



BLEDLow-CUM-SAUNDERTON PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Parish Meeting held at Bledlow Ridge Village Hall
Monday 17th April 2023 at 7pm

Present: Councillors: S Breese (Chair), D Dobson (Vice Chair), S Reading,
N Cox, S Bird, J Butler, D Freeman and P Davidson

Clerk: Tracey Martin

Buckinghamshire Councillors: C Etholen and S Adoh

1. **Apologies for Absence:** R Carington
2. **Approval of Minutes from 7th April 2022:** Following a proposal by Cllr Butler seconded by Cllr Reading the minutes were approved.
3. **Chair's Annual Report:** Cllr Breese read out his annual report (copied below)
4. **Question Time / Members of the Public Invited to speak:**
 - 4.1. The question was raised by a Councillor as to whether the deadline for adding footpaths to the Definitive Map which was originally planned for 2025 has been rescheduled. Cllr Etholen / Cllr Adoh to find out if a new date has been set and report back at the May Parish Council Meeting.
Action: Cllr Etholen / Cllr Adoh
 - 4.2. Discussions were had on the Molins site and a possible need for a Village Hall. These discussions are still in early stages and cannot be progressed until the site is sold.
 - 4.3. Cllr Reading stated that to date there has been 165 responses to the speed survey

Meeting closed at 7.30pm

Signed.....

Date.....

Chairman's Reports:

During the past year we have made good progress, but a few longer term and persistent issues remain.

Footpaths

The footpaths working group continues to monitor Rights of Way. Following last year's survey; of the issues raised about 50% have been rectified with a further 40% scheduled for work by the Buckinghamshire Rights of Way team leaving about 10% outstanding. There is one footpath to be negotiated for inclusion on the definitive map near Lodge Hill before the map is expected to close in 2030.

This March Buckinghamshire Council's Senior Definitive Map Officer recommended that the disputed footpath near Lydebrook at the end of North Mill Road should be reinstated. There remains the possibility of an appeal, but the many local residents who provided evidence may soon be able to resume walking towards Towersey without having to cross and recross the Lyde which is impossible when the stream floods.

At the other end of Bledlow, Carington Estates, with the help of the Chilterns Conservation Board, have agreed the route for a new circular walk giving access to Bledlow Cross and the tumulus in The Cop. They intend to dedicate this new route as a public footpath as part of a package of measures including waymarking, interpretation and restoration works.

Bledlow Ridge HRC (Household Recycling Centre), Wigans Lane

After being closed for several years, the HRC was reopened in January 2023 as an 'interim measure'. This is very much a two-edged sword: a convenient facility for many, but unwelcome for those living nearby and along the approach routes. Buckinghamshire Council removed trees and scrub to ensure adequate sight lines, making what is a semi-industrial facility more visible within the AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). After lobbying by local residents, Buckinghamshire Council held a number of 'focus groups' and as a result have planted new hedging and four new trees, but it will inevitably take a few years for this screening to soften the impact of the recently exposed site. Opening hours are 9.00 to 6.00 five days a week, Friday to Tuesday. Residents from outside Buckinghamshire have to pay £76 for a family car to use the facility. As a consequence, though we only have figures for a short period, usage is much lower than before. This will greatly reduce traffic along the lanes which form the HRC's only approach routes, and it seems likely the HRC will operate within its capacity limits for some years to come. If you plan to use the HRC, please be sure to bring proof of your address.

Princes Risborough Relief Road

Planning the expansion of Princes Risborough continues. It remains likely that the 'Culverton Link' relief road which will skirt the south of the town will not be completed until the town's expansion is all but finished. The Parish Council will continue to lobby for the completion of the link to be brought forward in order to reduce the load on Shootacre Lane.

Development is soon due to begin on Phase 1 of the relief road from Picts Lane to the site of the Sumitomo factory. The Parish Council made a submission to Buckinghamshire Council's Strategic Sites Committee in November pointing out the impossibility of HGVs passing one another on Shootacre Lane without one leaving the road. As a result of our submission the committee has imposed a condition requiring the developers to impose single direction working for HGVs along Shootacre Lane for this and future phases of construction.

Molins Data Centre

Permission to build a data centre was granted in 2008 on the former Molins site on Haw Lane. After several alternate proposals during the intervening 14 years, including one for a large residential estate, work started in the summer. For those interested in such matters, this explains the apparent lack of a recent planning application as work is allowed under the original permission.

The first phase entailed the excavation and removal of many thousands of tonnes of chalk from the site. While the disturbance caused complaints from as far away as West Wycombe and Longwick, the data centre will sit lower in the landscape thus reducing the impact on the AONB.

Cllr Davidson is working closely with the developers to minimise the impact on Bledlow-cumSaunderton and neighbouring parishes, but the scale of the project means that a measure of disruption is inevitable. The second stage, already underway, is to dig a trench for a new power supply from Haw Lane to an electricity sub-station in Amersham. This will cause additional disruption in the wider area already suffering from HS2 construction traffic. But a welcome aspect of this work is that there will be no impact on local power supplies or indeed on local water supplies as the latest data centre technology uses air cooling.

Broadband

As before the majority of the Parish now has 'superfast' broadband of varying speeds, though a few 'not spots' remain principally those living off parts of Wigans Lane who have to rely on 4G for a reasonable service. A welcome development is that the transmitter on the tower of Holy Trinity, Bledlow will probably be allowed to remain. We hope the price of satellite systems such as Elon Musk's Starlink will soon come down to the point where they become more affordable.

Grants

During the year we made the following grants to local organisations:

First Steps Family Hub	£150	support for this facility in Chalgrove which is used by a Bledlow family
Aylesbury Opera	£500	support for performance at Bledlow
Holy Trinity PCC	£1,500	Queens Jubilee Celebrations
Bledlow Ridge Cricket Club	£1,896.54	Queens Jubilee Celebrations
Bledlow Ridge Village Hall	£11,000	Village Hall Renovations
Bledlow Social Club	£1,500	Coronation Celebrations

A grant is also expected to be made shortly for Coronation celebrations in Bledlow Ridge.

Meadow Styles Playground

After many draft agreements exchanged with the Trustees, Cllr Dobson has negotiated terms for a new 20 year lease for the land used by the Bledlow Ridge playground, thus securing the facility for the next generation of children.

Parish Maintenance

I wish to thank Cllrs Reading, Cox and Dobson for their work on the maintenance working group. During the past year a new mowing regime has been agreed with the Church Warden of Holy Trinity Bledlow which will help protect wild flowers. Routine maintenance includes cleaning road signs within 30 mph limits and clearing footpaths for which the council is responsible. In Bledlow Ridge, after several years the management of the hedge at the Crest has finally been resolved and work carried out on potentially dangerous trees on public land adjoining a property on Chinnor Road.

HS2 Road Safety Fund

While he was Chairman, Cllr Reading applied for funding from HS2 to finance traffic calming measures on the A4010. As a result 'dragon's teeth' and 40mph road markings were installed at Saunderton in December 2022.

Speeding

A speed survey has been carried out on the A4010, B4009 and Bledlow Ridge. The most extreme instances of speeding were captured on Chinnor Road, Bledlow Ridge outside the entrance to the Cricket Club and Playground. Over the sampling period 25% of vehicles were travelling in excess of 35mph (the limit here is 30mph) with some vehicles travelling in excess of 50mph.

Cllr Reading hopes to secure funding for additional traffic calming measures. Local residents can help by completing the e-petition on Buckinghamshire Council's web site before 1st May.

Highways & Funding Minor Projects

As reported last year we could not secure funding to reinstate 'Piccadilly' (where Chapel Lane meets Sandpit Lane). Small highway works requiring modest expenditure quickly become unaffordable once the cost of compliance and project management are added. Last year I wrote to Buckinghamshire Council's cabinet member for highways, urging him to address this issue which effectively disenfranchises sparsely populated areas such as ours.

Buckinghamshire Council have let a new outsourcing agreement starting in April 2023. They have appointed Balfour Beatty Living Places as its new road maintenance contractor and Atkins as their consultants for roads. A welcome part of the new contractual arrangement is the introduction of a new 'Minor Works' framework; though in this context 'minor works' are those costing less than £500,000 – somewhat more than the £26,000 estimate for Piccadilly. As soon as arrangements become clear the Council will test how effective the framework is by reapplying for the reinstatement of Piccadilly.

Existing arrangements continue for reporting problems with footpaths and road surfaces via fixmystreet.buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

Finance & Precept

The financial year started with an opening balance of £143,705.33. During the year, we received funds of £35,996.11 and are projected to have spent £59,119.67 thus leaving a year-end balance of £120,581.77.

The Parish has the second lowest precept in Buckinghamshire (the Parish's share of Council Tax). We have held the rate for Band D houses steady since recovering legal expenses following negotiations to determine the ownership of the Old Schools at Bledlow almost 20 years ago. Since then, we have received a number of grants and substantial sums from the Community Infrastructure Levy for housing developments in the Parish. It is unlikely we will increase the precept until our reserves are further depleted, which at current levels of expenditure will not be for some years.

New dates for meetings

In order to avoid bank holidays and election dates Parish Council meetings have been moved from the first Thursday to the second Monday of each month. Inevitably Easter this year has conflicted with this new arrangement as has the Coronation! However we should avoid having to reschedule as many meetings in future years.

Councillors & Communication

I wish to thank the clerk and the councillors for their work during the past year. As a council we appoint Cllrs to represent the Parish Council with the following organisations.

Community Board: Cllr Breese
Bledlow Ridge Village Hall Committee: Cllr Butler
Bledlow Village Hall Committee: Cllr Bird
Bledlow Consolidated Charities: Cllr Reading
Footpaths working group: Cllrs Butler and Bird
Maintenance working group: Cllrs Reading, Cox and Dobson
Bledlow Charities: Cllr Reading

The Parish Council runs a mailing list which we use sparingly and from which you can unsubscribe at any time. We started the list during the development of the Neighbourhood Plan and have since used it to publicise an Energy Clinic at Bledlow Village Hall, Broadband and during the pandemic for the Covid Support Group. Please consider signing up if you have not already done so.

Councillor needed for Bledlow

Cllr Sage resigned last autumn. He was very active as a member of the Maintenance Committee and he took the lead in managing the day to day activities of the Covid Support Group during lockdown. We are still looking for a volunteer to be co-opted as a councillor for the Bledlow Ward. This report serves as a summary of the matters we deal with. If you are interested or know of someone who might be persuaded to join the council, please contact either me or the Parish Clerk.

Simon Breese
Chairman, Bledlow-cum-Saunderton Parish Council Chairman, Bledlow-cum-Saunderton Parish Council