

Chairman's Report AGM 23rd May 2016

Well another eventful year for us. We started off with the full complement of 9 parish councillors, but in May, Nicola Fryatt and Marianne Harding decided not to stand for re-election and I would like to thank them for their several years of service to this community. Accordingly, the Casual vacancies were advertised after the summer break and one candidate came forward - Dawn Armstrong. We are particularly pleased to welcome Dawn as she is one of our new residents from the Ashmiles. Earlier this year James Sheppard joined us. James lives in Itchingfield and I am pleased that we now have 2 representatives from that end of the parish.

Our Precept for the last financial year was £39,128 net following the deduction of a grant of £872 from HDC. It will increase considerably for the next financial year due to the costs of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan.

We considered 43 planning applications and once again thanks go to Brian O'Connor for his diligence in researching these for us – by the time we considered them – all the hard work had been done!

We successfully fought off an application for a developer to build new homes on Cheffyns & Ropers Fields behind homes in Sandhills Road and Two Mile Ash Road. Our parish council meeting was attended by some 70 people! However we were able to reassure them that the PC would not support the planning application.

We also had 2 presentations regarding potential sites in the parish – both parties agreed to hold fire until the Steering Group called for sites.

We were not happy with the service and response we were getting from HDC Planning and as a result a meeting was arranged between 3 Parish councillors and the new head of planning Dr Chris Lyons. Things are gradually improving although we still have outstanding issues.

Grants to the Parish were:

£879 to Barns Green Village Hall for its insurance

£2000 to the Trust for its Insurance and playground maintenance

£1250 to the Field Committee towards the purchase of mowing equipment for the village green

£1500 to St Nicolas Church towards the upkeep of the churchyard

We also purchased a defibrillator which has been sited on the village hall wall facing the green.

Looking back, I think we will all agree that one of the best events of the year was the opening of the new primary school - all on one site in the middle of the village. The triumvirate of Berkeley Homes, WSCC and this Parish Council had worked well together to bring this to fruition. It was really a dream come true - 40 years after the move was first mooted.

Another bonus was the gift of Ancient Woodland at the back of the Ashmiles and once Berkeley Homes have moved out we look forward to enjoying it. We were also gifted a section of adjoining land to enable easy access by the new owner of Marlands, Lee Goossens.

Speaking of land transfers, having repaid the outstanding balance of the loan from the Public Works loan Board amounting to £7,277.89, we transferred half of our section of the Jubilee Field to the Village Trust for the new village car park. This is nearly finished and will ease parking problems around the Green. Congratulations to all concerned - although technically that is for next year's report!

Parking problems continue at Christ Hospital. Only one platform is in our parish, but many of our residents are affected. Discussions are continuing between all parties – hopefully for a new bigger car park there.

Work started on the Neighbourhood Plan in April and at the Village Meeting in June, the go-ahead was given by attending villagers and a steering group was formed, headed by Ian Walker. This will cost in the region of £20-25K and the Steering Group will be assisted by Action in Rural Sussex and a Planning Consultant. This will necessitate increasing considerably our precept for 2016/17. The Steering Group and 6 Focus groups have been meeting monthly – their minutes are on the website. There has also been a very well attended public meeting. A more detailed update will be given at this year's Annual Village Meeting on Tuesday 7th June.

A village clear up day took place last July and 16 volunteers attended. These to be continued as and when necessary.

The Development Fund continues to be well managed by the subcommittee of Nigel Currie, Tors Barrett, Paul Allen and Andrew Crossley. £46K was allocated to the village car park project topped up by S106 money of around £63K. A report on the progress of the other projects will be made at the village meeting.

We have been frustrated in our dealings with County Highways. Although supported by our County Councillor, it seems to take forever to get some things done. We have several outstanding issues, including 4 missing road traffic warning and speed signs reported last Autumn. There are also 2 outstanding TRO's plus repairs to pavements. This is very frustrating as we have to take the flack from residents who don't understand the process and that the delay is not down to us. We are still awaiting the go-ahead for our gateways after 18 months and several meetings.

We have been well supported by our 2 District Councillors and our WSC Councillor and I thank them for listening to us and for supporting us.

Finally, last but not least, my thanks go to all you Parish Councillors and the Clerk for the work and support given to this parish.

Penny Simpson

Chairman May 2016