

## **MILCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL**

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – 5 May 2020**

This report covers Milcombe Parish Council's activities during 2019 up to the present and I would normally commence this Annual Report by welcoming Councillors and the public to the meeting. Unfortunately, this year all public gatherings, including Parish Council meetings, are forbidden due to the Coronavirus pandemic affecting all countries across the globe.

#### **ABOUT THE PARISH COUNCIL**

Milcombe Parish Council meets 7 times a year including the Annual Parish Meeting.

In 2019 meetings were held on January 8<sup>th</sup>, March 5<sup>th</sup>, May 7<sup>th</sup> (APM), May 14<sup>th</sup> (Annual Meeting of the Parish Council), July 2<sup>nd</sup>, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, November 5<sup>th</sup>.

The year started with the 7 Councillors as elected in May 2018:

Peter Booth, Marlene Cowell, Michael Haynes, Alex Honey, Clare Jones, Mandie McCullagh and Myra Peters.

Unfortunately, two Councillors resigned during the year – Alex Honey due to being away at University and Clare Jones for health reasons. The Vacancies were advertised in January and March as required with no applications.

Sad to report that Peter Booth was taken ill in November shortly after Remembrance when he represented the Parish Council by laying the poppy wreaths at the Bloxham War Memorial and at the plaque in St. Laurence's Church porch. He remains on the list of Councillors. Peter was also responsible for flying the flag on national occasions and Myra has now taken over this task.

At the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council on May 14<sup>th</sup>, Marlene Cowell was re-elected as Chairman and Mandie McCullagh as Vice-Chairman.

So far this year meetings have been held on January 8<sup>th</sup> and March 3<sup>rd</sup> but now cancelled for the foreseeable future.

However, the present Councillors are working to the best of their ability via email and the Clerk is keeping everybody up to date via the PC website. Grateful thanks are expressed to all Councillors, County Councillor Kieron

Mallon and District Councillor Hugo Brown and particularly to our Clerk, Theresa Goss, who works tirelessly on behalf of Milcombe Parish Council.

PC meetings are open for the public to attend but very few do.

There is much admin and red tape involved for Parish Councillors, such as Risk Management, Data Protection, Freedom of Information, Standing Orders, Asset Register and Financial regulations and these are just some of the items to which PC's have to adhere, not least being the Code of Conduct. The majority of the public are unaware of how a PC works and we rely heavily on our Clerk to keep us updated.

There are occasional meetings in addition to the regular PC meetings and CDC holds Parish Liaison meetings twice a year. Myra and Marlene attended in June and Mandie attended the November meeting. The majority of PC's send representatives to these meetings in order to keep Councillors aware of what CDC and OCC as well as other local bodies, such as OPFA and OALC are doing.

It is possible for parishes to pay their elected Councillors a small remuneration. Milcombe is Band 3 and the entitlement is £228 per annum. Councillors agreed not to accept the allowance and consequently this is a considerable saving for residents.

In November the Precept for the current year was set at £13,500 – an increase of £300 on the previous year.

**PLANNING** – There has been the usual mix of planning applications throughout the year.

Mr. Bertrand Facon had been granted planning permission on his three applications connected to agricultural use.

Application granted for stonework repairs and repointing of chimney at Bay Tree House LB.

Two single storey extensions were granted in Newcombe Close.

Observations were made on two-storey and single storey front extension at Holly Cottage on Main Road. Original application refused.

Variation of conditions at Swerbrook Farm on Hook Norton road (part withdrawn).

PC gave their support for kitchen ducting at rear of Horse & Groom . (granted and withdrawn.)

Single storey extension at Fieldside, Paradise Lane (granted)

Garage/workshop/games room at Little Acre (granted)

Observations on retrospective application for shed at The Rosarie.

The PC objected to the application by Gladman Developments for 95 houses on the South Newington road, Bloxham, by the recreation ground. (subsequently withdrawn)

OAK FARM PHASE 2 (Sanctuary Housing) – This application has been in limbo for about two years whilst the planning officers and Sanctuary have been coming to an agreement. The PC were also involved in the discussions. Reserved matters for layout of the site, etc. had been granted but, due to high costs of development, Sanctuary has now withdrawn from the site. The PC were to receive a sum towards the new equipment on the Play Area from Sanctuary but obviously this is no longer available which means that we are now back to square one.

**PLAY AREA – PLEASE NOTE THAT, DUE TO THE PRESENT CORONAVIRUS SITUATION, THE PLAY AREA IS CLOSED IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES.**

The Play Area on Bloxham Road is owned and maintained by the PC. There is an annual inspection by RoSPA which is a legal requirement and up until recently Peter Booth has overseen the area with weekly checks and voluntarily carrying out minor repairs. Myra Peters took over the weekly inspections but these have had to come to a halt whilst the restrictions are in place. Mowing is carried out every two weeks during the growing season but this is not happening at the moment although Nigel Prickett did manage to get one cut done before it had to be closed.

Last year we reported on the project to completely refurbish the Play Area with various grants already in place plus the proposed grant from Sanctuary Housing. Following the withdrawal of Sanctuary from Oak Farm Phase 2, the commuted sum expected will no longer be available. We can only wait to see what happens next.

The Parish Councillors would like to take this opportunity to thank Peter Booth for all the work he has done inspecting and maintaining the Play Area over a number of years.

**DOVECOTE SITE** – The Dovecote site is in the ownership of CDC who received commuted sums of around £66,000 from Tay Homes, the original developers of the Dovecote development in 1999. This was for the future maintenance of the Dovecote and surrounding site. CDC continues to maintain the site and carries out the mowing. Some remedial works were carried out to the Dovecote a few years ago, such as re-pointing, and the front dry stone wall was also re-built. Since then the side wall has been re-built as it had become quite dangerous.

The Millennium soft floodlighting of the Dovecote is the responsibility of the Parish Council.

**CUCKOO WALK** – The path through Cuckoo Walk contains the original blue bricks. Although it is not the responsibility of the PC, it has taken on some of the responsibility over the years of clearing the path twice a year. The work is carried out by Barry Giles who is also employed to carry out weed control along the verges and footpaths in the village.

**GRASS CUTTING** – Nigel Prickett was again appointed as the contractor for mowing the grass verges throughout the village on a three/four weekly cut, depending on growth. He is also the contractor for the Play Area and this is cut every two weeks during the summer and the Churchyard on a three/four weekly cut. The PC is responsible for the Churchyard extension.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT DURING THE PRESENT SITUATION, THE PC DECIDED TO SUSPEND THE MOWING OF THE VERGES AND THE PLAY AREA UNTIL IT IS SAFE TO DO SO. THE VICAR AND CHURCHWARDENS WERE CONTACTED REGARDING THE CHURCHYARD AND AGREED THAT IT WAS REASONABLE TO CONTINUE WITH THE MOWING AS IT WAS NOT EXPECTED THAT THIS WOULD POSE A PROBLEM AS NIGEL PRICKETT AND HIS SON WORK INDEPENDENTLY AND NOT LIKELY TO COME INTO CONTACT WITH ANYBODY ELSE WHILST CARRYING OUT THIS WORK.**

**SPEEDING/HIGHWAYS** – Speeding through the village is always an issue despite the VAS signs. The 30mph signs and village gates on the Hook Norton road have been moved due to new builds on this stretch of road.

Safety improvements were made to the A361 at South Newington and everybody is aware of the construction of a costly cycleway between Bloxham and Banbury and safety improvements at Ells Lane/Grove road and Wykham crossroads. We have all sat at the traffic lights!

**CHURCH TOWER CLOCK** is the responsibility of the PC which holds a 3-yearly contract with Smith's of Derby for annual service and maintenance.

**DOG BINS** are emptied on a regular basis by CDC for which the PC has to pay a charge of almost £1000 p.a. Unfortunately, not everybody cleans up after their dogs which could lead to a fine if caught. There are free dog bags which can be picked up from the Church or village shop. These should be dropped in one of the many dog bins around the village or taken home and placed in the green bin. They should definitely not be thrown in the hedgerows as is often the case.

**(NOTE: As the Church is currently locked, the dog bags are in the porch.)**

**THE ANNUAL VILLAGE LITTER PICK** was due to take place on March 28<sup>th</sup> but had to be put on hold and will now probably take place sometime in the autumn.

**REMEMBRANCE** – Poppy wreaths were laid at the Bloxham War Memorial at 11.00am and again in the evening at the Memorial plaque in the Church porch by Peter Booth with members of the British Legion in attendance. A donation of £100 was made to the RBL by the PC.

VE DAY 75th Anniversary celebrations were to be celebrated the weekend of May 8-10<sup>th</sup> but is something else which has had to be put on hold.

**DONATIONS** – The PC also made donations to Milcombe Charities towards the children's Christmas party, the Christmas Community Lunch held in Bloxham and open for Milcombe residents as is St. Mary's Thursday Club and the Cherry Tree Centre at the Primary school.

**BOOK OF CONDOLENCE** – During 2019 (before the Covid-19 pandemic) PC's were advised that they should have in their possession a Book of Condolence and arrangements in hand for the death of a senior Royal or other national figure such as the Prime Minister.

A book of Condolence along with three framed photographs of the Queen, Prince Philip and Prince Charles were purchased and are being held in the metal filing cabinet in the Church Vestry.

It seems rather ironic that this should have been considered last year as nobody could ever have known what 2020 was going to bring. We trust that they are there for the future and not for the present.

**DEFIBRILLATOR** – During the year the Council has been liaising with the PCC regarding the siting of a Defibrillator in the Church porch as this appeared to be the most central and accessible for the village. The Vicar and PCC members were in full agreement and advice sought from the Diocese of Oxford. We were informed that this would require the approval in the form of a faculty. We have now been advised that several Churches are considering a similar idea and the Diocese has agreed that, as from April, applications will be able to be made in an easier format. It is the intention of the PC to pursue this project.

**VILLAGE WEBSITE** – It was decided to close the village website as Milcombe has a community page and the PC already has its own website  
[www.milcombepc.com](http://www.milcombepc.com)

**MILCOMBE NEWSLETTER** – Once again we are indebted to Mark Boardman for voluntarily editing and publishing the monthly Newsletter which is delivered to every household in the village – except, of course, at the present time but you can still pick it up from the village shop. Local businesses are invited to have a free printed advertisement and events held in Bloxham but also open to Milcombe residents are included, such as The Cherry Tree Centre, St. Mary's Thursday Club, Bumps and Babes, etc.

The PC funds cost of paper and print cartridges only.

THANK YOU MARK AND THE 10 DISTRIBUTORS WHO GET THIS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER TO YOU.

**THE PUMP SITE (situated on Main Road by the Millennium map)** served the old Council Houses before mains water came to the village. Although not the responsibility of the PC, it is a village feature and we thank Brian French who keeps it tidy. As with Cuckoo Walk, the upkeep of these sites enhances the appearance of the village.

**THE DAFFODIL BULBS** in the spring have also become a feature around the village and we have to thank Peter Booth for donating these and for planting them along with some volunteer helpers. We know that he was unable to plant more last autumn as had been his intention. We wish Peter well for the future and thank him for the impressive displays which are so much enjoyed by residents.

**MILCOMBE CHARITIES - THE VILLAGE HALL** is currently closed as are all public buildings at the present time. During the year the Committee has been considering how it can best make improvements to make it more user friendly and to encourage more people to hire it.

Quotes were obtained to remove the stage and replace with stud walls and doors for storage, new fire door and renovation of the parquet flooring. The Committee has been looking into grants but obviously any work is on hold for the time being. The Committee also hopes to replace the front noticeboard with a covered front.

Caroline Willoughby has continued as Chairman with the help of the Treasurer, Richard Hazel, and Sarah Dowling who takes the bookings. Some new members were recently co-opted to the Committee.

The monthly Coffee Morning in aid of VH funds has been run by Raychel Pomroy and helpers but unfortunately is also on hold at the present.

The Committee ran a Christmas party for the village children with the help of a donation from the PC.

It will not be possible to hold the AGM in May as planned and a new date will be fixed as soon as it is possible to do so.

All Committee members are thanked for their help in running this facility on behalf of village residents.

**AND FINALLY.....You will be relieved to read.....**

Over the last 4 years there was one word which was on every news bulletin – **BREXIT – GET BREXIT DONE** – and then we did – except there is still much more work to be done on that score.

We have been met this year with the terrible Coronavirus which has taken over globally, putting lives at risk and most other things to the back of our minds as shops, offices, schools and public buildings have been closed with only key workers being allowed to travel to their actual places of work. Nobody could ever have predicted what was in store for 2020. We will never be able to thank enough all those emergency workers in our hospitals, GP surgeries, Dispensaries, supermarket workers, the Fire Service, Ambulance paramedics and the Police Force. We are so grateful to all the volunteers who have rallied round to assist their communities. In Milcombe, we thank Sam Hughes and her helpers who have made life more bearable for the elderly and those most vulnerable by shopping, collecting medication, etc. Even a knock on the window provides reassurance to the person inside and to the volunteers knowing that person is safe. We cannot **THANK YOU** enough.

We will continue to **CLAP OUR THANKS** every Thursday evening at 8.00pm for the NHS and the army of volunteers as we give thanks and live in the hope that some day soon our lives will return to some kind of normality.

On a personal note, I thank all those who have phoned, text and emailed me and, in turn, I have tried to contact as many people as I can.

**PLEASE KEEP TO THE RULES, STAY SAFE AND LET US ALL LIVE IN HOPE.**

Marlene Cowell

Chairman – Milcombe Parish Council

May 2020