



ANNUAL REPORT

FOR THE YEAR 2019 –2020

Cllr Paul Berry, Chairman of the Council

This time last year, I reported that with the Council due to retire in May, many Councillors had decided to restand; these were elected unopposed and were joined by several new faces. We were left with 1 vacancy which we filled by the cooption of Sue Rogers. At the time of writing, we have recently had the resignation of Sue Kingston so there is currently one vacancy which, as no by-election was called, can be filled by cooption once the Council is in the position to meet again (more on this later). I would like to thank Sue for her time and hard work whilst a member of the Council and wish her well for the future. In January, we were very saddened to hear that former Councillor Paul Leaney had passed away. Paul had been a Parish Councillor for a number of years and was a hardworking, well known and popular member of our community and will be sorely missed.

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.

At the time of writing, due to the Coronavirus crisis, the Council has suspended all of its Committees, including the **Planning and Environment Committee**.

Planning applications are, however, still coming through from Horsham District Council (HDC) and planning decisions continue to be made by them. Before the suspension of meetings, the Council resolved that officers submit comments on planning applications to HDC after seeking views from the Chairman of Committee.

During the year, the Committee met on 21 occasions to consider 131 planning applications. The Committee did not object to 91 of these; 6 were subsequently refused by HDC. One is now the subject of an ongoing appeal.

The Committee objected or strongly objected to 15 applications, 7 of which were granted permission. Four applications were refused, two of which are now the subject of appeals.

Decisions are awaited on 14 applications. This number includes two applications by HDC – one for development on land at Roman Way and the other for a car park to the rear of the High Street.

From 1 November 2019, HDC introduced paperless planning. Sadly, this means that residents are no longer able to visit the Billingshurst Centre in order to view paper

plans. Instead they must visit HDC offices in person or access the plans online – either at home or via the Public Library.

HDC is in the process of reviewing its Local Plan, a very important planning document which sets out the policies that future development proposals must conform to and which includes various strategic development sites for large-scale housing. Despite repeated requests by Parish Councils throughout the District for an extension of the comments deadline because of the Coronavirus pandemic, no extension was permitted and HDC continued with the consultation during February and March.

The Planning and Environment Committee established a Local Plan Review Working Party consisting of 5 Councillors, the Clerk to the Council and the Assistant Clerk, in order to press on and formulate the Parish Council's response to the review. A professional Planning Consultant was engaged to look specifically at the housing allocation part of the draft Local Plan. The Working Party met on 4 occasions during March and members also attended a joint meeting with West Chilmington and Pulborough Parish Councillors and officers as there was a shared interest in the proposed site at Adversane.

In conjunction with the Planning Consultant, the draft Parish Council response to the consultation was considered at a meeting of full Council and was approved for submission. In summary, we have objected to all three strategic sites proposed for our immediate area, and asked HDC to work with us on identifying several smaller sites which would have less cumulative impact. The Council's full response to the Local Plan Review can be viewed on its website.

Continuing the planning theme, our **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN WORKING PARTY**, upon which sit representatives of several partner organisations, has finally submitted a draft plan to HDC. This followed further consultation in the latter part of 2019. Ordinarily, HDC would now consult on the plan, we would appoint an Inspector and it would go to a local referendum, but as with everything else at the moment, this is subject to delay or change.

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:

- Work continues behind the scenes to look at the feasibility of putting the site on mains sewerage. This may assist with the possible provision of public toilets in the future and any plan to upgrade the pavilion.
- A public consultation on designs for a bigger and better skate park will go live once current restrictions are lifted.
- We are investigating drainage issues at the site which are damaging footpaths.

At Station Road Gardens:

- The Gardens retained its silver gilt award in the South & South East in Bloom competition, joining the village which received silver. The hard work of the Friends of Station Road Gardens in complementing Council contractors and staff continues to be valued.

At Lower Station Road Recreation Ground:

- Work finally started on the improvements to the main gateway to the site. This was an expensive and complex project which had many twists and turns. It was not just a case of laying some new tarmac. Electrical supplies needed careful consideration and it was vital that adequate drainage was included in the project, particularly due to the proximity of neighbouring properties. Trying to accommodate the requirements of groups resident at the site and a very wet winter hampered the commencement. Work is largely complete but Coronavirus has now halted it being totally finished. Much of the cost of the project were funded by planning gain money.

Elsewhere:

- The Public Conveniences in Mill Lane were awarded Platinum in the 2019 *Loo of the Year* Awards and we are working towards achieving Diamond this year.
- A new planting contract awarded last summer saw more striking seasonal planting in our sponsored High Street planters and hanging baskets as well as the main bed on the Village Green
- New play equipment at Manor Fields was finally installed last summer to which we have added a bench following requests from those waiting for their children. A well-supported children's show marked the completion.
- We hosted our second *Billingshurst in Bloom* awards evening last September. We do hope that residents will support this year's competition.
- We are very grateful to the many residents who have contacted us to suggest locations for new trees on highways land. These are now being evaluated by WSCC. Up to 33 trees are being funded by the Parish Council from the portion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) it receives.

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, in the process being sensible regarding any increases in precept.

Below this report the Clerk reports on the finances from this year and looks ahead to next.

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 last autumn, following a speedy public consultation, decided to purchase 83a High Street. The ground floor will host youth activities and related services and the first floor will be let as a self-contained flat, to help meet the costs of servicing the loan. A planning application is currently with HDC for the necessary works and prices are being sought for the physical separation of the two floors.

We also support other voluntary organisations in the parish by way of our **GRANTS** programme and in 2019-20 awarded the following:

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| Victim Support Sussex* | 75.00 |
| West Sussex Association for the Blind / 4Sight Vision Support* | 250.00 |
| St Catherine's Hospice* | 200.00 |
| Billingshurst Centre | 2000.00 |
| Luncheon Club* | 600.00 |
| Billingshurst Community Transport | 2000.00 |
| Mary How Trust* | 200.00 |
| St Mary's Church - lawnmower | 750.00 |
| Billingshurst W.I.* | 120.00 |
| | 6,195.00 |

(Those marked with an * were made using S137 LGA 1972)

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 started to allocate CIL funds to local good causes to help them with their projects and during the year made the following awards.

| | |
|---|------------------|
| New kitchen at Women's Hall | 13,000.00 |
| Cont. to new play area at Dauxwood Pre-School | 5,000.00 |
| | 18,000.00 |

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 who replaced Norma Sullivan who sadly left last summer. Satisfaction amongst hirers remains high. Due to the loss of a regular hirer last in 2018-19 the Centre did not cover its costs and we had hoped to reverse that position this year due to some savings and new hirers, but the recent lockdown has made that unlikely.

The Centre held its very own Christmas Fair last December and for a first effort it was a resounding success. We hope to make this an annual event.

Meanwhile Planning Consent was obtained, and tenders are now being sought to construct a new garage to the rear of the Billingshurst Centre in order to house the Council's Litter Warden Team.

The Parish Council continues to try its best to communicate with its residents using different media such as Facebook, Twitter and a new website went live during the year. We continue to have a double-page centre spread in the monthly Village Tweet magazine. This year we also introduced an email subscription service. Due to the

current lockdown, we are not currently holding meetings, but at our last meeting on the 23 March, we did broadcast the meeting for those who were self-isolating. This was a good experiment and perhaps something we will look to do again in the future, especially if the current lockdown measures are extended and we do have to look at holding virtual meetings.

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

Sadly we were unable to repeat the successful 2019 Billingshurst Showcase here at the Centre in March due to the lockdown. If we are unable to reschedule for this year, then this will almost certainly be back in 2021.

Our Neighbourhood Wardens 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 vast variety of the tasks they undertake.

In the past year, the Council has looked into CCTV for the area. This is a long-term project which has been visited before and has largely not proceeded due to the high cost involved. However, technology is always changing and new options emerge for providing CCTV. The fact that more funds are coming into the parish through development means that if CCTV was provided, any burden on local taxpayers would be much less than it may have previously been in the past. It would not be cost effective or indeed necessary to cover the whole of the parish with CCTV, however there are certainly some areas which do sometimes suffer from crime and anti-social behaviour where CCTV could prove beneficial.

With the huge increase in development and the impact this has had, and will increasingly have on the area's road network, traffic calming is another subject that the Council has been looking into. It is important that when the new spine road opens that other areas within the village do not become 'rat runs'. The Council has started to investigate with West Sussex County Council and traffic calming experts how our roads can not only continue to cope with increased traffic flow but how traffic speeds can be reduced and the area can be made more user friendly and of course safer for pedestrians and cyclists. There is no quick fix regarding this and as a Parish Council we are reliant on the assistance of our principal authorities regarding the planning and funding of such things. Of course, the whole subject of traffic calming can be very divisive with some people being passionately in favour of measures such as speed humps but many people being just as passionately against! On the subject of speeding vehicles in our parish, it is very pleasing to see that Billingshurst's Community Speedwatch scheme has really become much more active in the past year, I would like to thank all the Speedwatch volunteers for all the hard work they do to help keep our roads safer.

Drafting an Annual Report is a real team effort pulling all the information together about the Council's committees and finances etc. Reports usually summarise the Council's key activities throughout the year but I also wanted to mention some of the day-to-day things which take up much of the time of Councillors and the Council's staff. The Council is responsible for 4 buildings in the parish and large amount of land. A great deal of time is spent making sure that the Council's assets are maintained, that repairs are undertaken when needed and trying to improve facilities for a changing and growing community. Sadly, this can sometimes be made all the more difficult, frustrating and time consuming when areas suffer from vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

A lot of the Parish Office staff time is taken up helping members of the public with queries and encouraging our principal authorities to fulfil their duties and responsibilities within the parish. For many years ‘the council’ is often talked about and sometimes criticised in the process. However, the area is covered by 3 local authorities. As such, Parish, District and County Councils have very varied duties and responsibilities and there are many things they can individually do but equally many things they cannot. For example, your Parish Council cannot approve or refuse planning applications, it is not responsible for the road network nor for policing, parking enforcement or rubbish collections.

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.

The Coronavirus crisis has been referred to throughout this report. Although it has impacted the Council and the way it operates meaning that many things have been put on hold, this is nothing compared to how it has impacted our parishioners, particularly those who succumbed to the virus or who had loved ones who were affected, my heart goes out to all those people. I would like to pay tribute to all the people who have helped our community during the crisis. Those in healthcare have done an amazing job, these include pharmacy and surgery staff, carers and NHS staff. Our post men and women, shop workers and delivery drivers have also continued to offer an exceptional service to us during the crisis as have teachers and playgroup staff. We are also grateful to the Council’s Litter Wardens for their continued hard work during the crisis.

We should all be hugely proud of how quickly local organisations mobilised at the start of the crisis in setting up the Coronavirus Support Group. Many volunteers came forward to help vulnerable people with shopping, obtaining medication and offering a listening ear and reassuring presence at the end of the phone.

Thank you to all the Councillors in the past year for all they have done, particularly perhaps those who head up committees and specific projects. Thanks to our Clerk Greg and his team in the Parish Office for continuing to run the Council’s affairs with great professionalism, care and diligence sometimes in difficult and challenging circumstances. Thank you to all the team at the Billingshurst Centre, led brilliantly by Sarah and of course to our excellent Litter Wardens, Colin and Roland, whose jobs extend far beyond just collecting litter. Finally thank you to the members of the public who attend meetings and respond to consultations. It is easier than ever for the community to find out what the Parish Council is involved in and for them to have a say. Please do visit the Council’s website and look for meeting agendas so you know what is coming up, follow the Council on Twitter or Facebook or sign up to its email subscription service.

Billingshurst Parish Council at 31 March 2020

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

Council Offices
Billingshurst Centre
Roman Way
Billingshurst
West Sussex
RH14 9QW

Tel 01403 78255
Email council@billingshurst.gov.uk
Website: www.billingshurst.gov.uk
Facebook: [@BillingshurstParishCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/BillingshurstParishCouncil)
Twitter: [@BillingshurstPC](https://twitter.com/BillingshurstPC)

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 bi-monthly |
| Neighbourhood Plan Working Party | meets as and when required. |

14 Councillors

1 vacancy

Next Parish elections May 2023.

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--------------|
| CHAIRMAN Mr P M Berry | 8 Nightingale Walk, Billingshurst, RH14 9TY | 07880 507666 |
| VICE-CHAIRMAN Mr K Peters | 31 Saddlers Close, Billingshurst, RH14 9GL | 07874 855387 |
| Mr G Acraman | 11 Kenilworth Place, Billingshurst, RH14 9UB | 01403 780940 |
| Mr B L Barnes | 13 Carpenters Billingshurst, RH14 9RA | 01403 780660 |
| Mrs E Bengier | 6 The Wadeys Billingshurst, RH14 9UD | 01403 783684 |
| Mr G C Commins | 130 Forge Way, Billingshurst, RH14 9LN | 01403 780527 |
| Mrs S Duck | 189 Berrall Way Billingshurst, RH14 9PQ | 01403 786146 |
| Mr A C Grant | Tanners Cottage Lordings Road Adversane RH14 9JE | 01403 784165 |
| Mr D K Homer | 24 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst, RH14 9LA | 01403 782824 |
| Mr R E Margetts | 47 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst, RH14 9NN | 01403 784487 |
| Mr J Perks | 6 Hawthorn Way Billingshurst, RH14 9GX | 0786 3336999 |
| Miss S Rogers | 4 Holders Close Billingshurst, RH14 9GL | 01403 785466 |
| Mrs M Wild | 66 Honeysuckle Drive Billingshurst, RH14 9UL | 01403 786095 |
| Mrs S L Wilson | 37 Carpenters, Billingshurst, RH14 9RA | 07990 755252 |

REPORT OF THE RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER 2019-20

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 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds, which it is obliged to account for and report on separately.
3. The Council has continued to earmark reserves for up and coming projects, to address earlier concerns from the Internal Auditor that the Council had excessive unspecified reserves for a Council of its size. The Internal Auditor is now satisfied with the level of reserves the Council is holding.

Looking to the year just started:

4. The Council as usual looks to a balanced budget, where income covers revenue expenditure. It has therefore agreed a revenue expenditure budget of £423,387 and has asked for £373,325 from Council Tax Payers.
5. This equates to a rise of £5.28 per annum for an average Band D property = 8 pence extra per week.
6. This will be the first year that the Council will be meeting the full cost of the Neighbourhood Wardens and servicing the loan to purchase 83a High St, both decisions being overwhelmingly supported by residents when asked. One advantage of the considerable house-building is that the total required is spread over more and more properties.
7. There were also increases in the cost of providing youth sessions, and the Council had been advised to allow for a pay award of up to 3%, still being negotiated.
8. 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
15/06/2020

| | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Balances b/f | 373,249.00 | 446,285.00 | 434,393.00 | 409,175.00 |
| Income | | | | |
| Precept | 280,790.00 | 258,408.00 | 335,932.00 | 352,463.00 |
| All other receipts | 77,420.00 | 121,328.00 | 125,768.00 | 545,826.00 |
| Expenditure | | | | |
| Staff costs | 129,919.00 | 144,163.00 | 197,735.00 | 184,440.00 |
| Loan repayments | 20,257.00 | 20,257.00 | 20,257.00 | 20,257.00 |
| All other expenditure | 134,998.00 | 226,209.00 | 269,342.00 | 691,514.00 |
| Balances c/f | 446,285.00 | 435,392.00 | 409,175.00 | 411,253.00 |
| Total value of cash & short term investments | 434,825.00 | 409,033.00 | 387,437.00 | 269,275.00 |
| Total fixed assets + long term investments + assets | 1,446,992.00 | 1,452,972.00 | 1,461,720.00 | 1,778,620.00 |
| Total borrowings | 161,417.00 | 149,783.00 | 137,506.00 | 458,553.00 |