



CHESHAM BOIS PARISH COUNCIL

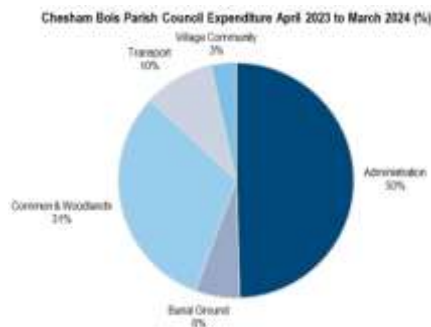
ANNUAL REVIEW 2023/24

The objective of this report is to provide an overview of Parish Council activities during the year to 1st April 2024 as well as information about annual income and expenditure. Chesham Bois Parish Council is made up of eleven councillors and a salaried Clerk whose primary role is to provide advice to councillors and ensure that the Council complies with statutory and regulatory requirements. As at 31st March 2024, there were two vacancies for Councillors to join the team.

As the current Chair of the Parish Council, I wish to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported the various community events organised by the Council during the course of the past year. I also wish to acknowledge and thank residents who have taken the time to provide feedback about council activities and local matters.

Lesley Winrow, Chair of Chesham Bois Parish Council

Finance: Chesham Bois Parish Council had an income of £132k in 2023/24 (prior year £152k) and derives its income from the Precept; managing and operating the Burial Ground; licences and wayleaves; matched funding for projects (if any) from Bucks Council via Amersham Community Board and some small grants. The Precept, (collected as part of the council tax), accounted for 69% of the total income for the year. During the year, the Parish Council spent £144k, adjusted to £115k as we received a rate rebate of £29k for the Burial Ground, as follows:



- The Council employs part-time staff at a cost of around £36k. Our current team of nine Councillors are unpaid volunteers of which six are elected and three are co-opted.
- We run a small office and this cost just over £21k.
- The Council owns and manages 18 hectares of local forest and land. In 23/24 the Council spent £36k on common, woodland and pond maintenance, of which £15k was for safety and emergency tree work.
- We have a legal obligation to operate and maintain the Burial Ground. The income for 23/24 was £25k (LY 49k), a lower amount following a change of policy with regard to advance reservations and fewer bookings. We spent £36k, adjusted to £7k after a rate rebate of £29k.
- The Council owns, maintains and funds the electricity cost for 65 streetlights in the village; cuts the grass on most verges; clears footpaths; provides seven Mobile Vehicle Activated Speed signs (MVAS) to help raise awareness of vehicle speeds; and these activities cost £12k. Our overall costs in this category were reduced by £1k as we received a refund for electricity charges last year, so streetlight costs have been funded from the credit reserve. All our streetlights are energy efficient LED units following the completion of a 6-year, £60k investment programme in 2022.
- We spent around £4k on several community events such as the Picnic on the Common, seasonal Litter Picks, Christmas Lights & Carols, communications and environmental initiatives.

The difference between our income and expenditure for the year, after transferring £8k to named reserves, was a surplus of £9k, (adjusted to a deficit of £20k allowing for the rate rebate). The annual budget had anticipated a deficit of £6k. Reserves are used to cover longer term liabilities and unexpected events. Good practice guidelines state that we should ideally have 50% of our annual income as a general reserve. At the end of the financial year, our general and named reserves totalled £156k and a breakdown of these can be found on our website together with full details of the accounts for the year.

David King, Chair, Finance Working Group

Burial Ground: Situated on a hillside surrounded by woodland and the Thomas Harding Meadow, the Burial Ground is a peaceful place to visit and reflect. It is a major asset for the community and also supports a wide variety of wildlife. Spaces are available for residents of Chesham Bois, Buckinghamshire and further afield. All enquiries should be directed to the Clerk.

During the summer of 2023, the chapel was re-decorated to deal with areas of damp and cracks in plasterwork. Historic heaters and lights were replaced with more efficient, electrical equipment and a Bluetooth enabled music system is now available for use. The path in the centre of the original, formal area has recently been repaired; pot holes filled; and spring bulbs planted around trees in the middle section.

Work has been started to create a dedicated space for soil to be stored, to enable contractors to deal with settlement on plots in a more timely, efficient manner.

The Burial Ground was first established in 1924 and plans are being made to mark the 100th anniversary in September 2024.

**Lesley Winrow, Chair
Burial Ground Working Group**

Common & Woodland: The Parish Council owns and manages Chesham Bois Common and part of Bois Wood. We also look after a further section of Bois Wood as well as Tenterden Spinney on Bois Lane on long leases from The Woodland Trust.

We are continuing to follow a programme of work that was recommended and approved by the Forestry Commission and Chiltern District Council and detailed in a 10 year Woodland

Management Plan which can be found on our website.

A qualified, experienced arboriculturist is engaged by the Parish Council to conduct comprehensive safety checks of all our trees alongside roads, paths and properties every 18 months, alternating between trees being in full leaf and after leaf fall. The latest survey was carried out in February 2024 and included a report about ash trees with signs of ash dieback disease. The survey identified two, diseased ash trees on the triangle behind the War Memorial. The recommendation was to fell both trees and that work has been carried out.

Bricky Pond: A consultant who works with Berks. Bucks. and Oxon. Wildlife Trust and its Head of Ecology were engaged to draw up a restoration and management plan for Bricky Pond in 2022 and we continue to follow their recommendations. For example, laurels at the western end of the pond have been removed and trees overhanging the pond have been cut back to reduce shading. The pond is reported to be in pretty good condition overall and is certainly not in need of major dredging and relining, which is good news.

**Jill Harris, Chair
Common & Woodland
Working Group**

Communications: The Parish Council formerly adopted the 'green tree' logo used on this leaflet in 2023/24.

Meeting agendas and notices are posted on three noticeboards sited around the Parish, near shops on Bois Lane; by Bricky Pond; and on the Amersham Road. Contact details, news

items and a wide range of information are published online. There were 5,580 views of the home page of the Parish Council website between 1/4/23 to 31/3/24 and we currently have 198 followers on Instagram; 264 followers on Facebook; and 370 followers on X, formerly Twitter.

The Parish Council submits a news article each month to Your Amersham magazine which is distributed free of charge to local residents. On occasion, the Parish Council also produces publications for surveys or specific events, such as the programme for the Summer Fete.

**Lesley Winrow, Chair
Communications Working Group**

Village Community: Events organised by the Parish Council over the past year have been well supported. Planning for the popular, biennial Summer Fete this year started in January and it will be held on Saturday 15th June 2024. The fete provides a great opportunity to meet new people as well as friends and neighbours.

The 'Beating the Bounds' walk around the boundary of the parish takes place each year on Rogation Sunday and we usually provide light refreshments after the walk for all those who participate.

The Picnic on the Common is now an established annual event which is held in July to mark the start of school summer holidays. Local bands are invited to perform and the idea is for people to bring along their own picnic, with any required blankets or seating, to enjoy the atmosphere and meet other local residents.

We would like to say a big **'thank you'** to everyone who has volunteered their time to help with the Common Clear Ups which we organise in Spring and Autumn every year. Residents who organise their own clear ups during the year are also appreciated.

Remembrance Sunday is a very special occasion. In 2023 this event at the War Memorial was extremely well attended by local residents and organisations. We would particularly like to thank Kim Speller from Amersham Concert Brass for playing the Last Post at dawn and dusk.

The annual Christmas Lights and Carols event held on the first Friday in December was attended by more people than ever before. Everyone enjoyed performances by three school choirs and a local brass band. Switching on the lights of the Christmas tree serves to mark the lead up to Christmas and the winter holiday period.

Please contact the Clerk for information about any of our community events or your ideas for new ones!

John Bailey, Chair
Village Community Working Group

Environment: Chesham Bois is widely recognised as a Conservation Area. It is a quiet oasis of green space, woodland and meadow between the busy towns of Amersham and Chesham. Land owned by the Parish Council is of high value to a variety of flora and fauna and key sites include designated Priority (woodland) Habitat and a designated Local Wildlife Site, the Thomas Harding Meadow.

During the course of the year, work was undertaken to clear bramble from the meadow in line

with the Management Plan developed with support from the Bucks. and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership. Footpaths through the meadow were widened; a damaged metal gate had to be repaired; and fencing replaced with boundary posts.

The Parish Council is currently developing a Biodiversity Policy and Management Action Plan which will be published on the website.

Lesley Winrow
Chair, Environment Working Group

Planning: The Parish Council is a statutory consultee in relation to local planning matters and decisions are made by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) which is Buckinghamshire Council.

The Parish Council has a Planning Committee that meets on a regular basis to review planning applications. Representations from residents are welcome and people should also submit their views direct to the LPA as the decision-making body.

At the start of the year 2023/24, the Parish Council had to continue to determine its response to a re-submitted proposal by St Leonard's Parochial Church Council to build a new development across the sites of the current parish centre, rectory and adjoining glebe land, (reference PL/22/4074/FA). In this matter, the Parish Council acts as both a statutory consultee and as owner of adjacent Common land.

Given the scale of the proposed development within the Chesham Bois Conservation Area, the Parish Council also published and distributed a leaflet to local residents in 2023 to help raise awareness of the scheme. The

substantial majority of people who responded to the leaflet objected to the application for a variety of reasons.

The Parish Council, after looking into aspects of the re-submitted application in detail, determined to object to the proposal on the grounds that the scale of the proposed development would lead to unacceptable impact and harm to the Conservation Area; the environment; wildlife; and the amenity of local residents. In addition, the impact of a significant increase in traffic had not been fully considered. It was not clear to the Parish Council that sufficient and proper regard had been given to any of these matters by planning officers of the LPA, which was also the view arrived at by councillors on the East Bucks. Planning Committee acting for the LPA, that resolved to refuse the application for a second time on 9th January 2024.

In addition, as landowner, the Parish Council in its written representations submitted onto the planning portal of the LPA, highlighted the fact that plans of the proposed development showed that access would be required over land owned by the Parish Council, to widen the entrance to the development. The applicant had not approached the Parish Council about acquiring such land and, given the response of residents following the consultation exercise, the Council was not minded to transfer or grant a right of way over this land.

Simon Staite, Chair
Planning Committee

Transport: This Working Group deals with local road verges, streetlights and Mobile Vehicle Activated Signs, (MVAS). We also listen to residents' views and refer matters to the Parish

Council which acts as a statutory consultee to Bucks. Council. Our responsibilities with regard to street lighting exclude the lights on the A416 Amersham Road and two lights on a zebra crossing in Bois Lane, provided by Bucks. Council.

A meeting has been held with Bucks. Highways to discuss the state of the roads in Chesham Bois and the road surface issues in North Road, South Road and Glebe Way in particular. It was agreed that these roads should be added to the list of repairs to be carried out although the scope of work was not deemed to be urgent.

Any problems or defects with road surfaces or pavements should be reported direct to Bucks. Council. There is an online reporting facility on the Council's website and on: www.fixmystreet.buckscc.gov.uk.

The Parish Council has participated in the Bucks. Council devolved services scheme since 2016 with regard to the management of grass road verges. The scheme was recently extended for an indefinite period, although the parish council can terminate the contract with 6 months' notice. Through the devolved services arrangement, the Parish Council receives funding towards the cost of cutting grass verges, clearing footpaths and cleaning street furniture. The scheme has

worked well to date and allows the Parish Council to respond quickly to local needs.

Contractors engaged to carry out the devolved services notified us that they were not prepared to extend their contract after April 2024. We therefore sought quotes from alternative companies and engaged a new contractor to start in April. The agreed scope of work is to cut grass verges once a month during the growing season, (except 'No Mow May'); to weed footpaths twice a year; and to clean street furniture. Residents should notify the Clerk if any paths need clearing so that arrangements can be made.

We are keen to set up a Community Speed Watch Programme again. If you are interested in volunteering please contact the Clerk. Thames Valley Police will provide the necessary training.

Between 1st April 2023 and 1st April 2024, the MVAS device on North Road recorded a total of 159,172 vehicles travelling towards the centre of Chesham Bois. 156,210 vehicles had observed the 30 m.p.h. speed limit but 2,962 vehicles exceeded the limit. The worst offenders were recorded travelling at the following speeds:

40-45 m.p.h. - 353 vehicles
45-50 m.p.h. - 55 vehicles
50-55 m.p.h. - 22 vehicles
55-60 m.p.h. - 6 vehicles

The number of vehicles recorded travelling in excess of the speed limit was slightly lower than the prior year.

The Parish Council is always keen to hear your views about local roads and transport issues.

Paul Eckersall, Chair
Transport Working Group

FUTURE EVENTS

Sunday, 5th May

Beating the Bounds Walk
Meet at 2 p.m. at the Parish Centre

Saturday, 15th June

Biennial Summer Fete
between 11.30 a.m. and 4 p.m.
Chesham Bois Common

Saturday, 13th July

Picnic & Music on the Common,
from 4 p.m.

Saturday, 5th October

Autumn Common Clear Up

Sunday, 12th November

Remembrance Day Service
11.45 a.m. at the War Memorial

Friday, 1st December

Christmas Lights & Carols
4 p.m. by the War Memorial

Details of each event will be published nearer the date.

Alternatively, please contact the Clerk to the Parish Council for information.

This report is available on the Parish Council website.
Copies with larger font text can be provided by the Clerk on request.

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