also the impact of some historical events. For our immediate area, Naphill and Walter's Ash, for instance, we are moving forward with regard to road safety issues near the Co-op store, and will be getting views from the Residents' Association, local businesses and local residents. We aim then to apply some of the thinking to road safety close to the new Post Office in Naphill. We are also looking for ideas about how to make the small pond in Walter's Ash more attractive. A parish-wide 'youth event' is being organised, though we are at an early point in planning it. You will also in the near future receive a 'Parish Survey Form', to get your views on a wide range of topics, which should help HPC to really know a bit more about how you feel about things, particularly those where we can do something positive.

On top of these forward-looking plans, we also have to consider 'internal' issues, which can affect the effectiveness of HPC.

More insights next month!

MARCH 2014

[Public involvement and consultation]

If you read last month's article you will know that we recently held a Full Council meeting that had a record number of items to consider and lasted well past midnight. The following meeting had far fewer items, and I'm glad to say we finished much earlier. Perhaps there is a connection!

For anyone considering becoming a Parish Councillor at some point, it certainly helps if you can feel comfortable working within committees, and it is always satisfying when enough people, often with different backgrounds and interests, come to decisions or make recommendations that will affect a sizeable number of residents, and even better when action starts taking place. So the following is an update on recent progress. You will know already that there are a whole host of road safety issues relating to the shops area in Walter's Ash. The Residents' Association worked hard for many years to seek action, and more recently Hughenden Parish Council (HPC) paid for a 'feasibility study' from Transport for Bucks, as well as gathering additional ideas. Recently we held a small meeting primarily of residents living on or near Main Road, Ash Close, etc., and in a few days we hope to hold one involving local businesses. At this point your Ward Councillors are primarily listening! We will then sift through all the ideas to see about presenting and refining them at a variety of meetings: HPC itself, one or more Public meetings, etc. If it looks like the ideas will need considerable finance we will in parallel discuss that with various businesses and public bodies.

Because the road safety issues in Walter's Ash have some similarities with road safety concerns near the Post Office in Naphill, we are hoping that much of the thinking will subsequently be applied there as well.

During the time I've been a Councillor, HPC has considered 'improvements' to the Pond in Walter's Ash, but each time have paid for any emergency work and postponed coming to conclusions about just what should be done, if anything, to make it an attractive local feature. So in the last few months we've had a few meetings, which have also included staff from the school, and are hoping to get approval for involving one or more environmental experts to come up with suggestions. Do you have any ideas about what to do with the Pond? If so, please contact HPC (clerk@hughendenpc.org.uk, or phone 715296).

In another part of our Parish, Widmer End, I've recently been involved in seeking agreement between local residents, HPC, BCC, TfB, and WDC! We've ended up with an agreement in principle to consider spending 'S106' monies primarily on a pedestrian crossing, but we are in the early stages of sorting out the details. It is clear that road safety issues dominate our thoughts, wherever we live.

We also have a number of ongoing projects that will affect the whole of our Parish: Another article mentions the Parish questionnaire which is a preliminary to working on a Parish Plan; we are looking at ways to improve Communications across the Parish; We are organising a 'youth event' within the Parish; and we have ongoing discussions with the Allotments charity. All of these, and more, involve personal time for some Councillors, with the simple reward of seeing things come together with a satisfactory outcome!

APRIL 2014

[Admit to errors. Further example of public consultation]

We can all make mistakes, and unfortunately by some chance event there was a single but significant mistake in the Parish Questionnaire which your household should have received by now. It is really important to get a feel for what everyone within Hughenden Parish thinks about the provision of amenities, and issues that we can try to influence. We will be analysing your completed forms, and will then use the results to help draw up a possible Parish Plan for the future. Unfortunately, anyone living in Walter's Ash will have noticed that the name of that village was missing! We hope that most of you will simply have ticked the spare box, and perhaps added the missing village name. We are sorry for any inconvenience this caused.

One of the amenities owned by Hughenden Parish Council (HPC) is Walter's Ash Pond. Over the years some of our money has been spent on maintenance work, to ensure that it is safe. Prompted by the school, who would like it to be an environmentally-friendly and sustainable local amenity, HPC has recently agreed to carry out a study to see what an environmental expert might recommend. Some people, for instance, believe it is a lost cause and should cease being a pond. Others believe that it can become a significant attraction for the village, with visitors including families and school children. What is your view, however? Have you ever visited it, perhaps with children or grand-children? What ideas do you have for what could be done to it? Please send us your views - we'd love to be inundated with ideas! If you use email, please address your comments to clerk@hughendenpc.org.uk, or telephone 715296.

Continuing the themes for Walter's Ash, please try to get to the public consultation session on ideas regarding road safety in the village. This follows earlier small meetings of residents and businesses in the vicinity of the shops, and some hard work by Ward councillors. This is an opportunity to support or criticise the plans which we believe may well be practical and which would improve road safety in that area, before then concentrating on any legal or financial implications. Please pop in to the school, at any time between 5pm and 8pm on Tuesday 1st April. Just follow the signs for 'Walter's Ash road safety'. Because arrangements are still being made at the time of writing this article, please double-check the details, either by phoning the Parish office on 715296 or if you have access to the Internet by going onto the 'News' page at www.hughendenparishcouncil.org.uk. We hope to get your views!

MAY 2014

[Taking care with public money. The value of accepting invitations]

If, as I hope you will, you come to the Annual Parish Meeting on the evening of Thursday 15th May, held this time at the Primary School in Hughenden Valley, we might well have some modest refreshments, though plans for that haven't been drawn up at the time of writing. What is certain is that any refreshments will not be elaborate. As a Parish Council we are always careful to remember that any money spent ultimately comes from all residents of the Parish.

The same is true when councillors, and the current Chairman in particular, get invited to some 'outside' event, such as the AGM of a village hall or residents' association, where light refreshments are typically offered, perhaps as a 'thank you' to those who turn up. The main advantages of such meetings lie in the chance to rub shoulders with people, some of whom we might have communicated with only via email, and to seek answers to questions which had already been raised. So it was, for instance, a short while ago when I attended a morning 'conference' by Transport for Bucks. I was able to chat with many about ongoing issues within our Parish, and they included the new Cabinet Member for Transportation, a recently-appointed person in charge of contact with 'customers' that includes parish councils, and two officials who can influence the progress of ongoing

road safety issues in two separate parts of the parish. At the end, there was a light buffet.

The current Chairman of Wycombe District Council has been responsible for several events which I've attended on behalf of the Parish Council. For instance, he introduced a simple and short service for Commonwealth Day, which ended with tea or coffee, and a tempting cake. A 'Civic Service' was recently held in Hambleden, a picturesque village between Marlow and Henley that I'd never been to before, again with light buffet afterwards.

The final example comes from the Royal Air Force, who in each of the years I've been on the Parish Council has invited Ward Councillors for Naphill & Walter's Ash, along with representative business people, members of local organisations, etc. to their 'annual reception'. As well as light refreshments there is the chance of informally chatting to others, perhaps for the first time. Subject to weather conditions, there has been both a marching band and a fly-past by one or more aircraft, at low level. We hope they will continue their tradition!

JUNE 2014

[Comments about an Annual Parish Meeting. A (small) success story]

In the last edition of the Gazette I mentioned that everyone was invited to the Annual Parish Meeting (APM), which met a few days ago. I have some different overall observations of that meeting.

First of all, I commend all those who came to Hughenden Valley school. You probably know that we have no fixed venue for holding the APM, and it is shared around different parts of the Parish, so for some the two or three miles might have been too far, or perhaps other meetings occurred on that night. However, I must admit to being a little disappointed with numbers when we recall that there are nearly 9000 residents across all parts of Hughenden Parish, from Naphill & Walter's Ash to the other six villages. What we lost in terms of numbers was, I believe, more than amply compensated for by what took place. The APM is an opportunity to outline some of the aspirations of the Council for the next 12 months, and to comment on what's been happening in the previous 12 months. Unlike some past meetings, there was a general goodwill and a hope that we can concentrate on positive projects within the Parish. We had, for instance, a number of youngsters who presented a video of views by youngsters at a recent Parish 'Youth Fun Day', which was held at Naphill Village Hall and the Crick. I think those teenagers who presented and subsequently faced a number of questions from the audience are to be commended. They carried it off with true professionalism. It is worth noting that we are actively on the lookout for schemes which we could help organise, that might benefit groups of parishioners. Youngsters and the elderly are two such groups, for instance.

We should also thank our keynote speaker, the head of Planning at Wycombe District Council, who outlined some dilemmas she continues to face with regard to the district's 'Local Plan', where the decisions that are taken are likely to affect each of us for many years, particularly with regard to the quantity and quality of homes in our locality.

I'll finish this article with a success story. Minor, perhaps, but success it was! Regular readers will know that from time to time I've encouraged everyone to contact Transport for Bucks, whenever you've seen potholes, and thought 'someone should do something about it'. You might remember that you can contact that organisation by internet, email, phone, or letter. In my success story, I'd let them know about a single pothole on our small cul-de-sac, not as a Councillor but as an individual resident. Within a week I saw white lines around the rectangle to be repaired. One day later, the repair itself had been

made. So in the modern jargon, if each of us 'owns' the responsibility to report potholes where we live or where we regularly drive, our collective small efforts might just add up to a locality which has far fewer potholes!
Enjoy the summer.

AUGUST 2014

[A slower pace, for once]

This has been a strange summer. For each of the last two years I've been especially busy throughout August, and particularly so just 12 months ago when we were selecting our new Clerk to Hughenden Parish Council (HPC) and trying to fairly respond to requests for information on a number of matters, which involved many additional meetings, and scrutiny of a mountain of email messages. This year, however, at least at the time of writing this article, circumstances are allowing most of us to enjoy the weather, and have a mental break from Parish affairs. The exception is that of HPC's Planning Committee, which continues to keep an eye on proposed business or residential developments in the area on a regular basis, whatever the time of year.

The next Full Council meeting is on 9th September, and it's worth mentioning that any Parishioner can attend that, or indeed any of our various Committee meetings. If you haven't previously come to see what goes on then please think about coming!

In the autumn a number of important topics will be further discussed, which might have long-term implications for the local community. In particular, you may have seen comments relating to the initiative by Bucks County Council (BCC) to transfer the provision of various services from them to Parish and Town Councils. We are still waiting for detailed information from BCC before coming to any conclusion. The services being discussed include cutting back grass verges, keeping road signs visible, and so on. The longer we wait for the additional details the more likely it is that the decision about whether HPC should take on the responsibility for such services will not occur until after the elections in May 2015.

If you might want to put your name forward to be a Parish Councillor, I'd suggest that you contact one or more existing HPC Councillors, to get a realistic view of what it entails. There is no doubt that for some the energy and time involvement can conflict with business, social or domestic commitments. The driving force, however, is almost always that we can do things 'for the benefit of the community', but it's still been nice to have that break over the last few weeks!

OCTOBER 2014

[Building up again after the summer break]

The Parish Council didn't grind to a halt during the summer, but many Councillors, myself included, took the opportunity for a few weeks to mentally switch off from various Parish affairs. Our Clerk, however, spear-headed the ongoing action that is always required: cheques have to be sent to suppliers, requests for information or action (as with overhanging branches or with grass cutting, or checking on playground equipment, for instance) have to be handled, and our thanks go to Peter, Emma and Jill for their contribution throughout the summer.

For most of us, though, it's the start of normal working! Full Council has already had its September meeting, and the various Committee meetings start up again. It's worth noting that while these are listed on our website (www.hughendenparishcouncil.org.uk), we also recognise a shortage of noticeboards throughout Naphill or Walter's Ash, which I

personally would like to see remedied in the next few months. Not everyone has internet facilities, or checks our website on a regular basis. Please do consider observing some of the meetings, which is your democratic right. You might just want to know how well we are spending or saving approximately £190000 of your money! It was pleasing to see one or two new faces as 'members of the public' at the Full Council meeting, and I trust we will see them, and others, at future meetings.

As Councillors, our diaries are quickly filling up. Apart from the regular meetings, various 'Working Groups' are starting up after the break, which do much of the hard work of discussing things prior to presenting a view to one or other of the committees, or directly to Full Council. Among the various working groups are those handling discussions with the Allotments for the Labouring Poor trustees (AFLP); looking at our overall Strategy, especially what broad approach on things might be implemented after the Elections in May; how communications across the Parish might be enhanced; and what road safety improvements are feasible in various parts of the Parish.

FEBRUARY 2015

[An appeal to consider becoming a parish councillor in May's elections; the decision not to seek re-election]

This is probably the last insight into the life of one Parish Councillor, apart perhaps from further ones that might encourage you to put yourself forward in the elections that will take place in early May. This has been a repeated theme in various 'personal perspective' articles over the last four years.

I'd like to inform you that I will not be standing in May for re-election as a Councillor. It's been a hard decision to make, and I thank you for the general support I've had, particularly on certain initiatives. However, there are a variety of other things which have not received their fair share of my time. I will continue to ensure that the build-up to elections, whether contested or not, will run smoothly and will hope for the active support of many parishioners. I hope that this article will help you to understand the reasons for my decision, and why I still recommend that everyone should seriously consider putting their name forward as a possible Parish Councillor in the forthcoming elections.

There are a number of reasons I believe you might consider if you want to find out more about being a Parish Councillor. Not the least is the fair distribution of public money, on which decisions can be made on behalf of the local community. In addition, the collective voice of the whole Council can often be helpful in encouraging other organisations (Wycombe District Council, Transport for Bucks, Bucks County Council, for instance) to consider action which we believe will be in the best interests of our community. You would also learn a little of how 'local government' works, and be part of the 'democratic process' which is at the heart of much that we cherish, even when our personal view is not always that of the majority.

There can, of course, be disadvantages. Allocating a fair share of time to family, work or other interests is not always easy, and has probably been the main reason why we've lost some of our other councillors over the years. I'm no exception to those conflicts of time, and will continue to work for the interests of Hughenden Parish, and for Naphill & Walter's Ash Ward in particular, until the elections.

So, if you'd like to know more about volunteering to become a Parish Councillor, please contact our Clerk, Peter Wetherman, on HW 715296. In addition, a single file of many of my earlier 'personal perspective' articles is being made available on our website, www.hughendenparishcouncil.org.uk, as one person's view of being a Parish Councillor. My best wishes to you.