

Good evening, welcome to our Annual Parish Meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to update you on what we, as your Parish Council, have been up to and our plans, it also gives you an opportunity to ask questions in the forum later.

Elections:

Parish council elections last year were uncontested, and we welcomed four new councillors – Sadly, shortly after the election we lost one of our village characters and great asset to Inkpen. I know most of you knew Bob May or heard exciting tales of Bob’s escapades, you would often hear him before you saw him assisting at the playing fields, the village pond and frequently on the triangle at lower green where a bench to remind us of his work has been placed.

So, we had an empty seat in the council, and we were as surprised as West Berks were that residents had written in to ask for a full blow election for this seat which the parish had to fund. The election brought us to full strength so let me introduce your Councillors Darren Durham, John Corne, Brian Cox, James Fisher, Dave Lester and David Thomas.

Parish precept:

Over previous years and especially through the pandemic we took the decision not to increase the precept for Inkpen. This year, due to inflation, costs associated with maintenance work the parish is responsible for we have increased the precept by 5%. Still in the grand scheme of other taxes a

small amount per head. We have this year also made grants to the excellent Inkpen bulletin and the history group.

Planning:

Since our last annual meeting we have considered only around 15 planning applications, down on previous years which I assume to be a reflection of the economy or perhaps there are no more interesting plots to develop?

Whilst we will always robustly defend against unsuitable development, we do see that residents desire to improve their homes as a positive reflection on the fantastic location we are lucky to live in.

Plans

Are parish councils necessary? This is tricky to answer as for some aspects, such as planning, where local input and feedback is important, then a Parish planning committee is crucial, but what about other aspects of the parish? This question led to me doing some homework....

I’d like to say I read the whole of Matt Hancock’s “Levelling Up” white paper, released in 2020, but at over 300 pages I was pleased to see a summary document was also available. To precis this further the focus of the paper is on “hyper local” democracy, enabling Parish and town councils and smaller villages to exercise democratic control over public spaces and amenities in line with community needs.

Whilst I totally agree to making democratic decision at local level to assist, help and make Inkpen prosper we have a challenge...



Our problem is poor village engagement across all demographics so we can understand our community's needs.

Unsolicited feedback from some villagers highlighted identified that they are unaware of when meetings occur or what the parish council do – so we need to address this too.

As a council we need to get better at reaching out, communication, engaging with and being visible to many more of the parishioners.

If we look around this room the majority here have attended for years, and we are very grateful for your support, but it is a very small percentage of the village, and we need to improve and encourage more participation.

If we have tried something twenty odd years ago it doesn't mean we shouldn't revisit that now – remember this twenty to thirty is classed as a generation ago, so we should not let history dictate or stifle our plans.

We have not carried out a village wide survey for 20 years and the village has changed with an influx of new residents, a different way of working and a different mix of residents – we need to work differently too.

To start we are implementing parish council emails for all councillors and will publish these so residents know who their representatives are and what they are responsible for. You may have noticed we have recently started to use social media platforms to inform residents of upcoming planning and parish meetings. We need to utilise all communications methods to gain a wider reach so will continue to look at ways of communication to run alongside existing

methods. Don't worry though – you are not going see all of us doing the Texas hold 'em dance on TikTok!

Over the next few weeks, we will start to send questionnaires to residents to find out what their main issues are, what improvements they would like etc and then the parish council can focus on the residents' requirements rather than just on national or personal pet projects. As we represent the villages, we need to ensure we are prioritising the main issues that villagers have and therefore need to be more aware of what these are.

We can't guarantee being able to resolve everything, but we should be able to help, plan or signpost residents to support them. I hope with your support we can continue to make Inkpen a lovely place for everyone.

I would also like to that all of you who volunteer and give your free time to run the groups represented here this evening.

Thanks

Mark

Mark Bates
Chair – Inkpen Parish Council

