



ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2021 –2022

Cllr Paul Berry, Chairman of the Council

As usual, I begin with an update on any changes in Councillors over the last year; Mary Wild resigned at the start of the Council's year. I would like to thank Mary for her time on the Council and welcome Phillip Day who was co-opted in July 2021. Graeme Acraman resigned early this April; again I would like to thank Graeme for his contributions.

Our Councillors, who all give of their time freely, supported by Officers, run much of the day to day affairs of the Council through our **COMMITTEES** which all meet in public and to which anyone is always welcome to attend.

Following the cessation of the regulations which allowed us to meet virtually, we recommenced physical meetings last summer. As promised to residents, we have continued to stream meetings to the internet and have introduced new microphones to enhance sound quality; I must thank Cllr Craig Gale for the considerable time and effort he has put into helping us utilise the right technology. This has meant we continue to be as accessible and transparent as possible. I would also like to thank members of the public for their patience when at times things have not worked as well as we would have liked, and to the Clerk and his team for embracing the new technology.

Members of the **PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** met on 14 occasions and a total of 163 planning applications were considered, that's 45 up on last year. The Committee did not object to 135 of these; seven of which were subsequently refused by Horsham District Council (HDC) who are the planning authority. Of this seven, three applications are currently in the appeal process.

The Committee objected or strongly objected to 22 applications; five of which were granted permission and five were refused. HDC returned a split decision on one application, taking into account comments from the Parish Council's objection to a particular aspect of the plan. Decisions on the remaining 11 applications are awaited.

It is heartening when HDC take into account the views of Councillors and members of the public but is of course frustrating when they cannot. HDC is so often restricted as to what they can and cannot allow due to the complexities of planning matters and the need to adhere to planning policy guidelines.

Committee members were pleased to welcome representatives of Dunmoore Group to 4 meetings during the year to hear about the progress of the Billingshurst Trade and Business Park (Hilland Farm). Regular updates were given in addition to attendance at

meetings and both Councillors and members of the public were able to ask questions and comment on the emerging plans.

Members of the Committee were asked to consider and recommend street names for roads within the Phase 3 Marringdean Acres development.

The Planning process was disrupted in September 2021 when Natural England (NE) contacted HDC (amongst others) setting out its concerns about the impact of new development on water abstraction and the effect this is having on protected habitats. Evidence collected by NE has shown that increasing demand for water as a result of development is leading to an observable impact on a number of rare species, with some considered to be under threat of extinction, within the Arun Valley.

Water neutrality means the delivery of new development which keeps the level of water abstraction to the same (or lower) level as existing rates. Initially, NE expected HDC to only determine applications if it was critical to do so and that any such applications would have to demonstrate water neutrality. The matter has implications for, and further delays, the production of the new HDC Local Plan.

On the subject of the Local Plan, in 2020 the Parish Council objected to all three strategic sites affecting the Parish that were being promoted. However, last year, the District Council initially earmarked further land to the east of the village as its preferred strategic site. Mindful of comments received from members of the public, Billingshurst Tennis Club and Billingshurst Sports and Recreation Association (BRSA) the Parish Council has since stated that its preference is for land to the west, as it will hopefully result in much greater net community benefit than the east, and indeed previous schemes! It can be difficult walking the incredibly fine line between objecting to largescale development but in the process trying to ensure that any development which HDC does allow, brings as many benefits to the area as possible.

Continuing the planning theme, the **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN** went to referendum on 6 May 2021 and the result on a turnout of 35.8% was 2,388 (87.83%) in favour and 331 (12.17%) against. This was then formally adopted by HDC on 23 June 2021 and is now being given due weight as a Supplementary Planning Document. HDC Planning Officers are using the Plan both when considering new planning applications and also in their appeal statements.

We have received many compliments on both the content and presentation of the Plan, so thanks again to all those past Cllrs and residents who put in so much work. As soon as HDC has put their own new Local Plan in place, we will commence a review of the Plan. As has been stated before, having a Neighbourhood Plan will not stop development. It will however help us to manage it and to make sure that as many community benefits come out of any development as possible.

The **PROPERTY** Committee, meeting bi-monthly, oversees the management of the Council's various sites and other equipment and street furniture in the Council's care. Over the past 12 months:

At Jubilee Fields:

- Works were completed to improve drainage at part of the site and more works in this vein are planned.
- We are looking at changing the barrier at the entrance to make it more user friendly.

- We have recently granted the BSRA £22,000 in CIL funds (funds resulting from local development) to help them commence with various improvements across the site.
- Sadly, work on the replacement skate park has stalled and we are continuing discussions with the chosen designer.

At Station Road Community Gardens, we have given Landlord's consent for the development of a *Men's Shed* near to the Leisure Centre.

We are grateful for all the volunteers who help look after the Gardens and Jubilee Fields and help make them remain the amazing community facilities they are.

Elsewhere:

- The Public Conveniences in Mill Lane retained their Platinum in the 2021 *Loo of the Year Awards*.
- Thanks to the *Reopening the High Street* Fund, we were able to add two more baby-change units in the public toilets; Christmas lights for the first time in the Library Car Park oak tree and a new wildlife feature on the Village Green
- The Christmas Lights were greatly improved with new features on lampposts.
- Winter hanging baskets have brightened the High Street for the first time.
- The Council is keen to try measures to help protect and encourage wildlife and to this end some grassed areas are being left unmown.
- In July 2021, the Council made the difficult decision not to allow an additional tennis court to be provided at Lower Station Road. Many views were received in favour and against the idea from members of the public and other local groups and sadly it was one of those subjects where some people were always going to be disappointed, regardless of the Council's decision.
- New, more attractive bollards are set to start appearing on Adversane Green very soon.

The **FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES** Committee continues to keep a close eye on the Council's finances. Again, I feel that the Council has maintained a good balance of maintaining current facilities in the Parish, updating others and increasing services and supporting the work of other organisations. The Clerk will say more about the Council's finances later in this report. However, I hope that when looking at the percentage rise in precept, people also look what this means in pounds and pence. The average 'Band D' property will only pay around an extra 44pence per month and I hope that with the services it provides, the facilities it offers and the way it tries its best to work on behalf of our community, you will consider that your Parish Council overall provides good value for money.

During the year, the Council increased the Litter Warden Team from 2 to 3, reflecting the ever-growing patch they keep clean and tidy.

The Council continues to fund regular youth sessions in the village, now held at the Women's Hall in partnership with Pulborough Parish Council and the long-awaited *Depot* youth facility at 83a High Street is now operational under the auspices of Sussex Clubs for Young People. The upstairs flat has been tenanted since last November, bringing the Council a regular income.

We also support other voluntary organisations in the parish by way of our **GRANTS** programme and in 2021-22 awarded the following:

Applicant	2021-22
Victim Support Sussex	75.00
West Sussex Association for the Blind / 4Sight Vision Support	300.00
St Catherine's Hospice	200.00
Kent, Surrey & Sussex Air Ambulance	£ 300.00
Billingshurst Centre	11,966.00
Billingshurst Dramatic Society	835.19
Billingshurst Street Pastors	500.00
TOTAL	14,176.19

The Council welcomes grant applications at any time of year, and there is an application form available to download on our website. We have also continued to allocate CIL funds to local good causes to help them with their projects, as per the following since last April:

Additional drainage works to Trim Trail	820.00
Prof fees relating to the above.	270.30
Investigation into failure of concrete	2,129.19
Investigation into failure of concrete	2,870.81
Perch seat at Clevelands Gardens	487.00
Install above	115.00
Wakoos - cont to replacement safety	1,000.00
Further improvements to Women's Hall	2,000.00
Grant to BSRA for various	22,931.00
	32,623.30

The Council was delighted that a mammoth 441 responses had been received following the recent public consultation on draft proposals to try to reduce and slow traffic in High Street and East Street. 76.4% supported the proposals and 23.6% were against. There were some excellent suggestions and points made, which have all be collated and sent to WSCC as highway authority in support of our request that they take forward all or part of the scheme. We are aware that traffic calming remains a priority across the parish and are trying to champion such demands where we can.

Last autumn, the Council was pleased to take on the administration for the Annual Remembrance Day Parade from the RBL. The Council is always pleased to support any community event where it can, and is currently working with other local groups to coordinate a modest program to mark HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June. The Council is leading on the lighting of a new beacon on Adversane Green which will be a lasting legacy.

The **BILLINGSHURST CENTRE COMMITTEE** continues to meet monthly to oversee the Billingshurst Centre of which the Parish Council is the Sole Managing Trustee (and meets as Trustee approximately 3 times per year.)

Daily management is left to an excellent team lead by Manager Sarah Newell; sadly we said goodbye to Denise Acraman after many years loyal service and have just appointed a successor.

Several COVID and more recently Omnicron business support funding streams were gained to help keep the Centre solvent and I am pleased to hear that bookings are now well and truly back on the up.

Work is now complete on a new garage to the rear of the Billingshurst Centre in order to house the Council's Litter Warden Team, funded by CIL monies held by the Council.

We are also taking forward significant improvement at last to the Centre, including new toilets and automatic front doors.

Our Neighbourhood Wardens – Julie and Barry continue to do sterling work in our parish. I would urge you to look at the Wardens' monthly updates which are posted on the Council's website. These highlight their activities and the wide variety of the tasks they undertake. No progress has been made on a possible CCTV system for the village but rest assured, it has not been forgotten.

The Parish Council often comments on public consultations and lobbies our District and County Councils to fulfil their duties and to make improvements within the Parish. Amongst other things, the Parish Council has commented about potholes, poor road signage and markings, flooding at Five Oaks, the Bowling Alley, New Road and Natts Lane and on the bypass path. Councillors have met with representatives from the Police and PCC and have supported our County Councillor and Weald School pupils in requesting better signage etc in Station Road by the main entrance to the school. The Council supported residents in Coneyhurst and Okehurst Lane who were requesting road safety measures from WSCC. The Council tries to support local businesses and other community groups in publicising events and services and offering advice as and when required.

Parish Councillors are local unpaid volunteers who unlike a majority of their District and County colleagues do not represent political parties. Parish Councillors can claim meagre expenses which they may incur whilst undertaking their roles (mileage for example) but most choose not to. Your Parish Councillors do not claim any allowances. On this, I would add that we are now starting the final year of the life of this Council, so I would encourage anyone who might be thinking about putting their names forward next May, to perhaps think about coming to meetings, or watching them online, so they can see what it's all about.

I would like to again thank the Council's staff for all their hard work. These include the Clerk and his team in the Parish Office, the Billingshurst Centre Manager and her team and the Council's hard working Litter Wardens.

Please consider signing up to the Council's email subscription service and following the Council's social media accounts. It also only takes a few moments each week to visit the Council's website to see if any new agendas have been added and what items are due to be discussed and decided upon. The excellent local Village Tweet publication also includes monthly updates from the Council. I know many parishioners have a real interest and passion for matters relating to Billingshurst. The Parish Council offers more ways than ever to be kept updated, as does HDC and WSCC. The Council works closely

with our District and County Councillors and has representation on a number of other local groups.

Billingshurst Parish Council at 31 March 2022

PARISH COUNCILLORS – JANUARY 2022			
CHAIRMAN Mr P M Berry	8 Nightingale Walk, Billingshurst, RH14 9TY	paul.berry@billingshurst.gov.uk	07880 507666
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Mr P Day	14 Summers Place, Stags Street, Billingshurst, RH14 9GN	phillip.day@billingshurst.gov.uk	07404 634821
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Mr C Gale	4 Groomsland Drive, Billingshurst, RH14 9HA	craig.gale@billingshurst.gov.uk	0782 6519432
Mr D K Homer	24 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst, RH14 9LA	dave.homer@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 782824
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Mr R E Margetts	47 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst, RH14 9NN	rov.margetts@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 784487
Mr D Waller	C/O Parish Office	doug.waller@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 257531
Mrs S L Wilson	37 Carpenters, Billingshurst, RH14 9RA	sarah.wilson@billingshurst.gov.uk	07990 755252

Clerk
Office Manager
Assistant Clerk
Administrative Assistant
Litter Wardens

Mr Greg Burt
Mrs Liz Berry
Miss Jo Booth
Mrs Sarah Meyer
Colin Ellis + Roland Clark

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The **Full Council** usually meets on the first Wednesday of every other month and has the following Committees/Working Parties:

Planning and Environment
Property
Finance and General Purposes
Billingshurst Centre
Working Practices
Neighbourhood Plan Working Party

meets at least monthly
meets bi-monthly
meets monthly
meets monthly
meets bi-monthly
meets as and when required.

15 Councillors
Next Parish elections May 2023.

REPORT OF THE RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER 2021-22

Points to highlight are:

For the year just ended, summarised below

1. Salaries includes paying those permanent members of the Centre's staff for ease of pension contributions, via the Council's own Payroll. These are subsequently reimbursed from the Centre.
2. The Council continues to receive CIL funds, which it is obliged to account for and report on separately and are detailed on the website.
3. Due the rapid expansion of the village in terms of new housing, the Council has responded by adding 31 hours per week to the Litter Warden Team which is responsible for keeping the village tidy. The hours of the existing two-person team were increased and were joined by an additional part time third member. A larger team enables the Council to have the flexibility to litter pick high profile sites on Sundays and Bank Holidays which has been demanded by residents. The extra cost was partly offset by taking in-house the cleaning of the public toilets in Mill Lane, for which we can provide an even more responsive cleaning regime.
4. Despite some COVID alleviation grants over the last two years, it will be some time before bookings at the Billingshurst Centre fully return to pre-2020 levels. To this end the Council continues to budget £22,000 to cover any losses, although last year only £13,000 was required.

Looking to the year just starting:

5. Overall the Council will be asking for an extra £42,030 to fund its services. This is 8.21% more than last year. Because there are more properties than last year, the overall take is spread over more payers. Therefore, the extra per typical average Band D payer, is £6.27 or 6.57%.
6. The main items affecting the budget this year are the pending transfer of a new open space at Kingslea Farm in Marringdean Road to the Council; the significant increase in the cost of providing services due to inflation, which I am sure we are all aware and a significant increase in the cost of insurance, to name but three.
7. The Council continues to undertake significant projects only where the majority if not all funds can be secured from grants and other sources.

G C Burt
05/04/2022