

“The Swinging 60’s in Chearsley Village”

Introduction

Karen

The post-war years witnessed a transformation of the environment in our village. Author Ted Hooton, in his book ‘Chearsley – Living Through History’ published in 1994, observed:

“So we come to the end of more than a thousand years of village history, which, except for the last three decades, have revolved around the parish as a farming community. As we have seen, the decade of the 1960s really was a watershed, a time in which the village changed forever. By 1993, the population had grown to over five hundred and the ‘long-time residents (living here for 25 years or more) only constituted a sixth of the electorate, compared with a third only thirty years earlier. Most of the modern population is more mobile and transitory than it ever was before.”

It has proved a fascinating exercise having a look through Parish Council records and other village documents during the 1960s and, in our research, we identified four key themes which loomed large in public discussion at that time.

- Village Development
- Mains drainage
- Hooliganism
- Traffic Safety

We will now hear some readings of excerpts from Parish Council meetings of the time on these themes, with occasional references to Ted Hooton’s work.

After each section, we’ll invite comments from our audience, in particular from those who have first-hand experience of life in the village at that time.

Village Development

Karen

We'll start with the subject of 'Village Development'.

During the 1950s and 1960s, a completely new village infrastructure emerged – new thoroughfares such as Cousin's Piece, Willow Gate, Old Plough Close, Bernard's Close, Elm Brook Close and several others that appeared on land previously devoted to farming for hundreds of years.

John Lewis & John Howard are our readers for this section.

John L

According to Ted Hooton, everything came to a head in Chearsley in 1964.

He quoted extracts from an article in the Bucks Advertiser earlier that year under the headline 'WHEN NEW MEETS OLD AT CHEARSLEY'. It said:

“Ancient attractive cottages, high banks and ever-changing views - everything should be peaceful here, but many of the villagers fear that development on a large scale will destroy the atmosphere. In recent months 20 new homes have been built or started in the centre of the oldest part of the village. And 20 modern houses can hardly be hidden when they represent 16 per cent of all the houses.

The development may mean that the loss of some of the village's most attractive features, its narrow lanes. For the housing means more traffic and the planners are insisting that School Lane and part of Dark Lane should be widened into a 36-foot wide highway, destroying the banks and many trees.”

John H

March 1965

“The Chairman read a letter from Mrs P. Tillier apologising for not being able to attend the meeting and registering her protest against either putting name plates on our roads or numbers on our houses.”

February 1968

“A letter from Mrs P. Tillier to Mr Pooley about the development of the village. This was debated and it was agreed that some of the development allowed in this village was quite disgraceful.”

December 1968

“Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs P. Tillier, who, we were glad to note, was recovering from a fall from her horse.”

John L

May 1971

“Proposed by Mrs Franks and seconded by Mr Wallis, a letter be sent to the County Council Planning Authority that the Parish Meeting deprecates the amount of infilling which has taken place in Chearsley.

This has had the effect of destroying the rural amenity characteristics of the village and it is the earnest wish of villagers that any new application for planning permission will be carefully considered on these lines. Carried unanimously.”

Karen

I'd now like to welcome any comments on what we've just heard or, indeed, recollections from our audience.

Mains Drainage

Karen

Graham Barry and Derek Allen will now tell us about some of the background to the introduction of mains drainage in the village.

Although the building of piped water systems into homes, and drainage from them, began in the late 19th century, their use was mainly confined to more affluent homes in urban areas. Even by the mid-20th century, mains water and drainage linked to modern plumbing systems was far from being a universal phenomenon. In the mid-60s, 25% of homes apparently still lacked baths, showers, indoor toilets and sinks with hot and cold-water taps.

The village of Chearsley was no exception and several of our longstanding residents confirm that what today would be regarded as normal indoor plumbing systems were still the preserve of more well-to-do households at that time. Many homes still drew their water from traditional wells and springs such as The Stockwell throughout the village.

As you'll hear, the eventual introduction of mains drainage in our village was a long and painful process.

Graham

March 1961

“Mrs Page asked when we were likely to get mains drainage in the village. Mr Keen replied that it would not be for years yet as we were next to the bottom of the waiting list. The fact that we have been paying a 2nd rate for this ever since 1947 makes no difference! We are much better off than some areas and the RDC know this.”

October 1963

A letter sent to Aylesbury RDC included the following:

“My council has instructed me to enquire whether, in view of the rapid increase in the density of the population in this village, it would be possible to advance the date upon which it is intended to introduce main drainage in the village. Is it possible to give with any certainty a provisional date for this event, please?”

Derek

October 1964

A further letter to Aylesbury RDC included the following:

“It is some time since my Council addressed you on this subject but at a meeting last night my Council instructed me to write to you:

a) To enquire whether you can now give us some definite time by which you hope to have installed main drainage in this village. The size and character of the village is very different from what it was even a few years ago and it is felt that the installation of main drainage cannot be much longer delayed.

b) Arising from the observation as to size – can you please give us the present population of the village and what you think it is likely to be this time next year?

My council note that observations in a local newspaper recently seem to indicate that you may be contemplating drainage development here fairly soon.”

March 1965

“The question of main drainage somehow came into the discussions and it was decided that the Parish Council should press for main drainage immediately as it was considered that the present system was quite inadequate in view of recent planning expansion.”

September 1966

“The Clerk reported that a Chearsley Sewerage Scheme is now in hand and the Expenses estimate has been received about £60,000 - £70,000, if accepted by the RDC.” *(Note. Equals £1.4-1.7m in 2023 terms)*

February 1968

“Sewage – a letter from Ministry of Housing & Local Govt making it doubtful if we get our sewage this year.”

Graham:

March 1969

“An Aylesbury RDC representative explained why the £64,000 sewage and main drainage scheme was not to be started yet which is much to be regretted but we are better off than Ludgershall & Dorton.”

September 1970

“An Aylesbury RDC representative reported that tenders for installing main sewerage had been discussed at the RDC meeting and that the cost would be in the region of £73,000 and would be connected to the Cuddington Sewerage but Lady Floyd’s and Mrs Parker’s would houses not be connected. The Chilton Road and Winchendon Road would also not be connected.”

Derek

March 1970

“The Aylesbury RDC representative reported that Chearsley is second on the list for Main Drainage”

September 1971

“The Aylesbury RDC reported that works would start in October 1971 and be completed within one year”

December 1971

“The Clerk read out a letter which he had received from Mr Mather Engineers Department of the RDC. The letter explained the position with regard to house connections to the new sewers and future service for emptying septic tanks in order that councillors would be in a better position to deal with queries from local residents.”

Karen

So who in our audience remembers what life was like before mains drainage became available to all homes in our village?

Hooliganism

Karen

So-called 'hooliganism' was a frequently debated topic at Parish Council meetings during the 1960s.

John and Derek will now give us a flavour of the conversations.

John L

March 1961

"A lengthy discussion took place and it became obvious that opinion was against the rather large expenditure (at least £120*) proposed for a new bus shelter, as it was felt that the hooligan element was at present so strong in the village that the shelter would be destroyed almost as soon as it was erected! (*Note: ~£3400 in 2023)

It was therefore proposed (by Mrs George, seconded by Mrs Green) that, in view of the present unsettled conditions prevailing in the village, the decision to erect a bus shelter be postponed for a year."

December 1963

"It was agreed that a letter be sent to the Chief Constable, Bucks County Constabulary, concerning the matter of police protection for the village, with the following message:

'My Council instruct me to ask you whether you will be kind enough to send a Senior Police Officer to our next meeting which takes place at The School on Monday 3rd February 1964 so that the matter can be further discussed and to facilitate an exchange of points of view which is not so easily possible by correspondence. My council was particularly perturbed by the complete absence of protection afforded during Guy Fawkes night despite the bad reputation for hooliganism which this village 'enjoys'.

And Ted Hooton reported that an article in the Bucks Herald, headlined 'GIVE US MORE POLICE PROTECTION SAY ANGRY VILLAGERS'

"Smashed windows, petty thefts, attacks on girls, young boys tearing up and down quiet country lanes on motor-cycles....these, say villagers, are incidents which regularly occur at Chearsley. The clerk, Mr George, said that on Guy Fawkes night, hooligans broke windows in his house and he sat on the floor with glass flying all around him".

But a contrary view was put in a letter to The Bucks Advertiser from Brian Green, one of the first residents in the new Council Houses, heading 28 other signatories. He and his neighbours had a different view. Obviously annoyed by the Parish Council, he said that 'George Town' used to be known as Chearsley:

"The misbehaviour has been greatly exaggerated and to talk of people being frightened to go on the streets is ridiculous.

The parish has more urgent problems....we have one street light only, no bus shelter, no street names (even the postman gets lost) and other urgent things for which the village patiently awaits.

Possibly the Village Hall might be used! One function a year is hardly likely to drive youth into a frenzy. I suggest we turn the Hall into a memorial for frustrated youth and bitter old age. Finally, a passing thought. Could it be that those who are tormented by youth are the ones who antagonise the younger element at every opportunity."

October 1964

"The Clerk sent a letter to the Chief Constable saying that it was hoped that the Police will be able to prevent a reoccurrence of the incidents which occurred last year on Guy Fawkes night....and that there are several men of goodwill in the village who would be prepared to help to keep order should the Police wish to make use of their services (!)"

Derek

December 1964

“Much appreciation was expressed at the way the Police ensured that the night of 5th November passed without incident of any sort, who were instrumental in giving the village the quietest Guy Fawkes night which it has ever enjoyed!”

September 1968

“On the night of August 5th/6th a gang of six hooligans smashed the shelter near the pond and threw it over on its back. The gang has been arrested and await trial, but in the meantime the Council felt it essential to replace the shelter and the clerk then to apply to the RDC for the funds needed and also inform the Police that the Council intend to take civil action against the offenders after the criminal cases are disposed of unless, of course, the court itself orders them to pay for the damage. “

December 1968

“The clerk reported that the shelter had been repaired by the Gregory Sales Company for £46.11* nett and this bill had been paid. The clerk attended the trial at Brill on Nov 25th of the five vandals who smashed it on 6th August and reported that all had pleaded guilty. In addition to various other penalties imposed they were sentenced to pay our council a total of £55 *(£11 each). It may be some time before we receive it all as the youths are to repay (through the Court) at various dates but the Court Clerk (Mr Fletton) has asked the clerk to ring him in February 1969 if we have heard nothing by then. The council expressed satisfaction.”

(*Note: £50 then is about £1100 now)

Karen

So let's hear from our audience – what were the Swinging 60s in Cheersley really like.

Who reigned supreme? – Mr George and the ‘bitter’ old men of Cheersley or Mr Green and the ‘frustrated youth’ of the day.

Traffic Safety

Karen

Traffic matters are a major issue in our village today, whether it's speeding cars or excessive numbers of HGVs using our village roads as a 'rat run'.

Let's hear from John and Graham whether the Swinging 60s were the 'good old days' as far as traffic was concerned.

John H

May 1965

"The Council wrote a letter to the Divisional Road Surveyor, about the erection of a red warning reflector at the apex of the triangle of ground which juts out into the Upper Winchendon Road where the road divides to go each side of the Chestnut Tree which stands at village crossroads.

The letter continues ...

"It was on the 17th January 1959 that the council first addressed you on this subject when you immediately complied with our request and placed a reflector there.

Recently this point has been the scene of several accidents and, when I spoke to Mr Luxton about the most recent one, he informed me that he had frequently had to replace this reflector owing to its removal by vandals until finally in despair he gave up replacing it. Enquiries reveal that the last time it was displaced by being hit by a lorry and that the roadmen, finding it lying on the road, removed it.

This is a most dangerous point as recent accidents have shown and my Council will therefore be much obliged if, when you replace it again as Mr Luxton has kindly promised to do, you would consider whether it would be possible to make

it stronger so as to be impervious to ordinary vandalism. It has been suggested that it might be more like a bollard made of deep-seated concrete, or, is it possible that from your experience you can suggest something even better.”

September 1965

Another letter to the Divisional Road Surveyor....

“....my Council is becoming more and more worried over the lack of any warning to strange(?) motorists who are approaching the central island and Chestnut Tree from whatever direction. Not only is the volume of traffic increasing but with the widening of the road (and) the speed with which it now approaches the central point from no less than seven directions has also increased and it is felt that steps should be taken NOW both to warn them of danger ahead and to control their speed.

Can something be done please? Perhaps a meeting at the site would make a decision easier to arrive at.”

Graham:

March 1967

“Mrs Franks raised the question of the danger to everyone especially children at the junction of the Aylesbury, Winchendon, Chilton & Long Crendon & School Lane. We have asked for a 30 mph sign and been refused. The meeting asked the Parish Council to go into this and suggest school signs or Go Slow or something to reduce the danger.

The Road Safety authority might also be made to take an interest. All agreed SOMETHING MUST BE DONE.”

May 1967

It is suggested that the danger at the cross-roads be addressed by the Parish Council again:

“After much discussion, the Clerk was told to see Mr Luxton of The Highways and ask him whether something could not be done. Traffic from Long Crendon to Aylesbury in particular speeds across the roads and is highly dangerous.”

The meeting suggested a few possible solutions:

- White lines with SLOW across the road before the Bus Shelter for Long Crendon traffic and opposite The Old Smithy for traffic from Aylesbury
- 30 mph signs
- CHILDREN CROSSING signs
- Improve the view of drivers coming up the hill from Aylesbury

[December 1970](#)

“Mr Godfrey reported that the Reflector Post is down again and suggested a steel one bedded in concrete be erected.”

[Karen](#)

The current 5-way junction next to our iconic Horse Chestnut Tree was constructed in the late 50s. As we've heard, major concerns were raised throughout the ensuing years.... but it is still with us today....and still a matter of major concern to residents.

But at least our iconic Horse-Chestnut Tree has survived all the traumas and still stands proudly at the junction.

Your thoughts please.