

Abbots Langley Parish Council



Annual Report

2021-2022

Presented at the Annual Parish Meeting held on
2nd March 2022 at The Manor House,
Gallows Hill Lane, Abbots Langley, Herts WD5 0DD.

www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk

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

I was honoured to be appointed Chairman of the Parish Council for the third time.

As one of the largest Parish's in Hertfordshire, we cover the diverse communities of Leavesden, Abbots and Bedmond Villages, Hillside, Primrose Hill and Hunton Bridge. We are fortunate that we have a strong and hardworking team of Parish councillors who put their communities first.

In addition to taking the Chair at full Parish Council meetings, I also sit on the Staffing Committee. Throughout my tenure I have always received support from my colleague Councillors in making decisions affecting the Parish.

During the year our long-standing Clerk, Tim Perkins, retired and I was delighted to thank him for his service by presenting him with a plaque to recognise his 14-year service to the parish. We also welcomed our new clerk, Isabel Montesdeoca. Having been Chair of Staffing and the Appointments panel, I believe Isabel will be a massive asset to the Parish.

I also want to thank all of the Parish staff for all their work throughout the year and especially for making the Christmas Lights in the High St a possibility and supporting the Christmas Lights switch on which was re-located from the High Street to the grounds of St Lawrence's Church. Feedback to this change continues to be favourable. Special thanks to Revd Dr Peter Waddell and the Friends of St Lawrence.

We also have a number of volunteer organisations within the Parish who give their time and efforts for the well-being of residents. I thank them all for their continued efforts especially during these difficult times and I hope their excellent work continues in the future.

I have received many invitations to attend various functions and I am pleased to say I have been able to attend and hand out prizes at Abbots Langley Tough Ten, take part and lay a wreath at Abbots Langley Remembrance Day Parade and then that afternoon lay the wreath at Church of Ascension (Tin Church), Bedmond. I thank Robin Powell and Jon Tankard for laying wreaths at Leavesden War Memorial and Langleybury respectively.

I chaired the Joint Parish Meeting of other Parish Council's here in Abbots Langley. I attended the official opening the Clive Winder climbing wall for the 1st Abbots Langley and 3rd North Watford Scout Group HQ here in Abbots Langley.

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour is always a concern, but we have the benefit of an active Neighbourhood Police Team based at the Manor Lodge and this year we welcomed Sergeant Jon Brown. Official figures continue to indicate we live in a low crime area, but we should all remain vigilant particularly in our own crime preventative measures.

The Abbots Parish Neighbourhood Plan (2019 to 2036) is nearing its second draft completion, which will then go out for public consultation and a final referendum for adoption. Peter Warman is doing an excellent job as Chairman of Neighbourhood Planning Group, and I thank him for all his efforts.

Finally, I would again like to thank all those people who have supported me over my year of office. Abbots Langley Parish is a great place to live and work and long may this continue.

2a. Planning & Highways Committee Report
Councillor Jon Tankard - Chairman of the Planning and Highways Committee

The previous year with the ongoing COVID Pandemic has seen the committee meetings continuing to be held remotely. Fortunately, the committee has risen to this challenge, adapted, and functioned well despite the operational challenges of remote working (e.g., difficulties in discussing applications when one cannot point to a particular issue on a screen or open debate being stifled by 'zoom' limitations).

Fortunately, we appear to be coming through that period and I am pleased to say that we are now returning to in-person meetings in the council chambers with interesting and enthusiastic but

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respectful debate. Going forwards, we are hopeful of the return of a larger public participation (as we had for the MOTO services scheme) as we are keen to have a representative body of the local community and it would be great to hear more local voices within the committee meetings.

Whilst overall, the last year has been quieter due to the pandemic, we have seen a wave of home improvements and extensions following the Lockdown of late 2020, early 2021 with the Summer of 2021 being a particularly busy time within the Parish Planning Committee.

We have seen an increase in the applications for allocation of offices within the curtilage of dwellings as well as the increase in reception rooms allowing more family space within the dwelling, (potentially reassessment of lifestyle need as result of lockdowns and new working from home trends).

Since the outset of the Lockdown, Mental Health awareness has been brought to the fore in all 'design and planning' bodies. The RIBA last year commissioned a report regarding wellbeing within the Urban Environment, stating that all residents require access to nature, safe routes to exercise both directly, or as routes to and from local infrastructure and a strong sense of community within public spaces. This aligns with the Parish Council's aspirations regarding the rewilding and interconnection of routes within the urban infrastructure. However, with many areas within the Parish coming under ownership or management of a variety of bodies, it is a hard task to reach out to and co-ordinate these disparate bodies to maintain a 'softer' urban landscape, as requested by a majority of residents.

Two major items which were mentioned in my 2019 report have moved beyond major milestones, these being:

1. The ongoing progression of the 'Call for sites', by the UK Government.
2. The MOTO services application.

1. Call for Sites.

This has gone through its first stage - in this, the sites proposed by the developers have been scrutinized by the planning officers as to whether:

- a) can they support the housing numbers proposed
- b) if this site were to be refused, would it win in an appeal situation.

The latter (b) is an important issue as this could have huge cost implications against the council, should they lose the appeal and incur costs. A high-status loss could potentially bring into question other sites refused in the same way. So, despite a site being rejected at the first stage, this does not mean that the site will remain out, and one must respect the due diligence required of the planning officers at this stage in the work they have to undertake (often a thankless task), against some of the most powerful and legally supported businesses in the economy.

I am pleased to report however, that the two sites highlighted in my 2019 report known as the Kings Langley Estate comprising of 1,755 dwellings to the south of the M25 and 2,870 houses to the north of the M25 has been removed at the first pass.

Whilst the village acknowledges that starter homes are needed (to enable the next generation to not only get onto the property ladder but also stay in their current location, and also the ability for the elderly residents to downsize, and likewise stay around friends and family), the delivery of such homes, by a widespread 'profit making' commercial development, generally fails to provide dwellings suitable for this demographic. These commercial developments tend to focus on larger 'executive' homes targeted at wealthier families from outside of the parish, and whilst hold no animosity to those families this situation does not support our existing population. It is likely a major change in Government Policy is needed to allow communities to build homes for local residents.

2. MOTO Motorway Services.

This came to Three Rivers Planning Committee in the spring and has been a constant objection of the Parish Committee. I spoke at the committee in objection to the application on various points such as 'interconnection with Kings Langley', scale of the development, scale of traffic and the loss of character at Hunton Bridge. The application was rejected by the committee and to my knowledge, no appeal has been raised to date. With an application such as this, it can be classed as an infrastructure

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project, this means that it can be overruled by the Secretary of State, due to its need on the road network, however to my knowledge, no appeal has been raised to date.

In other news about government policies:

It was with continued dismay that Section 73 applications poured through the planning committee - this means removing all the conditions on new build dwellings throughout the Parish required Photovoltaics, a way of creating clean energy have been removed. As an experienced architect, it took a while to get the committee to understand, that we could not formally object to this, as it was now the 'law of the land', we did right formal notes of objection, but knowing that our statements had no bearing on the ability of the Planning Officer, to refuse the application.

Further Notes in our Planning Year.

- We saw an application by Warner Bros for temporary use of the field to the west for use for filming Game of Thrones. We addressed the application both with the Gypsy Lane Neighbourhood Committee and Warner Bros. Following consideration, we concluded as a committee that the biodiversity improvements that were being made to the site, the moving in of the fence at our request away from Gypsy Lane footpath and further BioDiversity enhancements on what was a very low field, could be supported. Recently, with our ongoing push to employ 'wellbeing', into our landscape enhancement, we are pleased to be able to achieve agreement with Warner Bros for residents to be given access to the lower North West field, which Warner Bros have additionally agreed to rewild so that residents of the area are able to enjoy the field and the views across the valley (with the open studio behind you). Warner Bros have also planted wildflower, trees and enhanced the existing hedgerow to promote wildlife back on the site.
- As an advocate of Biodiversity, people may question why I would support a scheme like this, but my childhood in the industrial North saw me growing up around working pits and factories, many in the countryside, many dirty practices but all surrounded by a rich and varied biodiversity. Residents should perhaps adjust from viewing the greenbelt as a tranquil place with the status of a National Park, but see it for what is, an area of non-residential industry which supports biodiversity. I personally, feel that if we can influence a prosperous local company to help us take back our countryside, then I am in support of it.
- The Arts and Crafts building on Gallows Hill Lane came under pressure from a couple of planning applications which saw to demolish the host dwelling and fill the site with multiple new dwellings. In this matter we supported the local community, not only with declaring overdevelopment of the site, but also with the demolition of what was an historically important building. The Arts and Crafts movement is the often overlooked link between Gothic Revival and Modern Architecture. Like it or loathe it, we felt that the building had historical significance, and therefore we are pleased to announce that it has now been given 'Local Heritage Asset' and as such has protected status and limitations on its ability to extend through the planning process.
- The neighborhood Plan has been progressed by Peter Warman, who as always has done an incredible job being the workhorse and driver of this. We would be looking for this to progress to Public Consultation in the near future, but as with the planning committee, we would like to see far more residents' participation.

Next Steps

In 2022 - 23 we would anticipate....

- Continuation of a more 'stay at home' basis for flexible working conditions, with home offices now becoming a 'basic' need for all residential requirements.
- Potential more involvement with the 'Call for Sites', as we move into the next phase.

We will continue to reach out to Management bodies within the Parish to push forward our commitment to 'rewilding' and biodiversity enhancement, not only as a plus for the Sustainability strategy, but also as an enhancement to all residents' wellbeing within our communities.

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2b. Leisure Committee Report
Councillor Jane Lay - Chairman of the Leisure Committee

As usual our committee have been very busy although lockdown prevented us from doing some things. The Manor House and Tanners Wood Hall both had to be closed for some of the year. We were pleased to welcome back two of our local societies to actual meetings in September in the Manor House as well as a few smaller events. Tanners Wood Hall opened to some of the usual bookings in April but of course the income was very low for both halls. We are looking forward to welcoming other local societies and events back into both venues in 2022 although with reduced participants as we must ensure that all users and staff are kept safe.

During the lockdown we have been looking into why our tennis courts have not been used by Club Supreme, the Lessee, and their members. Unfortunately, we found they are no longer in existence, and we have now lawfully reclaimed the courts and hopefully we may have another tennis club who wishes to teach our children and adults tennis.

We are very keen on being an environmental Council and have changed some of our petrol driven grounds maintenance equipment to electrical equipment to reduce emissions and also eliminate the safety issues around storing and carrying petrol in jerry cans. We also have agreed to gradually change our Council vehicles to electric.

I am sure you may remember that when we renewed the equipment in the play area at Primrose Hill there were bad comments at the way the contractor had left the grassed area. Our ground staff worked wonders and it is now a very popular facility. During the year we were asked for permission by the Abbots Langley Cricket Club to rebuild their old cricket nets on the Manor House Grounds and we were very pleased to support this venture for our local cricket club as we did for Langleybury Cricket Club some years ago. Evergreen Football Club have also asked our permission for their new project where they are requesting a Grant from the Football Association's Football Foundation's Pitch Improvement Programme to help them to bring their football pitches up to a higher quality above what we could provide at no extra cost to the Council. We were also pleased to support this costly project. We are very sad to see that the surface on the very popular skate park on the Manor House grounds has been breaking up in some areas. It has taken us many months of trying to contact the firm who laid it but success at last and we and the firm are working hard to get the surface repaired or re-laid for the safety of all the users.

We run 4 allotments sites with 125 plots in the parish and so many of the plots had not been used as per their leases during the last few years. Each site has a Council Representative and together with the Works Manager we are gradually giving those who have not worked their plots notice to quit unless they have a good reason. At last, we should be able to welcome new plot holders who are keen to grow their own food. A request has been received for having bee hives on our allotment sites. We now have an Agreement for any plot owner wanting to have bees on their plot where all near plot holders have to agree to the bee hives. May I thank the Allotment Representatives for volunteering and attending the leisure committee meetings.

On the Primrose Hill Park there is a shed which used to be in use for the changing facilities for football. This has not been used for many years and we have agreed that this can be used as the Abbots Langley and Kings Langley Repair Shed project in partnership with Community Action Dacorum and HACRO to be used as a workshop as per the Repair Shop project and we hope that it goes ahead.

Projects 2022/24

Our biggest and expensive project for 2022 is the resurface of the works depot at the Manor Lodge car park. For many years this area was used by the old Manor House for stables and buildings for vehicles. The buildings have gradually been demolished as they became dangerous and unusable but the yard itself has always flooded during the winter and after heavy rainfall and made it very difficult and unpleasant for the work staff. In January, for 5 weeks, contractors were working to resurface the area and remove the sump which used to take away the water and slurry from the stables. Unfortunately, the Manor Lodge car park and area was closed to the public during this period.

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Other projects in the pipeline we hope to provide during the next two years – Replacing the muddy path from Standfield steps through to the Manor Lodge car park with a solid path; resurfacing of the South Way Playing Fields car park; replacing or updating the footpath lighting on Primrose Hill Park; looking into adult fitness equipment for Manor House Ground; replacing or renewing the lights on the tennis courts/MUGA; replacing or repairing the rubber matting at the Langleybury Play Area; looking into providing two net ball courts.

Queen's Green Canopy (QGC)

Another big project we are planning is the planting of an orchard of semi-mature fruit trees on the football pitch at Primrose Hill Park. Yes, we had tried to plant smaller trees before, but vandals and the bad soil prevented the success of this previous venture. In addition, we are planning this time to sow wild flowers and provide benches for people to enjoy the area. If local societies want to support this by planting a tree to support the QGC, they are requested to contact the Parish office. This community orchard will be for all parishioners to pick the fruits for their use only and obviously not for commercial use.

Sadly, we did not have our village Carnival the last two years run by the Watford Lions and we look forward to attending this year. Luckily Applefest went ahead, and it was amazing how many people attended. The lovely weather helped but thank you to all the stall holders for making the event go so well. We also have to thank the Watford Lions for putting on the fireworks in November as several local ones had been cancelled.

May I finish by thanking our previous Chief Officer and Clerk to the Council Tim Perkins and our new Officer Isabel Montesdeoca as well as Facilities Manager and Works Manager, office staff and works groundsmen for running the Council under such difficult circumstances during lockdown. Thank you also to Leisure Committee Councillors for dealing with meetings on zoom and in person.

2c. Finance & Administration Committee Report Councillor Liz Burns - Chairman of the Finance and Administration Committee

What a strange year this has been due to covid and its restrictions. We as a Parish Council adapted our working to using technology and met either by Zoom, Teams, or other platforms, which at least enabled us all to continue to serve our community as best we could.

There have been several staff changes at the Parish Council offices and I would like to personally thank all those who have left us, some to retire some for other reasons. I would also like to welcome all our new staff particularly our new Chief Officer & Clerk and our Finance Officer & Deputy Clerk as interviewing through covid was a very different procedure, and to thank them for all they are doing to bring us up to date with so many changes and advances in technology.

It is good to see that we are still receiving applications for both small grants and larger financial grants. Grant applications are available on our Council website, and we would welcome applications from more groups.

As some of you will have noticed, the Depot is finally being updated which is long overdue. This will provide much needed space and better working conditions for our Works team.

We have had to increase the council tax this year but hopefully you will all see that it is as little an increase as we felt was operationally possible.

The cost of maintaining our football pitches and green spaces has increased but we hope that all the clubs and public that use these areas are benefiting from these amenities.

If anyone would like any further information regarding Finance & Administration, please do not hesitate to contact me.

2d. Staffing Committee Report Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst - Chairman of the Staffing Committee

The committee considers matters related to the employment of the Parish Council's staff. Parts of the committee's meetings are confidential, as they relate to individual members of staff.

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

The Staffing Committee has had a very busy year particularly over the selection, interview and appointment of a new Chief Officer & Clerk as well as reviewing and updating staff roles.

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2e. Review Panel Report
Councillor Sara Bedford - Chairman of the Review Panel

The Review Panel met to consider one complaint during the year.
The complaint was not upheld.

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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	Bedmond	No email
Councillor Liz Burns 51 Sheriff Way Leavesden WD25 7QS 01923 661533	Leavesden	cllr_liz.burns@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Ruth Clark 33 Primrose Hill Kings Langley WD4 8HZ	Primrose Hill	cllr_ruth.clark@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Fran Deschampsneufs 18 Harthall Lane Kings Langley WD4 8JH	Primrose Hill	cllr_fran.deschampsneufs@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Jane Lay The Gleanings 31 Marlin Square Abbots Langley WD5 0EG 01923 447281	Abbots Langley	cllr_jane.lay@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst 25 Tudor Manor Gardens Garston WD25 9TQ 01923 893661	Leavesden	sgm@cix.co.uk
Councillor David Major 10 St Lawrence Close Abbots Langley WD5 0AU 01923 265570	Abbots Langley	cllr_david.major@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 Simon Stanley 26 Breakspeare Road Abbots Langley WD5 0EP 01923 265090 07796 261284	Abbots Langley	cllr_simon-stanley@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk

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Councillor	Ward	Email
Councillor Owen Roe Abbeyfield Tannerswood 11 Greenways Abbots Langley WD5 0EU 01923 265702	Hunton Bridge	No email
Councillor John Swallow 4 Gallows Hill Lane Abbots Langley WD5 0DA 01923 265068 07721 850959	Abbots Langley West	cllr_john.swallow@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Jon Tankard 69 Trowley Rise Abbots Langley WD5 0LN 07527 620842	Abbots Langley West	cllr_jon.tankard@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor John Wyatt 7 Magnolia Avenue Abbots Langley WD5 0SW 07762 135451	Abbots Langley	cllr_john.wyatt@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Councillor Roxanne Yau 8 Balmoral Road Abbots Langley WD5 0ST	Leavesden	cllr_roxanne.yau@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk

The Parish Council is made up of fifteen members, fourteen of whom were elected at the ordinary elections held in May 2019 and one in a by-election held in October 2019.

Councillor contact details are correct as of February 2022.

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

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Senior Staff

Name	Position	Email
Isabel Montesdeoca	Chief Officer & Clerk to the Council and Responsible Financial Officer	isabel.montesdeoca@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
David Abbott	Facilities Manager	david.abbott@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Mark Ellis	Works Manager	mark.ellis@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk
Jayshree Patel	Finance Officer & Deputy Clerk	jayshree.patel@abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk

Parish Council Offices

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