



# Harrold

PARISH COUNCIL



## Chairman's End-of-Year Statement for 2019/2020

## **Your parish council**

It always surprises me when we do the annual roundup, just how much gets achieved during the year – and I'm only discussing the highlights. I'm pleased to say we're now a full council with 13 councillors in our ranks; this hasn't happened for quite a while. Your current councillors are: Robert Tickle (Chairman), David Mercer (Vice Chair), Richard Barrett, Bob Muller, Jayne Peverell, Pat Pedersen, Sebastian Reger, John Calver, Hayden Mead, Fran Ross, Eddie Thompson, Andy Bryce, and Heather Paston. However, the parish council is saying goodbye to Robbin who has served us with dedication for the last five years. Being a parish clerk is a difficult and an often thankless task. Robbin has been at the front line in dealing with the concerns of the public, which are not always expressed in the most reasonable of terms. Robbin has dealt with these with tact, patience and common sense. She has also been assiduous in being our conduit with the borough council and our contractors. She has given us, the council, well-researched advice and has always dealt with us with cheerfulness. She has performed all her tasks with great efficiency and we are grateful for her sterling service. Thank you Robbin from us all and on behalf of the village. We now welcome David who takes over as our new clerk. David has spent five years as a parish councillor for Harrold and has been heavily involved in many of the projects. He currently clerks for another Bedfordshire parish council.

## **Distribution of funding to local voluntary groups**

One of the council's ongoing strategies is to distribute sufficient funding to local voluntary groups through parish council 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 year we issued the maximum amount of grants again, including to the following groups: £1900 to Harrold Cricket Club to train new coaches, for new pitch maintenance equipment, and for new equipment for the Friday night junior cricket events; £5,000 to the Harrold Primary Academy PTA group towards their project for playground equipment; £500 to The Bridge magazine towards production costs; £1,050 to the Harrold Pit Run committee to cover race costs; £1,000 to The Villager minibus service; an organisation managed and run by volunteers to provide community minibus services to the villages of North Bedfordshire to destinations not otherwise served by public transport; £5,000 of funding towards the running costs and future projects at the Harrold Centre.

## **Projects**

As ever, we have had a year full of projects. Many of our larger projects span more than one year so it was satisfying to see them completed: the new village entrance signs, for example, which look stunning in my opinion. The new stone wall by the main bridge was finished in late April 2019 and the old wonky railings were removed – beautiful stonework that complements the bridge nicely. The Scout Hut renovation project was completed. This was funded by the parish council but the hard work was carried out by the Harrold Playing Field Association and the Scouts group; approximately £30k was granted for internal cladding of the walls, ceiling fixes, kitchen changes, toilet facilities with wheelchair access, repainting, a new heating/cooling system and electrical improvements. We also had the lockup re-mortared over the summer using a traditional lime-base mortaring technique. It's an extremely special and unique building for Harrold and ensuring it is looked after correctly is a high priority for the council. We installed additional life-saving equipment at the Lower Green, in combination with the existing secure throwline lifebag. We added Royal British Legion poppies to the streetlights along the High Street to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE75). We commissioned an ecology survey to ensure the brook is being maintained in line with best practice; to ensure support for protected species, correct treatment of invasive non-native species, and to highlight opportunities for enhancing the brook for biodiversity.

Smaller projects included the purchase of a second Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) measuring vehicle speeds and encouraging and reminding drivers to keep to the speed limits. We added a sign to the bench by the Coop to designate it as Harrold's Happy-To-Chat bench: Some people may go days or even weeks without the simplest of human contact, so these types of benches seek to break down that social barrier and allow us all to say hello. It's a simple way to let people know you're open to a chat. We hosted a professionally-run, and well-attended, training course on the use of public defibrillators and CPR to build confidence for the public in using the defibrillator on the front of No.68 Hairdressers on the High St. We supported the creation and sale of the Harrold "Then and now" 2020 calendar, which raised an amazing £3,000 in profit. Many thanks to Judy Riley and Jeremy Duncan for developing the idea and producing such a wonderful memento of our village.

We take forward the following projects into the coming year: upgrading to LED the 15 parish council-owned streetlights around the village – there are no longer replacement parts for many of the existing lights. Working with the Harrold Playing Field Association to refurbish the sports pavilion; we have £70k set aside for this project. The schedule of work includes essential repairs to the roof, electrical improvements, access and facilities for wheelchair and internal redecoration. Installing the three dog poo bag dispensers we've purchased to encourage dog owners to clear up after their animals.

### **Developing the Neighbourhood Plan**

The parish council has made 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 set at a prescribed amount of 30 dwellings. Through public consultation, 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 entered into its next phase with a second village consultation in June 2019. This consultation gave villagers an opportunity to express their views on the viable development sites and, in particular, the allocation of dwellings to the viable sites. Using the results of the consultation, a draft plan was prepared and submitted to the borough council for review. Following a further village consultation on the near-final version of the plan, it will be submitted for official examination; the process will be concluded with a Village Referendum – in the current climate this is not allowed to happen until at least May 2021, although we have been informed that a plan at the referendum stage will hold more weight than normal in the planning process due to this enforced delay due to coronavirus.

### **The precept**

In January, the parish council approved an increase in the precept from £74,708 to £81,128; this is the amount of council tax levied by the parish council to carry out its services. This was mainly to account for £5,000 annual funding to the Harrold Centre Committee to ensure the long-term viability of the Harrold Centre; a building that the parish council invested heavily in during the (fairly) recent refurbishments. The overall percentage increase in the precept was an 8.6% rise, or £9.19 per year per Band D household; bringing the total annual Band D household cost up to £116.13. 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 remains a great place to live.

As always, I look forward to what the coming year brings, and I thank the councillors and the clerk for their dedication and hard work.

Robert Tickle      Chairman - Harrold Parish Council