

Cuckfield Parish Council: Chairman's Report 2010-2011

Firstly, on behalf of the whole community in Cuckfield, may I thank all the members of the Parish Council for the time they give so willingly in finding solutions, amidst the nightmare of government demands, to retain the unique place that is Cuckfield. This year, after the second election in eight years, we see some 'new blood' to bring fresh ideas coupled with a good level of continuity from re-elected existing members.

The main burden of interpreting and responding to the complexity of Government papers falls to our Parish Clerk Frances Jones who, as I keep reminding the community, is in law, the 'Proper Officer' responsible for ensuring the Council acts within the law. Frances continues to provide us with a high level of understanding and support in managing some very complex matters; particularly now the office is running so smoothly with Nicky established in her assistant role. You may wish to know that Frances is the local training officer for clerks in Sussex, so we are in good hands.

Of great importance has been the work carried out by groups supporting the Parish Council on the "Cuckfield Village Design Statement". Sincere thanks to Marie Dormer and all who contributed to this fantastic project which is now with MSDC for scrutiny. The intention is that this will 'morph' into a Neighbourhood Plan and we will be looking to the community to take the lead on this in the coming days, under guidance from the Parish Council.

Finance

Total funds available to the Parish Council this year was £269,693 which was made up of £134,820 from the 'precept' (the tax levied by the Parish Council) and £134,873 from grants, interest and other earnings; principally from burials and Queens Hall rentals. There have been few surprises this year and good financial performance in both the Environment Committee and Queens Hall has left us with sensible reserve levels and, despite forecast difficulties for the immediate future, we are confident that we can continue to provide the same levels of service on the same overall income in 2011/12. There will be NO rise in the precept in Cuckfield for this financial year; a small decline in income in real terms when taking cost of living rises into account.

The Queens Hall

We continue to maintain the Queens Hall to a high standard and this has been reflected in it becoming a venue of choice for many wedding parties. We continue to maintain a 'balance' of users so that we can meet the community need. This year new lighting was installed to give an 'ambient' effect for differing functions. With some of the more irritating problems, such as boilers and flooding resolved, we can now move on to addressing the problems of the 'Green Room' (small room by the stage) hopefully assisted by funds from developers which are designated for community buildings. Our thanks to our two caretakers for ensuring the high standard of cleanliness and a warm welcome to all our users.

Environment

The 'New' burial ground along Newbury Lane is now well established. Management of the ground does not happen by chance. We are grateful to Sandy Gallagher for her continuing work as our 'Registrar of Burials'; an essential job that goes on quietly in the background and also to Pat Gallagher for his continuing support of the Environment Committee in all matters to do with the ground. I continue in praise of the diligence with which Dick and Brian respond to the challenge of making Cuckfield's burial ground a visual spectacle. Work is ongoing in bringing the Observer Field up to the Natural England designation of a plant and wildlife sanctuary; which we hope will eventually encompass other areas adjacent to it. The Observer Field gets its name from the 'Cold War' observer bunker which is still sited in the field. This year will be the second that the refurbished bunker will be open for interested groups to view. Other aspects of the Environment Committees work covers provision of Christmas lights. This year

new designs were hung and we continue to explore other lighting opportunities to enliven the Christmas scene in the High Street.

Planning

Development in Cuckfield has been the most difficult business to deal with. The flux in the legal position, versus the Government's intended legislation, has left a window of opportunity for developers which has effected the strategic ambitions of the Parish Council. As a statutory consultee we have been clear in our objectives but have been disappointed this year with the outcomes of both the Chatfield Road and Bylanes Appeal decisions. We have worked hard to influence the District in finding ways to call a halt to further development until we understand, through landscape appraisal, the impact on Cuckfield's unique character.

Roads and Traffic

Whilst this is probably the area of greatest concern to many, the Parish Council can only 'influence' since the budgets are held by County; though we seek to push hard! The 'Vehicle Activated Sign installed at Whiteman's Green in an effort to slow traffic has had success in that measured speeds have fallen by some 5mph, however further work is being done to move signage further out so that it is more visible, and some form of speed management is under consideration. Further work has also been commissioned on traffic management on Ardingly Road and London Lane. None of this work is seen as a priority by West Sussex Highways, so the work has been commissioned and is being paid for by the Parish Council. The rugby and soccer clubs were supported by the Parish Council in their application for a new car park which is now open and gives some relief to the parking issues at Whitemans Green. The Parish Council has been looking at footpath and cycle routes around the village with connections through to Haywards Heath and this work will continue as we develop a Neighbourhood Plan.

Other Matters

To maintain our 'Quality' status, 80% of councillors have to complete 'Quality' training. Following the elections we will need to rapidly train our new councillors to maintain our 'Power of Well-being'. Whilst the Parish Council can act as a lead for the community, it is the community whom we serve, and so to be effective we need the community to be involved with the work done to realise our ambitions. You don't need to join the Parish Council, but we hope that those who wish to contribute to the community will take part in the work programme.

Robert Salisbury
Chairman Cuckfield Parish Council