

Steyning Parish Council

Chairman's Report for 2016/17

I am delighted to be able to address our Annual Parish Meeting as we come towards the end of what has been an eventful and at times challenging year. As many of you will know, our Parish Council consists of a team of 15 councilors and we conduct our activities through a committee structure. We had one vacancy during the course of the year and were delighted that Cllr Steve Pearcey joined us following a contested election in October. Steve has already proved to be a supportive, hard-working and proactive member of our council.

During this last year, we were of course saddened by the loss of our long serving colleagues Cllr Gill Ness-Collins and Cllr George Cockman. Gill served for 12 years as a member of our council, chairing the Playing Fields committee for 10 years, whilst George was a parish and district councilor for over 20 years. Both Gill and George served our community in other ways in addition to their contribution as councilors, and are sorely missed by many.

Before I talk about the activities of each of our committees in turn, I would like to say a few words about some of the services we are happy to have been able to provide again through the course of the last year.

Our Neighbourhood Wardens, Paul and Michael, continue to provide invaluable community support alongside our PCSO and our community policing team, and we are all grateful for the work they do in keeping our town safe. Wardens are not only a positive presence in the town to discourage and deal with incidents of anti-social behavior, but they work with all age groups and are a valuable source of advice on safety and security issues.

We have continued to provide an excellent community youth service through SAYS (Steyning Area Youth Service) and we are again grateful to Emma Edwards and fellow youth workers Maria and Paul, for the great work that they do. For more of an insight into the value of providing this service, I would recommend reading a copy of the recent quarterly Community Youth Work report published last month. In April this year, SAYS will be replaced by a Joint Parish Youth Committee (JPYC) which will contract directly with Horsham Matters, the supplier of the services, saving VAT.

One of the highlights of the past year was undoubtedly the Steyning Festival, which once again offered a wide and varied programme of artistic and community events for all ages. The Parish Council were delighted to be able to support the event again, and our thanks once again go to Christine Aubrey and her team of volunteers who delivered a festival of which we can be justifiably proud as a town of our size.

Turning now to the reports from our committee chairs, please note that I have precised reports at some points, but you will find full copies of each report on your chairs this evening. I would also remind all residents that these committee meetings are open to the public, and include time for members of the public to make statements or put questions to the committees. In addition, the agenda and minutes of these meetings are available through the Parish Council website.

Highways and Lighting Committee

Chair: Cllr Gill Muncey

We were pleased to have received two further Operation Watershed grants to enable further work to be carried out to the Mouse Lane drainage project. These works were completed in autumn and have diverted a proportion of the water coming off the Downs at Charlton Court towards Wiston Pond, rather than down Mouse Lane. The end of the bridleway opposite Charlton Court has been resurfaced in concrete, thanks to contributions from the Wiston Estate and the West Sussex County Council Rights of Way Team. We have worked closely with Wiston Estate throughout this project and we are grateful for their co-operation.

Thanks are due to the Wilson Memorial Trust for a grant which enabled a streetlight to be placed on the footbridge over the A283 between Goring Road and Kings Barn Villas, and a generous Lottery Grant from the Awards for All scheme enabled us to complete long awaited improvements to the public toilets in the High Street.

The low point of the year has been the difficulty in negotiating with Horsham District Council over their proposed introduction of car park charges. We argued strongly that this will adversely affect local businesses which rely on visitors from outside the town, and lead to further congestion in our narrow streets. Horsham District Council would not agree to alternative suggestions put forward by Steyning on the basis that consistency across the five market towns was of paramount importance to them. Recent events however suggest that this consistency has not been as important elsewhere. As I'm sure we all know, the parking charges will take effect from 3rd April.

Planning Committee

Chair: Cllr Nick Muggridge

The Planning Committee have had another busy year with a significant number of planning applications considered at most of our fortnightly meetings. Most applications relate to building extensions to properties, loft and garage conversions and preventative maintenance, and tree surgery; just a few applications relate to the building of new homes.

Though we take our role very seriously, it is perhaps helpful to remind residents that SPC are "consultees" in the planning process, as are residents, and that it is HDC who make all planning decisions with reference to the National Planning Policy Framework and the HDC Local Plan (Nov 2015). We are now regularly monitoring the impact of SPC input to HDC planning decisions, for our own development.

The SPC long-term project to produce our own Steyning Conservation Area Character Assessment document was completed in mid 2016 and sent to HDC for their consideration, with minor modifications after our public consultation, and incorporating a few helpful suggestions from local residents. After a somewhat frustrating delay, we have recently heard that Strategic Planning in Horsham District Council have now retained consultants to

start work on their own Conservation Area Character Assessment document taking our document and request for an Article 4 Direction for the Conservation Area as input.

We have also increased our focus on “enforcements” by HDC, where planning rules appear to have been overlooked or compromised. We now include a list of active “enforcements” and their status in our regular meeting minutes, as public information.

Steyning Centre Committee

Chair: Cllr Michael Willett

The Steyning Centre Committee have met eight times during the year, and have dealt with roof repairs, partition doors renovations, Legionella risk assessment and many other issues.

In conjunction with the Parish Clerk as the Steyning Centre Manager, we have ensured the continued efficient management of the Steyning Community Centre for the optimum enjoyment of all users.

The guiding strategy for maintenance of the building is to continue with proactive preventative work rather than retrospective repairs, though all decisions made by the Committee are, of course, subject to certain financial constraints. Nevertheless, issues with the floors, toilets, gardens, fences as well as many other day to day occurrences and Health and Safety issues have all been addressed satisfactorily through the course of the year by the Committee.

We are very thankful to all the staff, helpers, and users that keep the Centre running as successfully as it does to the actual and potential benefit of everyone.

Finance & Community Committee

Chair: Cllr Phil Bowell MBE

The 2016/17 Financial year has been another demanding year for the Finance & Communities Committee. Thanks to the hard work from all committees we have stayed within our budget and have also made savings to allow us to keep the increase in precept for the 2017/18 to a minimum. That said, we are expecting increases during next year, especially regarding the utilities we have to source, and we will continue to make use of grants that can assist us in saving our own funds.

On the subject of grant funding, each year the council does provide grant funding to support a number of charitable causes, however we have now decided to support local groups only in the future and not any national organisations or charities, in order that our funds stay in the community.

During the past 12 months we have undertaken reviews of several policies, including our Standing Orders, Code of Conduct, Financial Regulations, FOI Policy, Complaints, Dignity at

Work, Staff Discipline, Staff Grievance and Communications Protocol. Our policies are 'living documents' and as such are subject to regular review.

I would like to highlight an important public health project that we have worked on this year. Legionnaire's Disease is a serious concern and one that must be taken seriously whenever water is stored, heated and supplied to the public. With the help of specialist consultants, we have undertaken a review of our facilities, these being the Steyning Centre, Public Toilets in the High Street and the Changing Rooms in Memorial Playing Field. The pipe and storage systems have been modified to ensure we comply with public health requirements and also trained our staff internally to ensure we record, document and action any deficiencies found.

The supply of CCTV within the town is currently being evaluated with a view to updating our systems where we feel it is appropriate to do so. We will be shortly commencing a trial of a new system in conjunction with Sussex Police and a supplier. This may lead to a very advantageous purchase of a new system for the future.

Due to a change in legislation, the Joint Parishes Burial Board has now been restructured as the Joint Parishes Cemetery Committee. The Committee still consists of equal representatives of the Bramber, Steyning and Upper Beeding Parish Councils and can also vote to appoint other Community Representatives including representatives of local faith groups as JPCC members in the future. The JPCC is starting the task of purchasing additional adjacent land from the local farmer in order to ensure available plots for burials and cremations into the future.

Playing Field Committee

Chair : Cllr Tim Lloyd

This year has been another busy year in the Playing Fields Committee and my thanks to all the committee members who freely give up their time. The key item this year has been the start of the fencing in of the Rublees allotments. The Allotment Association came to the council with a proposal to fence in the Rublees allotment to prevent animals from stealing their crops and to also prevent gardening tool theft and damage to sheds. Through the hard work of the Allotment Association and a local resident, Charles Ashby, funding was found for part of the installation and the North and South ends are now complete and our thanks to Charles Ashby for his tireless work in getting the funding. Over the coming months the undergrowth will re-grow and the fencing will gradually blend into the sky-line. The committee hope to complete the remainder of the fencing later this year.

As part of the continuing re-assessment of the allotments and their use the committee have decided to issue a new contract to allotment holders starting from March 2018. This contract principally follows the NALC model and has simplified the existing one. All allotment holders will be given notice on the existing contract at the end of March this year. The committee have appointed a local tree warden, Simon Zec, and has put in place a tree management programme – some major work was done to the trees on the MPF side of the Rublees allotments in February and this programme will be on-going and will be overseen

by a working party that will also include members of the public with a vested interest in the management of our hedgerows.

The committee is looking at finding funding to replace most of the play equipment around the town, much of which is outdated and costly to maintain.

The Community Orchard group continue to go from strength to strength and have finished planting the new Orchard at the top of the MPF and have re-planted others to replace old trees that were diseased and removed. Many residents attended the apple day in October.

Cllr. Tim Lloyd – Chair of Playing Fields Committee

Neighbourhood Plan

SPC Representatives: Cllr Steve Northam & Cllr Deborah Hanson

Our Neighbourhood Plan (SWAB) is being developed jointly by representatives from Steyning, Wiston, Ashurst and Bramber. As I reported at last month's full council meeting, SWAB representatives attended a Horsham District Council Neighbourhood Planning Conference for Parishes. The key message from the conference was that HDC now recognized that as a result of legal challenges against 'made' Neighbourhood Plans, not only in the Horsham district but elsewhere; it is now no longer possible to expect plans to be prepared with only a 'light touch' from HDC.

For this reason HDC are offering greater collaboration and constructive engagement with parishes during the development of Neighbourhood Plans, including providing an informal review/comment on plans at key milestones.

A meeting with the HDC Neighbourhood Planning Officer, Norman Kwan, is currently scheduled for 5th April at which we will discuss our own plan, and in particular agree what now needs to be done to complete the pre-submission document.

We will of course hear more about Neighbourhood Planning from Barbara shortly.

Council Process

Whilst I am pleased to have shared some of the council's successes with you all this evening, it would be wrong of me to deliver an annual report without mention of some of the internal challenges we have had to deal with this year.

Members of the public who have attended some of our council or committee meetings over the past year or more may well have witnessed deeply divided opinions and sometimes excessively heated discussions. It is of course, the very nature and purpose of a body such as ours to debate issues some of which will touch upon passionately held views. There are no rules to say that council discussions must be harmonious at all times, indeed it would probably be an unhealthy sign if we were all in agreement on every topic at all times.

Nevertheless, these divisions have at times become disruptive to an unacceptable degree and it will be my intention, should I be re-elected as chair for the forthcoming year, to encourage a more robust approach towards disruptive and disrespectful behaviour within

council. It is the council's intention to continue to work in accordance with its clear guidelines (as embodied in our Standing Orders and Code of Conduct) to ensure that we operate as efficiently as possible and follow a democratic and transparent process.

Closing remarks

Finally, and in no particular order, I would like to express our thanks to a number of other people to whom we are indebted for their support during the year in helping deliver valuable services to our residents.

Our council staff, namely our Clerk Carol Stephenson, our Deputy Clerk Hazel Roxby and Administrative Assistant Tessa Eckert, as well as our caretaking staff James Hermon, Matt Foster, Gareth Pearce and Daren Pegg and Lou Weeks who has just left us.

Our District Councillors, Michael Willett and Tim Lloyd.

Our County Councillor, David Barling.

And of course, last but by no means least, my fellow members of Steyning Parish Council, and the many residents who support the council and our community, whether as individuals or through one of our active local community organisations.

Cllr Steve Northam
Chairman, Steyning Parish Council