



CHESHAM BOIS
PARISH COUNCIL

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ANNUAL REVIEW 2022/23

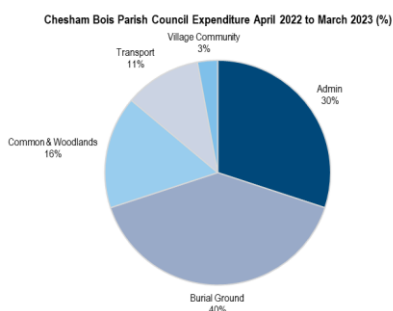
The objective of this annual report is to provide an overview of Parish Council activities during the year to 1st April 2023 and information about annual income and expenditure. Chesham Bois Parish Council is made up of eleven councillors and a salaried Clerk whose primary role is to ensure that the Council complies with statutory and regulatory requirements. As at 31st March 2023, 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 those who have taken the time to provide feedback about council activities and local matters.

Lesley Winrow, Chair of Chesham Bois Parish Council

Finance: During the financial year 2022/23, the Council changed its accounting system to AdvantEdge, an accounting software package that simplifies the process to produce monthly and annual financial reports which comply with Local Government financial regulations. Chesham Bois Parish Council had an income of £152k in 2022/23 (prior year £146k) and derives its income from the Precept; managing and operating the Burial Ground; Licences and Wayleaves; matched funding from Bucks Council via the Community Board; and some small grants. The Precept, (collected as part of the council tax), accounted for 57% of the total income for the year.

During the year, the Parish Council spent £173k as follows:



- The Council employs part-time staff at a cost of around £32k. Our current 9 Councillors are unpaid volunteers of which 6 are elected and 3 are co-opted.
- We run a small office and this cost is just over £19k.
- The Council owns and manages 18 hectares of local forest and land. In 22/23, the Council spent £28k on common, woodland and pond maintenance. £7k of this was for safety and emergency tree work.
- We have a legal obligation to provide and look after a burial ground.

The income was £49k and we spent £69k on operating and maintaining the burial ground. Of this, £31k was for non-domestic rates. I'm pleased to report that we have had a successful rating appeal and will receive a significant rebate in 2023/24 for rates dating back to 2018.

- The Council owns, maintains and funds the electricity cost to 65 streetlights in the village, cuts the grass on many of our verges, clears footpaths and provides 7 vehicle activated speed signs to help raise awareness of vehicle speeds; these activities cost £19k. We also received an electricity refund of £3k as all our streetlights are now energy efficient LED units following the completion of a 6-year, £60k investment programme.
- We spent around £5k on several community events such as the Christmas Lights & Carols, Theatre on the Jubilee Field, Litter Picks and local communications.
- The difference between our income and expenditure for the year was a deficit of £21k which will be funded from the Council's general reserves. 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 reserves totalled £140k 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: An in-depth operational review of historic working practices has been carried out during the course of the year. The scope of work has included ground maintenance; surveys; repair work; installation of boundary posts in the woodland section; and changes to operational roles and procedures, some of which have been outsourced.

In October 2022, the Parish Council resolved not to continue the option to reserve plots in advance, to help manage available space for interments. Also, stone pavers are now used as place markers for plots available for sale.

A long term contract was recently awarded to a local gardening company to restore and maintain the Memorial Garden area by the Chapel. This area had originally been planted with box hedging which became diseased and had to be removed.

From an administration perspective, a software package has been introduced to streamline the production of necessary documents relating to interments.

The Burial Ground is situated on a hillside which provides wonderful views of the surrounding area and the site is a major asset to the community.

All enquiries about the Burial Ground should be directed to the Clerk to the Parish Council.

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

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

We are continuing a programme of work, as recommended and approved by the Forestry Commission and Chiltern District Council, details of which are provided in a 10-Year Management Plan that can be found on our website. We engage expert consultants to carry out comprehensive safety checks of all trees managed by the Council alongside roads, paths and property every 18 months, alternating between trees being in full leaf and after leaf fall. The latest survey was done in January 2023 and all the high priority work was completed by March 2023. We are currently out to tender for the remaining work. Some of the larger sections of timber that have had to be felled have been made into rustic benches to replace some of those near the pond which were in poor condition. We have also installed three of these benches around the cricket pitch.

Ash Dieback:

As recommended in the management plan for the Common, all trees have now been checked for signs of ash dieback. We are in consultation with the Forestry Commission for possible funding to offset the costs of felling affected trees.

Bricky Pond:

There have been suggestions that the pond is leaking. We therefore engaged a consultant who works with Bucks, Bucks and Oxon. Wildlife Trust and their Head of Ecology to draw up a restoration and maintenance management plan. We received a comprehensive report in September 2022 and follow the recommended maintenance schedule. The report indicates that the pond is in good condition and certainly not in need of major dredging and relining, which is welcome news!

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

Communications: The Parish Council regularly posts meeting agendas and notices on three noticeboards sited around the Parish, by the parade of shops; adjacent to Bricky Pond; and on the Amersham Road. We also have a website and Twitter and Facebook accounts. The number of followers on social media has been disappointing to date and we would encourage local residents in particular to follow us!

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 will produce publications for news items or specific events, such as a programme for the Summer Fete. Most recently, a newsletter was created and distributed locally to raise awareness of a significant planning application, (PL/22/4074/FA), to develop land in the centre of the village.

**Lesley Winrow, Chair
Communications Working Group**

Village Community: Events organised by the Parish Council over the past year have been well supported and seem to grow in popularity every year. The summer fete in particular is a very successful, biennial event and we appreciate the support of all stall holders. At the Platinum Jubilee Summer Fete, it was great to see so many local schoolchildren take part in our Chesham Bois Nature Photography competition. Our thanks go to Wallace Wormley for his valued expertise in judging this event. The fete raised around £1,000 and we have advertised the opportunity for local organisations to apply for a grant to benefit from the proceeds. We look forward to the next summer fete in 2024.

The 'Beating the Bounds' walk around the boundary of the parish takes place each year, on Rogation Sunday, and was very popular in 2022 despite the tropical weather on the day!

The Picnic on the Common is now an established annual event, held in July to mark the start of school summer holidays. The playlist chosen by the Bad Dads band in 2022 was popular with people of all ages.

We would like to say a big 'thank you' to everyone who came along and volunteered their time to help with the Common Clear Ups which we organise in Spring and Autumn every year. Particular thanks go to the local Brownie groups that regularly support these events.

Remembrance Sunday is always a very special event and in 2022 this was extremely well attended by local residents and organisations. We would specially like to thank Kim Speller from Amersham Concert Brass for playing the Last Post at the War Memorial at both dawn and dusk.

The Christmas Lights and Carols event held in December was attended by more people than ever before and included three school choirs and a local brass band.

All events organised by the Parish Council are advertised on posters, noticeboards, social media (Twitter and Facebook) and on our website. Please contact the Clerk for information about community events.

**John Bailey, Chair
Village Community Working
Group**

Environment: Chesham Bois is widely recognised as a Conservation Area and quiet

oasis of green space, woodland and meadow between the busy towns of Amersham and Chesham. These features together with the sense of community, all combine to make Chesham Bois a very special place to live. Your support is needed to preserve the character of our unique village for future generations of people and wildlife to enjoy.

The Parish Council has a significant role to play in protecting the local environment as one of the largest landowners and managers of woodland.

The remit of this Working Group is to work towards protecting and enhancing the environment and biodiversity, focusing on natural habitats which allow a variety of protected species to thrive. We also work with established local and national groups, such as The Chiltern Society and The Woodland Trust.

A key aspect of our activity is to raise awareness of local environmental issues. Going forward, we intend to promote opportunities for people of all ages to participate in nature surveys.

If you have any suggestions for improving biodiversity and protecting the environment, please contact the Clerk to the Parish Council.

**Derek Banner
Chair, Environment Working
Group**

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

The Parish Council has a Planning Committee which meets on a regular basis to review

applications. Representations from residents are welcome and people should also submit their views about planning applications direct to the LPA as the decision-making body.

Recently, the Parish Council had to determine its response to a second proposal, (reference PL/22/4074/FA), to develop the site of the parish centre, rectory and adjoining glebe land, as both a statutory consultee and owner of adjacent land. Given the scale of the proposed development within the Conservation Area at the centre of Chesham Bois, the Parish Council also published and distributed a leaflet to local residents, to help raise awareness of the scheme. A substantial majority of residents who responded to the leaflet objected to the application for a variety of reasons.

The Parish Council 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 amenity of local residents. In addition, the Parish Council as landowner, in its representations to the LPA highlighted the fact that the proposed development would require access over land owned by the Parish Council and the applicant had not approached the council about acquiring such land and that, given the responses of residents, it was not minded to transfer this land.

**Simon Staite, Chair
Planning Committee**

Transport: The Transport Working Group represents the views of residents to Buckinghamshire Council and other organisations. The primary role of the Parish Council in respect of roads and transport is

to act as a statutory consultee in relation to draft policies or documents issued by Buckinghamshire Council. Any problems relating to roads and pavements should be reported direct to Buckinghamshire Council and the website FixMyStreet can be used.

The direct responsibilities of the Parish Council include all street lighting in the Parish, except for street lights on the A416 Amersham Road and the two lights on the zebra crossing in Bois Lane which Buckinghamshire Council provided and maintains.

The Parish Council has participated in the Buckinghamshire Council devolved services scheme since 2016, which has recently been extended to 2024. Under this scheme, the Parish Council receives funding for grass cutting, weed control, clearing footpaths, rights of way and street furniture cleaning and maintenance, allowing the Council to respond quickly to matters arising in relation to these items.

Last year, a number of roadside verges were selected to be left uncut for a number of weeks to help improve biodiversity but, for a number of reasons, the short experiment was deemed unsuccessful. In 2023/24 contractors will resume regular mowing of roadside verges for which the Council is responsible

through the growing season, with the exception of 'No Mow May'. Footpaths are cleared of weeds twice a year and fallen leaves are cleared at the end of autumn. Residents of St. Leonards Road may have noticed recent improvements to a footpath at the bottom of their road.

Residents should contact the Clerk to the Parish Council if any paths by the road need sweeping so that arrangements can be made.

The Parish Council has invested in several Mobile Vehicle Activated Signs (MVAS) set up across Chesham Bois to monitor the volume of traffic and speed. Between 1st January and 9th September 2022, the device on North Road recorded a total of 105,990 vehicles travelling past from the direction of Amersham Road. Of that number 103,524 were recorded observing the speed limit but 2,466 vehicles exceeded the speed limit, some even exceeding 60-65 mph.

Going forward, the Transport Working Group is keen to set up a Community Speed Watch Programme and the Council will be looking for volunteers to receive training. If you are interested in volunteering or wish to share your views about local roads or transport issues, please contact the Clerk to the Parish Council.

**Paul Eckersall, Chair
Transport Working Group**

Future events in 2023



Sunday 14th May

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

Saturday 15th July

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

Saturday, 7th October

Autumn Common Clear Up
From 10 a.m., Parish Centre

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 on the Parish Council website and on social media nearer the date. Alternatively, please contact the Clerk to the Parish Council for information.

This report will be made available on the Parish Council website and copies with large font text can be provided on request.

Email: clerk@cheshamboispc.org.uk

Telephone: 01494 432585

Office address: Parish Council Office, Glebe Way, Chesham Bois, Amersham HP6 5ND

Office hours: 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. Tuesday to Thursday

Website: cheshamboispc.org.uk **Twitter:** @CheshamBoisPari **Facebook:** CheshamBoisPC