

SWANBOURNE PARISH COUNCIL
Outgoing Chairman's Annual Report
Cllr. Clive N. Rodgers BSc., Ph.D.

Written for Swanbourne Parish Assembly planned for 12th May 2021. After cancellation due to Covid 19 crisis, this was published in the Swanbourne Newsletter and distributed to every household in Swanbourne village and parish.

It is May 2021, and as I have just stood down as Parish Council Chairman, this will be my final annual report.

Late spring and early summer last year were marked by the easing of the first lockdown. At first, we received queries about legalities and what was and was not allowed during lockdowns, but that eased as time went on.

We were living in circumstances which were unusual, to put it mildly, in that many people were working from home or on furlough. As self-employment became harder, however, it was now that Dave Thrower started a gardening business, helping out the Parish Council with some strimming and mowing of the picnic areas of Millennium Wood and with the general maintenance of the playing field and other parts of the village on an ad hoc basis. By the time we had reached the end of the summer, the play area part of the playing field had been repaired and was back in full use as the lockdown had fully eased.

By September, 2020, we seemed to be getting back to normal as schools were fully open again but unfortunately, this could not last as another wave of the virus began to hit us with the advent of the more contagious Kent variant.

By December we were back in lockdown and schools closed once more, not reopening until 8th March 2021. For many of us home working again became essential. However, by the time we reached April, 2021, Dave's work in his traditional business of *Redshift Media* had resumed, so his gardening business closed. Our thanks go to Dave for everything he's done for the village.

The social distancing requirements meant that the annual Parish Assembly held in the Village Hall which normally takes place between March and May could not take place. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to give you a written summary of our work over 2020 and 2021 to date.

Bus Shelters – The second bus shelter had been completed in November 2019 at the top of New Walk. The John Price memorial bench had been relocated to a new concrete base next to the shelter. In October 2020 a light was installed with a sensor. The light comes on at dusk if somebody is waiting in the shelter (when movement is detected). Last autumn, the subsided section of public footpath close to the Village Hall bus shelter was finally replaced by Buckinghamshire Council.

New Walk Footpath – The tarmac surface of New Walk has been deteriorating for several years and by December 2020 the deterioration had intensified. Sections of the footpath had come away completely, exposing clay below which was very slippery and water retentive. The footpath was starting to become a health and safety hazard, so something had to be done. At the start of 2021, I began meeting contractors and obtaining quotes then project managed it myself. Completion was in late April.

Playing Field and Playground Equipment – The last year has been a difficult time, with the tennis court often closed. The two new rubbish bins occasionally overflowing as now Buckinghamshire Council's refuse contractors sometimes missed us. We still have some money

ring fenced as part of the original playing field regeneration project, with which we will need to look at replacing some of the defective tennis court netting or instead installing a tennis wall.

Swanbourne Memorial Gardens – These have been well maintained by Phil and Sylvia Dalton over the last year. However, the bark on the paths has been breaking down over the last two years to expose areas of base liner. A speculative visit to Brook Farm aggregates of Winslow enabled me to secure two loads of pine bark and I would like to thank the owner, Garry Kemp, for supplying £105 worth of bark to us for no charge. This new bark was laid in April 2021. However, we still need more.

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway – As it stood, the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway proposals were paused for review. However, in March 2020 the scheme was formally cancelled by Grant Shapps (the Transport Secretary). I've written several letters myself and attended meetings about this, and I extend my thanks go to all who persisted in their opposition to the scheme.

East - West Rail – Sadly, in September 2020 the original Swanbourne railway station (built and opened by the Buckinghamshire Railway in 1850-51) was demolished and the track was lifted. Reginald G. Waters, a resident at the Station House for many years, was re-housed in the summer of 2020. The new railway (planned for operation by 2023-24) has unfortunately led to an increase in local heavy goods traffic and periodic closures of local roads as the projects progresses. It seems that we just have to put up with that.

Traffic Studies – Helen Cleaveley is also standing down from Swanbourne Parish Council after spending six years as the Councillor in charge of traffic issues and studies. Helen has organised and overseen the traffic feasibility options with Ringway Jacobs over the last year and still plans to maintain her interests through the Speed Watch programme. Helen has kindly written a summary of Swanbourne's traffic issues:- *The PC is acutely aware of the concerns of parishioners, particularly those riding and cycling and has over the years instigated - and often paid for - many measures to tackle speeding ("dragons' teeth" road markings, tree planting to obscure sightlines, removal of the central white line, speed indicator warning signs on rotation, voluntary Speed Watch, warning signage, village questionnaire), however the big recent change was the commissioning of the Transport for Bucks Traffic Survey.*

This is because it told us clearly where, and what, the issues were and enabled us, armed with data, to continue our campaign for a police speed camera van and to commission a TfB Feasibility Study to assess our options for the worst affected areas. The challenge brought by the Study was that the best option seemed to be build-outs/speed cushions on Mursley Road (where the highest volume and speeds occur), which would reduce speeds to around 25mph and reduce volume by 20%, but at a huge cost (the PC's preferred option was £108,000).

Better news, perhaps, is that Thames Valley Police has finally recognised our concerns (particularly at commuter peaks) and agreed to add us to the rota for the speed camera van. As a sign-off from me, the COVID-19 lockdown brought quiet roads (that many villagers hadn't seen since the 1970s) but, as restrictions ease, there has been a worrying increase in speeds, due to the still fairly low traffic volume. Please help the PC to keep speeds low and make Swanbourne safer this Summer, by volunteering for Speed Watch and sticking to 30mph, or less, particularly near the playground and wherever children are playing.

Standing Orders – An updated copy is published on the PC website.

Grass cutting and strimming – We have been using Lynch Garden Services since last autumn and they do a great job with our verges, the playing field and Millennium Wood. As Parish Council specialists they do similar work for other local villages (e.g., Whitchurch, North Marston, Granborough, Padbury).

Swanbourne Village Community Facebook Group – Over the last year, Deborah Barrow and Rosemary Andrew have provided helpful advice and they continue to do a fantastic job as administrators and moderators. This has continued to be a vital resource during the current Covid 19 crisis, enabling the community to help each other e.g., sourcing local fresh food (when the Swanbourne shop closed) and has provided an important source of practical and moral support (e.g., dropping off shopping/medicines) as well as providing a discussion outlet when so many people feel relatively isolated.

Finances and Annual Return - The Annual Return and finances for the 2020-21 year were considered and approved by the Parish Council at a meeting held on 19th May 2021 in Swanbourne Village Hall. A copy of the Annual Return and documentation will be posted on the new Parish Council website soon after it goes live.

New Website – A new website is about to be launched and great thanks go to Mike King who is leading this exciting new development. The website will have the same email address as at present which is www.swanbourneparishcouncil.co.uk but will have a totally updated appearance. Each Parish Councillor will have a new unique email address linked to the new website, making them easier to contact.

Notification of Public Rights (to inspect Parish Council books held by the Parish Clerk) – The period agreed is Monday 14th June to 23rd July 2021. However, the accounts summary, Annual Return etc. will also be published on the Parish Council website.

Parish Council Transparency – The Parish Council website follows government transparency guidelines and contains all the Parish Council news and documentation (e.g., agenda and minute records as well as all financial information).

Departing from the Parish Council

I am now retiring from the PC after 7 years as a Parish Councillor. Helen Cleaveley is retiring after 6 years and Vanda Bennett is retiring after 3 years as Parish Clerk. We are all very grateful to both Helen and Vanda for the fantastic work they have done for Swanbourne. The Parish Clerk vacancy is currently advertised.

Election results

The following Swanbourne residents were recently elected to serve as Swanbourne Parish Councillors: - Mike King, Linda Sirett, Deborah Barrow, Rosemary Andrew, Jo Hill, Andrew Wood and David Brooks Wilson, with David also elected Chairman at the PC meeting held on 19th May. Other Councillor roles are still being finalised.

C. N. Rodger

(May 2021)