

This report is being made in unprecedented circumstances. This is the first time that the Annual Town Meeting has been cancelled but I hope that my report, and those from my colleagues, will give residents a helpful overview of what the Council has been doing over the last twelve months. If you have any comments or questions please email the Clerk (l.stapleton@wstc.org.uk) and we will get back to you.

The year has obviously been dominated by the events of the last couple of months. As far as Woburn Sands is concerned I have been enormously impressed by the way the community has pulled together. Most of the town is now covered by groups of volunteers who are supporting and helping the vulnerable in our community. Medical services have continued to be provided in an exemplary way given the circumstances and we have been fortunate enough to have two supermarkets which are meeting our immediate needs. The willingness of restaurants and pubs to provide takeaways demonstrates the strength of our community. We are enormously grateful to all those who have volunteered so willingly in the last few months so thank you to them.

Unfortunately the coronavirus epidemic has meant that we have had to cancel a number of events – the planned VE Day celebrations, the Over-60s monthly outings, the Garden Competition, the Community Market, the Music Festival plus, of course, the various family parties and celebrations booked in our halls. Inevitably there will also be a drop in the income from halls lettings; at the moment we do not know the scale of this decline but we will reduce expenditure as much as possible to counter the decline in revenue. Fortunately the Council is in a fairly strong financial position but Clive Cowmeadow's Finance Report gives more details.

Now to my regular report.

First of all I should make clear that I am not the Mayor who was elected last year. Unfortunately Gill Brook, who was elected by the Council, had to give up the role just before Christmas due to pressure of work and other commitments. As Deputy Mayor I took over. A second Councillor, Keith Temple, also resigned during the year. We are very grateful to both Gill and Keith for their contribution to the work of the Council over the last few years; I am pleased to report that both of them are continuing to serve the community in other ways. In accordance with our Standing Orders we co-opted two replacements – Jo Green and Richard Lanyon-Hogg. We look forward to working with them in the next few years.

The past twelve months have been a busy time for the Council. Much of our discussions have been of a strategic nature. Woburn Sands remains a community under threat in a number of ways – the proposed expressway, the development of the East-West railway, the proposed development of 3,000 houses between Woburn Sands and Bow Brickhill, the possible development behind the former Wyevale site promoted by Wavendon Properties, and a major distribution centre at Caldecote. While the threat of the expressway appears to have receded we still await final decisions on which parts of the route will be re-developed. The Town Council has been involved in the various discussions about all these projects and David Hopkins brings you up to date on them in his report.

Over the last few years Woburn Sands has benefitted significantly from Section 106 funds which are generated from building developments in the town. We now have the Summerlin Centre and have been able to move the Library to the Institute; we have also been able to develop the Old Fire Station and, just recently, the Greens Community Room has been opened. Two other significant projects are in the pipeline – the new Sports Hall is appearing while we are planning the development of the recreation Ground. There are more details in the Halls Report elsewhere.

We have also had to deal with a large number of minor planning applications and Jacky Jeffreys reports on them in her report.

Woburn Sands has always been a vibrant community with active local organisations and strong support for the wider community. I am delighted to say that this has continued over the last year. The Remembrance Day parade was very well attended although I must apologise for the failure in the PA system – it had been purchased just before the parade and we did not have an opportunity to check it beforehand; I am happy to report that corrective action has now been undertaken and you should have no trouble listening to future services.

The Christmas Fair, the Summer Music Festival and the Summer Fayre organised by the Woburn Sands Band were all extremely successful and well attended. We were fortunate with the weather and significant amounts were raised for charity. We are very grateful to all those volunteers who give up their time to make these events so successful. Incidentally this is a good opportunity to congratulate the Band on their award of The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service which was thoroughly well deserved.

The Saturday Markets have also been increasingly well supported and add to the enjoyment of the community.

However not everything in the garden has been rosy. There has been a disappointing rise in the level of anti-social behaviour in the town. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of disturbances in the High Street fuelled, I suspect, by alcohol; our High Street has a good range of outlets and the number of those selling alcohol in the last few years has increased. A number of residents live in the High Street and they should expect reasonable behaviour from those leaving the bars and restaurants.

There has also been a noticeable increase in the number of drivers parking indiscriminately both in prohibited areas and on the pavements. This is very anti-social behaviour and shows no concern for local residents or those using push chairs.

The selfish behaviour of a few should not be allowed to spoil the enjoyment of the majority. Accordingly the Council has decided to introduce CCTV to the High Street, and elsewhere where necessary, and to increase the number of warden hours. We will not hesitate to take action against individuals who act in an anti-social way. We recognise that it is difficult and costly to bring legal action but I hope that the measures that we are introducing will act as a deterrent. I am sure that we will have the support of residents in our approach.

In order to partially fund these improvements the Council took the decision to close the public toilet in the High Street. This facility was costing us about £12,000 a year and its usage has declined in recent years.

We are very conscious of our environmental responsibilities as you will see from Peter Skelton's report. However I would like to mention two particular initiatives – firstly we have introduced 20mph speed limits on most of the central roads in the town. While I accept that most traffic does not move in excess of this because of parked cars a formal limit sends a clear message to drivers and, of course, improves the environment. Secondly we have set aside four spaces in the Shoppers' Car Park to be fitted with electric charge points.

The Council's work would not be possible without the support of our staff. Lynne and Pauline in the office labour long and hard to keep the show on the road, while Mike makes sure that everything practical works satisfactorily.

But all good things come to an end and I have to report that this will be the last Town Meeting which Lynne will run. After 33 years she has decided to retire at the end of the year; she will be greatly missed and the whole community owes her an enormous debt of gratitude. There will be opportunity to say farewell later in the year but this will be her last Town Meeting. Pauline will also be retiring later this year so many thanks to her.

The Council will be advertising for a new Clerk in the next month or two so please let us know if you think you can live up to Lynne's high standards – we will be lucky if we can attract anyone to fill her shoes adequately.

Mike Geddes
Mayor