

Abbots Langley Parish Council



Annual Report 2015-2016

Presented at the Annual Parish Meeting held on
3rd March 2016 at Tanners Wood Hall,
School Mead, Abbots Langley.

www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk

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1. Parish Council Chairman's Report **Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst - Chairman of the Parish Council**

May 2015 saw the four yearly cycle of Parish Council elections. The elections were not without some complications as the poll in Abbots Langley & Bedmond ward had to be postponed due to the death of a declared candidate. The rearranged election took place at the end of June and necessitated some reorganisation of Parish Council meetings as the council was operating with ten instead of the usual fifteen members. I thank my colleagues and staff for their support and flexibility through this time.

I would like to thank all those who stood for election to the Parish Council.

It has been an honour to serve as Chairman of the Council this year. I have attended many civic events and it has been a delight to meet with so many residents who make Abbots Langley such a vibrant community in which to live.

I would like to publicly thank the dedicated and committed Chairman of the committees that take responsibility for all aspects of the Parish Council's business. Their reports follow.

The Parish Council has a sound financial base and is working on many key projects, of particular importance is the new play area for the Manor House, which we will be joint funding with Three Rivers District Council. The Parish Council will be contributing at least £135,000 to this project.

It has been a pleasure during the year to engage with many community groups and see how well our wider community works - no more so than at the Christmas Carol Concert which raised a record amount for my nominated charity - the Peace Hospice. All the community events in the Parish would not be possible without the hard work of Parish Council staff, volunteers and indeed your Parish Councillors. Thus I take this opportunity to thank those who have worked within the community on a voluntary basis and who have helped to make the area what it is.

I also take this opportunity to thank most sincerely those of you who give your time and dedication to your various societies and wish you all well for the ensuing year. Finally I would like to say a special thank you to our local Police who regular attend our Parish Council meetings to update us on their key priorities and also to hear from councillors any concerns they have on policing matters.

2a. Planning & Highways Committee Report **Councillor David Major - Chairman of the Planning and Highways Committee**

Fortunately the Parish Council remain statutory consultees to planning applications submitted to Three Rivers District Council within the parish boundary, for comments and recommendations based on planning regulations, local knowledge and public reaction. Members have been successful in trying to protect the parish from the pressure of urban sprawl and unacceptable infill development; nevertheless there have been some disappointments generally due to planning law or a successful appeal decision made by a government appointed inspector which has included the removal of protected green belt land from the register, but fortunately this threat is minimal at present. Nevertheless I do feel Abbots Langley has retained its community and village atmosphere despite enormous pressure for further development.

Temporary relaxation of the need for full planning permission to allow a single storey rear extension to a property, and allowing it as permitted development, has not reduced the committee's workload. There seem to be more than ever two storey side and rear applications, also a trend to remove conservatories to allow a more permanent expansion to a property and the ongoing conversions of garages into habitable accommodation. On the other hand this has been no reason for our assiduous members to disregard the much larger and contentious development sites proposed in the district.

I know that members of this committee are very conscious of the strong public feeling regarding protection and enhancement of this parish. The committee will continue to relay matters such as the poor condition of the road surface, inappropriate housing and commercial development, including any general neglect of the area, to the respective authorities including this council's own officers and workforce.



2b. Leisure Committee Report

Councillor John Wyatt - Chairman of the Leisure Committee

All of the allotments are being well used but for the first time ever we have a close to zero waiting list, except for Manor House. So if you fancy an allotment now is the time to put your name down but keep in mind that working an allotment successfully takes a lot of time and effort.

John Kersey is keeping an eye on the community orchard at Primrose Hill, it's establishing well and just needs time now to do what apple trees do.

We have had some vandalism this year through the Parish but fingers crossed it hasn't been a great inconvenience to anybody and hasn't cost an arm and a leg to repair.

We have spoken to Herts County Council's Countryside Management Service about a management plan for the new English Wood at the back of the Manor House playing fields. Hopefully this year we will be thinning out the trees to allow more light to the under story and more space for the better specimens to grow.

There is of course an ongoing problem with dog walkers allowing their dogs to foul in public areas. We're trying to think of a way to communicate directly with the dogs and appeal to them. On the basis that the dog must be more intelligent than the owner. Poop bags are still in the office and poop bins are in the parks. Can we possibly make it any easier!

At the beginning of March new parking measures will come into effect at the Manor House and Primrose Hill car parks. The problem has been people parking there in the mornings, walking to the train station or place of work and leaving the cars there all day, so the users of the public open areas and the Manor House have nowhere to park. The parking will be free but restricted in time.

The refurbishment of the Manor House play area is still on course for 2016-2017. We have managed to put more money aside. The consultation with the users happened in November 2015 and the initial tender is with suppliers, we are awaiting their proposals with interest.

One thing we're trying to build into the tender process is that all equipment should be sourced from nowhere further afield than Europe. We recently had to replace a slide at Primrose Hill play area which had been originally sourced from Canada. Tim and the officers tried to source a more local replacement but the slide was made to fit the piece of equipment it was attached to, so the new one had to come from Canada as well. A silly situation that we don't want to happen again.

We had hoped to give some attention to the patio area around the Manor House but that is still at the planning stage. We hope to extend the patio area and perhaps partially cover it to make it more usable for more of the year.

The replacement of all council owned benches in our parks is largely complete. Sturdier benches made largely from recycled materials have been fitted and hopefully will last many years. We now have eight cPads (defibrillators) installed in the parish and these have mostly been paid for by local organisations.

The Watford Lions again did a wonderful job of arranging the carnival in June and the fireworks in November but could always do with some extra help. If you would like to find out more about the Lions please contact Allen Harvey, email him on allen@watfordlions.co.uk. All monies raised by the Lions go to local charities

I am very pleased that The Abbots Langley Tough Ten put their race on again through the village. All ages and abilities run on various length courses and again all monies raised go to local charities. The Tough Ten are always looking for more safety stewards to police the runners, if you are able to help please contact the organisers. <http://tough10.co.uk/>

AIMs (Abbots Improvement Group) are still out there in all weathers looking after various parts of the parish notably Kitters Green, Millennium Gardens and the area around the police station. If you are interested in finding out more about their work or lending a hand please contact Laila Namdarkhan on 01923 269388.

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This committee still rely heavily on local representatives to report on the allotments, halls and sports clubs in the parish, we would like to thank them and the recently outgoing reps.

This committee has the biggest turnover on the parish and so takes up a lot of the time of Tim Perkins our Clerk, David Abbott our Facilities Manager, Mark Ellis our Works Manager, the ground staff who keep the parish owned grounds up to scratch and the office staff who keep the rest of us on our toes. My thanks to them all.

2c. Finance & Administration Committee Report

Councillor Brenda Kersey - Chairman of the Finance and Administration Committee

Unlike the Leisure Committee, which each year moves through different projects, this Committee performs much the same duties every year. So, as a new Chairman getting to grips with its work, I thought I would pass on to you my view of what F & A Committee actually does.

The Committee has a very wide brief, with three main areas of work -

1. supervising the day-to-day housekeeping;
2. budgeting for future spending and checking current spending; and
3. making sure that the Council is complying with the mass of legislation that governs its operation.

First, there is the supervision of the day-to-day finances of the Council. The financial tasks are carried out by the staff, principally the Clerk and the Finance Officer, with important contributions from the Facilities Manager and Works Manager. The front office staff ensure that the fees and charges for bookings are properly deal with.

Some of the work would be familiar to any householder. Our staff use local businesses where they are competitive on price and service, they shop around for the best gas and electricity deals, they hunt for better interest rates, they look at insurance quotations, they assess the best time to replace an ageing vehicle - in other words, they operate just as you do. Staff and councillors are all aware that we are spending your money, and we aim to spend it wisely.

The work is carried out efficiently and effectively by the staff but your elected councillors on this Committee keep a watchful eye on all that they do. For example, two councillors sign every cheque and authorise all direct debits to pay the Council's bills - up to eighty cheques and direct debits per month - not just signing them but checking the background papers prepared by the Finance Officer. This gives members a good insight into where the money goes.

The second area is budgeting. Work starts in September on the budget for the next financial year. The Committee's final draft is presented to the full Council for approval at its January meeting. The Council may make alterations, but once passed it becomes the budget that will govern our actions for the year from April.

There are two sides to a budget - spending and income. In setting the budget the Committee has to do more than simply look at the previous year's budget and tweak it a bit. It has to consider whether there are areas where expenditure can be cut or postponed, and where additional spending has become necessary and must be planned for. The Committee has to respond to needs identified by the Leisure Committee and the Staffing Committee - if their proposals are to be implemented they must be funded. We are an employer and have to provide decent and safe working conditions for our staff. We must maintain our buildings to a satisfactory standard. You look round Abbots Langley and see a green and pleasant environment. Well, if it belongs to the Parish it has to be budgeted for. Trees have to be inspected and maintained, grass has to be cut, playgrounds and pathways kept safe. We are also a vibrant community thanks to our local organisations, many of whom could not continue without some financial support. Part of our budget is earmarked for grants large and small. Allocating grants is quite a task, weighing up competing demands while staying within budget.

We cannot spend what we do not have, so we have to look at our income - what money will be coming in to pay for the spending. One source is the money from the use of our halls, open spaces and sports facilities. Here we try to cover the cost of running the facilities but cannot risk increasing the charges to the point where they deter potential users. Our main income is from the taxes you pay to Three Rivers, who pass a portion of the money to us because we are running services at local Parish level - the mechanism is known as the precept. We aim to keep the precept as low as we can while still providing the services and facilities that we believe the people of the parish want. For the past two years we

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have asked for no increase. In real terms this is a decrease and cannot go on indefinitely as costs creep up.

With the budget in place the Committee reviews spending against budget, identifying and tackling any drift. So far this year our finances have been well controlled and we should end the year with spending in line with our budget.

The third important area is compliance and the Clerk to the Council is our guide here. Nothing stands still, and he has to keep abreast of new legal requirements, informing us of how these impact on our Council.

It is not sufficient for the Council to police itself. We appoint a firm of internal auditors who are specialists in the local council sector to carry out audits of all our financial and statutory process. The auditors are all professionally qualified. Each year we review their effectiveness and independence. They report three times a year to the Parish Council on their findings across the whole of the Parish Council's operations and at the end of the financial year approve the accounts. As councillors they give us assurance that the officers of the council are running the day to day business of the council properly and professionally.

External auditors are appointed on behalf of central government. They review the financial and statutory compliance of the Parish Council and also the work of the internal auditors. Their audit is paper based and remote, whereas the internal auditors spend a number of days in our offices.

Both our internal and external reports this year were excellent. No faults were found in our procedures so residents can be confident that their money is in safe hands.

My thanks to everyone who has contributed to the good financial results and to the Committee's work - my fellow councillors and the staff, with special thanks to Finance Officer Gail Kiely and Clerk to the Parish Council Tim Perkins.

Small Grants have been awarded to local organisations at various times throughout the year, including AIMS, Bedmond Task Force, Local Vocals, Transition Town Association (Applefest), and Langleybury Cricket Club.

Financial Grant cheques and certificates will be presented at the Annual Parish Meeting. Which will be held on 3th March 2016 in Tanners Wood Hall.

2d. Staffing Committee Report

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst - Chairman of the Staffing Committee

The Staffing Committee meets as required to consider matters related to the employment of the Parish Council's staff. Significant parts of the committee's meetings are confidential, as they relate to individual members of staff.

The committee continues to work with the Clerk and our advisors on employment related matters, monitoring changes to legislation and the impact these may have on our staff.

2e. Review Panel Report

Councillor Sara Bedford - Chairman of the Review Panel

This committee's principal role is to review complaints against the services provided by the Parish Council, which have not been resolved through discussion with officers of the Parish Council. Complaints are reviewed in line with the Parish Council's published complaints policy.

The committee did not meet during the year as no such complaints were received.

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Councillors

Councillor	Ward	Email
Councillor Sara Bedford 100 Kindersley Way Abbots Langley WD5 0DQ 01923 270469	Leavesden	cllr_sara.bedford@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Jean Bowman 9 Bell Close Bedmond WD5 0QU 01923 270190	Abbots Langley and Bedmond	No email
Councillor Martin Brooks 17 Margaret Close Abbots Langley WD5 0NN 07896 787261	Leavesden	cllr_martin.brooks@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Liz Burns 51 Sheriff Way Leavesden WD25 7QS 01923 661533	Leavesden	cllr_liz.burns@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Lyn Ferguson Railway Arms Cottage Railway Terrace Kings Langley WD4 8JB 07590 577085	Primrose Hill	cllr_lyn.ferguson@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Brenda Kersey 30 Abbots Road Abbots Langley WD5 0AZ 01923 266954	Abbots Langley and Bedmond	cllr_brenda.kersey@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Mrs Jane Lay The Gleanings 31 Marlin Square Abbots Langley WD5 0EG 01923 447281	Abbots Langley and Bedmond	cllr_jane.lay@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor David Major 10 St Lawrence Close Abbots Langley WD5 0AU 01923 265570	Abbots Langley and Bedmond	cllr_david.major@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Stephen Giles- Medhurst 25 Tudor Manor Gardens Garston WD25 9TQ 01923 893661	Leavesden	sgm@cix.co.uk

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Councillor Leslie Proctor 1 The Maltings Hunton Bridge Kings Langley WD4 8QL 01923 263243	Hunton Bridge and Langleybury	cldr_leslie.proctor@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Hitesh Tailor 42 Westland Close Leavesden WD25 7GH 07949 030222	Leavesden	cldr_hitesh.tailor@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Owen Roe 31 Lauderdale Road Hunton Bridge Kings Langley WD4 8QA 01923 262257	Abbots Langley West	No email
Councillor Alison Ward 64 Trowley Rise Abbots Langley WD5 0LW 01923 267337	Abbots Langley West	cldr_alison.ward@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor John Wyatt 122 Tibbs Hill Road Abbots Langley WD5 0LL 07762 135451	Abbots Langley and Bedmond	cldr_john.wyatt@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk

The Parish Council is made up of fifteen members, all of whom were elected at the ordinary elections held in May and June 2015.

Councillor contact details are correct as at January 2016.

Please refer to the Parish Council website www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk for any updates.

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Senior Staff

Name	Position	Email
Tim Perkins	Clerk to the Council and Responsible Financial Officer (Chief Officer of the Council)	tim.perkins@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
David Abbott	Facilities Manager	david.abbott@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Mark Ellis	Works Manager	mark.ellis@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Gail Kiely	Finance Officer	gail.kiely@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk

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