

Steyping Parish Council

Chairman's Report for 2014 / 15

Chairman's introduction

I would like to welcome you to the Steyping Parish Council, Annual Parish Meeting for 2014 / 15. We are 15 Councillors, representing 4,630 members of the electorate. Councillors are volunteers, committed to achieving the best that they can for parishioners. We have achieved much in the last four years, on your behalf, and have been pleased to do so. A summary is provided below.

Full Council

At the beginning of the new municipal year, Steyping Parish Council invited Wiston, Ashurst and Bramber to cluster together and draft a Neighbourhood Plan. This is a strategic, statutory document that will allow local councils to manage development within their area and ensure that the greatest benefit is obtained from any development that does occur. The plan will focus on planning and land use, business and economy, transport and community facilities, as well as the protection of the environment, local heritage and assets within the community. The key to a successful plan, is public participation and engagement. To this end, a public meeting was held in November and volunteers came forward to join Focus Groups. Steering Group members are grateful to residents who took time to complete a recent survey to residents. We had an excellent return rate. Responses have been analysed with the help of Action in Rural Sussex. Information yielded will be added to a State of the Parish Report that will be used as a reference when drafting policies to be included in the final plan. A draft plan will be submitted to the Independent Examiner in due course, with a public referendum to follow. Councillors would like to thank those who have given their time to join Focus Groups and would urge any additional members of the public, who wish to take part in the process, to contact the Parish Clerk. Information on progress to date is available on the Steyping, Wiston, Ashurst & Bramber (SWAB) Neighbourhood Plan website - www.swabneighbourhoodplan.org

During the later part of the year, we said goodbye to our Clerk Sue Booth. Sue gave many years professional service and guidance to previous councils – we miss her. That said, we now have an excellent new clerk in Rebecca Luckin. Rebecca has thrown herself into the challenge and stamped her own style on the role. Rebecca is also doing sterling work with the Neighbourhood Plan team led by Nick Mills and we look forward to working with her for many years to come.

In November, this Council agreed not to continue to seek rectification of Village Green status on the upper half of the Memorial Playing Field. Due to a change of advice from HDC, we had to withdraw our planning application for the skate park project.

SAYS is doing good work with our young people and I would like to thank our Youth Worker, Emma, for all her efforts. We have not completed a full financial year yet, although SAYS has been operating since June in 2013.

Our first full financial year finishes at the end of March and following a trustee and management meeting last Wednesday, we are hoping to have an initial set of financial results on our website shortly.

Finance & Community Committee

In the financial year 2014 / 15, Steyning Parish Council received a 22% reduction in the amount of Council Tax Benefit Grant from HDC. Despite the shortfall, Councillors have managed funds well and remained within budget. There has been a further 30% reduction in the grant for the year 2015 / 16, but the chairs of the committees worked hard to ensure that there was no increase in the precept for the coming year. This will be challenging and to this end, all committees will have to monitor and review spending very closely indeed in the next financial year.

The council has been and, continues to be, underfunded and we are well below the recommended 50% of the precept in reserves. The task in the next few years is for all committees and councillors to be creative to find ways in which the council can build up its reserves. One way which has been hugely successful, is the community cinema which will bring in an additional £4-6,000 in income. This will go a long way to help the Steyning Centre, which is our major asset, to become profitable.

Over the last four years there have been many financial challenges that had to be faced including litigation costs over the proposed skate-park, the taking over of the Youth Service and, more recently the Neighbourhood Plan. The committee has overhauled most of its procedures and protocols, financial regulations, standing orders, risk assessments, ICO publication scheme, communications protocol and, has prepared a draft business plan to take us forward over the next five years. In addition it has managed the new legislation regarding filming/recording of council/committee meetings and, is beginning to put more information on the website, although this will take some time. A consolidated budget for next year will shortly go up on the website.

The next council will be in better shape than ever before to carry on its business.

The committee continued to give donations to support local groups such as Steyning in Bloom, The Royal British Legion and the Christmas Tree lights.

I would like to thank all my committee members for their hard work over the last few years and Rebecca who has so ably stepped into the role as Responsible Financial Officer.

The Clerk and councillors will continue to ensure that best value for money is always achieved and that levels of service are maintained.

Cllr Tim Lloyd

Parish Council Vice-Chair and Chair of Finance & Community Committee

Planning Committee

I would like to begin my report by thanking my fellow Committee members for their continuing work and support during the past year. As statutory consultees in the planning process, we are sent planning applications relating to the Steyning Parish by Horsham District Council, which we consider at our twice-monthly meetings, after individually having viewed the plans and the location. Occasionally, we arrange on-site meetings to view and discuss complex applications. Sometimes, residents obtain pre-planning advice from Horsham District Council or the Parish Council before plans are drawn up.

Over the past year, there have been a steady number of residential applications, mostly for extensions to residential properties and arboricultural requests, but we have not had applications for large developments, such as the application in the previous year for the redevelopment of Briton's Croft in Charlton Street, which is now nearing completion.

There were a number of enforcement notices issued, mainly for properties within the Steyning conservation area for work undertaken without obtaining prior listed building consent or conservation area consent. As a result, the Committee undertook to review and update the Steyning Parish Council Policy Document for the Character Appraisal and Management of the Steyning Conservation Area in order to strengthen controls and to remind property owners, within the conservation, area of their responsibilities. It was a large undertaking and I would like to thank my fellow committee members for their considerable input in producing such a comprehensive and thorough piece of work. The draft document was completed at the end of last year and forwarded to the Strategic Planning Department at Horsham District Council for review. This has been completed and the document will now feed into the Steyning, Wiston, Ashurst and Bramber Neighbourhood Plan as an evidence-based document that may be used to develop other policies or plans within the Neighbourhood Plan. I would also like to thank Chris Tod, the curator of Steyning Museum, for also agreeing to review the document particularly the character appraisal and historical details. The document now stands as a supporting document to the Neighbourhood Plan and will be open for public review and comment as part of the process of consultation of the Neighbourhood Plan as a whole.

At district level, Horsham District Council's local planning framework underwent examination at the end of last year and the Inspector found much of the Horsham District Planning Framework acceptable but, in his view the correct level of housing need over the period of the plan had not been properly identified. The Inspector wished to see provision for at least an additional 100 houses each year, with the growth concentrated in Horsham, Billingshurst and Southwater, although there could be some development in other villages in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plans currently being produced (a total of 15,000 over 5 years within the district). HDC is now working on the revision of the plan with a view to re-submitting it in the summer.

The Airports Commission public consultation into airport expansion has recently ended, and is likely to be published in the summer. It had already concluded there is a need for one additional runway in the South East of England by 2030 and had shortlisted three options: a third runway at Heathrow, lengthening an existing runway at Heathrow or building a second runway at Gatwick. If a second runway at Gatwick is found to be the preferred option and given the go ahead, the HDC local plan will need further revision and at that point the provision of additional housing in the district will be considered.

All in all, we had another busy year, and I thank my colleagues for their commitment and we look forward to the next Council.

Cllr Mariella Alexander

Chair of Planning Committee

Playing Fields Committee

The Committee has met regularly during the year and has enabled a full programme of works to be initiated and carried out.

The annual inspection of all the play equipment took place and as a result a number of repairs were undertaken.

At this time last year we had just agreed that the children's play equipment on the Memorial playing field should be fenced to keep dogs out and Children in. The work was carried out in the early part of the summer. The fence is unobtrusive and has proved very successful.

Dog fouling is still occurring on the field, but possibly not as noticeable as previously. This is an ongoing problem which needs constant attention. The bins are emptied regularly, but there are occasions during the winter when it is impossible for the contractor to get his vehicle on the field.

Mysteriously, the dog bin at the entrance to the field disappeared during January, then just as we were going to order a new one, reappeared in a slightly different location! Thank you to HDC for taking care of this so promptly!

This brings me to the spreading of wood chips at the entrances. This has proved successful and has prevented these areas from becoming dangerously slippery.

The Community Orchard group has held a number of very successful workdays at the top of the Memorial Field, clearing back the undergrowth and removing several self-sown trees. This has freed up the area around the old fruit trees and some pruning has been carried out and hopefully, there will be some fruit for the community to enjoy this year. One new apple tree was planted in the Autumn and four more were planted in February.

The Royal British Legion maintain the Memorial Garden, which is situated in the Memorial Playing Field, to a high standard. This provides an area for peace and reflection which is greatly appreciated. Sadly the idea to have a pond on the Abbey Road open space had to be abandoned as it was not a viable or affordable project.

The individual members of the committee are each responsible for monitoring one open space. I thank them for their assistance and regular check-ups which enable us to pick up problems quickly before they get out of hand.

Thank you to all the members of the committee for their help and support this year.

Cllr Gill Ness-Collins

Chair of Playing Fields Committee

Highways & Lighting Committee

We have had recurrent problems with flooding in Dog Lane, near the junction with the Lower High Street over the last few years, which have failed to be resolved effectively. The Parish Council had the opportunity last year to bid for a grant under Operation Watershed to investigate the problem and find a permanent solution. Contractors for West Sussex County Council (WSCC) completed the works to alleviate flooding in Dog Lane in January, which so far has proved effective at keeping the water flow to a reasonable level, thus preventing the flooding at the junction of Dog Lane and the High Street.

After the very wet winter last year, Mouse Lane was awash for many weeks and a lot of rubble was swept down with the water from the footpaths and bridleways on the Downs. Following meetings with the residents, Wiston Estate, Parish and County Councillors and the WSCC highways team, we submitted a plan for a feasibility study to be undertaken, to reduce the flow of water down Mouse Lane so that it can be managed or contained, with consequent amount of rubble and silt that end up at the bottom of Mouse Lane being reduced. There is no wish to change the nature of Mouse Lane, an historic water course and unique lane, but we would like to divert some of the water that flows down off the Downs in wet weather. The consultants commissioned by WSCC to scrutinise the plan to provide a flood relief channel to divert water away from Mouse Lane, have submitted their report. WSCC highways department met on 5th March with residents of Mouse Lane, Wiston Estate and the Parish Council to discuss the report and informed us that the plan would not be feasible. However, they put forward proposals for works in three areas around Mouse Lane and suggested that the Parish Council applies for funding under Operation Watershed before 31 March, the closing date for applications. A resident of Mouse Lane may have a proposal to make, later in the meeting. The Committee is investigating lighting options for the twitten and footbridge between Goring Road and Kings Barn Villas. This unlit footpath is very well-used and we would like to provide discreet lighting at a key point where the footpath from Goring Road meets the footbridge. We have to be mindful that the whole unlit stretch of the A283 is a bat corridor and any lighting must be subdued

and cowled. There are also issues with the maintenance of any high-level lighting along this path as well as the possibility of unwelcome light spill into neighbouring properties and gardens. As a result, the Committee is considering various options, such as a single or short string of solar lights at a relatively low level, which could be prone to vandalism, a 'star' path, which is a material that absorbs UV light that is laid down on the path itself and should light the path effectively but may not provide enough light into dark corners or a new handrails with inset lighting. In order to help us select the right solution for this problem, we would appreciate any comments from regular users of the path, identifying priority areas that need to be lit and any issues that they may foresee with either option. Parish Councillors have had a meeting with Horsham District Council (HDC), who wished to discuss the implementation of car parking charges for long term parking spaces in the town. Councillors felt that the introduction of a charge would have an impact upon workers, businesses and nearby residential streets. Councillors were concerned that Newman's Gardens Car Park, which has the long-term spaces for Steyning businesses, provides for the medical centre and other services, and they would not welcome any forms of charging. Other Parish Councils are in a similar position, and it is hoped that we can work together when discussions resume with HDC.

Unfortunately, litter is a perennial problem, and Steyning has its problem areas. HDC has just introduced an Adopt-a-Street initiative. Anyone interested in looking after their street or a street nearby can volunteer and will be registered on a database of volunteers, provided with black bags, gloves and a litter picker, and will be offered training if required. Collections of full bags will be part of the normal rounds for litter bin emptying by HDC Cleansing Department, so co-ordination will be important to identify which locations are suitable for leaving full bags for collection. If only a small amount of litter is collected by a volunteer during a litter picking session, they can dispose of it in their normal green household waste bin. Anyone wishing to volunteer can obtain forms online via HDC website or from the Parish Office. These should be filled in and returned to HDC for registration. It is hoped that volunteers will provide feedback once a month to HDC. Specific clean-up days may be organised on an occasional basis. Schemes such as these help foster a sense of community and may be useful in keeping an eye on vulnerable and elderly, so please help if you can. During the autumn and winter months, the amount of dog faeces left on our pavements has been unacceptable. The Committee plans to run further campaigns, such as the one that took place last October, in order to highlight the problem and emphasise how unacceptable it is not to pick up your dog's mess from the pavements and twittens. In the meantime, I would like to thank all those who took part in the campaign and to remind dog owners and dog walkers that they have a legal duty to pick up their dog's faeces. Tied bags of dog waste can be placed in any dog waste bin or litter bin. The penalty can be up to £1,000.

As we come to the end of Winter and look forward to Spring, teams of West Sussex County Council (WSCC) highways operatives have been busy on our roads, Newham Lane, Horsham Road and Tanyard Lane, amongst others, filling potholes and patching road surfaces, as well as emptying gullies, clearing culverts and cutting back overgrown trees and shrubs. The results of the monitoring of the roads and footways for defects that all parish councillors undertake on a regular basis feed into a WSCC highways priority works list. Our county councillor, David Barling, who is also a member of the Highways and Lighting Committee, has been instrumental in ensuring a timely response to such problems on our roads and footways, and we are grateful for his perseverance on our behalf.

I would also like to thank my fellow committee members for all their support and hard work – not forgetting our remaining fellow councillors, because they are involved in monitoring programmes! In addition, thanks to the Steyning Downlands Scheme for repairing and rebuilding the footpath leading to the Upper and Lower Horseshoe paths from Newham Lane, and to Steyning in Bloom for yet another fabulous display of flowers, making the most of the additional troughs and tubs in various locations along the High Street.

Mariella Alexander
Chair

Highways and Lighting Committee

Steyning Centre Committee

The Committee has worked hard this year to ensure that the shortfall between the cost of running the Steyning Centre and the income generated by its use, is kept as low as possible. The building is now over 20 years old and repair costs are increasing. The Committee has drafted a Maintenance Programme, to allow Councillors to plan ahead and budget for major repairs and expenditure over the next five years. Councillors are very grateful to the caretaking staff, for undertaking minor repairs and maintenance and offering an excellent service to users of the Centre.

Although the Centre is always busy, Councillors were mindful that income needed to be increased and began running a community film evening in the Autumn. This has been a great success, in terms of profit, but especially in terms of offering a very sociable and affordable evening of entertainment to our residents. We will strive to continue to improve the choice of services offered.

Cllr Roger Toms

Chair of Steyning Centre Committee

In closing, there are some people I would like to thank.

Firstly, I would like to thank the councillors for their support during difficult times, especially the Chairs of the committees and my Vice Chair Tim Lloyd.

We could not undertake our duties without the assistance of Cllr David Barling (WSCC Cabinet Member for Residents' Services), Cllr George Cockman (HDC) and Cllr Sue Rogers (HDC) who work tirelessly representing the interests of parishioners throughout the year.

On behalf of all the councillors, we are most grateful to our Community Wardens, Paul and Mike, for keeping residents safe and working with our young people.

We need to thank our Clerk, Rebecca, and her team; Hazel, Clare, James, Lou and Mathew.

We should also thank our PCSO Tom Slaughter for all his efforts on our behalf and wish him well in his new role as Police Constable. We are already looking forward to hearing who his replacement will be.

Lastly I would like to thank all those residents who have supported the council in its endeavours – it is not an easy task, and on a few occasions a thankless one, nevertheless, councillors have continued to strive to do their best and so the support we have received is doubly appreciated.

Cllr Philip Bowell MBE

Chairman of Steyning Parish Council

Steyning Parish Councillors

Cllr Philip Bowell MBE – Chairman of the Council
Cllr Tim Lloyd – Vice-Chairman of the Council and Chair of Finance & Community Committee
Cllr Gill Ness-Collins – Chair of Playing Fields Committee
Cllr Mariella Alexander – Chair of Planning and Highways & Lighting Committee
Cllr Roger Toms – Chairman of the Steyning Centre Committee
Cllr Nick Muggridge – Vice-Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
Cllr Martin Toomey – Member of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
Cllr Sue Rogers – Also Horsham District Councillor
Cllr David Barling – Also WSCC Councillor and Cabinet Member of Residents' Services
Cllr Gordon Marshall
Cllr Nick Hopkinson
Cllr Ben Staines
Cllr Liz Trundle
Cllr Gill Muncey
Cllr Michael Willett

Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Rebecca Luckin
E-mail: spcclerk@btconnect.com
Website: www.steyningpc.gov.uk
Phone: 01903 812042

Deputy Clerk

Hazel Roxby
E-mail: steyningcentre@btconnect.com
Website: www.thesteyningcentre.co.uk
Phone: 01903 812042

HORSHAM DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

Cllr Sue Rogers Sue.Rogers@horsham.gov.uk
Cllr George Cockman George.Cockman@horsham.gov.uk

WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCILLOR

Cllr David Barling David.Barling@westsussex.gov.uk
WSCC Cabinet Member for Residents' Services.