



# ANNUAL REPORT

FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR

01 April 2013 – 31 March 2014

Mr Paul Berry  
Chairman of  
Billingshurst Parish Council

## **Chairman's Report**

The Parish Council has had a long relationship with the Billingshurst Community and Conference Centre (the Centre), formerly the Billingshurst Village Hall. When I first joined the Council in 2003, it was clear that the relationship often created challenges. The rules governing local authorities are complex enough at times, as are the rules governing charities so adding the two together further increases any difficulties. There has, at times, for example been confusion as to if individual Councillors were Trustees of the charity, or the Council as a corporate body. Advice received over the years has at times been contradictory and difficult to obtain. In 2011, the Council agreed a route for the Centre that made things much clearer in my view, confirming that it was Billingshurst Parish Council that is the Trustee as a corporate body. Talking to the Clerk Beverley Bell, advice seems to have been clearer in recent years and more guidance has been forthcoming.

The past year has been a seminal year for the Centre. In January of 2013, in the midst of a recession that was causing difficulties for so many, the financial situation was causing concern and the Centre was possibly heading for a considerable loss. At this time, the Parish Council agreed to set aside a revenue grant to the Centre of £10,000 to be called upon in increments of £2,500 if needed. During the past year some difficult decisions have needed making and lots of hard work has been put in to turning the Centre around; certainly I know that I have had some sleepless nights as a result and I am sure the same applies to many of my Councillor colleagues and Parish Council and Centre staff alike! The result of all this is that in March 2014, the Centre was in profit by £25,441 and only £2,500 was used of the £10,000 made available by the Parish Council.

We must not of course rest on our laurels and I am sure that the Parish Council being the Trustee of the Centre will still throw up challenges to overcome in the future. Personally, my hope is that this turn around continues through the next year and that money can be invested back in to the Centre and maybe some of the jobs that have been put off due to lack of funds can be commenced at last.

Although Councillors have had some demanding debates and had to make some difficult decisions, they are not at the 'coal face' so to speak on a daily basis so special thanks must go to the Council and Centre staff who have helped improve things so dramatically in the past year, particularly perhaps the Centre Supervisor, Norma Sullivan and Parish Clerk, Beverley Bell. I would also like to thank Hilary Morris who left the Centre in February after over 10 years of dedicated service, who also helped hugely to improve matters at the Centre in the past year or so prior to her retirement. Final thanks must go of course to the users of the Centre for their continued support and at times in the past year, their patience.

No one can have failed to notice the impact the weather has had on our parish this winter. The wet and windy conditions have brought new challenges for this Council and trees seem to be uppermost in everyone's minds. Despite our best planning, nature always wins. The weather impacted on the progress of the new allotments in Manor Fields with the ground being too water logged to bring in the machinery to create the basic allotments. Now spring is here work is progressing quickly and we will soon see the fruits of this labour.

It is lovely to see the new Gardens taking shape at Station Road and see all generations of our community enjoying the facilities there.

This area of our parish is changing and we were very sorry to see the signal box removed to make way for widening of the railway crossing, but are grateful that the signal box has been re-homed at Amberley Museum. We thank our County Councillor Amanda Jupp for her efforts to ensure this piece of the village's history is preserved in perpetuity for generations to come.

The Council successfully nominated the Mill Way Public Conveniences, Library Car Park, Billingshurst Library and Women's Hall as assets of community value. Should any of these assets become available for sale in the future, the Council will receive early notification should it wish to make a bid for their purchase.

This year we welcomed Dan Jenkins, our Community Youth Worker shared with Pulborough Parish Council, and we are delighted to confirm that Dan will be with us for a further year. He is making links with community organisations in the parish and hopes to start a new Youth Club soon.

There have been no changes in the membership of the Council but I have been very ably supported by the Council's Vice Chairman Mrs Lesley Wilding who puts an enormous amount of energy and research into the role. We were very pleased this year to undertake Chairmanship training which confirmed that as a Council we have the right procedures in place and exhibit examples of good practice.

I was delighted this year that bouquets were presented to two members of staff to commemorate 10 years of service and sorry to say farewell to Shaun Marshall and Hilary Morris. Norma Sullivan joined us in October as Centre Supervisor and Katie Hodgson has joined us to replace Hilary and has quickly got to grips with bookings at the Centre, and Haydn Beaumont replaces Shaun Marshall and is doing an excellent job keeping our play areas clean and tidy.

Your Parish Councillors, Parish Office and Billingshurst Centre staff continue to provide an excellent standard of service for this parish and for this I thank them all.

The Council has also submitted responses on behalf of its residents to the following consultations:

- Horsham District Council Preferred Strategy
- NALC Consultation A New Future Developing the Strategy
- WSCC Safer Routes to School consultation.
- WSCC Drainage Improvements to Marringdean Road consultation.
- HDC Consultation 'Should more people pay towards their Council Tax bill?'
- Highways and Transport Draft Works Programme
- WSCC Strategic Transport Investment Programme

And finally, I would like to record my thanks to all the other volunteers in our community who work with the Parish Council for the benefit of others, and in particular, our District and County Councillors. It has been a pleasure to serve the parish of Billingshurst as Chairman of the Council for a third year.

**Paul Berry**  
**Chairman**

## **Planning and Environment Committee Report**

The Planning and Environment Committee has needed to meet at least once and sometimes twice a month over the last year and has commented on approximately 126 planning applications. This is despite the General Permitted Development Order 2013 which came into force on 30 May 2013; the new rules allow larger extensions to homes, offices and shops to be made without submitting a planning application.

Permission has been granted to demolish 47 – 55 High Street and replace these five shops with one retail unit. The Parish Council strongly objected to these plans and will be deeply saddened if this application results in the loss of these businesses in Billingshurst. The Council also objected to the application for change of use of an area of Jengers Mead car park for a hand car wash facility and the erection of a sun canopy and storage container, which was refused.

The Parish Council was delighted when Horsham District Council refused the planning application for 550 houses on land east of Billingshurst last year, so was dismayed when this year Horsham District Council permitted a new application for 475 houses for the same land. The Parish Council worked tirelessly with its planning consultant, but the lack of a district wide five year housing land supply in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework has left the entire district vulnerable to development. Sadly despite the Parish Council attending the appeal for 46 houses at Daux Wood, this appeal was allowed for the same reason and the shape of the south eastern edge of the village will change forever with 46 houses in Daux Wood and 46 houses at Daux Avenue. The Parish Council continues to concentrate a lot of its time on planning matters and participated in a very well attended CPRE annual conference.

The Parish Council, as yet, has not decided to proceed with a Neighbourhood Plan. The decision has been deferred for six months as the Council is worried that parishioners may be consultation fatigued and the Plan will not help our immediate vulnerability to development. And at the time of going to press, the outcome of a High Court challenge is awaited on the weight of a Neighbourhood Plan without a Local Plan in place.

Celtique Energie contacted the Parish Council this year to re-affirm their proposals at Broadford Bridge. They said the target reservoir for their well at Broadford Bridge is the Triassic Sandstone. This is a conventional (non shale) reservoir and the rock is sufficiently permeable that oil or gas should flow naturally into the well from the reservoir when produced. Celtique do not have planning permission to undertake shale gas hydraulic fracturing on this site and has committed in writing to West Sussex County Council that it will not be using hydraulic fracturing on shale oil or shale gas deposits at this well in the future.

The Planning and Environment Committee will continue to meet usually on the first Thursday of every month, with a second plans only meeting later in the month and warmly welcome members of the public to attend its meetings. Please see our website or noticeboards for plans only meeting dates.

## **Property Committee Report**

By far the item keeping the Property Committee busy this year has been trees. The Council undertakes a survey of all its trees every five years by an arboriculturalist and then acts upon any recommendations in the survey. The survey was done in June, and works requiring immediate action or within one year were completed in the autumn. However, the country has had notably very wet and windy weather this winter. The increased rainfall can lead to waterlogging of the ground and in extreme conditions the potential destabilisation of tree root plates. This was certainly evident in Billingshurst as the Council lost some trees that had not been identified as at risk in the survey. Cllr. Wilding has kept a log of all of the incidents of flooding in the parish and the Council has asked Horsham District Council's Scrutiny and Overview Committee to look into the impact flooding had on the strategic road network, as you will undoubtedly recall the flooding on the A272 at Slinfold, properties on the eastern side of the High Street and on the A29 at Pulborough.

The Property Committee learned about Public Access Defibrillators (PAD) and agreed to the installation of a PAD in a locked cabinet at the Jubilee Fields Sports Pavilion. Emergency services can provide the code to access the PAD. Training has been offered on the use of the PAD and undertaken by a number of people in the community. Air vents will shortly be fitted to the Jubilee Fields skate park to prolong the life of the ramps, and following a request from the park users, the grind rail will be removed.

Following a request from the owner of Essential Harmony in the southern end of the High Street, the Property Committee has re-convened meetings of the Christmas Lights Sub-Committee to consider the extension of the Christmas Lighting Scheme along the High Street. Cllr. Barnes managed to repair the electronic sign in Budgens and we had a few more months usage from the sign, which is again in the workshop and we are hoping that Cllr. Barnes might be able to work his magic once again. In the autumn, our Litter Wardens took delivery of a new road sweeper and have had training on its use and we are very grateful to our Litter Warden Tobias who is an expert at maintaining the machine.

The Committee was pleased to be able to grant a request from the Billingshurst Scouts and Guides for use of a small part of the Lower Station Road Recreation Ground for camping and we hope the weather is kind to them. Also at Lower Station Road, the Tennis Club pavilion is now complete. Councillors who attended the opening were very impressed.

## **Finance & General Purposes Committee Report**

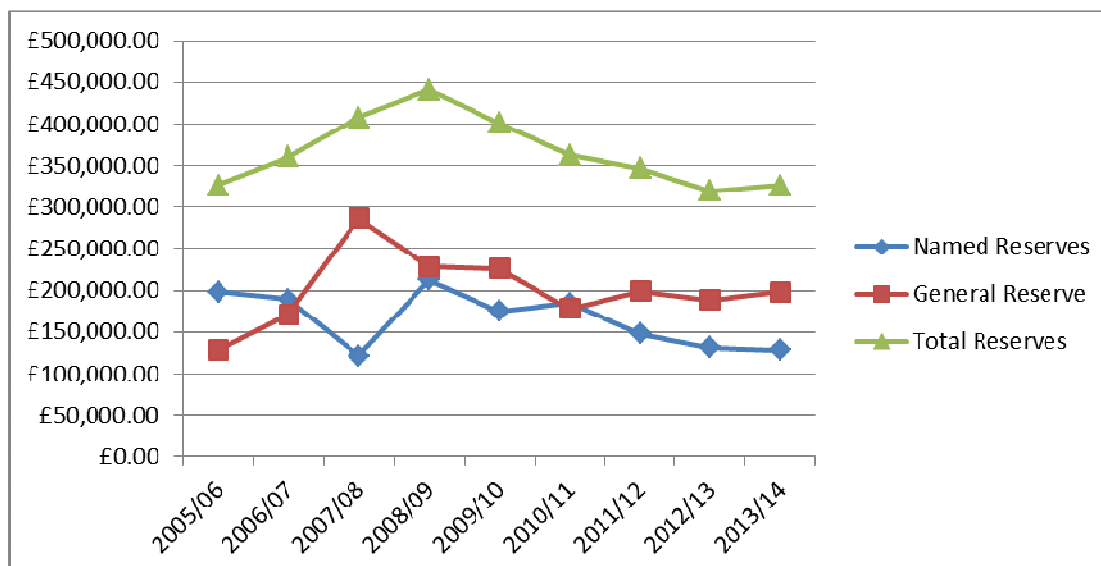
Last year saw the introduction of the Council Tax benefit grant and Parish Councils being asked to pick up the 10% shortfall in the grant. This Council's fears have been realised this year when Horsham District Council cut this grant by 22% in line with their grant reduction from central government. The Parish Council decided not to increase the precept and has instead cut its budget to mitigate the impact of this change on parishioners.

The total fund holding of the Council has increased slightly this year to £326,083, but is still far short of its peak of £441,036 as at 31 March 2009. The Council continues to use its reserves to reduce the financial burden on Council Tax payers.

The Council's income for the financial year was £295,003 from the precept of £247,415, bank interest of £2,651, environmental cleansing grant of £17,130 from Horsham District Council and the remainder of the income derived from grants and planning obligations funds.

The Council's expenditure this year was £288,458, including the purchase of a new road sweeper at a cost £8,250, almost £7,000 spent on the Council's trees, a grant of £7,368 for the Manor Fields allotments and £10,000 spent on our Community Youth Worker. The remaining expenditure was on the Council's open spaces, operating contracts and staffing. The Council continues to set aside £10,000 per year as its contribution to the running costs of the swimming pool.

The Council's named reserves have decreased from £165,892 at the start of the financial year to £128,009, and the Council's general reserve is £198,074 at year end. The Council has set the precept for 2014/15 at £249,212 when combined with the Council Tax benefit grant equates to £69.73 per annum for a band D Council Tax property and no increase on 2013/14.



**Donations were made to the following local organisations this year:**

Date	Organisation	Amount
22/05/2013	Victim Support Sussex	£50.00
26/06/2013	Age UK	£50.00
26/06/2013	West Sussex Association for the Blind	£50.00
26/06/2013	Unitarian Chapel	£75.00
26/06/2013	Community Transport	£1,000.00
29/01/2014	Royal British Legion	£18.50
18/12/2013	West Sussex Mobile Youth Trust	£50.00
29/01/2014	Outset	£50.00
23/10/2013	Central & Sussex CAB	£100.00
23/10/2013	Billingshurst Centre	£2,500.00
24/04/2013	St Catherines Hospice	£100.00
		<b>£4,043.50</b>

## Income and Expenditure Account for the Year Ended 31 March 2014

31 March 2013 £	<b>INCOME</b>	31 March 2014 £
825	Parks and Open Spaces	600
1,401	General Admin	7,609
0	Salaries	0
28,309	Highways	24,775
2	Public Lighting	1
244,151	Precept	247,415
1,000	Interest	2,651
5,212	One Off	11,953
827	Unp chq	
<b>281,727</b>		<b>295,003</b>
	<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	
40,016	Parks and Open Spaces	36,981
33,084	General Admin	58,590
112,628	Salaries	115,808
20,257	Village Hall	20,257
5,572	Highways	5,720
3,139	Public Lighting	3,181
3,644	s137	4,044
0	Election	0
90,470	One Off	43,878
<b>308,810</b>		<b>288,458</b>
	<b>General Fund</b>	
	<b>Balance B/Fwd</b>	
	<b>01/04/13</b>	<b>319,538</b>
	Add Income	295,003
	Deduct Expenditure	288,458
	<b>General Fund</b>	
	<b>31/03/14</b>	<b>326,083</b>

## Reserves as at 31 March 2014

Reserve	Amount
Open Spaces	£5,000
Trees	£105
Cemetery	£9,500
Memorials	£4,500
Village Hall	£1,297
Station Road Gardens	£1,719
Civil Emergency	£1,200
Street lights	£5,792
Play Equipment	£26,000
Road Sweeper	£1,250
Skate Park	£10,000
Bus Shelters	£2,025
Allotments	£585
Planning	£6,221
IT	£3,530
Christmas Lights	£2,580
Jubilee Event	£0
Toilets	£18,000
Trespass Legal Fees	£2,000
Football Field	£10,000
Elections	£7,000
Members Allowances	£0
Parish Office Phone	£1,500
Youth Grants	£8,862
BPC Youth	-£657
Bowling Club	£0
Named Reserves	£128,009
General Reserve	£198,074
	£326,083

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Council has processed nine requests this year at a cost of £244 to the Council. Whilst not much cost in financial terms, the cost to the Parish Office in terms of time, has been considerable. Due to the time limits imposed regarding FOI requests, and the amount of time office staff need to spend in collating information and researching items, sadly sometimes other work has had to wait at times. The basic parish allowance was set to £440 for financial year 01/04/13 – 31/03/14. Cllr. Rands was paid £100 members basic allowance and travelling expenses of £57.83 were paid to Cllr. Leaney.

And finally, during 2014 and the early part of 2015 the Parish Council will be concentrating on the May 2015 elections with preparations for the new Council. The Council will be holding drop in sessions for those interested in becoming a Parish Councillor. If you are interested in your community and think you could make a difference, why not consider standing for election? Parishioners are encouraged to attend Council meetings, so why not come along and find out what you could do?



## **Billingshurst Parish Council at 31 March 2014**

**Chairman:** Mr Paul Berry  
**Vice-Chairman:** Mrs Lesley Wilding

**Council Offices**  
Billingshurst Centre,  
Roman Way,  
Billingshurst,  
West Sussex  
RH14 9QW.

**Clerk:** Mrs Beverley Bell  
**Deputy Clerk:** Mrs Liz Berry  
Assistant Clerk: Miss Jo Booth  
Office Admin: Mrs Sarah Meyer  
**Tel:** 01403 782555  
**Fax:** 01403 787699

**Email:** [council@billingshurst.gov.uk](mailto:council@billingshurst.gov.uk)

[www.billingshurst.gov.uk](http://www.billingshurst.gov.uk) Find us on Facebook too

<b>Parish Council as at 31 March 2014</b>		
Mr Barry Barnes	13 Carpenters, Billingshurst	01403 780660
Mr Paul Berry	8 Nightingale Walk, Billingshurst	07881 825517
Mr Steve Buck	66 Arun Road, Billingshurst	01403 782599
Mr Garry Commins	130 Forge Way, Billingshurst	01403 780527
Mr Alan Grant	Tanners Cottage, Lordings Road, Adversane	01403 784165
Mr Roy Grantham	5 Pine Close, Billingshurst	01403 782895
Mrs Lesley Gray	Ladymead, Coneyhurst, Billingshurst	07954 249296
Mr David Hart	5 Rosier Way, Billingshurst	01403 782533
Mr Dave Homer	24 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst	01403 782824
Mr Paul Leaney	11 Rowan Drive, Billingshurst	01403 783812
Mr Ken Longhurst	The Brier Patch, Marringdean Road, Billingshurst	01403 784039
Mr Roy Margetts	47 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst	01403 784487
Mr Colin Milne	8 Rosehill, Billingshurst	01403 785205
Mr Doug Rands	62 Arun Road, Billingshurst	01403 783551
Mrs Lesley Wilding	26 Carpenters, Billingshurst	01403 783192

The Council was formed in 1894. There are currently 15 Parish Councillors. The next Parish Council elections are on 07 May 2015.

The **full Council** meets the first Wednesday of each month and has the following Committees:-

<b>Planning and Environment</b>	meets monthly
<b>Property</b>	meets monthly
<b>Finance and General Purposes</b>	meets monthly
<b>Billingshurst Centre</b>	meets monthly
<b>Working Practices</b>	meets every other month

The Council's Chairman and Vice-Chairman, together with membership of Committees are elected in May of each year at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council. The Council has two Sub-Committees:- Bank Reconciliation and Budget and Working Parties: Skate Park, Community Plan, Health and Safety, Internal Audit, Emergency Planning and Parking Strategy.