



INKPEN PARISH COUNCIL

REPORT FOR ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – 4th MAY 2021

Many of us have experienced tragedy in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic, with friends and loved ones succumbing to it. It has been a sad and painful year, and the parish council wish all those affected our genuine sympathy and condolence.

We also wish to record our feeling of loss for David Wilson, a parish councillor for many years, who died very recently.

This is the second year in a row where our ability to hold a public Annual Parish Meeting has been prevented due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Naturally, the pandemic has taken its toll on much of the Parish Council business, except where support for residents in need is concerned. We have worked closely with WBC to ensure the free flow of food parcels and essential services, and have provided a free phone service for those less technologically able.

Throughout, we have tried to keep residents up to date via the parish website, and we continue to do so. The Covid-19 pandemic is not over yet. Use of the parish website peaked at around 27000 visits per month and remains well supported even now that the urgency for support has lessened.

Residents have truly shown the meaning of community during this time, looking out for neighbours in need and looking to help the wider community via food banks etc. Having come together and shown such generosity of spirit, it would be a shame to let that sense of unity and togetherness disappear. Please remember and retain the values and purpose that you have so freely given over the past year or so.

For many of us during lockdown, broadband and in particular, Gigaclear broadband, has been a lifeline. The fact that every home in Inkpen and Combe now has connectivity to this ultrafast broadband network despite some having alternative access through BT, is due to negotiations between Gigaclear, and John Bryant and I (working on behalf of the parish council). Where we are now is the culmination of several years work that started in 2013. I would like to express my thanks and pay tribute to the late John Bryant for his selfless input into this broadband project, that has given new vitality to our village.

In the months immediately prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, the Parish Council continued to work closely with Gigaclear to get some remaining installation issues resolved. All is now in place for the next 20 years or so, giving residents a speed of internet that, so far, few other communities enjoy. The Inkpen Primary School,

Inkpen businesses and those working from home can link to the outside world whilst continuing to enjoy a more family centric style of life.

During the Covid pandemic the Parish Council has had to get used to new ways of working in the same way that all other councils and government bodies have had to. Bodies such as West Berkshire Council had a mainly 'work from home' policy and this has meant that our efforts to work with, and contact WBC, were significantly slowed. Such aspects as dealing with planning applications became somewhat disjointed but we tried our best to do the job required of us. Looking back, it is perhaps hard to remember what strain home working - with its reliance on email and zoom - put the national broadband network under.

Whilst the pandemic caused major issues with the way we work and live, we were lucky to be able to continue with fund raising and renovation of the playing field pavilion, the children's play area and the new children's woodland play facility. Claire Jones, who led the refurbishment and children's play-area projects, will outline where we are and what has been achieved, and our indebtedness to the fundraising committee.

The Inkpen Memorial Playing Field trust is as many will be aware, the responsibility of the parish council and it is now in a stated fit for the next generation. Please take good care of it.

We expect that the next year will see a return to a more normal (albeit a new normal) way of working. The Parish Council urges all residents to observe the covid-19 guidance as it unfolds, so that we can more quickly attain the freedoms, safety and security that we all desire. And please try and maintain the sense of community that we have established in the last year or so, the tolerance of and kindness towards neighbours. Stay safe.

David Thomas
Chairman, Inkpen Parish Council