



**ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE YEAR
2023 –2024
Cllr Ken Peters, Chairman of the Council**

As usual, I begin with an update on any changes in Councillors over the last year; last May, 14 of the 15 vacancies on the Council were elected unopposed and Craig Gale was coopted to fill the vacancy. More recently, Deepak Mahal resigned as a Cllr, and as no election has been called, we are looking to fill the vacancy by cooption, so if anyone is interested in being considered, please contact the Clerk ASAP.

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. In addition we continue to stream meetings to the internet, which works most of the time!

In 2023 the **PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** lost two of its long-standing members, Dave Homer and Garry Commins, as they resigned as Parish Councillors. The Committee Chairman, Doug Waller, paid tribute to both in his address at the meeting held on 25 April saying thank you for the years of service they had given to the Parish Council generally and, specifically to the Planning and Environment Committee. He said that their local knowledge had been invaluable when considering planning applications. Cllr Steve Thomas also resigned from the Committee in April but, happily, remains a Parish Councillor.

Committee members were happy to welcome new Parish Councillors Faye Algar and Deepak Mahal to their first Committee meeting in May 2023. Membership currently stands at 50% of capacity with five of a maximum 10 persons. New members will be made very welcome.

The Committee met on 14 occasions in the last year – two of these meetings were extraordinary meetings to consider planning applications whose deadlines might otherwise have been missed. The need for these additional meetings has been reduced by allowing late entries to be considered provided they are received 24 hours prior to the meeting taking place. From 1 January 2024, meetings were moved from Thursday to Tuesday evenings and now start at 7.00pm along with all other meetings.

During the course of the year, the Committee considered and responded on 94 planning applications. Of these, the Committee did not object to 60 – 58 which were subsequently permitted by Horsham District Council (HDC) and the remaining two were refused. Decisions are awaited on 16 applications which raised no objection from Committee members. Of 13 objections, four were permitted, three refused, one withdrawn by the applicant and decisions awaited on five applications. One of these applications is for a single dwelling on land at Maple Road. The land in question is designated Public Open Space in the Neighbourhood Plan and has also been registered as an Asset of Community Value. The application has been referred to Planning Committee South at HDC so that District Councillors will make the decision as opposed

to a single Planning Officer using delegated authority. A decision was due in May 2023 and there is no known reason for the delay.

There has been an increase this year in the number of alleged planning breaches reported to HDC. The Planning Compliance Team issue a weekly update on new reports and a monthly statistical report on cases which have been dealt with. Alleged breaches of planning include untidy sites, parking on cycle ways, unauthorised works to trees in the Conservation Area, unauthorised stationing of caravans and operation of businesses from residential premises, amongst others.

Whilst water neutrality issues are still being resolved, HDC has now restarted the clock on the production of its new Draft Local Plan, citing the need to have a new plan in place in order to ward off speculative large applications, which can result in large developments where neither councils or communities want them.

HDC published its Draft Local Plan last December, which saw it allocate land to the East of Billingshurst. Whilst the Parish Council is opposed to any new large development in the parish, it has previously said that it would prefer land to the West, if at all.

The latest consultation (Regulation 19) commenced this January which asked the question *Is the Draft Local Plan Legal and Sound?*

An extraordinary meeting of this Council took place in February, which saw 65 residents continue to support the Council's position. The Council resolved to comment that it did not feel that the Plan was *sound* and has submitted accordingly. We hope to make further representations direct to the Plan Inspector later this year.

The **PROPERTY COMMITTEE**, meeting approximately bi-monthly, oversees the management of the Council's various sites and other equipment and street furniture in its care.

At Jubilee Fields:

- Work will start this month on the replacement skatepark; thanks to the users for their patience.
- We are closely supporting the Billingshurst Sports and Recreation Association (BSRA) to realise their ambitions to improve the facilities using existing S106 funds.
- Replacement of the Trim Trail equipment continues as the wooden components come to the end of their life.

At Station Road Community Gardens, work on the *Men's Shed* is now finished and it is open for business.

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.

We continue to keep under review areas of grass that can benefit from reduced mowing to assist biodiversity, often in response to residents' feedback, plus looking at anything else we can do differently to help with the climate change agenda.

Elsewhere:

- The public conveniences in Mill Lane is now in the Premier League of Local Authorities in the 2024 *Loo of the Year* Awards.
- The project to replace the bollards on Adversane Green is approaching its final phase.
- We have bought our very first vehicle, electric of course! This is kept in our new garage and helps our team look after our growing estate without having to rely on their own vehicles.

A lot of backroom work goes on to make sure our assets are safe for users and visitors, such as regular surveys of play equipment and trees.

Last year the village went from Silver to Silver Gilt in the South & South East in Bloom Awards, with Station Road Community Gardens retaining its previous Silver Gilt accolade.

The **FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** continues to keep a close eye on the Council's finances. 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 0.7 pence per week, bringing the total weekly contribution to just £2.17.** Given all that the Council is charged with looking after and provides, I think that represents good value.

Sadly, during the year Sussex Clubs for Young People folded, meaning that there is virtually no youth work currently being undertaken in the Parish. Simultaneously, we are also looking at how better use can be made *The Depot* at 83a High Street, preferably youth-orientated.

We also support other voluntary organisations in the parish by way of our **GRANTS** programme and in 2023-24 awarded the following:

Grants awarded by Billingshurst Parish Council	
2023-24	
Victim Support Sussex	80.00
Arun Counselling Centre	150.00
St Catherine's Hospice	400.00
West Sussex Association for the Blind / 4Sight Vision Support	440.00
Tyler's Trust	500.00
Billingshurst W.I.	600.00
Men's Shed	750.00
Choral Society	1,500.00
TOTAL	4,420.00

This list includes all grants made, incl. those using s137 LGA 1972

In addition, the Council awarded monies from its CIL fund to help groups with capital projects. See CIL update.

The Council welcomes grant applications at any time of year and an application form is available to download from our website. We have also continued to allocate Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds to infrastructure projects, many to local good causes, as per the following since last April:

Funds committed from CIL Fund 2023-24	
Drainage works at Jubilee/BSRA	4,895.00
New play area safety surfacing at Dauxwood Pre-School.	6,034.80
Replacement meeting tables BCCC.	2,354.40
CCTV consultancy Part 1	1,600.00
CCTV consultancy Part 2	3,250.00
New noticeboard on B/Centre	800.69
Replace play surfacing at Mothers Garden/Women's Hall	4,000.00
New gate at Bowling Club	750.00
	23,684.89

The Council continues to be frustrated that West Sussex County Council (WSCC) seems to refuse every bid we make to bring about traffic calming in our area. Our application to reduce the speed of traffic in upper High Street was turned down and even our own County Cllr has had no luck either. WSCC has though now agreed to release further funds to allow us to revisit our earlier package of works to slow speeds in High Street and East Street. Congratulations to the residents of Five Oaks who led a bid to get the limit reduced there from 40 to 30 which has now been implemented.

The Billingshurst Community Speedwatch Group continues to do excellent work and always needs more volunteers.

The Council seems to be getting involved in more events, which do help bring the community together:

- We continue to undertake the administration for the Annual Remembrance Day Parade working with the Royal British Legion.
- Last summer we led on the coronation of King Charles III with some superb activities here at the Centre, in Station Road Community Gardens and the lighting of the beacon on Adversane Green.
- We will be lighting the beacon again on June 6th to mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day and hope to add to the activities prior to the lighting at 9.15pm.
- Last year we held the Showcase here at the Centre, the first since 2019, showcasing all the many groups and societies in the parish. This will be repeated on the 23 March.

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 6 times per year.)

Daily management is left to an excellent team lead by Manager Sarah Newell; bookings have now returned to healthy levels. During the year the toilets were refurbished,

automatic front doors fitted and the Main Hall extended. Further improvements are planned. Once again, the Centre hosted a fantastic Christmas Fayre.

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. Their long-awaited move to a dedicated office upstairs here at the Centre is just days away.

We are also pleased to report that we are starting to move forward on the much-requested provision of CCTV in the village. A specification has been approved and tenders are being sought.

The Parish Council often comments on public consultations and lobbies our District and County Councils and other organisations to fulfil their duties and to make improvements within the Parish. We made two representations in the last year on railway matters: timetable changes and ticket office closures.

I would like to 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 Environmental Operatives.

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 magazine 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 do 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 2024

Clerk

Office Manager

Assistant Clerk

Administrative Assistant

Environmental Operatives

Mr Greg Burt

Mrs Liz Berry

Miss Jo Booth

Mrs Sarah Meyer

Colin Ellis, John Bicknell, 1 Vacancy.

**PARISH COUNCILLORS (as at
6 March 2024)**

CHAIRMAN Mr K Peters	C/O Parish Office	ken.peters@billingshurst.gov.uk	07511 170205
VICE-CHAIRMAN Mr D Waller	C/O Parish Office	douglas.waller@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 257531
Ms F Algar	C/O Parish Office	faye.algar@billingshurst.gov.uk	07800 729820
Mrs E Benger	6 The Wadeys, Billingshurst, RH14 9UD	edna.benger@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 783684
Mrs C Beresford Pratt	C/O Parish Office	caroline.beresfordpratt@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 782767
Mr P M Berry	8 Nightingale Walk, Billingshurst, RH14 9TY	paul.berry@billingshurst.gov.uk	07880 507666
Mr P Day	C/O Parish Office	phillip.day@billingshurst.gov.uk	07404 634821
Mrs S Duck	189 Berrall Way, Billingshurst, RH14 9PQ	sandy.duck@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 786146
Mr C Gale	Billingshurst Family Church, Billingshurst Centre, Roman Way, Billingshurst, RH14 9QW	craig.gale@billingshurst.gov.uk	0782 6519432
Mr T R Leonard	56 Broomfield Drive, Billingshurst, RH14 9TN	trevor.leonard@billingshurst.gov.uk	0777 2208590
Mr J Marchant	103 High St, Billingshurst, RH14 9QX	james.marchant@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 785041
Mr R E Margetts	47 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst, RH14 9NN	rov.margetts@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 784487
Mr S Thomas	C/O Parish Office	steve.thomas@billingshurst.gov.uk	07920 260558
Mrs S L Wilson	37 Carpenters, Billingshurst, RH14 9RA	sarah.wilson@billingshurst.gov.uk	07990 755252

14 Councillors + 1 vacancy
Next parish elections May 2027.

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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	meets at least monthly
Property	meets bi-monthly
Finance and General Purposes	meets monthly
Billingshurst Centre	meets monthly
Working Practices	meets quarterly
Neighbourhood Plan Working Party	meets as and when required.

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Next parish elections May 2027.

**REPORT OF THE RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER
2023-24**

Points to highlight are:

For the year coming to an end.....

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 by 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. Bank interest is up significantly, helped by higher interest rates and the interest on the commuted sum of £420,127 which is currently on a series of short term NatWest Treasury Reserve deposits.
4. There were significant underspends on youth services provision following the demise of SCYP, and the continued vacancy in the Environmental Operatives Team.

Looking to the year ahead.....

5. Overall, the Council will be asking for an extra £22,424 to fund its services. This is 4.57% more than last year. Once again, because there are more properties than last year, the overall take is spread over more payers, thus the extra per typical average Band D payer, is £3.64 or 2.7%.
6. The Council continues to undertake significant projects only where the majority, if not all, funds can be secured from grants and other sources. For example, the new electric vehicle has been funded from the commuted sum.

G C Burt
05/03/2023