

# **Harden Village Council Annual Report – 2021**

**Gerwyn Bryan, Chair**

I would like to begin my report by thanking my fellow Councillors for their contribution to the Village Council over the last 24 months, as no Annual Report was delivered last year due to the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic and subsequent restrictions.

The last 2 years has seen significant changes within the council, not least in name where we voted to rename ourselves as Harden Village Council, losing the 'Parish' in a bid to make the status more local and meaningful.

We said goodbye to Andy MacDonald and Gerald Jennings and welcomed Jools Townsend, Falak Ahmed and Robert Hawthorne to the Council.

So much has happened throughout the last 2 years so I'll do my best to cover the most important points in summary for this report.

In October 2019, The Village Council became one of the first rural communities to declare a Climate Emergency and produced a Climate Emergency Plan for 2020-21 with a broad commitment to put the Emergency at the forefront of discussions and decision making.

We are embracing this declaration within our actions as a Council on a number of projects.

2019 to 2020 was a particularly busy period where significant progress was made on Harden's Neighbourhood Plan, with the Council having engaged the services of a Planning consultant and with regular meetings of the steering group, including interested residents, enabling the draft Neighbourhood Plan to be 'market tested' over recent weeks with a consultation period to the people of Harden just ending. This is a valuable document which will help to shape the future of the village and influence the wider plans and strategies proposed by Bradford MDC, so please consider the draft and let us have your views so that you can be listened to.

One of the key points raised as part of our consultation exercises has been the concern of residents to both the volume and speed of traffic through the village. In November 2019 we commissioned a Traffic survey of the village to establish facts in order to lay the foundation for any changes. The results of that survey have been discussed with Bradford MDC and as a result we are now working towards a variety of speed reduction measures through the village, much of will be progressed in the next 12 months and my thanks go to Cllr Jools Townsend for her valuable work in this direction.

Funding received from Skipton Properties has been secured towards the Allotments Project and the hunt for a suitable site continues. Any recommendations for a site of 0.5 to 1 acre will be looked at seriously, as this is a project that we want to fully advance after lock down ends.

Other projects that are work in process and have been held up by the lockdown include the refurbishment of the village telephone box as a village information point. As the weather improves, we will be repairing and repainting the kiosk to maintain it's iconic status and style. Replacement of benches at various locations through out the village are ongoing and a project to enhance boundary and village centre signage is gathering momentum.

Throughout the year, we have continued to comment on planning applications received, supporting development that is in keeping with the village and opposing that which is not. Cllr Kay Kirkham is our lead on planning matters and has, once more, done a sterling job throughout the year, visiting many sites and leading our discussions.

Despite the Village Council having to conduct its meetings via Zoom, competing with family members for bandwidth for the last 12 months, this has still been a busy and energetic period.

Cllr Ahmed has led a project to develop an Emergency Plan for Harden and this should complete in the coming months. This will help the local team and Emergency Services to be able to react to any major incident within the village should it be forthcoming.

As we emerge from lockdown and COVID-19 becomes more controllable, it looks like the squeeze on local public finances will continue. This means that there is less money available for non-essential services and Bradford Council is increasingly looking to either close or transfer assets and to reduce non-essential services.

As I mentioned in my last report of 2019, this presents an opportunity for Parish & Village Councils to try and preserve those services that matter to local people. This is another reason for the Village Council to engage with residents, to understand where these impacts will be felt locally and where we may be able to make a difference.

Harden Village Council are continuing to monitor those assets where we feel an asset transfer may be appropriate and in addition will make appropriate applications to preserve Assets of Community Value where we feel there is a danger that they may be lost to the village.

It's not possible to describe all activity, over what has been a particularly testing time for all, but I hope I have given a flavour of our work. I am, of course, grateful to other Councillor's for their input and for freely giving their time to support the Council and to contribute to village life.

Harden Village Council comprises;

Cllr Gerwyn Bryan - Chair

Cllr Kay Kirkham - Vice Chair and Member for Planning & The Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Jools Townend – Member for Climate Change

Cllr Falak Ahmed – Member for Emergency Planning

Cllr Paul Sullivan – Council Member for Bingley Rural Ward

Cllr Ann Taylor – Member for Horticulture

Cllr Robert Hawthorne