

## **Chairman's Annual Report 2015/16**

A new Parish Council was formed in May 2015 and this is the first year of a four year term. It is formed of ten locally elected residents who give their time voluntarily to ensure we can run a Parish Council and the Committees, which enact our statutory responsibilities, as the first tier of local government.

The second tier of government is Mid Sussex District Council, with whom we work closely. They are responsible for planning decisions, housing provision and local amenities such as parks and recreation. Robert Salisbury and Pete Bradbury are your elected Ward Councillors representing Cuckfield in Mid Sussex. The third tier is West Sussex County Council who are responsible for services such as Education, Highways, Social and Healthcare services, and then Central Government who define National Policy and statutory law. I mention this for clarity and understanding of responsibility, as sometimes this leads to confusion with the community about who has responsibility to make changes or how decisions have been made. It has been particularly relevant for some of our Planning and Highways issues for this year.

At time of writing we have just started our second year and I was pleased to accept the nomination for Chairman again, with Martin Sambrook as Vice Chairman. This Annual Report and the Annual Parish Meeting are our annual opportunity to share the work for the previous year and to look forward to the following year. The year has been dominated by residents' concerns over traffic congestion and the increase in HGV traffic. We therefore invited Richard Speller to be one of our guest speaker this year. Richard is Area Manager for Highways and Transport.

I will summarise each committee shortly, but the focus has been on Highways safety improvements, running both the Queen's Hall and Village Hall and ensuring we provide services for Burials in the Churchyard. Weddings, including Civil Ceremonies, in the Queen's Hall provide a valuable source of income for us and a valuable service for the community. We also had our biggest ever Christmas Street Festival this year which raised money for local charities and clubs. It has become a regular social event and an opportunity to start the festive period with friends in the community. Such is the size of the event we are starting to plan for this year's event already.

I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank all the Parish Councillors who have served during this first year. You can find a list and contact details of Councillors on the Parish Web Site [www.cuckfield.gov.uk](http://www.cuckfield.gov.uk) and in the regular newsletter.

### **Planning Committee**

With the Neighbourhood Plan formally adopted by Mid Sussex District Council, and now part of the District's 'Development Plan' which is being used to assess planning applications, the parish council's attention has turned to the Plan monitoring that we need to do. This intends to evaluate the progress being made towards delivering the Plan's spatial vision and assess the extent to which the policies are being implemented. Most policies have Monitoring Indicators and Targets to provide examples of the council's intentions and enable some measurement of outcomes. These can be anything from the number of trees, hedges and ponds affected by development to the impact on listed buildings or the loss of strategic views out of the village, as well as the number and location of properties built. Records are being kept that we can review over time and action can be taken if targets are not being met.

We have seen in the last few months how the Neighbourhood Plan is already having an impact on the future shape of the village. Decisions on a number of prospective developments have been made where Plan policies have been a critical factor in the outcome. In particular, monitoring of infrastructure improvement progress against the Plan Infrastructure Assessment highlights the fact that we are doing well. Still more work to do though, and this has informed the three-year business priority planning which we are publishing today for your comment.

### **Policy**

Mid Sussex District Council continues to struggle on its District Plan delivery, and further delays mean that the area still cannot demonstrate the all-important 5-year housing supply, against figures which are still to be

examined. This has a knock on effect on our own Neighbourhood Plan, as the government dictates that without this land supply, most policies we have adopted which affect housing are deemed 'out of date' even though they're only a few years old, and therefore they do not have the weight they should.

### **New developments**

The Horsefield Green 14-house development on Ardingly Road is nearing completion, with new residents having moved in from Christmas onwards – we welcome them to the community. Landscape works on the new public open space are largely complete now, and we are awaiting discussions with MSDC over its transfer from the developers to them, and then onto CPC.

Buttinghill Drive is starting to mature as a development. The public open space which accompanies this development will not be transferred to CPC until the end of this year. However, the drainage pond issues we reported on last year are still no nearer resolution, with MSDC and Taylor Wimpey struggling about how to resolve the collapsed banks, without significant expense. This may complicate and delay the transfer.

Yew Tree Court redevelopment has also been completed recently and we should thank the developers for mitigating the disruption around the school, which itself is now undergoing a major expansion extension and improvement.

We are awaiting the detailed planning application for Penland Farm development at the end of Hanlye Lane. CPC made a detailed submission to the public consultation, and we look to the developers to mitigate the impact on the gap between Haywards Heath and the village.

### **Planning decisions and appeals**

The Neighbourhood Plan has been a critical document used in the decision making and subsequent appeals process. We await still the outcome of the Appeals for the proposed development for 4 or 20 houses along Broad Street, at which CPC was represented by our retained professional planner, tasked with defending our Neighbourhood Plan policies.

The Appeals for the extension of Courtyard House at Whitemans Green, Longacre Farm on Ardingly Road and the change of use from planted verge to parking space on the Brick Lane estate, which the Parish Council objected to, were also all dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate.

### **Roads & Traffic Committee**

Highways is always a source of public concern and generates the majority of comments to the Parish Council and one we take very seriously. The majority of the issues are the responsibility of West Sussex Highways with whom we work very closely, but we do own and influence certain projects which we prioritise.

We've seen an increase in traffic, especially HGVs, due to the number of development projects outside the Parish which have generated through traffic. We've seen a rise in parking on pavements to the point of obstructing pedestrians. The current legal position on this is tenuous and we continue to ask people to be considerate on this matter. Our key focus for the year was the puffin crossing in London Road which is now complete. We've also been developing a scheme for London Lane to reduce the speed of traffic and a consultation process started at the Annual Parish meeting. Additionally, we have plans to change the roundabout scheme at Whitemans Green scheduled for 2016-2017 which will be funded and completed by WSCC.

Another cause of concern and frustration has been the pavement outside Cuckfield House. We now have an agreed scheme which will be delivered by WSCC and will include bollards and planters on that stretch of pavement, along with new brick paving.

### **Community Buildings Committee**

As a reminder we completed the purchase of the Youth Club building in London Lane, and we now own the building and freehold for the site, against a Public Work Loan. We officially renamed the building in Sept 2015 to the Village Hall and it is our newest asset to the village.

I am pleased to announce that the Village Hall has now completed a first full year and we have put in place all the necessary processes and procedures to ensure we can run it as a Community Building for our regular hirers and provide a valuable community asset. Over the summer holidays a series of maintenance projects will be undertaken which includes redecoration of the north hall and entrance area, new flooring and storage. This will benefit existing hirers and also make it an attractive hall to hire and use for new hirers.

The Queen's Hall continues to be very busy and a key asset to the village. It does however take a lot of time and effort to maintain and ensure we deliver a good experience for our regular hirers and community groups. We have seen a good use as a wedding venue, including civil ceremonies, and continue to attract very positive feedback from users. We have also worked hard to minimize any impact on our neighbours at the end of the events which are strictly managed and monitored. We have just completed some major decoration in key areas to ensure it is well maintained.

For 2016 - 2017 we will combine the Queen's Hall and Village Hall into a single Community Buildings Committee.

### **Environment Committee**

The Environment Committee is focused on wellbeing for the Parish. It has worked hard to ensure the Churchyard and Cemetery are well maintained and provide a beautiful and tranquil environment with stunning views to the South Downs. We are introducing a new mowing regime in certain areas with longer grass to encourage more wildlife and insects. We also ran our biggest and most successful Christmas Street Festival this year with over 2000 people attending and raised money for our local charities. The event marks the start of the Christmas celebration in Cuckfield and coincides with the Tree Festival in the Holy Trinity Church. We plan to run it again this year but do require the community and traders to get involved.

The Observer Field (Newbury Lane) continues to be a long term project to develop and maintain a natural zone for wildlife and ecology. The introduction of bee hives has been an important development for this year. We have also supported the volunteers with the renovation of the Royal Observer Corps Nuclear Bunker, as part of Cuckfield's history, which has attracted many visitors at weekends and is located in the Observer Field.

### **Finance and General Purposes Committee**

This year has seen some challenges to the management of our finances with additional costs due to Government pension rules for all of our paid staff. During the year we hired an Assistant Clerk to ensure we could open the office in The Queen's Hall every day and to help us to run our community buildings. A little known fact is that we have as many amenity and community buildings as a small town. As a larger Parish Council we need to ensure we have the right office structure in place. The amount of regulation we need to observe and follow, associated with projects and events, is also increasing and is an additional responsibility for us to take on.

### **Looking Forward**

The focus for 2017 will be to deliver the projects in our Business Plan for the period 2016 - 2019. We will be consulting on this, starting at the Annual Parish meeting, and it will be found on our website for review and feedback. We'll also ratify a new Communication Plan which will then lead to a small investment in our website to upgrade it and provide new methods of communication using social media.

On a staffing note, our current Clerk, Annette Jones, will be leaving at the end of May and we are currently recruiting for a new Deputy Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer. Our Assistant Clerk Sam Heynes will take on the role of Clerk from June 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 and we wish her every success in her role.

### **Getting Involved**

We're always grateful for help with our projects and it's a great way to become more involved in your community. We're always looking for people to take part, everyone one has a skill we can use and we'd like to hear from you. For example, the Christmas Street Festival was only possible due to volunteers coming forward to run the event. Also, we're keen to form team of Speedwatch volunteers, so please do get in touch if you are interested.

Regards  
Nigel Page  
Chairman  
19<sup>th</sup> May 2015