

# St Stephen Parish Council

Autumn Newsletter Issue 26 - 2014



## Message from the Chairman

I was elected to the post of Chairman of St. Stephen Parish Council in May, with Cllr Dorothy Kerry as Vice Chairman. I have been a Parish Councillor for the past 11 years and continue to serve on various committees and working parties. I still remain as Chairman of the planning committee and as in the past, I together with my fellow Councillors will continue to fight long and hard, wherever possible to preserve and safeguard the Green Belt.

Shortly after taking up the position of Chairman I had the honour of attending How Wood School with Cllr Bill Pryce to present the Katharina Kubrick trophy to the school for their magnificent sculpture that they made for the Parish Festival at Greenwood Park in May. Well done to How Wood pupils and teachers for winning this event. The Festival, which ran over three days was a resounding success and the weather was kind to us. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those concerned for their hard work and determination. I again wore the chain of office at the Armed Forces Day which was held at the Parish Centre on the 28 June.

The Parish in Bloom working party continue to work wonders with the flower beds. Many residents I am sure will have noticed the large boulders that now grace the entrance to Greenwood Park, which really sets off the flower bed. Our thanks go to Lafarge and all members of the working party for making this possible.

Once again the Parish Council voted in favour of not increasing the precept which I am sure will please a lot of residents. With a long list of things that need to be achieved within the Parish, we do not know how long it will be before we may have to increase the precept. Let's just wait and see what transpires next year.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to thank Cllr Oonah Jones for all her hard work in being the previous Chairman and for continuing to edit the Parish Newsletter. The newsletter is not an easy document to compile and I speak for all members of the Council when I say what a fantastic job she does. Well Done.

Cllr M Freeman

## Long Service Award

34 years ago Gary Field started working for the Council when his father held the position that Gary now holds. Gary's knowledge of the Parish and its environs is extensive, his enthusiasm for the natural world infectious, his belief in doing the right thing at the right time – as far as grounds maintenance is concerned - is what drives his passion for the job that he does. With the job of Manager, in charge of a small team of equally enthusiastic like-minded men, comes a considerable level of responsibility for the team and the actions they take. His leadership qualities are reflected in the way they work and the results that they achieve. You will hear on many occasions about letters of congratulation which are received from residents and visitors, about the standard of the parish parks, play areas and green spaces. Our football and cricket pitches are the subject of praise from the teams that use them and often from the governing bodies of the particular sports.

Congratulations Gary on the award, and we hope that you will continue the good work for many years to come.



Gary Field, Head Groundsman receiving his certificate



## Armed Forces Day

Our "Fly the Flag" event was held at the Parish Centre on Saturday 28 June as part of the national Armed Forces Day celebrations held throughout the United Kingdom, giving the local community the opportunity to show their support for the men and women who make up the Armed Forces, from serving personnel, veterans and cadets.

About 60 people saw the Armed Forces Flag raised by the Chairman, Cllr Mick Freeman. W.O.1 Simon Getley from the Air Training Corps led the parade, with Standards from the Royal British Legion, 220 Squadron Air Training Corps and the 1st Park Street Brownies. All dipped their standards when the National Anthem was played at the conclusion of the flag raising. A charity collection raised £130 for Combat Stress, the event's chosen charity.

Music throughout the event was provided by the Watford Brass Band. There was a display of military memorabilia supplied by local residents, with and tea and coffee provided free by Cllr Berriman and other members of the Council. If any residents feel that they may be able to assist with any military memorabilia next year, please contact the Parish office.

This has become an annual event and plans are under way for 2015, details of which will be circulated. Let's make the next one even bigger and better.

## Neighbourhood Planning

The Localism Act 2011 gave Parish and Town Councils the ability to take on board a number of activities that the Government thought would assist in giving power to the local people, the Government's decentralisation, localism and the Big Society. One such power was a greater say in planning matters, power to shape and influence the places where they live and where they might have more reason to say 'Yes' to sustainable development. The Government's Neighbourhood planning proposals will enable the devolution of planning responsibilities to a more local level, a fundamental principle of which is that neighbourhood planning should be community-led.

The Parish Council has decided that it would like to explore the feasibility of producing a neighbourhood plan and has asked each of the three Residents' Associations to nominate one or two of its members to join us in forming a working party to look into it. In the first instance the working party will meet with a specialist organisation 'Towns Alive' who will give a presentation on what is entailed in the process, how to manage the early stages, how much it will cost, what the benefits and the problems are.

## Books for Schools

At the Annual Parish Meeting at Greenwood Park on 8 May the four schools in the Parish were presented once again with books for their libraries. As this year marks the centenary of the First World War, the books reflected this. Pupils and teachers accepted the books on behalf of their schools.

## Community Awards

Every year we make two awards to residents who 'have made an exceptional contribution that benefits the community'. One is to a young person – up to 18 years - the other to a person over 18. In both cases the person must have been nominated by a member of the community, supported by evidence. We believe good works should be recognised. This year the adult award was given to a person who has given years of service to the community, fighting battles with authority, chairing a Residents' Association and much more. That person is Laurie Hart of Bricket Wood, who has devoted much of his time to the Association and to the Bricket Wood Society. We congratulate Laurie on his work over many years, and for being the recipient of this award.

The award for the young person went to Josh Kalms who for three years has devoted Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings to the maintenance of the Riverside Way - ¾ mile alongside the river Ver. The work includes coppicing willows, clearing litter and building deflectors in the river. Josh is an enthusiastic conservationist who enjoys environmental work, which benefits the Ver Valley Society and the community at large. Congratulations to Josh - the first young person to receive this award.



## Grateful thanks

We really appreciate the letters and e-mails we receive from those using our facilities, especially when our volunteers' and staff's efforts have been noticed. We have heard from one parishioner who welcomed the recent maintenance work on the woodchip pathways through the meadows at Greenwood Park; another admired the rock and flower display at the same park, and the easing of some of the parking problems there. Our local Brownies have let us know how much they enjoyed a very special 'Camp fire' experience, with the help and advice of our Head Groundsman. A regular hirer on behalf of the Hearing Dogs for Deaf People – Liz Arendt MBE – reminds us that her organisation has enjoyed yet another successful fundraising day in our grounds. We are very happy to be able to provide these facilities, despite a reduced income this year.



## Parish Festival

It hardly seems three years ago that the Parish Council held the first Arts Festival and two years ago that it took over what used to be the Park Street Fete. Both functions took a lot of organising and imposed a great deal of hard work on all who helped to set up and run them, so we decided to combine the two functions and held them at the bigger venue of Greenwood Park in mid May, renaming it the '2014 Festival'. The Festival started on Friday and was opened by Katharina Kubrick, a great supporter of the Arts and an accomplished artist in her own right. The evening entertainment consisted of a dance band and a Ukulele band which set the event off well. On the Saturday and Sunday a number of artists, dancers, singers and bands entertained a large number of visitors to the festival. There were many things for children (and some adults) to do, such as the mountain of clay to make models, and painting materials for budding artists. The four schools in the Parish were invited to enter a competition to make a sculpture made from recyclable materials. This was won by How Wood School with Park Street School as runners up. The Sunday included the Fete aspect of the Festival where local associations, clubs and businesses were able to set up displays of what they do and make, selling their products if they wished. These included the Real Ale Bar and a bar selling lager and soft drinks, a stand with two live alpacas, a penalty shoot-out with signed balls donated by Watford Football Club and run by Park Street Youth Football Club, plus of course the usual Fair.

You will have to wait two years for the next one, but time will soon pass, so if you have an artistic bent, let us know and we will put you on our contact list.



## Planning matters

Early in July a stakeholder's engagement workshop was held at District Council with a view to shaping the Detailed Local Plan. When finalised, this will form the basis of the DLP. Matters to be included are housing, education, retail, leisure and tourism. In addition it will be determined how St. Albans should be divided in the future. The thoughts will be published in December 2014 and will go out to public consultation in May 2015. Three broad sites have been identified by the District Council where it is anticipated that up to 2,500 new homes could be built. The sites in question are towards Hemel Hempstead/M.1, East of St. Albans and to the North of Harpenden.

All these sites are within the Green Belt but have been identified as having a low impact upon its openness. At this stage it would appear that no major developments are planned for our Parish.

The planning application to redevelop the old HSBC site is still under consideration.

Recent planning applications affecting our Parish have been received to build 12 new homes on Green Belt land in Bucknalls Drive and to build 4 new homes in Oakwood Road. The latter application entails the removal of trees that have preservation orders on them. Some trees on this site, which were also the subject of Tree Preservation Orders have already been removed and this matter is being dealt with by District Council. Tree replacement orders are awaited.

## Rail Freight Interchange decision

Disappointed, betrayed, a slap in the face; the decision by the Secretary of State to allow the Interchange to be sited in our midst has cast a devastating blow on our parish. We believe the wrong decision has been made in allowing the go-ahead of this development. The term 'localism' appears to mean nothing. Has the voice of our MP Anne Main, been ignored along with the 10,000 signatures on the petition against the development? Mr Pickles has supported the preservation of the Green Belt – so why not this valuable piece of Green Belt? We have lost a battle but not yet lost the war. We must now ask our County Councillors to look carefully at the position of the County Council, and then to make the right decision not to sell the land to Helioslough. County is duty-bound to obtain best value for the land. The District Council is considering further legal action. We must keep up the support if we want to stop this development.

## Bus shelters

Further to our recent success in persuading the County Council to replace and enhance the bus shelters on the A405 at Bricket Wood, we are now hoping that they will also take responsibility for the remaining shelters on this major road. It has been increasingly difficult for our staff to carry out maintenance on this busy road, due to the restrictive working requirements of the Highways authorities. We hope, therefore, that with a change of ownership the shelters can be maintained in good order.

