

**Cllr Hugo Brown, District Councillor Report for 2017-18  
For Hook Norton, Milcombe, South Newington and Wigginton**

As I approach the end of my second year as one of your District Councillors for Deddington Ward, I look back on 12 months of varied and interesting work and challenges.

Firstly, as always, I should like state how valuable I find it to attend Parish Council meetings and to thank all Parish Councillors for welcoming me. This is undoubtedly the finest way to “take the temperature” of local feeling and to learn first-hand the issues which affect our communities. Since I now sit on only 2 Council Committees, having dropped the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, I have managed to clear many of the time-clashes, which be-devilled my first term, in order to put in a more regular appearance in the Villages. In between times, any constituent is more than welcome to contact me at any time, on any issue, either via e-mail (preferably) or by phone using the contact details shown on the CDC web-site.

Many have done so and I am delighted to have been able to respond to them. The vast majority are in respect of planning applications – either seeking help with their own or making an observation about a neighbour’s. I have found that a gentle prod from me can “help along” an application which has seemingly ground to a halt within the Planning system. I would add, however, that our Planning Officers are consummate professionals and for them to do their job properly, and in accordance with the ever more complex regulations, does take time especially in view of the increasing number of applications passing over their desks. One of the responsibilities of a District Councillor is that of “calling-in” Planning applications. This means that, having been requested by a Parish Council to do so, I can seek from, the Chairman of the Planning Committee, permission (not always granted) to appear before the Committee to make a representation, generally against an application which the community is unhappy about; obviously, this also works the other way and I can call-in an application which the Officers seem likely to turn down in order to seek Committee approval for it to go-ahead. Call-in is strictly time-barred to 21 days so please do contact me as early as possible if you would like to consider this option.

Planning Officers are also willing to attend Parish Council meetings, to answer residents’ questions, and we were pleased to welcome Bob Duxbury to Milcombe PC in November. If you would like me to arrange such a visit to your Parish please do not hesitate to ask.

On the subject of Planning, or more specifically housing, many of you will be aware that I took a stand (ultimately doomed) against the Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal at the February Full Council Meeting. I will not re-hash my objections to the proposal, here, but I consider this to be a very bad deal for the County, especially for those of us who seek to preserve its largely rural nature.

As mentioned above, I no longer sit on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee but I do remain a full member of both the Budget Planning Committee and the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee (this latter as Vice-Chairman) and also a Reserve Member of the Planning Committee.

I was pleased, as a member of the Budget Planning Committee, to support the recommendation to Full Council that CDC’s share of the overall Council Tax bill should remain unchanged for a 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive year.

Much of my time in late November and December was spent, with Ian Corkin (Chairman of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee), combing through the detail of the proposed acquisition of the Castle Quay Shopping Centre in Banbury together with the plans for the development of Castle Quay 2. This is a very major investment by CDC and it was right that it was closely scrutinised. The opportunity to acquire the whole of Castle Quay together with the proposed development of CQ2 affords us a great chance to redevelop a major slug of Banbury Town Centre and to reposition the Town as a preferred shopping and leisure destination, some of which cachet it has lost recently. This significant undertaking will take many years to come to full fruition but Banbury will soon enjoy a new cinema, hotel,

supermarket and restaurants as CQ2 rises up (building work is scheduled to begin in August)

Cherwell District Council also played a significant role in trying to keep the Horton General Hospital functioning with a full maternity unit. We were extremely un-impressed with the Consultation undertaken by the Oxon Clinical Commissioning Group which we deemed to be overly complex and flawed in its two-part approach. Although we were ultimately unsuccessful in the Judicial Review, it was felt (and I entirely agreed) that we should expend every effort in seeking to get the original decision over-turned. However, it does now seem as though there is some new movement on this with the announcement that the Independent Reconfiguration Panel questioned whether "all the available evidence" was drawn upon by the Clinical Commissioning Group and said that the "consideration of options between consultation and decision fell short" and that "more detailed appraisal of the options" was required before a final decision is made. We might, at last, be getting somewhere.

As well as the main committees I also sit on 2 sub-groups; the A361 Working Group and the Parliamentary Boundary Consultation / Community Governance Review Working Group. Progress on the A361 has been slowed down pending an announcement from the Department of Transport, delayed until mid-2018, on further funding. During the year work undertaken by South Newington Parish Council on the effects which a proposed weight limit in Burford would have on the stretch of the A361 through the Ward was passed to the Working Group and to OCC. The Parliamentary Boundary Commission / Community Governance Review Working Party responded to the Government Consultation on proposed new (and fewer) Parliamentary constituencies for the next election – which could see the Eastern section of the present Banbury constituency hived off to a new enlarged Henley constituency – although this is now all subject to Parliamentary vote. Closer to home, the Working Group was asked to rule on changes to numbers of Councillors in a few of the parishes as well as alterations to some parish boundaries (the latter of which is always quite contentious)

On the subject of boundaries, the proposal that Oxfordshire should abandon its current two-tier governance structure in favour of becoming a Unitary Authority seems to have, for the time being, gone away (although probably not "shut up" as Gavin Williamson, Defence Secretary, would also have it). The problems of Northamptonshire County Council will have a knock-on effect on Cherwell especially if the current idea of abolishing all Northants Councils, and creating 2 Unitaries in their place, takes hold given the "joint-working" that CDC and South Northants District Council currently enjoy (much to the benefit of both). We shall have to wait and see.

During my first term, I held two surgeries at which anyone could come and question or harangue me on CDC policy, (in)action, etc. These were not spectacularly popular (no-one came!!) and so I suspended these last year. If there is a demand that I resurrect them, I should be more than happy to do so – although I do repeat that any constituent is more than welcome to contact me at any time, on any issue, either via e-mail (preferably) or by phone using the contact details shown on the CDC web-site.

Finally, I should like to thank all the Parish Clerks and Members of Parish Councils who have been a great support to me over the past year and to all the Villagers of Hook Norton, Milcombe, Sth Newington and Wigginton for continuing to place their trust in me to represent and to help them.

HMHB  
April 2018