

Harrold Parish Council - Chairman's End-of-Year Statement for 2018/2019

May 2019 represented the end of a four-year term of office for the councillors. There was no election for Parish Councillors on 2nd May as we had fewer applicants than positions (7 out of 13). The councillors remaining for the next four-year term of office are Robert Tickle (Chairman), David Brough (Vice Chair), David Mercer, Richard Barrett, Bob Muller, Jayne Peverell and Pat Pedersen. Sebastian Reger and John Calver are expected to be coopted back on to the council. Robbin Brough remained as clerk for her fourth year. This past year we were sorry to say goodbye to councillors Bob Page, Lucie Hoad, Lindsay Duggan and Gary Lloyd and we thank them for their hard work.

The end of the four years represents an opportune time to look back (in summary!) and see what has been achieved by the Parish Council. Over this period we have made a tactical effort to bring down the level of cash reserves through a process of expediting projects and focusing on areas of the village that had previously been overlooked. These reserves had built up from "Section 106" payments from the developers of Roman Paddock and Harewelle Way.

Strategy 1: Distribution of funding to local voluntary groups

One of the council's strategies is to distribute more funding to local voluntary groups through Section 137 Grants. These benefit parishioners by ensuring that voluntary organisations and services are able to keep functioning and to assist those that are newly formed. Over the four years we issued grants totaling over £31k, including to the following groups: The Friends of Harrold Odell Country Park to construct the pond-dipping platform for school groups; Harrold Snooker Club (based at the Harrold Centre) for new equipment and refurbishment of the snooker room; The Bridge magazine - an essential communication tool for the council; United Reformed Church for a new cooker, to support their community group activities; Bridgman Bowls club for roof renovations; Harrold Good Neighbours for their liability insurance; the Villager Minibus service for a new minibus; Dancevybz dance group to support their attendance at the European and then the World Street Dance championships (congratulations to them!); Harrold Twinning Association to support their community social events; Harrold Toddler Group for start-up equipment; Harrold Scout Group for camping equipment; Harrold Lawn Tennis Club for their court fencing; Harrold Allotment Association for their noticeboard; Harrold Preschool for their awning/building; Harrold Online for the new village website.

Strategy 2: Improving the look of the village

Another of the council's continued strategies has been to improve and smarten the look of the village. In the last four years we have: built the stone wall down by the bridge and removed the unattractive metal railings; restored the war memorial, added the WW1 "Tommy" figure and sited the memorial bench next to it; designed and purchased 3 new village entrance signs (still being manufactured); repaired/restored the Lych gate at St Peter's church; installed two wooden bins on the Lower Green in an effort to reduce the amount of littering that happens in that area; employed a Street Ranger to litterpick, clear leaves and empty the village bins, which would regularly overflow; repainted over 100 lampposts along the High Street and other main roads; restored all the ornamental fire hydrants throughout the village; replaced all the wooden bollards on The Green and removed the rusty chains; replaced the pedestrian crossing poles that had turned green; replaced all the plastic High Street bins with the attractive cast iron bins; installed the "2016" new cast iron benches and restored the existing metal benches to their former glory; started a program of tree maintenance including trees on The Green and Lower Green; a plethora of other smaller maintenance items, including playground fixes.

Strategy 3: Facilities and services

We completely replaced the playground at Harewelle Way, encouraging the transfer of ownership from the developer, took over a lease for the land and took ownership of £149k to maintain the land; replaced the climbing frame/fort and soft surface at Saxon House End playground, which had reached end-of-life; extensively refurbished the Harrold Centre playground with the large playfort and other pieces of new equipment; later we replaced the playfort in the toddler section of the Harrold Centre playground; we are continuing to work with the playing field association (HPFA) to deliver a renovated sports pavilion; the refurbishments to the HPFA-owned Scout Hut are nearing completion and include internal cladding of the walls, kitchen improvements and improvements to the heating. The council had set aside £100k from reserves

to fund the two HPFA projects; we transferred approximately £143k for the Harrold Centre redevelopment project; installed an Outdoor Gym in the Harrold/Odell country park, upon a request from residents; added new ramps to the skate park in the country park and resurfaced the current ramp; initiated gritting of the High Street and Medical Practice pavements; bought a defibrillator for the High Street and arranged training on its use; instigated re-mortaring of the Lockup on The Green (expected shortly); we also created a good-looking new council website and regularly update the Parish Council Facebook page to keep you informed of what we're up to.

Developing the Neighbourhood Plan

The Parish Council has made very good progress in developing a Neighbourhood Plan for Harrold. This plan will, in line with the requirements imposed by Bedford Borough Council and the government, result in some new developments in Harrold. However, the expected scope of development is proposed to be within the prescribed range of 25 to 50 dwellings. This reflects the preferences of the village as a whole and is consistent with the strategic policies of the Development Plan for the area. The Neighbourhood Plan is about to enter into its next phase with a further village consultation planned for May/June. This consultation will give villagers an opportunity to express their views on the viable development sites and, in particular, the allocation of dwellings to the viable sites. The Parish Council will proceed with the Neighbourhood Plan as planned and intends to have a draft plan ready for submission by the end of 2019.

SpeedWatch group

The SpeedWatch group was created and continues to attempt to curb speeding in the village. We also purchased two portable speed signs for the village (VAS) and report the data to the police.

Finances for 2018/2019

Cash Balance: As at 31st March 2019 the cash balance sits at £146k, down from £171k this time last year. We estimate that the overall cash balance will drop to approximately £34k once all the projects in this coming year's budget have been completed. This remaining balance will then form an accrual to keep Harrold's current facilities up to standard and replacing them when they reach the end of their life.

Spending: Ignoring larger projects in progress, in the 2018/19 financial year, the council overspent the budget (and used up reserves) by £14k due to items of expenditure that couldn't be forecast. This consisted of £2.5k unexpected costs for the new Street Ranger salary, £8k to replace the Harrold Centre playfort, £2k to fix the Lych gate and £1k on the WW1 Tommy statue.

Precept: The parish council has agreed to increase the precept only by the rate of inflation this year: from £72,645 to £74,708. The parish council believes it is vitally important to set the precept at a level to enable services to be provided, local groups to be supported and to ensure village equipment can be replaced when it deteriorates beyond repair: in short, to keep Harrold alive and to make sure it stays a great place to live.

Robert Tickle Chair - Harrold Parish Council

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The next meetings are June 12th and July 10th in the Harrold Centre – there is no August meeting. All are very welcome and encouraged to attend; there is a public open forum at 7.30pm at every meeting. Please email the clerk if you wish to address the council as we may wish to add the item to the main agenda so that we can take immediate action. Please note that the clerk role is part time, so you may not receive an immediate response to correspondence - although she does try to be flexible and spread her time through the week.