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Chairman's Annual Report: 2018-2019



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Introduction

I am pleased to submit my Chairman's report for this year as we complete our final year of a four-year term. This report will be published at the Annual Parish Meeting on Thursday 23 May 2019 and in our regular newsletter, which is published in Cuckfield Life and on our website www.cuckfield.gov.uk.

The coming year will be the first year after Council elections which were held earlier this month. I would like to thank all Councillors for their dedication and application in discharging the business of the Council. Some Councillors have returned for the new term and they have been joined by many new Councillors, whom I congratulate on their election.

The Parish Council is formed of ten locally elected residents (non-political) 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.

Our primary focus is to serve the interests of the Cuckfield area and Community. The Parish Council is part of a hierarchy of government and is tiered as below. I mention this for clarity to show who has responsibility and how decisions are made. Where the Parish Council is not a decision maker it acts as a consultee to represent the community in key decisions.

- Central Government defines national policies and statutory law, which are cascaded down to the County Council, District Council and lastly the Parish Council. Sir Nicholas Soames is the MP for the Mid Sussex.
- West Sussex County Council is responsible for services such as Education, Highways, Social and Healthcare services. Your current elected representative is Peter Bradbury.
- Mid Sussex District Council, with whom we work closely, along with the three Town Councils and Parish Councils form the rest of the Mid Sussex District. They are responsible for planning decisions, housing provision and local amenities such as parks and recreation. Cllr Robert Salisbury and Cllr Peter Bradbury are the elected ward councillors representing Cuckfield in Mid Sussex.
- In 2018-19 the Parish Council ran committees for Community Buildings, Environment and Wellbeing, Estates, Finance, Planning and Roads and Traffic. The core activity for the year is summarised in the remainder of this report.

This Annual Report and the Annual Parish Meeting is our opportunity each year to share the efforts of the previous year and to look forward. We have worked to continually improve the Annual Parish Meeting and to make it relevant to the community, with guest speakers who reflect the interest and feedback we have received during the year.

This year we are delighted to welcome as our guest speaker Inspector Pete Dommett, Prevention Inspector, Mid Sussex Police.

The Parish Council has several committees whose activities are summarised later in the report. Each committee works in a specific area. This year the focus has continued to be on Roads and Traffic in respect of safety improvements, running both Queen's Hall and Cuckfield Village Hall, and to ensure we provide good services for burials in the cemetery and investing in our allotments. We have received the land transfer for Horsefield Green, south of Ardingly Road as a public open space.

We have continued our commitment to making Cuckfield's roads safer. The London Lane traffic calming works will commence in the summer of 2019 and will bring to fruition a campaign for enhanced pedestrian safety which I first became involved with in 1991. A long time in gestation would be a fair comment, but nonetheless a welcome improvement. The time and resolve required at Parish level to implement traffic calming and road safety improvements is considerable as all works approvals and funding need to be channelled through WSCC. We are fortunate to have Colin Mercer as the Chair of our Roads and Traffic Committee for many years. He has worked tirelessly to achieve all of the calming measures within the village and London Lane in particular. Thank you, Colin. The speed watch programme continues in conjunction with Sussex Police and the programme is staffed by local community volunteers who monitor and report speeding vehicles to Sussex Police who will then decide on what action to take.

We have also increased our contracts hire charges for both community buildings. The Council managed its costs and expenditure within our means and budget, but these increases were necessary to ensure we provide the right services to the community.

The Parish Council raises the majority of its income through the precept (Council Tax, collected by Mid Sussex District Council).

You can find a list and contact details of Councillors on our website www.cuckfield.gov.uk and in our regular newsletter in Cuckfield Life.

I should also add that I concluded my last term as a Councillor having stepped down as Chairman on 16 May 2019.

The workload the Parish Council addresses each year increases, as does the complexity of the legal framework in which we are required to conduct ourselves. Our success in doing so is due to the great work undertaken by the Parish Council team, led by our Clerk Sam Heynes.

I am pleased to summarise the activity of each of our committees for 2018- 2019 on the following pages.

Planning Committee – Cllr Burton

2018-19 has been another busy year for the Planning Committee. Whilst the business of the Committee has continued in the number of applications considered with responses to Mid Sussex District Council, who are the Local Planning Authority, there have fortunately been no new applications that would significantly erode the distinctiveness of Cuckfield.

District Plan

The key issue in the year was the adoption, after ten years in the making, of the new District Plan. Whilst it is a relief that we may be getting some respite from the planning-by-appeal experience we have had in recent years, with planning policies now carrying full weight, the sting in the tail was the much higher housing target which the developers successfully argued for being imposed. The District now needs to find space for another 2,000 dwellings over the plan period on top of those it had previously included. The solution in the Examination was fudged, by spreading these across Category 1 and 2 settlements in an undefined manner (as a large village, Cuckfield is Category 2). An exercise is now currently underway, by the snappily titled Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA), to reassess every potential site. It is therefore highly possible that the village is going to have to take an additional 200 houses on top of what is assessed in the Neighbourhood Plan. That's an additional 20% increase in the size of the village, on a scale of the Penland Farm development, in just a few years, and can only be accommodated by further erosion of the gap between us and Haywards Heath, or in the fields south of the church. This will have a major impact on the village. The Parish Council will continue to argue strongly to defend our Neighbourhood Plan policies, which aim to protect our settlement distinctiveness and environment.

Burgess Hill Northern Arc

The central lynchpin of the District Plan, 3500 new houses on the northern side of Burgess Hill, is accelerating. The District secured the support of the Government Homes England department to co-ordinate the development, and it's hoped that this will mean infrastructure is implemented in a timely manner, rather than all being left to the end (or not at all) as we've seen when developers are left to their own devices. The older Martlets centre in the town is about to be torn down to make way for a new leisure, shopping and housing area. No word on when the A2300 upgrade to the A23 will be undertaken, but funding has been secured apparently. This is crucial to try and prevent traffic through Cuckfield getting even worse than it already is.

Penland Farm

This development of 210 continues into successive phases. The three-month closure of Hanlye Lane that developer Redrow insists is required to construct the new roundabout junction, will now be carried out over the summer of 2020. By this time, the London Lane scheme in Cuckfield will have been completed (in August 2019), so hopefully it will be a little safer for pedestrians given all the additional traffic for such a long time. It is unfortunate that the District Council did not insist on this infrastructure being in place first, before houses were built on the space where there could have been a temporary diversion, and which would have prevented the considerable inconvenience. Profit has trampled over community disruption once again.

Planning Enforcement and Issues

There are a number of planning issues which the Parish Council is continuing to press MSDC to take, or continue, action on.

- The Buttinghill drainage pond is still in a state of collapse, and Taylor Wimpey are continuing to do all they can to avoid doing anything about it. CPC cannot take this land over formally as intended public open space until this is resolved. We continue to pressurise.

- MSDC have confirmed that the entrance gates to the new Denning Place development along Broad Street do not have planning permission, and these block the strategic views across Blunts Wood identified in the Neighbourhood Plan. However, MSDC have taken almost a year so far to do nothing about it.
- MSDC granted themselves planning permission again (the seventh time) in the new year for the play meadow in Courtmead Road, despite losing previous High Court Judicial Reviews. I don't think anyone thought this saga would run for so long or cost the taxpayer so much (over £100k in professional fees, let alone Council staff time!).
- Whilst officially just outside the parish boundary, developments at Cuckfield Golf Club continue to cause concern. We await to see the outcome of the recent application for residential use of the club house and landscaping issues.
- Across the road, the proposed new clubhouse for Haywards Heath Rugby Club is making progress through the planning stages.
- The Court Meadow School site is currently being sold by West Sussex County Council. The Parish Council submitted an application for this to be entered on the Assets of Community Value register, such that we could have some influence on what will happen to the site (which is allocated for housing in the Neighbourhood Plan), but unfortunately this was flatly rejected.

Planning Applications and Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring

CPC continues its monitoring of the Neighbourhood Plan policies and targets, and overall this year there haven't been any significant breaches of the policies (aside from Denning Place and Courtmead Road highlighted above).

Overall, the Parish Council formally responded and made recommendation on 42 applications. The number of applications for conversions and extensions have dropped off a little this year to 37 (last year was 41). Those we see are generally of good quality, design and construction and aim to retain the character and distinctiveness of the village. New dwellings rose to 5; two of these CPC objected to but were over-ruled by the MSDC planning committee. There were nine applications in total (reduced from 12 last year) where the CPC recommendation was different to the MSDC outcome – some 20%. Members of the planning committee assess each of these now to identify any particular reasons and trends.

Whilst there have been no significant Planning Appeals this year, the Parish Council has also submitted written responses to the Planning Inspectorate on a number of cases. Further details on all the Neighbourhood Plan policies, monitoring and targets can be found on the Planning stand at the back of the hall.

Just a reminder that there is a ten-minute item at the beginning of each planning committee agenda for anyone in the parish to raise any planning related issues. See website for details.

Roads and Traffic Committee – Cllr Mercer

Highways are always a source of public concern which generates the majority of comments to the Parish Council. We take those 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.

Last year I reported that we were working with West Sussex Highways to provide a scheme to improve pedestrian safety in London Lane. The scheme has now been approved and the plans are on display for you to see. In order to minimise disruption work will be carried out during the school summer holidays commencing on 22nd July and will take five to six weeks to complete. There will be a road closure in place, details of which will be advertised by West Sussex Highways nearer the time. The work involves widening the pavement from Glebe

Road down to the Chatfield Road junction, formalising of the lay-bys and cutting back some of the vegetation.

The portable Speed Indicator Device (SID), which records the number of vehicles, type and speed is now in its second year, and is still being moved around the village. The data it provides will help us in considering future safety improvements. We have also installed a second permanent SID at Whitemans Green to try to encourage traffic to slow down.

Our community speed watch group is still doing a great job. Any vehicles recorded breaking the speed limit will be reported to the police for action.

We are always looking to recruit more volunteers if you can spare an hour or two per month and would be interested in joining please contact our clerk Sam Heynes or Colin Mercer our speed watch coordinator.

Community Buildings Committee – Cllr King

The Village Hall

Initial decoration and refurbishment projects have been completed though there are others we may consider. The Council is considering the annual costs and intends discussing the future of the hall in depth during the forthcoming term of office. The Pre-School continue to use it during term time, and we have regular enquiries from other potential hirers. The vandalism earlier in the year was distressing and costly for all involved and we now have CCTV in place which we hope will deter any repetition of this.

The Queen's Hall

The major external redecoration and new hall floor undertaken a couple of years ago has meant that only general maintenance has been needed recently. However, as with any old building, there are constant problems with the fabric and regular essential maintenance projects.

The garden has been a major focus this year and we now have a delightful gazebo and outdoor chairs and are able to offer outdoor wedding ceremonies as part of our marriage licence. This has proved a very popular option with couples planning their wedding ceremonies at the hall. You will find some lovely photographs from recent weddings in the hall on our website.

The office staff are very busy dealing with potential hirers and a new booking system has just been established.

Environment Committee – Cllr Dormer

The Environment and Wellbeing Committee had a successful and busy year. In 2017 the fees for a plot at both our allotment sites and our rules and guidelines were reviewed, as changes were needed as many plots had been abandoned and generally unkempt. In, 2018, thanks to the hard work of our Deputy Parish Clerk, Caroline, the allotment sites are now better managed, and each allotment site has a representative. There is general interest from possible new tenants, although there is less than a handful of allotments to rent out.

Cuckfield Parish Council is responsible for the Cemetery, Churchyard and Horsefield Green. A container, which will be painted in green in due course, has been placed on the Green to store maintenance equipment. Over the last two years there has been a change in our

groundsmen. Mowing and general maintenance is now undertaken by Alex and Matthew, who are constantly on the go ensuring all areas are well maintained along with balancing biodiversity, allowing crescents of wildflowers to grow.

In 2017 the Committee discovered an area of the cemetery held around 500 unmarked babies' graves. Committee members felt a memorial, or a commemorative sculpture was needed in recognition of the unmarked graves. Councillors Marie, Andrea and Fran set up a working group to commission a local sculptor to produce a galvanised steel feather bench. It was recently installed in the cemetery near to the unmarked babies' graves. An arts grant was obtained from Mid Sussex District Council for the sum of £3000 to cover all the costs. Later during the year there will be a small service followed by tea and cake. This will take place once the inscription plate has been completed and installed opposite the bench.

The Committee last year organised a couple of events, one of them being a litter pick during the summer. Unfortunately, the weather had other ideas and it was like a monsoon! However, some brave people still came out to help.

The Christmas Street Festival drew great crowds for this seasonal event and after three months of planning, it was a great opportunity for families to meet up and meet others who live in the village. An article will be placed in Cuckfield Life with contact details for anyone interested in the Festival.

Finance and General Purposes Committee – Cllr Laing

Finance information for 2018-19 is listed below. We were underspent in several areas. The funds for these items have been transferred to Reserves. We have several large items of expenditure forecast, including resurfacing pathways throughout the cemetery, traffic calming on London Lane, and the remainder of the 10-year fund to maintain Horsefield Green.

| Finance Summary 2018-19 | Budget | Actual Net | Balance |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Roads & Traffic | - | - | - |
| Income | £17,600.00 | £17,463.39 | -£136.61 |
| Expenditure | £16,768.10 | £9,525.50 | £7,242.60 |
| Planning | - | - | - |
| Income | £5,000.00 | £5,000.00 | £0.00 |
| Expenditure | £5,000.00 | £0.00 | £5,000.00 |
| F&GP | - | - | - |
| Income | £101,979.22 | £96,333.22 | -£5,646.00 |
| Expenditure | £102,027.22 | £97,762.20 | £4,265.02 |
| Environment & Wellbeing | - | - | - |
| Income | £113,282.00 | £144,293.81 | £31,011.81 |
| Expenditure | £113,782.00 | £90,665.62 | £23,116.38 |
| Queen's Hall | - | - | - |
| Income | £58,050.00 | £55,166.19 | -£2,883.81 |
| Expenditure | £58,050.00 | £51,100.61 | £6,949.39 |
| Cuckfield Village Hall | - | - | - |
| Income | £23,600.00 | £26,859.04 | £3,259.04 |
| Expenditure | £22,940.00 | £14,965.24 | £7,974.76 |
| Estates | - | - | - |
| Income | £2,500.00 | £2,500.00 | £0.00 |
| Expenditure | £2,750.00 | £17,780.51 | -£15,030.51 |
| | Budget | Actual Net | Balance |
| Total Income | £322,011.22 | £347,615.65 | £25,604.43 |
| Total Expenditure | £321,317.32 | £281,799.68 | £39,517.64 |
| Net Balance | £693.90 | £65,815.97 | - |

| Reserve Movements | Current Value 2018-19 |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Traffic Calming (London Lane) | £20,925.11 |
| Grants | £435.81 |
| Horsefield Green Landscape & Pond | £28,858.75 |
| Horsefield Green 10 Year Fund | £104,375.83 |
| Allotment Deposits | £3,000.00 |
| Council Elections | £1,250.00 |
| CVH Refurbishment | £4,500.00 |
| Planning Committee Reserves | £3,795.00 |
| Cemetery Pathways | £34,161.00 |
| South Street Railings | £1,500.00 |
| Allotment Maintenance | £444.00 |
| Stage Curtains | £2,300.00 |
| CCTV | £1,000.00 |
| Current Reserves Total | £206,545.50 |

Business Planning

During the next few weeks, the newly elected Councillors will develop a business plan for the coming four-year term.

If you have any issues or concerns that you would like to be considered or included in the Business Plan, please contact Sam or Caroline in the Parish Council office.

Best Wishes,
Paul Mantripp
Chairman, 2018-19
Cuckfield Parish Council

23 May 2019