

## **Richard Preston's' Letter to the Editor, Steeple Aston Life**

After a quarter of a century representing the concerns and aspirations of the parishioners of Steeple Aston I have made the decision to retire as a parish councillor. Not maybe exactly when or as I expected to leave the position but on reflection, the correct decision.

My reasoning for becoming a councillor back in the early 90's was that at the time there was no play provision in the village and with three youngish children I thought this was possibly my way of promoting the idea. Along with the support of a few similarly minded villagers the parish council warmed to the idea and with enormous support from the village and the landowners, Dr Radcliffe's School Foundation, the first play-area was born.

Over the years, I have seen the play provision in the village expanded and we now have one of the most envied play-spaces in the county along with an equally high quality sports and recreation ground. I have been lucky enough to meet and work with some wonderful and talented play-provision workers across Oxfordshire learning so much about play for the younger members of our community. This led to me taking a keen interest in play-areas as my wife will confirm. When on holiday or days out, if there is a play-area to be seen I must go and have a nosy round.

During my time with Steeple Aston PC the council secured well over half a million pounds in grant funding and whilst helping to secure such funding I became well versed in grant application forms and knowing the right phrases to use on application forms. In my time as a councillor I have seen the village hall come into control of the village via the parish council and helped to secure additional housing for the younger and more deserving members of the village.

It has been a wonderful quarter of a century of serving the community and giving something back to a village that supported me and my family so well in my days of self-employment as a market gardener and greengrocer.

The role of parish councillor has changed somewhat over that time and I feel that bureaucracy and red-tape are now getting in the way of progress. In my opinion there is too much time spent ticking boxes and not enough time made in taking this village forward. On saying that it is still possible to make things happen and with a little determination and talking to the right people anything can be achieved.

This gives me the opportunity of thanking everyone who has supported me through my time as a councillor especially the villagers who make their own contribution to village life by passing on their thoughts and comments on various aspects of village life. After all, it is the residents of Steeple Aston who I have served for the last 25 years and that is what the position is all about and for that I have been extremely privileged to have served with so many superb councillors and hopefully enhanced and improved village life for all.

Richard Preston

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