

Abbots Langley Parish Council



Annual Report 2016-2017

Presented at the Annual Parish Meeting held on
1st March 2017 at Tanners Wood Hall,
School Mead, Abbots Langley.

www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk

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1. Parish Council Chairman's Report Councillor Alex Michaels - Chairman of the Parish Council

I would like to start by reflecting on a sad event during 2016-17, the death of serving Councillor Lesley Proctor, who was a valued member of Abbots Langley Parish Council and who will be very much missed by all members.

There is a statutory process to follow when a vacancy occurs during the council year. An election was not called by the required number of residents so the vacancy will be filled by co-option. The process for co-option was agreed at the Parish Council meeting on 9th January 2017. The vacancy is currently being advertised, the closing date is 6th March 2017. Any applications received by that date will be considered at the Parish Council meeting on the 13th March 2017.

It has been an honour to serve as Chairman of Abbots Langley Parish Council for 2016-17 and I have enjoyed attending many interesting events. I feel it has been important to have a younger Chairman who is in full time employment and with a young family, and although at times this has been challenging to ensure I spend enough time on official duties I have received overwhelmingly positive feedback at almost every event. A particular interest has been visiting schools, and after visiting several for in depth tours and meetings and I extremely proud of the provision, skills and commitment our headmasters, headmistresses and their staff have. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the passion they show and the importance of the work of educating and guiding the next generation which rests on their shoulders- the most important job in our ever changing society.

There are many important projects under way in the parish. Most important of all is our Neighbourhood Plan, currently led by Peter Warman and his committee of residents and councillors. The Neighbourhood Plan, introduced by the Localism Act 2011, is a community led process to help decide the future of Abbots Langley as a place to live and work and I'd encourage everyone to get involved in the process through our consultations over the coming months. I have also really enjoyed meeting the various charities and community groups who have invited me along to see their valuable work (and to those I have invited myself along to!).

My chosen charity of the year, Herts Air Ambulance also deserve a mention for all the incredible work they do all year round, and it is testament to this that I am delighted to have raised over £800, one of the highest amounts raised by a Chairman in recent years. I am also delighted to have supported the Abbots Langley Tough Ten, a cause that caught my attention early on as being outstanding and one I was able to raise £630 for via sponsorship for running the 10k.

I would like to say a huge thank you to all Abbots Langley Parish Council staff for all their hard work and commitment all year round which has led to such fantastic events such as the Christmas Carols and Fireworks, to name just two, as well as the equally important behind the scenes work. I would also like to thank our dedicated volunteers in the community who give up their time to make the Parish a better place to live via our various clubs, societies and community groups, as well as our dedicated and hardworking Police officers and staff based in the village. Finally, I would also like to wish the 2017-18 Chairman my best wishes of support in a truly unique and interesting role.

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

Among other bodies 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 greenbelt 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 and also successive Government's "Presumption in favour of Development".

Temporary relaxation of the need for full planning permission for 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 extension 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, bizarrely including houses on the new local estates. On the

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other hand this has been no reason for our assiduous members to disregard the much larger and contentious development sites proposed in the district, these include the recent trend to allow large commercial office blocks to be converted into residential apartments by way of "Permitted Development".

I know that members of this committee are very conscious of the strong public feeling regarding protection and enhancement of this parish. They will continue to relay matters such as the poor condition of the road surface, worn-out road markings, inappropriate housing and commercial development as well as any general neglect of the area, to the respective authorities including this council's own officers and workforce. Hopefully the much overstretched infrastructure will continue to cope with the ever increasing pressures.

2b. Leisure Committee Report

Councillor John Wyatt - Chairman of the Leisure Committee

All the allotments are being well used and again we have a close to zero waiting list, except for those at Manor House. So if you fancy one, 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, with the help of allotment holders from Primrose Hill, are keeping an eye on the community orchard, a couple of trees have been replaced but on the whole things are looking good.

The new English wood at the back of the Manor House grounds has still not had any attention but hopefully this coming year things will happen.

We don't seem to have had as many problems with dog poo this year. Perhaps last years appeal directly to the dogs had some effect! Poo bags are still available from the office and poo bins are in the parks.

The parking restrictions came into force later than we had hoped in October. The Manor House and Primrose Hill car parks are for the use of the users of the play areas, open spaces and pavilion. Restricting the use to users only and not people who want to leave their car all day while they are at work, will hopefully allow us to let the Manor House on a more reliable basis on weekdays throughout the year and reduce the maintenance costs of the car parks. These restrictions will be looked at again in April to see if they need modifying. The parking is free but restricted in time. So far there have been ten tickets issued to date. None of the penalty fee comes back to the council.

Hopefully the new play areas at the Manor House grounds and Bedmond playing fields are finished by the time of this meeting and you all think they are wonderful.

The new patio area for the Manor House pavilion is finished. Again we hope you think it's wonderful.

The Watford Lions again did a splendid 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 Frank Rouse, email him on frankrouse@yahoo.com. All monies raised by the Lions go to local charities.

I am very pleased that The Abbots Langley Tough Ten staged their race 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 so if you are able to help please contact the organisers on <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, the area around the police station and community centre and the planting around the entrance signs to the village. If you are interested in finding out more about their work or lending a hand please contact Laila Namdarkhan on 01923 269388.

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 also the recently outgoing reps.

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

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2c. Finance & Administration Committee Report

Councillor Brenda Kersey - Chairman of the Finance and Administration Committee

The Parish Council's finances are in good shape.

This is not a vain boast. Every year we are independently audited and our auditors have confirmed that all is well.

There are two types of audit carried out - internal and external. Three times a year the internal auditors visit the office, with two one-day visits and one two-day. They scrutinise every aspect of how we conduct our financial affairs. They look at major and minor elements, from the reserves we are obliged to maintain down to the petty cash procedures. Their overview covers both the day-to-day work of the officers and the policy decisions of the Councillors where they impact on the budgets. They know what to look for, as they specialise in this work. After each visit they report to the Council on their findings, commenting on what we do and at times suggesting areas where the Council could benefit from small modifications.

We are also scrutinised by external auditors appointed by central government. This is a more distant procedure, based on returns we send them, and is extremely strict. Again our result was good, which is particularly welcome in a year when we have heard that many other parish and town councils have been criticised.

Much of the credit for these good results must go to our staff - all our office and supervisory staff, but in particular to the Clerk and the Finance Officer. I will also thank all my fellow councillors, particularly the members of the Finance and Administration Committee, for their measured and useful contributions.

To give some idea of the scale of our day-to-day operation, we issue nearly 50 cheques a month and pay direct debits or BACs to 19 organisations. The work is done by the Finance Officer with a team of authorised cheque signatories (councillors) scrutinising every transaction.

Moving on to particular events during the year, one major item of expenditure was on the office refurbishment. Reception and the whole front office had not been upgraded for years. The public area was too large and the office area too small. The public area had been planned when visitors came to the office to view planning applications, which entailed spreading large plans out on the even larger table. With online applications this procedure became redundant. The office space was narrow and cramped and lacked proper storage. The wiring was not up to the standards required in this computer age. Those of you who have visited the office recently will have seen the amazing improvement. It is light and airy and deceptively seems larger than before. Both the public and the staff love it. The project ran smoothly despite a couple of hidden structural problems, opening hours remained unchanged and the Council's affairs were all managed from the Council chamber. We had good project management by the Facilities Manager and good co-operation from all the staff. And of equal importance we didn't stray from our budget.

The next stage of the office refurbishment is to upgrade the rest of the building - mostly the Driscoll Suite that was added to the old building 25 years ago. We will be modernising the kitchen, w.c., and decorating.

There were two changes on the staffing front that had financial implications. We previously used a commercial firm of HR consultants when various needs arose. Good management practice meant that we needed more ongoing advice, and the Council decided to employ the HR body that provides advice to both Watford Council and Three Rivers District Council. This cost more but we are getting more appropriate services for our money. At present our staffing structure is being reviewed to find how best we can serve the community.

We also reflected on the long and loyal service we get from so many of our employees, and introduced a long service award scheme. The awards are not large, but it is good to recognise good service, and we think the long-serving staff members appreciate our appreciation!

We also provide a small budget for the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. You should all have received a leaflet about this Group's task, and if you want to know more please ask.

Although we try to plan for most eventualities, some events can bring a small financial shock. For example, the Parish Council now has to reimburse Three Rivers District Council a proportion of the election costs each time a Parish Councillor is elected. We were billed retrospectively for three

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elections, but negotiated a reasonable settlement with TRDC. Suitable budget provision is now in place for the future.

The Council banks with Lloyds, and the closure of the village branch made life a little more difficult but staff have gamely adapted their practices and coped with the change.

We do listen to comments from our service users. People booking our halls wanted to pay online, and this can now be done. We used to make a charge for credit card bookings, and this was very unpopular and saved very little money, so we no longer charge.

Every year this Committee considers grant applications made by local organisations. These grants help the organisations continue with their valuable work to serve our community and keep it vibrant. I would stress that we would welcome applications from a wider variety of groups. Please ask for a copy of our regulations to see if a project planned by your local voluntary organisation meets our criteria, and if so then please do apply. We will be reviewing the grants scheme later in 2017, but this need not stop you. Small grants can be applied for throughout the year.

Last year we had to increase the amount our residents pay to us, which is collected by TRDC and passed on to us. The increase meant that a family in a Band D property needed to pay an additional £2.93 per annum. The additional money was needed to cover expected costs arising out of staffing restructuring, and works needed to bring our much-loved woodland up to a standard that is acceptable on safety and environmental grounds. Not all this additional money has been spent: it is likely to be drawn on this coming year.

The extra housing developments we have seen over the past few years are not generally welcomed by residents, or indeed by Parish Councillors. But it is worth pointing out that the Council receives money from the developers via the Community Infrastructure Levy and we are about to reap the benefits of the final phase of the Rolls Royce development this year. This money has to be used for capital projects, not just the day-to-day costs of the Council's services, and councillors will be considering how best to use it.

One final message to our residents is that our operations are open and transparent. Members of the public may attend all our meetings although there may be a very small part of the agenda which has to remain confidential. All our agendas and minutes are available online. We are spending your money, and we really do want you to know the financial decisions we make on your behalf.

2d. Staffing Committee Report

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst - Chairman of the Staffing Committee

The Staffing Committee meets four times a year, with additional meetings if required. The committee considers 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 Jane Lay - 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 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	Ward	Email
Councillor Alex Michaels 77 Toms Lane Kings Langley WD4 8NJ 07931 554698	Primrose Hill	cllr_alex.michaels@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Robin Powell 8 Lapwing Way Abbots Langley WD5 0GG 01923 336770	Leavesden	cllr_robin.powell@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Hitesh Tailor 42 Westland Close Leavesden WD25 7GH 07949 030222	Leavesden	cllr_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	cllr_alison.ward@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor John Wyatt 122 Tibbs Hill Road Abbots Langley WD5 0LL 07762 135451	Abbots Langley and Bedmond	cllr_john.wyatt@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Vacant	Hunton Bridge and Langleybury	

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

A vacancy in the Hunton Bridge and Langleybury ward, caused by the death of a serving member, will be filled by co-option.

Councillor contact details are correct as at February 2017.

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
Janet Pearce	Planning & Administration Officer	janet.pearce@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk

Parish Council Offices

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