



## WEST BLETCHLEY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2016

### Introduction

I am delighted to introduce our 2016 annual report which details West Bletchley Council's main activities and achievements during 2015/16 and summarises the Council's financial position at the close of the year.

During the past year we have continued to invest in and improve the assets that we own and manage on behalf of West Bletchley residents. This includes the extension of the Frank Moran Centre to incorporate Melrose Avenue Resource Centre enabling us to provide a wider range of services and activities. We have also continued to work in partnership with key agencies to extend the support and activities that we provide for our older socially isolated residents.

West Bletchley Council has maintained its record of being 'first past the post' when it became the first town and parish council in Milton Keynes to be awarded Quality Gold Status by the National Association of Local Councils. This is the highest category of award under the new National Scheme and demonstrates that the Council is at the forefront of best practice and achieves excellence in governance, community leadership and Council development.

Last year we committed to continue to develop the ways in which we communicate with residents to improve our understanding of local issues. We believe, from your feedback that we have achieved improvements, particularly through our extended use of social media. We will during the coming year continue to seek further improvements to help us ensure that we concentrate our energies on addressing your priorities.

**Councillor Veronica Belcher**  
**Chair of West Bletchley Council**

### Summary of Activities and Achievements

West Bletchley Council has reviewed overall performance against its agreed Business Plan 2013/14 and published a revised Business Plan 2016/19.

The Council regularly consults with parish residents either formally by survey or informally, for example at events or when residents visit the Council offices, in order to determine priorities and/or concerns that the Council should address. The Business Plan 2016/19 has been compiled with the benefit of this regular feedback from and engagement with residents.

During the last twelve months, approximately one third of those residents surveyed have indicated that:

- The way in which West Bletchley Council has represented them has improved.
- Standards of landscape management and maintenance has improved.
- The way in which West Bletchley Council communicates with residents has got better and the level of information has improved.
- Facilities available to them, within the parish, have got better.

Whilst, at the same time, over 50% of those surveyed have indicated that the above standards have stayed the same, the Council has rightly considered that survey results demonstrate that current policies and actions taken are having a positive effect on the lives of those who live within the parish.

The Council is, by no means, complacent and the new Business Plan will challenge the Council on delivery across a range of service areas.

The Council will shortly complete a building extension at the Frank Moran Centre in Melrose Avenue and will move activities currently undertaken in the Melrose Avenue Resource Centre (The MARC) in to the new extension.

Having taken ownership of Rickley Park in June 2014, the Council has consulted widely during 2015 on proposed plans to improve the range of facilities available to local residents within the park. The Council is keen to encourage more West Bletchley residents of all ages to be able to enjoy the facilities in the park and it is expected that improvement works will commence in the spring of 2017.

### **In the Community**

- The Council continues to consider ways of addressing social isolation of those individuals and groups who find personal interaction difficult, whatever the cause. Age related groups remain active at the Frank Moran Centre as well as the Living in the Moment sessions twice monthly at the Council offices in Whaddon Way. Over recent months the Council has facilitated the establishment of a Men in Sheds project, based in Rickley Park, which offers the potential of a range of activities and crafts to, predominantly, those older men who have time on their hands.
- The annual West Bletchley carnival, managed and supported by the Council, remains the high profile event within the parish attracting all ages to both participate and watch.
- A range of smaller scale events and activities are being developed across the calendar. An inaugural “jazz in the park” event on Church Green proved popular as did some owner and dog days. Many local parks house play and activity sessions for youngsters during school holiday periods, run in conjunction with Milton Keynes Play Association.
- The MARC provides a hub for local people to meet, socialise, access computers and meet representatives from a range of local support agencies.

- The Frank Moran Centre has enabled a range of specifically targeted activities to benefit local residents, including arts and crafts activities, job clubs and provides more discreet facilities for private consultations with local support agencies.
- The Council’s partnership with West Bletchley Wellbeing and Counselling service continues, with increased numbers of residents taking advantage of the free support available, when it is needed.
- Many West Bletchley residents continue to take advantage of the opportunity to swim for free at Bletchley Leisure Centre, within those qualifying categories and age groups.
- The Council’s quarterly magazine, Open Door, delivered free to every household in the parish, provides information and updates on the wide range of activities on offer. The Council is content that the magazine is well received and read by many, as the number of entries for each crossword and childrens’ colouring competition testifies.
- The Council sets aside an annual budget which is used as grant funding for local groups who need support for specific projects or purchases.

### **Environment**

- Having taken responsibility for maintenance of all areas of open space, the Council has been pleased with feedback from residents indicating that standards have improved. The Council continues to work closely with its appointed contractor to ensure sustainability of parks and other areas of public open space.
- The Council has successfully retained the prestigious Green Flag status for Chepstow Park.
- The Council has been particularly successful in ensuring that potholes on highways and pathways have been expeditiously repaired by Milton Keynes Council, despite an apparent tightening of budgets.

- West Bletchley Council remains one of few parish councils across Milton Keynes to provide free dog waste bags to residents and there are more dog waste bins per square metre than any other parish within the borough. Despite this, the Council is aware that litter, and particularly dog litter, continues to be of concern to many residents and the Council continues with its education and awareness programme.

## Planning

- West Bletchley Neighbourhood Plan is nearing draft completion. The Council is grateful to many individual residents and local groups who have contributed greatly to the content. Milton Keynes Council and other partner agencies, being aware of the plan, already consider its content and objectives when necessary.
- The Council has been encouraged that its efforts to ensure practical and beneficial use of parcels of unused land within the parish has borne fruit, specifically in the case of land owned and managed by Milton Keynes Council. Three greatly underused garage block sites have been demolished and age related bungalow accommodation built, which is already occupied. There is more to do in this regard and the Council continues to exert pressure on Milton Keynes Council.
- West Bletchley Council's planning committee comments on all planning applications submitted to Milton Keynes Council that relate to land or property situated within West Bletchley, taking account of this Council's planning policy as well as the views expressed by local residents.

- The prospect of large scale housing development on land within Aylesbury Vale, but adjacent to the parish boundary, remains. The Council remains alert to any proposals from developers, keeping residents informed and supporting their objections to planning approval.

## Council Finance

The following figures have been extracted from the draft accounts for the Council, for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016, subject to audit.

### DRAFT SUBJECT TO AUDIT

Local Councils in England  
**Annual return for the year ended  
 31 March 2016**

### WEST BLETCHLEY COUNCIL The statement of accounts

	Year ending	
	31 March 2015 £	31 March 2016 £
1 Balances brought Forward	1,323,904	1,524,737
2 (+) Annual Precept	782,643	803,584
3 (+) Total other Receipts	324,386	296,255
4 (-) Staff costs	323,175	366,293
5 (-) Loan interest/ capital repayments	35,641	35,009
6 (-) Total other payments	547,380	591,704
7 (=) Balances carried forward	1,524,737	1,631,570
8 Total cash & investments	1,512,857	1,597,934
9 Total fixed assets and long term assets	912,271	915,464
10 Total borrowings	331,035	303,448