

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2015

By default I find myself as the incumbent Chairman and as such the responsibility of submitting the Annual Report falls upon me. It would have given me much pleasure to be able to report that it has been a good year all round, but members still serving will be only too aware that this has not been the case. Clashes of personalities and differences of opinion have led to heated discussions and, unfortunately, resignations. It is not my intention to dwell upon this, or the reasons why, only to say that hopefully all of this is now behind us and with a newly elected council we can move forward in a positive and constructive manner to achieve our overall ambition of serving our community.

At the time of writing the results of the Parish Elections have just been announced and I am delighted to welcome Lorraine Vakil, Michelle Young, David Brede and John Clements as new Councillors. Unfortunately Gary Stevens decided not to re-stand in Little Billing Ward and we thank him for all his valuable contributions. I would also like to acknowledge the input that those departing have made upon the Council.

I would like to say a big thank you to everyone who has worked tirelessly to make our parish a great place to live, work and play. Special thanks must go to our Clerk, Sue Harris, for the professional manner in which she has managed to carry out her duties over the past year and on a personal note, for the support she has afforded me. Similarly, our thanks go to our Green Space Manager. Chris is not only responsible for the management of the green spaces but is also the central figure and first point of contact for the numerous people who make daily use of the Pavilion, playing fields, pocket park and The Leys, together with their associated problems. One only has to visit these areas during the evening, or especially at weekends to witness the many people of all ages playing sport, walking, using the play areas etc. It is only then the full picture emerges – and these things do not just happen.

I would now like to include our 'Unsung Heroes' –

- those members of our community who freely give up their time to not only join organised litter picks, but who on a daily basis keep the area around their homes and those of their neighbours litter free
- those who work as volunteers in the two pocket parks
- those who abide by the rules and do not park on pathways
- those who notify the relevant agencies of problems, i.e. graffiti, etc., and
- those who, because of their love of the parish do anything they can to make it a more pleasant place to live.

Once again we have had the benefit and experience of Dick Oram to advise and undertake the maintenance work on The Leys, the old Orchard and the Garden of Reflection. The Leys continues to be a source of enjoyment for the many people who use the area, and the continued support of dog walkers is encouraged to help stop the unfortunate but regular dog fouling by the few. This is something that I hope will be further challenged in the coming year. Volunteer Damian Lang continues to operate as our Highway Warden and our thanks must go to him for his input in this area.

The Summer Fayre was held on 28th June 2014 but unfortunately the weather was not kind to us and we were not able to get the full benefit of all the hard work put in by the organiser Steve Rockall and those who took part. The day was not a failure and many people did turn up – I would like to think this was to show support as a community to those who had put in so much effort. Unfortunately, due to those differences mentioned earlier there will be no Fayre this year, and it would be remiss of me not to say a special thank you to Steve Rockall for all his hard work over the years in making this event a highlight of the parish calendar. I do hope someone will take up the mantle for the future.

Steve was also instrumental in the restoration of the War Memorial cross and figure which now proudly stands in the grounds of All Saints Church in Little Billing. It may have taken a little time to complete this work but I am sure that anyone who has viewed it will agree it was time well spent.

Tree work in Little Billing was eventually carried out but only after the Parish Council commissioned a full survey of the area and basically forced Northampton Borough Council to carry out its obligations.

The Heritage Lottery funding has now finished but the various projects are ongoing. The Oral History Society continues to interview and record memories of our senior citizens, many of whom no longer reside in the parish, and the leaflets depicting the walks and cycle routes around the parish and places of interest are in full circulation. Once again our thanks go to Steve Rockall for all his hard work on this leaflet. A new website www.billingparishheritage.co.uk is in the process of being set up to cover this project.

The Garden of Reflection adjoining St Andrews Church in Great Billing has been cleared during the past year and recently partly planted out by the Green Space Manager with Silver Birch and Dogwood. Further work is planned during the year with the objective of making this an area of tranquillity where people can visit and reflect on personal issues of joy and sorrow.

On a sad note I must mention the sad loss of our dear friend and former Councillor, Father Damien. His contribution to the community over the years is immeasurable and I along with many others within the Parish will miss the presence of this wonderful man.

In conclusion, I look forward to the forthcoming year with the development of the Community Centre in Ecton Brook, the greater emphasis being placed on Bellinge Community House by the new Manager, Michelle Aveyard and the further development of our pre-schools, but most of all I look forward to working alongside my fellow Councillors and staff as a team for the benefit of the whole of Billing Parish.

John Marlow
May 2015