

CHAIR'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MAY 2024

It is a pleasure to report that it has been another pretty good year in Langford, no disasters and lots of good things happening, including a major achievement by the cricket club to progress their new pavilion plans – well done to them.

Parish Council Personnel

There has been no change in the council's personnel this last year, and thus I once again thank my fellow councillors for their continuing efforts, and know that they join me in our gratitude for the sterling work of our Clerk, Caroline Parsons.

Our priorities over the past year

Let me report first on the four priorities the Council identified for its work over the past year.

1) Further work on a possible affordable housing project

Our housing needs survey carried out a few years ago identified a clear need for a modest amount of affordable and social housing in Langford, with initial priority given to people with Langford or local connections. After initial enthusiasm from WODC in working with us on this it is frustrating that for the last two years very little progress has been made due to the lack of engagement by WODC.

This will continue to be a priority for us, but the next steps do require the active involvement of WODC, as they are the owners of the land behind the school which remains the prime site for some affordable housing. As soon as we can restart this initiative and have something more concrete to go on, the Parish Council will of course undertake a consultation within the village, and in particular with the residents in the Elms and The Wickets.

2) Contributing to measures promoting sustainability and environmental improvement

The council can claim no major successes in this respect, but we have continued our small scale work in and around the village to help maintain our village environment in the best state possible – for example, some mowing, weed spraying, playground maintenance, support towards the churchyard upkeep, and in organising litter picks.

It is a pleasure to note the tree and hedge planting work of Jim and Cyndy Johnson in the Back Fields, and Bo and Jonny Potter in The Closes.

3) Organising CPR training sessions

A very successful and well attended CPR training session was held in March.

4) Continuing to foster Langford community spirit and people's involvement in village activities

Forgive me for repeating something that I wrote in my report last year, because I do think it reflects the view of all of us on the Parish Council.

Something I believe very strongly is that a PC can play a key role in helping to promote something often called "a sense of community". I've been fortunate to have a long connection with Langford and my feeling is that the community spirit at the moment is as strong as it has been for many a year. It can be hard to pin down what exactly community spirit is, and how it is generated, but I believe it comes partly from trying to involve as many

villagers as possible in community activities, and partly from encouraging people to have a voice on village matters, both of which in turn help to foster a sense of belonging.

Community spirit is difficult to measure, though it is pretty obvious when it is absent. Let me just highlight three examples which I think show that in |Langford it is pretty buoyant at the moment. The cricket club is a real asset to the village, and the way people have rallied round to contribute to the club's major fund raising efforts this past year exemplifies both community spirit and the esteem in which the club is held – and the tangible outcome is the very smart new pavilion. Over the Christmas period there was a series of delightful festive events, exemplifying community spirit both by the range of people organising them and by the large number of people enjoying them. Another example would be the Arts Festival, held for the third last June. This is a major event for a small village to put on so successfully, and while the main organisation is inevitably carried out by a small group, the community spirit is shown by the large numbers of volunteer helpers (and attenders) without whom the festival simply could not happen.

Two priority areas which emerged during the year

Two important strands of parish council work emerged during the year.

20mph speed limits

Oxfordshire was designated as one of the country's pilot areas for introducing 20mph speed limits in cities, towns and villages. Whether or not lower speed limits are adopted is voluntary, a matter for each town or parish councils to decide. However, as a pilot area, Oxfordshire has significant funding to support this initiative and so a change would involve no direct cost to the local community if a decision was made within a defined time frame. The parish council accepted that there are reasonable arguments both for maintaining the current 30mph and for reducing the limit, but on balance, given that the offer to move to 20mph was fully funded, we felt that we should put this to village consultation. The response to our simple survey was good, and there was a clear but not overwhelming majority in favour of lowering the village speed limits. Thus we have asked OCC to go ahead with the change and the work is now scheduled to happen within the next six months

Community land project

Between 2020 and 2022 trying to purchase a plot of land as a village amenity was one of the council's main priorities. Two opportunities arose with the sale by the Church Commissioners of first Lower Farm and then Rectory Farm. At the time of the first sale the council carried out a major village consultation to find out the level of support for the village buying a plot of land for community use, the cost of which would be funded by taking out a Public Works Board loan to be repaid by a modest increase in the parish precept. Support for trying to obtain some community land was very strong indeed, which encouraged us to explore any options available.

While unfortunately we were unsuccessful in the two farm sales, we have kept alert to any opportunities, and now we think we are in a position to achieve our objective to acquire an almost ideal plot of community land – the field adjacent to the church, called the Vineyard.

I will not go into any detail here as by the time you hear or read this I suspect you will have seen a fuller report of the current situation as part of our follow-up consultation process. The parish council are strongly in favour of going ahead with the purchase, but before doing so we want to check that we still have good support for doing so. My own view is that acquiring The Vineyard as a village

amenity will be a great benefit to Langford residents for many generations to come, as well as giving us to control to protect this important plot of land in the heart of the village conservation area.

Council finances

All the Parish Council's income comes via the annual precept, the amount the council requests as its share of the local "rates" paid by each household. For the past few years we have used an agreed formula for calculating our precept - the formula aims to balance the wish to control expenditure with the need to maintain sufficient reserves to cover unexpected costs. This year we were able to reduce our precept slightly, although it is broadly in line with the past few years.

Looking ahead the level of our precept will depend partly on whether we go ahead with buying The Vineyard, and this is one of the element in the consultation process going on at the moment.

Looking ahead

The Council's priorities for next year will include:

- 1) Progressing the community land project if the consultation shows that there is still support to go ahead with buying The Vineyard, and then setting up the necessary management and development structure
- 2) We will continue to try and rekindle WODC's interest in exploring options for a limited amount of affordable housing
- 3) As a more local action the council would like to record and map the traditional field names in the parish, or as many of them as possible, before they are lost to posterity

Richard Kemp
May 2024