



Chair's Review 2023-2024

Firstly, I would like to thank my Vice Chair Debbie Hammond, fellow Parish Councillors and all those residents who have throughout the year, supported the Parish Council with community issues, opposing planning applications, litter picking and other environmental projects.

Along with formal consultations, the Parish Council is the only way in our current democratic system for local people to have a voice representative voice – even if on occasions we can't achieve what we want and feel that our views and feelings are simply ignored and / or irrelevant to bigger interests. That does not mean we don't keep trying.

Parish Councillors are all volunteers giving of their precious time to try and make our community a good place to live for all. Sometimes though, our personal lives get a little heavy and Councillors need to step away.

It is thus with disappointment that I need to note the departure this last year of Councillors, John Kwijuka and Stacey Lloyd but also our Parish Clerk, Lalit Patel.

Thank you to them all for their contributions to our work over recent years.

In consequence of these departures, we were once again left with vacancies in our Parish Council numbers, and also needed to find a new Parish Clerk.

Finding volunteers and Clerks is not easy, but I am pleased to report that in September, we appointed Mrs Jennie Allwork as our new Parish Clerk. She is now rapidly getting herself established on what for her is a new role, but we know Jennie will be a great asset to the Parish Council and is already putting her own positive and professional stamp on how we do things.

Meanwhile, a new appeal for resident volunteers to join us on the Parish Council has once again led to two new prospective Councillors to fill our two vacancies.

Jim Keary, who has lived in Hunsbury Meadows for over 20 years, joined us formally last month – April – and I am delighted to report a resident from Pineham Village has stepped forward and we shall hope to formally co-opt him to the Parish Council at our June meeting, bringing our number back up to the full 8 Councillors.

Thank you to both for coming forward, we shall look forward to having your new input to our work.

Key Points from this last year are as follows:

Environmental Inputs:

1. We once again commissioned the installation of our three tier planters across the Parish, but this year added some fence baskets to the long fence at the top of Banbury Lane and in from to the Children's playground on Banbury Lane. These will be reinstalled again for this next summer.

2. We did get back most of the bulbs from the spring displays last year and these were replanted where we are able to do so quickly without having to get permission from third parties.
3. Once again, we need to recognise and thank the Inland Waterways Association volunteers (IWA) and the Cummins Power Systems charity for their work and charitable contributions to the maintenance of the tow path and canal that runs through the Parish. Cummins and the IWA once again extended the hard surfaced tow path towards the motorway and are about to start the final section. Almost the entire length of the tow path through the Parish is now surfaced. We are so lucky to have such support and input from both organisations enhancing what is a beautiful community facility.
4. Due to a totally dry 2022, the wildflower strips we set up in Wildflower Meadow failed to establish properly. Three strips have now been rotavated again and seed planted at the beginning of April. This appears to have germinated quite well, though Magpies were a bit of a problem with the new seed! Gaps will be filled with new seed accordingly as time goes on and with warmer weather, we may see a new display established this year.
5. We've had some ongoing problems with an overflowing ditch in Hunsbury Meadows due to a blocked culvert under Upton Way. Parish Council lobbying via our Ward Councillor, Nick Sturgess – Alex, has finally got agreement to the ditches and culvert being cleared properly.
6. I would like to note the work of Cllr Debbie Hammond in the organisation of our Biannual “Party in the Park” event scheduled for Saturday 27th July this year in the children’s play park on Banbury Lane. This is no small task, and we hope that the weather is good and residents from across the Parish come out in force and enjoy the event.

Transport and Communication:

1. Potholes in our Roads!

The Parish Council constantly lobbies our Highways contacts regarding the “pothole mess” but it really is important that every resident affected by any pothole to report them directly to the “*fixmystreet*” web portal: www.fixmystreet.com. The more complaints the better to get results!

2. Bus Infrastructure & Routes:

- We have confirmed via our Ward Councillor Cllr, Nick Sturgess-Alex, that Pineham Village residents would like to see the promised Stagecoach service routed through the village stopping at the stops already in situ and as originally planned for the village. At present we understand that Stagecoach have refused to start this service due to parked cars obstructing the route.
- For most of the last year, we have been pursuing the installation of bus stops which formed part of the planning agreement for the new 34 houses at the top of Banbury Lane. These should be installed on Upton Valley Way East between the pedestrian crossing at the top of Banbury Lane and the Upton Way / A5123 roundabout and will facilitate access to the Stagecoach service 55 that runs from Swan Valley to the town centre. This will supplement the existing 87 route that runs along Banbury Lane and down to Pineham Village and which the Parish Council continue to subsidise from our precept funds.
- Most recently we have approached West Northants Council for the installation of hard bus stop areas and potentially also some form of bus stop cover, (if possible), for the two stops

for the 87 service at the top of Ashpole Spinney. Currently these are grass only and through the winter – especially this last very wet winter – are very muddy and potentially unsafe for those getting on and off the bus.

3. Verge cutting Upton Valley Way East

- After annual complaint going back many years, we are advised that the entire length of the Upton Valley Way East road and cycle way verges will now finally be included in the Highways road verge cutting schedule.

Emergency Plan:

My thanks must go to Cllr Nathan Stewart who has been working with the West Northants Emergency Planning Department to draft an Emergency Plan for the Parish. The plan will dovetail with the West Northants Council and emergency services plans and establish “*places of safety*” and people to contact, should a major incident affect the Parish and its residents whereby we need to evacuate, or direct people away from the incident and/ or their homes.

Provision for Older Children and Green spaces for the Community:

Pineham Village:

In my last review, I referred to our efforts to research the use of the land adjacent to the Pineham Barns School (the land edged by a ditch) for the use of older Pineham Village children to play football and ball games in general to alleviate the stress caused by them using the Village Green in particular.

Sadly, we found that this was not possible, as it is not possible for us to get the necessary insurance and health and safety was going to be an issue in respect of Traveller trespass risk. That land is also of course part of the flood plain and subject to flooding.

However, the work undertaken by Cllr Stewart in respect of the Emergency Plan has meant that we are now pursuing the possible use of the school playing field during the summer holidays and possibly summer evenings.

We still have work to do to work out the details of this including having installed a new gate and arranging a parental rota for supervision and litter clearance after use – but it is a positive in an otherwise frustrating dead end.

Hunsbury Meadows:

In the meantime, Hunsbury Meadows has a similar issue.

As with Pineham Village, the Parish is surrounded by flood plain and / or warehousing. There is very little green space for us to develop larger play or community areas for older children / teenagers and residents.

Utilising the West Northants Council Local Plan consultation, we are therefore now looking to ask for at least some of the only remaining available land just below Pineham Lock and Wootton Brook and adjacent to the tow path, designated a green space for our community use.

Pineham Village Residents Association:

It is clear from social media that there are often issues that are solely relevant to Pineham Village and often need liaison with the Management Company responsible for the maintenance of the village, or in relation to the roads (until they are “adopted” by West Northants Council), Taylor Wimpey, and as such are beyond the remit of the Parish Council.

The Parish Council is thus seeking to assist residents of Pineham Village to form a Residents Association. It is hoped that such a body will give Pineham Village a formal recognised joint voice through which issues and new community projects can be advanced and through which effective representative liaison with the Parish Council can be achieved.

Planning Applications:

Many of those which come before us are for residential extensions and we usually do not make any objections to these. However, this year, we have had four that have caused concern:

1. 80 Houses on Upton Valley Way North

Along with many Pineham Village residents, we have objected to this further encroachment into the flood plain on the grounds of flood risk.

2. 5G Mast Banbury Lane:

Unfortunately, the planning regulations around the installation of such masts is currently tilted in favour of the Network companies and they are not forced to properly liaise or take note of community views. The installation was therefore simply “rubber stamped” to approval and 65 legitimate objections regarding appearance and suggesting an alternative site were not considered.

A concession to make the colour of the mast and box green rather than Radal Grey was only win in an otherwise distasteful planning episode.

3. New Bus stops – Upton Valley Way East

Over the year, we have pursued *Future Housing Group* (the developer) and West Northants Council Planning Department in respect of the “missing bus stops” promised as part of the planning application and approval for the new 34 houses at the top of Banbury Lane.

Future Housing have advised that plans for these are in the process of being finalised and the bus stops will be installed but this is taking a very long time, and we are thus pressing for implementation.

These will give access to the Stagecoach service that runs along Upton Valley Way East from Swan Valley and supplement the No 87 route which is subsidised by the Parish Council.

4. Canal Bridge – Pineham Lock

Aviva, who own the land just below Wootton Brook and adjacent to the canal along with the land on the other side of the canal, have applied for planning permission to install a bridge to allow access to the land on the tow path side from Swan Valley.

Notwithstanding our forthcoming proposal that the land on the tow path side of the canal should be designated community “green space”, no information is available regarding what they

propose to do with that land, but it is assumed that should planning permission be granted for the bridge, the likely development is for more warehousing.

The Parish Council has opposed the bridge because of the environmental and visual impact this will have, not to mention the uncertain prospect of further warehousing and potential heavy goods vehicle noise pollution so close to Pineham Lock has upset residents.

We hope that the Local Plan Consultation process and inputs to that by us and hopefully residents, for the land to which it will link, may also help prevent its construction.

Conclusion:

In summary, this has not been a year of positive quick fixes and installations. Yes, two new bins are in place in Pineham Village and a new bench on Banbury Lane has been installed on Banbury Lane, but these are small wins over which we have total control.

Despite the hard work and effort of my fellow Parish Councillors, this year has often been one of frustration trying to secure facilities and improve our environment.

All we can do is take every opportunity afforded us as a Parish Council in the democratic processes available to us and press for the outcome (s) we desire. Sadly, we don't always succeed but by liaison with other organisations and bodies, we can sometimes get positive results.

We hope to continue to do this over the next year too. To do that we do however need the continued support of our residents. Thank you everyone who comes forward to help in whatever capacity.