Chairman’s Report for the year 2014 -2015

Having read all the Minutes for the past year, I think we have as a Parish Council achieved quite a lot. However nothing is achieved as fast as we and the locals would like, but I think we have done pretty well with our somewhat limited powers.

Having eventually sorted out the majority of the flooding problems in the parish with WSCC, local landowners and Balfour Beatty , the next 2 emotive subjects to emerge were speeding and planning. Since our last AGM we have considered 46 applications and my thanks go to Brian O’Connor for his diligence in overseeing them all on our behalf.

Speeding and Planning were issues that packed us out on 2 occasions and we duly listened to all the comments. We are now planning 30 mph traffic calming “gateways” to each entrance of the village with roundels and red road surfacing, but to our disappointment installation is being held up by a change of staff at WSCC Highways. However, we WILL get there! We have also supported a speed limit for the narrow Bashurst Hill road and implementation of this is proceeding.

As to Planning, the one application that has had the whole village up in arms is DC/15/0029 proposed 63 homes on Ropers and Cheffins Fields. This we are fighting vigorously and have been told that HDC Planning are also opposed – but we will have to wait for July’s planning meeting for the official outcome.

In response to nearby residents we had another try with the bollards by the railway crossing and this time they have stayed in place, so there have been no further complaints about heavy plant parking. We also planted up the verge nearest to Finians Field with evergreen bushes with the help of several residents . This too is looking good but will need another strim soon.

As promised, we managed to decrease our precept this year to just over £39,000 – this with the help of a small grant from HDC, We in turn made grants to the Village Green, the Village Hall, the Churchyard and the Youth Club as we strongly support these organisations.

We received the Development Funds of £350,000 in May and this has been banked in a separate account. To date, we have received grant requests from the Village Hall, the Sports & Social Club, the Church and the Playing Field Committee . We have allocated some funding, but each application will be expected to get “matched” funding where possible and there will also be S106

money available as the new houses become occupied. It is hoped that with careful housekeeping the £350K can be doubled.

As car parking is an issue around the Village Hall and Green we are supporting an extension to the village hall carpark which will be on the section of the Jubilee Field currently owned by the PC. Arrangements are in hand to gift a section of land to the Village Trust.

The first few of the New Homes are now occupied and the road Names of Sycamore Rise, Willow Place, Bramble Copse and Bluebell Lane were suggested by the PC. As a result of a suggestion at last year’s village meeting, Nigel Currie and Sue McLeod have produced a very fine welcome book for all new residents and we are looking to put this on the website shortly.

The official cutting the sod of the new school took place last April and the building is now complete. The new school is magnificent , and we can be really proud of the part the PC played in seeing it come to fruition. Real Localism and People Power at work. The first pupils will be moving in shortly and will be “marching out” of the old building at Itchingfield on 20th June.

We are being encouraged by the powers that be to formulate a Neighbourhood Plan and have started the process which can take up to 18 months and cost up to £20,000. However, we are told that it will give us a greater say in what goes on in our Parish especially Planning. I certainly hope so. We will discuss this in further detail with the village at our Annual Village Meeting on 9th June.

Sometimes it is the small things that matter and can be achieved easily - we are purchasing another defibrillator for the village and this will be placed on the wall of the village hall near the playground and we have purchased another dog poo bin which has been placed at the top of the Hordens near the new school.

Our precious Minute Books which date back to the 1880’s have now been deposited at the County Archive Office in Chichester. We thought that would be the safest place for them.

Although a big responsibility , it has been a pleasure and a honour to serve as your Chairman and I would like to thank the Clerk and all parish councillors for their hard work throughout the year. Also Amanda Jupp, Tricia Youtan & Stuart Ritchie for their support. We welcomed Sanjeev Joshi to the Parish Council but lost Nicola Fryatt & Marianne Harding who decided not to stand for re-election. We will miss them and their wisdom.