

Hitcham and Taplow Society
Annual General Meeting 9th April 2025

Chairman's Report

This report covers a period longer than the usual year due to the revision of our accounting year, which our treasurer will cover more fully.

The last report was full of worries about station parking, the missing footbridge and election ward re-alignments. They have all now settled – we have a fine new footbridge, temporary yellow line systems on Approach Road with promises of a full solution to come and are about to have elections using the new ward boundaries. On the other hand, two new areas of stress have emerged.

First is the appalling state of some of the fields off the Cliveden Road. The owners of Cliveden Stud have facilitated their invasion by car repair and van wrecking businesses, destroying and polluting the land and menacing anyone who remonstrates. Buckinghamshire Council is doing what it can to remove them but the legal steps they have to go through are endless, with every action being appealed. Taplow currently has 5 such appeals outstanding and a further three appeals against Enforcement notices. I believe that the law needs revision to strengthen council powers, which is not my normal view of these things.

Second is the proposal for a new town at Taplow that has arisen as a consequence of the government's New Towns initiative. The proposal is the product of a government leaning think tank but the authors had not even visited Taplow before writing it! We are never-the-less taking it very seriously. We have combined with our parish council and those of Dorney and Burnham, who are also affected by this, to set up a working party to make objection to the government Task Force who are charged with producing a short list of sites later this year. I am chairing the working party and we are producing many effective arguments against the proposal. There are highly charged concerns about the loss of Green Belt and serious Heritage impact but perhaps most effectively will be issues relating to the geography, geology and infrastructure of Taplow that we believe make a new town simply infeasible. We are making extensive use of AI tools to gather and co-ordinate data and references. There will be an article on this in the Newsletter coming out later this month. In the meantime please send me any ideas or information that you think may help our case. I will be happy to take some questions on this in our AOB session.

Other planning changes are coming. The higher levels of Mayoralities etc. will not affect us at parish level but Green Belt / Grey Belt changes will almost certainly do so, particularly with the statements that GB between villages could be built on and that there will be limitations on local democratic input to building applications.

More locally we are seeing the very last of the Mill Lane developments with the Gage houses now for sale. It is to be hoped that the somewhat related question of the river moorings will now resolve – the application being outstanding since 2022. Conversion of the Amerden kennels site to 16 houses has been approved, despite our concerns over A4 access. Public footpath 13 off Ellington Road has become virtually impassable due to adjoining residences encroachment. The County Rights of Way Team has taken this up with the landowners.

What about ourselves? Our big success has been the restoration of the Celtic Cross (again!) with much appreciated financial support from our parish council and the Beeches Community Board. The upcoming Bucks Council elections will see revisions to the Community Boards, almost certainly meaning that they will have less money than previously for such grants.

As Eva has said we owe grateful thanks to our committee members and countless volunteers for the continued success of the Village Green Party and the Tidy up Taplow day. It is a reminder to us all that Taplow has a vibrant sense of community, supporting not just ourselves but many other local events such as the Carols round the Christmas Tree and last autumn's very successful Screen on the Green which we hope will return.

My very particular thanks to Mike Turner, who has dragged our membership and accounting system into the 21st century and is about to tackle an update to our website. And to Andrew Findlay who has been transforming our articles and pictures into the attractive magazine you enjoy for over 17 years.

The post of chairman has been formally vacant for some time, with myself being secretary and acting as chairman as I did not feel it right to officially hold both the posts. As you can see from the agenda that we have progressed and if you are willing to so vote I am happy to be formally the chairman and welcome Jane Curry as secretary.

I thank you all for your continuing support and interest in the Society.