

## WALKERN PARISH COUNCIL

### Chairman's Report to the Parish Meeting 06/05/21

The last 12 months has been a challenging time for many residents in the village of Walkern both in terms of the lockdown periods of isolation and following the rules as they change over time. Walkern Parish Council (WPC) has continued with its help for anyone in the Parish who needs grocery and or prescription delivery and pick up and we will continue to offer our support and funds to anyone who still needs our help.

Last year we set ourselves the following goals and objectives to improve the effectiveness of the Council and enhance the lives of the people who live in the Parish as follows:

- **Communication** – WPC recognised the need to better communicate with all residents of the village and with that in mind we built a new web site that has been in place for the entire past year and features more useful information both on the village in general, the work of the Parish Council and links into other community areas of the county. We regularly update our site with news items and welcome constructive feedback from residents to its ongoing development. We also attended a village day with our own stall to promote our ongoing projects within the village.
- **Planning** – This has proved and continues to be a challenging brief for Walkern Parish Council as some applications are still being sought despite their disregard of both the local plan and our very own Neighbourhood plan. Both plans are designed to protect our village from unwanted and undesirable developments up to 2033.

Some of these applications essentially bring no enhancements to the fabric of our local society or way of life. That said applications that do meet the afore mentioned plans thresholds are welcome and we have a track record of supporting sensible small-scale development by the residents of the village.

During the year we worked with **County & District Councillor Ken Crofton** to secure a Tree Preservation Order at Box Wood and an Article 4 Direction there, which restricts the scope of permitted development rights.

We are also fully engaged with the ongoing construction site at Froghall lane (this requires monitoring and liaising with EHDC and Mears) and the proposed development of East of Stevenage (EOS) Gresley Park. We are also committed to attending meetings and providing feedback related to the proposed expansion of London Luton Airport.

Planning remains a complicated area and Walkern Parish Council is extremely fortunate to have **Councillor Rist** heading up planning responses for us as she brings invaluable knowledge of the Neighbourhood Plan and the village in general. I would like to thank **Councillor Rist** for all her hard work and diligence in protecting our village.

- **Walkern Sports & Community Centre (WSCC)** – As many people will know this facility is owned by WPC but run by a dedicated team of volunteers under the stewardship and guidance of Nigel Bennett, Jo Ransom, and the rest of the committee. Walkern Parish Council as landlord has a direct interest in the success of this venue plus the sports fields and has demonstrated this by investing in new bi-folding doors that separate the facility into two function rooms and completing the purchase of the security doors at the facility.

WPC will continue to support Nigel and Jo throughout the coming year, and I wish to thank them both for their hard work in making this facility a viable village venue for our residents and the wider WSCC user groups. Furthermore, **Councillor Overall** who heads up this brief for WPC, has shown real commitment to the WSCC and I would like to also thank her for her work in this area.

- **Grants** – WPC will continue to make grants to important groups within the village and help with unforeseen expenses when funds allow us to do so. It is vital that we, as a council work closely with all village groups that need our help and we remain open minded and committed to supporting these village groups.

If any group wishes to apply for a grant, then please do not hesitate to contact the clerk at least a week before our WPC monthly meeting.

- **General** – We continue to install new dog waste bins and general waste bins at various locations around the village as required. Other work involves the management of our village assets and their maintenance requirements. We have also recently engaged Hertfordshire County Council over traffic issues in the high street and have relocated the Speed Indication Device (SID) from Stevenage road to the high street facing the walk-in entrance to the Sports field. The SID can now be switched between both locations as required.
- **21/22 Goals and Objectives** – although we have achieved nearly everything, we set out to accomplish in the previous 12 months, we do not want the momentum to stop there and have set the following key objectives for the next 12 months –

1. **Councillor Vacancies** – We can only really deliver at pace when our team is full and for the last 12 months, we have worked with 5 councillors instead of the 7 permitted. In the next 12 months it will be important that we recruit two new councillors as the workload continues to increase. If you are 18 or over and live in the village of Walkern we would be very pleased to hear from you, should you have an interest in becoming a Parish Councillor so please contact the clerk Heidi Broady for more information.
2. **Fitness equipment at the sports field** – as a key part of last year's plan, we are close to completing this and hope to have the equipment in place by the summer 2021. There will be 8 pieces of outside sports equipment located along the path and side of the field with equipment also supplied for disability users which we

believe is key to making this available to all. I would like to thank **Councillor Nudds** for taking this project forward and delivering it for all the residents.

3. **Picnic Area at the sports field** – many will have noticed that we have begun to clear an area at the top left of the sports field so that it can be used by all residents and visitors as a picnic area in years to come. This project involves levelling the ground, removing rubble, applying topsoil/seed and so on and requires a lot of effort and time to get the area ready. **Councillor James** has suggested that we involve the community in creating the picnic area which would be a really good community project and we will further define this as the project develops. I would like to thank Jim Wakely and Michelle Hilton for assisting us with this project and we will update the village further as it proceeds.
4. **Updating the Neighbourhood Plan** – as previously stated planning remains a challenging brief for the Parish Council and we have decided to further update the Neighbourhood plan in line with new policies and features that have come to light over recent months. We have engaged the help of Jacqueline Veater from Gov Resources Ltd who was instrumental in getting our first plan over the line. I am grateful to **Councillor Rist** for leading this project as it takes hours of detailed work and resources to complete the task.

I would also like to thank Paula Clements for keeping the village looking clean and tidy and James Wakley and Michelle Hilton for maintaining the war memorial and the village flower beds at the entrances to the village.

Finally, it wouldn't be possible to carry out the various projects and duties of the Parish Council without the important work of our **Clerk Heidi Broady**, Heidi has carried out this role for many years through an ever-changing line up of councillors and provides the important continuity that the Council must have, and I'd like to sincerely thank her for her continued commitment to the WPC.

Councillor Tom Deffley

Chairman