

## **Chairman's Report 2023 for the year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023**

Well, here we are again – with a new King - back to near normality after Covid 19. It is something that now seems liveable with, rather like flu. With the end of Covid restrictions, the Barns Green Cobra Team, having done a wonderful job for the Parish finally wound up with the planting of a friendship tree on the village green.

One of the wonderful events of the year was Queen Elizabeth II 's Diamond Jubilee and we gave financial help to help with the celebrations which included Mugs for the children, Trees for the school and Sumners, a flag for the village hall and the funding of the Jubilee Beacon on Sharpenhurst Hill with live streaming to the village hall for those unable to walk there.

We dealt with 37 Planning Applications, one of which was for new houses at Sumners Ponds. This was in accordance with our Local Neighbourhood Plan. Unfortunately, the Neighbourhood Plan has now stalled due in no small part to HDC having no Plan themselves and of course the Water Neutrality problem. Despite repeated efforts our Referendum has been held up for over a year and it looks like it may well be held for another few months at least. However, we have been assured that we will not lose out on the increased CIL benefits that a "made" Plan would entitle us to. We are in the same position as 3 other Parishes in the District and we 4 came together to lobby HDC, having hoped for the Referendum to take place on May 4<sup>th</sup> alongside the local elections.

Financially we are sound, having voted not to make early repayment of our PWLB loan. There are at least 3 worthwhile projects in the Parish that will need our support in the upcoming months. We made grants totalling £7,100, and paid out £2,400 for further legal advice. Our Precept for the year 2022-2023 was £72,000, although in December we voted to reduce this to £63,000 for the upcoming year – something almost unheard of.

Our external auditors recommended that we should also have an Internal Audit and thus we appointed Mulberry 's who carried out a very thorough audit of all our processes. This has resulted in a few minor alterations and the recommendation that we review our procedures including our Code of Conduct and our Standing Orders. This is currently being done.

One of our biggest problems has been Traffic, with the condition of the roads deteriorating after each spell of bad weather. We are currently endeavouring to put SID's in place to deter speeding and also trying to help the residents of Bashurst Hill/West Chiltington Lane with getting a TRO in place. Several residents attended our October Meeting to alert us of the dangers of speeding drivers along this road. We are indebted to Cllr Richard French for keeping in contact with WSCC Highways advising them of concerns in our Parish. Richard has also produced articles and inserts for the BigMag advising readers how to report problems to the appropriate authorities.

We have also advertised for a Drain Warden to help with keeping the road drains clear hopefully to solve some of the flooding issues in the Parish. No response as yet.

At the request of residents in Vale Wood Lane, we have approached both the Environment Agency and HDC's Environment Officer to investigate the foul odour emanating from the ditches opposite Vale Wood Close. Neither was inclined to help by investigating further despite evidence of human waste being seen (and photographed) in the ditch. We are endeavouring to get the ditch water tested by an independent company, but this is proving difficult to accomplish. We have met with reticence on their part.

A small win -the renovated and re-sited telephone kiosk is no longer empty – our defibrillator having been moved there from the Village Hall outer wall.

One big “win” is that we were informed in March that the proposed pathway from the village club, via the green and with road crossings will now be done in the upcoming summer holidays. This should solve the problem parking around the primary school.

Finally, my thanks to all our hardworking Parish Councillors, our Clerk, our District Councillors and County Councillor. The Annual Village Meeting will take place on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> July 7.30pm at the Village Hall, when we will be discussing items of interest and concern to us all.

I hope this report will indicate in part what we have been up to, but of course the full update can be found in our Minutes on our website:

[www.itchingfieldparishcouncil.gov.uk](http://www.itchingfieldparishcouncil.gov.uk) Penny Simpson, Chairman 22/05/23