**Borough Council Report**

This has been a very interesting 12 months, with no one expecting the town, borough or country to be in the situation we find ourselves in today, we can also be certain that when this is over things will not return to how things were.

The last twelve months started with Pat Olney standing down after 33 years as the Borough Councillor for Oakley. Pat served the community tirelessly over this time and has left big shoes to fill. The Borough Council officially recognised Pat’s service to the community by making her an Honorary Alderwoman at a ceremony held in January, at the Harpur Suite. The overall shape of the council did not change at the election, with a Liberal Democrat/Labour executive plus Doug McMurdo the independent Councillor for Sharnbrook. This has meant continuity for the Borough and the services provided.

**Transport**

There has been major infrastructure work carried out on roads across the borough, with the implementation of the Transporting Bedford 2020 plan, which has looked to improve traffic flows on some major roads in both the north and the south of the town. The works on Manton Lane, were designed to try and improve traffic flows around Bedford Modern School, by increasing the width of the road, providing a dedicated filter lane for the school and reinstating the footbridge that was removed over 10 years ago. All works apart from the footbridge have now been completed and the bridge is still due to be installed over the summer. There will also be further improvement works carried out to the roundabout at the end of The Paula Radcliffe Way to install traffic lights to help the peak-time flows.

Work has also been ongoing at Britannia Road by the hospital to help improve the flow on this major artery, due to finding additional utilities under the road that required moving and also Covid-19 pandemic, this work has slipped and should now be finished by the end of June. Works will then start at the Cowbridge Junction and on rebuilding Ampthill Road. The Council also found itself having to rebuild the A6 Bypass at Wilstead after road collapsed and now that work is completed, they will start on the Ampthill Road beyond the Interchange Park.

Unfortunately, as all of this was going on Network Rail, as part of their plans to electrify the Midland Mainline north of Bedford, decided to close Bromham Road to replace the central part of the road bridge over the railway. This was done with little consultation to the council and caused additional traffic to be funnelled through the village and over the narrow river bridges. This work is finally due to be completed in the summer. As part of this the bridge parapets on overbridges have had to raised or replaced, this has led to the parapets on Highfield Road, being raised with GRP pieces that the council does not feel is appropriate for the location, and this has been raised a number of times by the Borough with Network Rail, to see if a more suitable alterative can be found. This currently on has temporary planning permission, with the hope that something more suitable will be put forward for the permanent permission.

During the year, Stagecoach withdrew any of No 51 services that ran beyond Oakley towards Rushden, the Council worked with Grant Palmer to ensure that there was still a service at the key times that served Pavenham and the villages north of Oakley.

**Local Plan**

This was finally adopted at the Full Council held on the 15th January, with work starting immediately on the next Local Plan to run until at least 2040, the inquiry for the Bedford Borough Plan was held over the summer of 2019, and there were few major changes recommended by the inspectors, before the plan could be formally made. During the time of the plan being inspected, Bedford Borough was subjected to a large number of speculative applications for major development, due to a change in how the potential land supply for housing was calculated, this meant that some schemes that would not has been part of the Bedford Borough Local Plan, or individual Neighbourhood Development plans had to be passed by the planning committee. Oakley has been one first villages to have their local plan made, having won an overwhelming majority at the referendum that was held in February. This thanks to the hard work of the NDP group, who ensured that a robust plan was created, that allows the village to have a say in any major development that is proposed within its boundary.

**Council Tax**

Just prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Borough Council budget was agreed with an increase of 1.85% in Council Tax plus 2% for adult social care. This allowed for a balanced budget that meant that at the time there would be no cuts to services. Events have overtaken the Council since then and a further budget is now proposed for June 2020.

**Covid-19**

It would be remiss not to finish on this current topic. This has caused the most major change in lifestyle that pretty much anyone alive will have experienced. The way local communities have rallied round to support one another has been very heartening to see. At the end of March the Council set up The Community Hub, in conjunction with CVS, to help ensure than the elderly and vulnerable people were supported. This has been (and continues to be) manned by Council staff, who along with over 600 volunteers, have been delivering food parcels, care packages and offering assistance with shopping and other services. Thank you to everyone who has been involved, either offering support within the village or with the Hub or anyone of the other groups who as been providing assistance.

**Cllr Jon Abbott – Borough Councillor**