



ANNUAL REPORT

FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR

01 April 2015 – 31 March 2016

Mr Paul Berry
Chairman of
Billingshurst Parish Council

Chairman's Report

In May last year, the Council started a new 4-year term. There are 15 positions on Billingshurst Parish Council and as only 10 people came forward, there was an uncontested election; this was in fact the case with the majority of Parish Councils in the Horsham District. We started the Council term with many familiar faces on the Council but we have also welcomed new members: Ken Peters, Fiona Lockhart Andrew Pearson, Natalie Van de Braam and Joe Horwood on to the Council. Throughout the year, the Council has had a good mix of experienced and new Councillors of differing ages and backgrounds.

Previous Annual Reports have referred to the relationship between Billingshurst Parish Council and Billingshurst Community Partnership. The past year saw the Council withdraw from the Partnership. After the Council having made this difficult decision, my hope was always that such a separation may in fact have the effect of improving the relationship between the two groups. This may have in fact turned out to be the case as certainly things seem to have calmed down and it is very pleasing that even with the separation, it has been business as usual for the two groups individually but also for the projects that the two organisations are jointly involved in such as the Community Plan, Village Centre Supplementary Planning Document and more recently the Neighbourhood Plan.

Certainly, deciding to produce a Neighbourhood Plan was one of the key decisions made by the Council in recent months, and one of the most important decisions that the Council has made for a number of years. Neighbourhood Plans are not without controversy. They are expensive to produce and are, by and large, pro-development. However, having a Neighbourhood Plan in place should give the Billingshurst community more of an input in how the area develops in the future and will mean that the area will benefit from a higher level of the Community Infrastructure Levy relating to any development which does take place. Although Billingshurst Parish Council embarked upon the process later than some other areas, it seemed inconceivable to me that the Council could have decided whether to produce a Neighbourhood Plan without knowing first as much as possible about the Horsham District Planning Framework.

Another issue which has taken up a fair amount of the Council's time is that of possibly having a Community Warden in Billingshurst. Looking through minutes from the past year, it is easy to see that this was very much an evolving and fast moving project. Initially, the Council looked into entering into a cluster arrangement where a Community Warden would be shared between Billingshurst and Pulborough Parishes. Then, it started to look like it would be better for Billingshurst Parish Council to look to employ a Warden on its own. Funding was successfully obtained from the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner but even with this, the project would still have involved an increase in precept. Although in monetary terms the increase would amount to a few pence per week, in percentage terms the increase was fairly significant. With little feedback from the community, in January this year the Council decided to proceed with the project; the timing of this decision was important due to the need to supply details of the Council's precept to Horsham District Council. As things progressed, concerns started to emerge that the project could end up being more of a burden in terms of financing and managing the project than was initially envisaged, so the Council took the difficult decision to withdraw from the process. Other options of employing a Community Warden may develop as time goes by so the Council could re-visit the idea in the future, hopefully when time-scales are not so tight.

The Parish Council continues to be frustrated with the number of new homes the area has had to accept and has submitted responses to a number of planning

applications including large developments to the east of Billingshurst and in Marringdean Road.

The Parish Council has been involved in helping to guide the production of a Village Centre Supplementary Planning Document. This has been an evolving and growing project looking into where monies gained from the development of 475 homes to the east of Billingshurst would best be spent in the area. Certainly, one of the things the Parish Council lobbied for was that organisations looking to fund projects not directly linked to the High Street area should be considered for funding too. As such, the Council made Horsham District Council aware of a number of groups and projects seeking funding. It was pleasing to see that recently, after so long, the document finally went out to public consultation.

The Parish Council is responsible for a number of open spaces and buildings in the Parish. These include Jubilee Fields and the Sports Pavilion, Lower Station Road, Station Road Gardens and Clevelands Gardens. Maintaining and trying to improve facilities for its parishioners remains a high priority for the Parish Council but in difficult financial times, decisions have to be taken carefully.

The Parish Council is the Trustee of the Billingshurst Community and Conference Centre. The past year has been good for the Centre and it is nice to see it regularly used by such a variety of groups for a huge mixture of purposes. The Parish Council has successfully obtained funding in the past year for new carpeting throughout the Centre, new chairs and improvements to the Council Chamber. I am so grateful to the Centre Supervisor and her team who do an excellent job running the facility.



Cllr. Wilding continues to work tirelessly on the issue of flooding in the Parish and the Council has successfully obtained funding from WSCC's Operation Watershed project to help develop flood resilience in the Parish, there is more detail about this further on in this report.

In January this year, the Parish Council agreed to renew the contract for our Community Youth Worker for a further year. Recently, I contacted our Youth Worker, Ben Sheldon who explained that he has been working hard to raise the level of contact with young people over the past year. Ben currently has a total of 50 young people on his register, and while they don't see all of these people every week, they have a good core group who are always there. As well as this, Ben and his team have been working on organising some more trips as well, including trips to Brinsbury. Alongside the youth club, Ben has been working with the Weald School to

support young people who would like to talk to someone who isn't a teacher, and he has been able to provide a listening ear to young people over the past two terms; in turn this has led Ben in being able to assist the young people in progressing in what ever way might be suitable for them.

As well as continuing to support the Community Youth Worker project, I am also very proud that during the past year the Council has also assisted Billingshurst Bowling Club, The Village Agent scheme, the Senior Citizens Lunch Club, Billingshurst Community Transport, Friends of Station Road Gardens and the Billingshurst Sports and Recreation Association to name a few.

The Parish Council continues to try its best to communicate with its community. The Council's web site contains a great deal of information and is regularly updated; the Clerk also tries to post updates on Facebook and Twitter as much as possible. The Council continues to have a monthly presence in the Village Tweet magazine. You may remember the electronic sign which was previously in Budgens. Sadly, when works were being done on the building prior to Sainsbury's opening, the contractors disposed of the sign. The Parish Office staff members have worked hard in the past few months trying to arrange a replacement so imagine their joy and relief when the new sign was recently delivered to the Parish Office. Further imagine how their hearts sank when it was discovered that the manufacturer had spelt Billingshurst incorrectly on the front of the sign! One of the many frustrations often experienced by the office staff but maybe in this case, you have to see the funny side. Sainsbury's initially said they would be happy for the sign to be placed in its original location but sadly, their views on this have recently changed. It may be that the sign is located at the Billingshurst Centre whilst we look into a possible more prominent location in the High Street.

I have rather felt like a part time Chairman at times in the past year, a year that has been very difficult for my family and me. What this has highlighted is that Billingshurst Parish Council has a good team. Councillors have worked together well and been very supportive and I think that Cllr. Wilding has done an excellent job serving as Vice Chairman. The Council and community should be proud of the Council's staff, in the Parish Office, Billingshurst Centre and Litter Wardens who have worked very hard in the past year, often working extra hours and rearranging their days off and annual leave to accommodate the Council's busy workload.

Paul Berry
Chairman

Consultation Responses

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

- DCLG Strengthening Parish and Town Council Accountability
- WSCC Traffic Regulation Order Consultation for Natts Lane and Silver Lane
- HM Government Enable Closer Working Between the Emergency Services
- Village Centre SPD
- Draft Sport and Physical Activity Strategy

Planning and Environment Committee Report

The committee has commented on over 140 applications during the past year. Due to the strict timings for responses imposed by the Local Planning Authority, it has been necessary for the Committee to meet twice a month on most months.

Billingshurst Parish Council is only a statutory consultee on planning applications with the final decision on whether or not to approve development falling to the Local Planning Authority, Horsham District Council. There are strict guidelines dictating what can and cannot be commented on when responding to planning applications; these have to be relevant to the proposal.

Planning applications for Marringdean Acres and Kingslea Farm were submitted as a result of inclusion of Land South of Billingshurst for 150 dwellings in the now adopted Horsham District Planning Framework. This framework should give some clarity about the future of development in Billingshurst until 2031, subject to any development potentially considered in the forthcoming Billingshurst Neighbourhood Plan. At the time of writing this report, the situation on a second runway at Gatwick is still undecided and Horsham District Council has stated that any decision for a second runway at Gatwick will require an early review of the Horsham District Planning Framework.

The Committee warmly welcomes members of the public to attend its meetings. Please see our website or noticeboards for meeting dates.

Property Committee Report

Although the Committee has only met on four occasions during the past year, it has nevertheless been involved in a number of projects, and a lot of work goes on behind the scenes to look after Council property and equipment. A selection of projects and work carried out is noted below:-

- The Committee arranged for roadside cleaning of Centurion signage at the entrances into Billingshurst village.
- The damaged A-Frame Net Equipment at Jubilee Fields was replaced last year.
- Discussions with Thakeham Homes resulted in a donation of trees towards the Station Road Gardens project; the trees were planted late last year and are being looked after by the Friends of Station Road Gardens (FOG) Group and the Council's Garden Contractor.
- The Committee continues to look into emergency access arrangements at Jubilee Fields. There have been a lot of communications with emergency services on this subject to ensure, as much as possible, that the relevant information is in place to assist vehicles entering Jubilee Fields in the event of an accident/emergency.
- The Parish Clerk commenced with the tender process to refurbish the public toilets in Mill Way. Subject to funding opportunities, it is hoped that this project will commence later on this year.

- Council staff worked hard to update and renew the garden contract and following a tender process, Sussex Land Services were successful in retaining the Council's garden contract.
- There was an increase in the weekly hours worked by the Senior Litter Warden to assist with odd jobs that are always needed. Most recently, a badly damaged bench outside the library was repaired; this sort of service reduces the need for odd-job contractors and helps keep costs down.
- The Committee continues to support the FOG Group on a financial basis helping the group with the project at the Station Road Gardens site.
- Repairs were undertaken on the bridge which spans the Parbrook watercourse running through Lower Station Road Recreation Ground last year. Staff members hope, when time permits, to be able to look into funding opportunities to replace the bridge in that location.
- In due course, Council staff would like to seek funding to assist with better access at the vehicle entrance to Lower Station Road Recreation Ground; it is hoped these improvements will include lighting along the footways in that location.
- Cllr. Barnes, Chairman of the Property Committee, is also a member of the Fireworks Working Party. They arrange the very popular autumn fireworks event at Jubilee Fields. The event this year is due to take place on 22 October.
- The Committee arranged and financed the 5 year electrical safety inspection and subsequent upgrades to the emergency lighting at the Jubilee Fields pavilion.
- Thakeham Homes kindly awarded a £500 donation towards works carried out at Station Road Gardens site. Cllrs. Barry Barnes and Sue Kingston (Chairman & Vice-Chairman of the Council's Property Committee) met with Pippa Bugby and Donna Spencer of Thakeham Homes to receive the cheque (see photo below).



- Following requests from members of the public, Council staff arranged for a third dog bin to be fitted at Jubilee Fields.
- Last year, a complete clearance took place of the Parbrook watercourse running through Council land at Lower Station Road. This was to assist with the flow of water, and to ensure the Council is acting as a responsible landowner. Comparison photos are noted below which show just how much the situation has improved.



- Finally, the Property Committee agreed to apply for funding towards Public Access Defibrillators in Adversane & Five Oaks. The funding application was successful and one defibrillator has been fitted at Adversane with the other due to be placed at Five Oaks. The Council is very grateful for the help and assistance of the Billingshurst Emergency & Assistance Team (BEAT) who have agreed to provide the ongoing maintenance and updating of both defibrillators. The BEAT Team will also work with the Council to publicise our new equipment and provide the necessary training for as many local residents as possible.

Finance & General Purposes Committee Report

The Council over the past year has worked within its budget and maintained its facilities and services in spite of reduced funding from Horsham District Council as a result of Government cuts in funding. Maintenance of play equipment, skate parks, recreation grounds, public toilets, Jubilee Fields, village greens and many other areas of grass and trees, costs money. Other facilities such as the Station Road Gardens, Community Centre, and Sports Clubs are all supported financially to some extent. It also funds services such as the Youth worker in total and the Village Agent in part.

These ongoing expenses are not reducing and once again in 2016/17 the Council Tax Benefit grant from the District Council is reducing by a further £4,500 so the Parish Council's budget is again under pressure. The Neighbourhood Plan, with all its future benefits to the Parish, does not come without cost especially in terms of staff time. Staff costs have also had to increase because of the new pensions regulations and the minimum wage

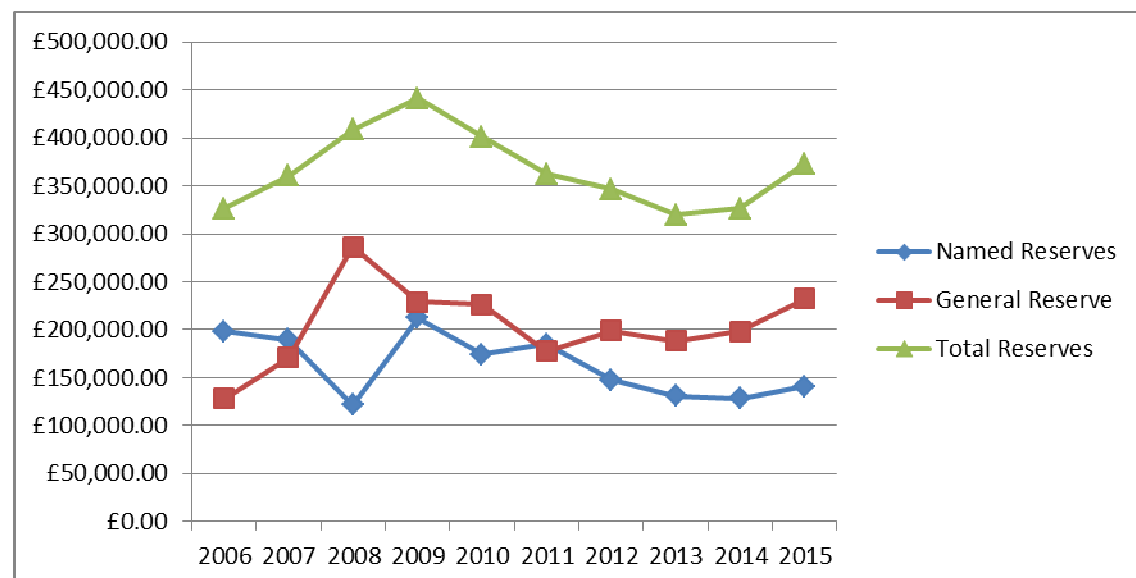
increases. These financial pressures have resulted in the Parish element of the Council Tax for an average household rising by £1.26 for the year.

The Council, after consultation with parishioners, planned to introduce a Community Warden this year. The extra cost of this for an average household is £4.73 for the year even with financial help from the Police. This resulted in a total increase of £5.99 for the year. After the budget had been set, further significant costs in the financing and management of this project led to the Council withdrawing. The extra money which has been raised for this project will be put in a named reserve and will be available to offset any rise in the 2017/18 financial year.

The Council made the following donations during the financial year:

Date	Organisation	Amount
29/04/2015	Victim Support Sussex	£50.00
29/04/2015	Age UK	£1,000.00
20/01/2016	West Sussex Association for the Blind	£50.00
24/06/2015	Central & South Sussex CAB	£100.00
30/03/2016	St Catherines Hospice	£275.00
23/06/2015	Billingshurst Community Partnership Limited	£100.00
20/01/2016	Billingshurst Centre	£50.00
30/03/2016	Billingshurst Bowling Club	£500.00
29/04/2015	Billingshurst Centre	£2,000.00
	Billingshurst Community Partnership Luncheon Club	£561.29
24/06/2015	Friends of Station Road Gardens	£400.00
18/11/2015	Billingshurst Community Transport	£1,000.00
24/06/2015	West Sussex Mediation Service	£125.00
		£6,211.29

And finished the year-end with the following reserves:



Income & Expenditure Accounts				
31 March 2015		INCOME		31 March 2016
£				£
525		Parks and Open Spaces		0
7,764		General Admin		7,069
0		Salaries		0
23,490		Highways		26,425
12		Public Lighting		214
217,914		Precept		248,589
15,649		Grant		10,955
1,792		Interest		442
142,654		One Off		35,065
409,800				328,759
		EXPENDITURE		
40,394		Parks and Open Spaces		42,479
35,639		General Admin		33,387
137,631		Salaries		141,736
20,295		Village Hall		20,295
3,842		Highways		5,332
3,214		Public Lighting		3,462
1,750		s137		5,865
0		Election		0
142,168		One Off		51,639
1,271		VAT bfwd		994
386,205				305,188
23,596		Net Income		23,571

Billingshurst Flood Plan

The Billingshurst Flood Action Group supported by Billingshurst Parish Council has been working on a Flood Plan with the National Flood Forum (NFF). Residents produced photographs, questions and evidence of flooding which formed the foundation of the Flood Plan. A core group of residents who represent the areas which have experienced flooding have attended several meetings with the National Flood Forum. An NFF meeting with the multi-agencies was held last October – West Sussex County Council, the Environment Agency, Southern Water and Devine Homes attended; Horsham District Council and Network Rail submitted answers to questions from the Flood Plan.

Many ditches, watercourses and ponds which are there to drain surface water away are neglected, silted up and used to discard rubbish; this can cause road flooding as well as potential flooding to properties both up and downstream.

Residents will quite often make a feature of a watercourse without realising that they are not allowing the free flow to be maintained and flooding may be caused upstream. Some may even fill in ditches on their property which causes surface water runoff to be displaced elsewhere; they could be risking flooding to their own property as well as that of other residents. Riparian ownership has the responsibility to pass on the flow without obstruction, pollution or diversion affecting the rights of others.

Billingshurst Parish Council applied for and was awarded funding from the West Sussex County Council's Operation Watershed to help develop flood resilience, to safeguard homes and businesses. The funding was used to clear ditches in Little East Street and Daux Road, to install an alarm on the trash screen protecting the barrel drain under the High Street and to reduce the impact to homes and businesses from the devastating effects of flooding.

WSCC has recently announced the resumption of Operation Watershed for 2016 and it is hoped that, if successful, four further areas may benefit from funding for ditch clearance in Billingshurst.

The WSCC Billingshurst Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP) will produce a comprehensive survey implemented by CHM2Hill of the areas which have suffered flooding. It is hoped that when completed it will give a better understanding of the reasons for the flooding in Billingshurst with identification of options to improve surface water drainage and prevent future flooding. Areas which are pinch points/hotspots in the drainage system are expected to be identified.

Once the SWMP has been finalised a further meeting for the Billingshurst Flood Action Group with the NFF and the multi-agencies will take place.

The Council getting involved with the community



Council Chairman Cllr. Paul Berry presenting a donation cheque for £500 towards new equipment for Billingshurst Bowling Club.



Last autumn, Gillian Yarham – President of Billingshurst WI made contact with the Parish Council to advise that their group would like to plant a tree at the Billingshurst Centre to commemorate the centenary of the WI. The photos show Paul Berry (Chairman of the Parish Council), Gillian Yarham (President – Billingshurst WI) and other members of the Billingshurst WI Group.

Billingshurst Parish Council at 31 March 2016

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

Clerk: Mrs Beverley Bell
Deputy Clerk: Mrs Liz Berry
Assistant Clerk: Miss Jo Booth
Office Admin: Mrs Sarah Meyer

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Parish Council as at 31 March 2016		
Mr Barry Barnes	13 Carpenters, Billingshurst	01403 780660
Mr Paul Berry	8 Nightingale Walk, Billingshurst	07437 287241
Mr Garry Commins	130 Forge Way, Billingshurst	01403 780527
Mr Alan Grant	Tanners Cottage, Lordings Road, Adversane	01403 784165
Mr Dave Homer	24 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst	01403 782824
Mr Joe Horwood	32a High Street Billingshurst RH14 9PF	07539 953800
Ms Sue Kingston	15 Daux Avenue, Billingshurst	01403 782820
Mr Paul Leaney	11 Rowan Drive, Billingshurst	01403 783812
Mrs Fiona Lockhart	49 Roman Way, Billingshurst	01403 784353
Mr Roy Margetts	47 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst	01403 784487
Mr Andrew Pearson	Denecroft, Little East Street, Billingshurst	01403 782080
Mr Ken Peters	31 Saddlers Close, Billingshurst	01403 780371
Mrs Natalie Van De Braam	28 Station Road, Billingshurst	01403 588722
Mrs Lesley Wilding	26 Carpenters, Billingshurst	01403 783192

The Council was formed in 1894. There are currently 14 Parish Councillors and 1 vacancy. The next Parish Council elections are in May 2019.

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

Planning and Environment	meets at least once monthly
Property	meets when required
Finance and General Purposes	meets monthly
Billingshurst Centre	meets monthly
Working Practices	meets when required