

BILLINGSHURST
PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL

REPORT

FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR

1st APRIL 2006 to 31st MARCH, 2007

Gavin Collins
Chairman Parish Council

Chairman's Report

By the time the majority see this report, you will have had the opportunity to vote and I hope will have been able to elect 15 Councillors for the next 4 years. I know a number of the current Councillors are standing down, and whilst I am sorry to see them go, I hope that we get new people coming forward to serve our community. Not getting enough Councillors will mean that we either have to go through another by-election or go through the process of Co-optation within Council. Having only had a by-election in December where Councillor Bobker was elected, I hope this won't be the case.

As I look back on the last four years of the current Council, we seem to have achieved an awful lot, with most of our plans really coming to completion in the last 12 months. I was honoured to "officially" open the High Street, after the enhancements were completed in December on a wonderful sunny day with the French market organised by HDC, the Chamber of Commerce and the Community Partnership marking what I hope will be an ongoing event in the future. It was great to see so many of you there, and I hope you enjoyed the day. We also opened our new sports pavilion on Jubilee Fields in June last year and that was followed by the first official use of the new cricket square with Sussex and Pakistan cricketers. The Trim trail is open and the Fishing Lake starting to look as though it has always been there. We do continue to have problems with people abusing the site with dogs and motorbikes, and we will continue to report this to the Police and the relevant authorities so that enforcement action can be taken to preserve the facilities for the majority. We are also trying to work with Virador to reduce the amount of litter blowing onto the site from the community waste facility.

After many meetings and lots of discussion, the development of our new swimming pool on the old Football Pitch in Station Road has started, with the ground and hedge being cleared in preparation for works starting over the next couple of months. The Pool is due for completion by next summer and will I am sure, be widely used, especially if the weather is as warm as it was last year.

The Council has agreed to allow the County Council (WSCC) in conjunction with WAKOOS and the Community Partnership (who were successful in getting a SEEDA development grant of £150K) to use some of the old football pitch in Station Road for a C4C Children's Centre. The Centre which will house an expanded WAKOOS catering for approximately 50 children will also be used by WSCC for providing local services to the community such as integrated care and education for young children. The original plan was to use land elsewhere in the village, but unfortunately those plans fell through, and the Station Road site selected. The land will be leased to WSCC for 25 years, and a clause will be inserted into the lease stating the Councils wishes that this not be renewed at that point, and that a permanent location be found. This will be for the Council in 25 years to decide.

The Council spent a good number of hours discussing the use and deployment of Community Wardens, with presentations and support from HDC. These schemes are in place in Steyning and Ashington, and the team from Ashington came to our Council meeting to give us a presentation. At the end of the debates the Council didn't agree to the concept, and felt that the potential impact to the precept of around £60k (£20 per home) wasn't justified. This would have been a 25% increase in our costs.

The Adversane Village Hall Trust undertook a number of enhancements over the last year including improving disabled access and improvements to the windows. The disabled access was paid for via a S106 grant application obtained by the Parish Council.

Councillors Helen Abbott, Paul Berry, David Sherlock and Ken Longhurst are not standing for re-election, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their hard work and dedication over the time they have been in office. With many years of service between them, their experience and knowledge will be missed. Congratulations to Councillor Alan Grant on being elected to be Chairman of the Horsham Association of Local Councils (HALC)

We are also having a number of changes with our Parish staff. Our Clerk, Mrs E. Berry is standing down, and our Finance Officer Mrs J Wharton is leaving us to relocate to the Midlands. We have also lost one of our Environmental staff Mr T Mothe, thanks to them all, and I wish them well in the future. We are currently actively recruiting for a new Clerk who will also be the Responsible Financial officer (RFO). Our first round of interviews were not successful, however we have a number of new candidates who we will be interviewing in April.

Planning and Environment Committee Report

Since May 2006 the seven members of the Committee have met 23 times examining in the region of 150 applications. The Committee has met on the first Thursday in the month for the main meeting, and again on the third Thursday to consider any applications which needed comment before our next main meeting. During the year Councillor Pavey resigned and Councillor Bobker joined us after he was elected to the Parish Council last December.

During the year, our co-operation with Saxon Weald Housing Association has seen the completion of Osmund Court, the re-location of Townland residents to their new flats and other elderly residents joining them. On behalf of the Parish Council, two Councillors attended the official opening, and were impressed with the quality of the facilities provided for the residents.

Permission has been sought to demolish the old Townland building, and we have requested that the site, which is in the conservation area, is left in a reasonable condition with the Ginkgo tree, the large Magnolia and any other trees being preserved. No application for further development has been received or is expected at present.

At our March meeting, Saxon Weald attended to explain to the Councillors and local residents their plans for the site adjacent to Arun Road, where the old garages will be demolished. This area, together with the land already belonging to Saxon Weald behind the houses, was put forward as a suggestion for housing, prior to Saxon Weald looking into the process further before submitting an application to HDC. We hope to work together with them again for the benefit of the local residents.

Recently we heard that the Heveco Mushroom company has gone out of business, so the threat to Adversane of major development nearby has somewhat abated. It is possible that Brinsbury College will be looking for other ways of using the site on the eastern side of the A29, but it is early days yet and no definite plans are known. Although the college is in Pulborough Parish, residents in Adversane would bear the brunt of any nearby development.

Major Planning Applications

14 to 16 Lower Station Road - Plans to build two blocks of flats on this land, freed by demolition of two houses, has been foiled again by dismissal of another appeal.

The Old Social Club - Permission was granted for change of use to shop and restaurant. The new shop and cafe have proved to be very popular in the village.

Summers Place (Sothebys) - At last the situation on this site was resolved with permission granted in January 2007 for conversion of the house to eleven apartments and additionally 21 courtyard dwellings plus 2 further dwellings, a two-storey office building, landscaping and access. S106 monies arising from this site total £402,500 spread between affordable housing, community facilities for Billingshurst, education and highways.

Forge Way site - A further application to have this site designated a Village Green was turned down this year. Permission was granted for the original application for 59 dwellings, the plan being adjusted at our suggestion to prevent more on-street parking, by moving the front row of dwellings back, to allow parking on their own drives.

Other major applications awaiting decisions

Hillview garage site - revised application
Daux Wood application - further amendment

Street Naming

During the year we have been consulted by HDC over street naming.

- Development adjacent to Cherry Tree Cottage, Stane Street, Five Oaks - to be called **Ingfield Manor Close**.
- Development at Forge Way – to be called **Saddlers Close**.
- Development behind Lloyds Bank – to be called **Bakers Meadow**.

When suggesting names for new roads, we try to find one that relates to the area, a person who previously owned the land, or a name that fits with others already used in that area.

Trees

As in previous years, we examined some applications requiring reduction of crowns or total removal of some trees in the village. We consider these applications with great care, trying to avoid loss of trees unless there is an obvious need, put forward by a surveyor, for this to happen.

Reports

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| <u>April 2006</u> | commented on Horsham District LDF: Alternative sites and boundary changes document - ADS113 - Brinsbury |
| <u>July 2006</u> | responded to HDC LDF planning Obligations - supplementary document. Particular concerns noted were access to hospitals. |
| <u>August 2006</u> | attended and reported on Waste Area Stakeholder Forum. |
| <u>December 2006</u> | HDC Strategic Flood Risk Assessment - reported on all flood risk areas we knew of in the Parish. |

S106 records

The Deputy Clerk keeps a record of all S106 monies applicable to this Parish. The Parish Office worked on five S106 applications during the past financial year. All of these applications were successful, gaining the Parish almost £9,000 in grant funding. A further application to improve the surface of the trim-trail has just been placed, and this should be dealt with during the early summer of 2007.

Design Statement

The work on a Design Statement for Billingshurst continues. The Sub-Committee looking at this has been assisted by Mr Bailie, Mr Stucke, Mr Tullett and Mr Gallani who have kindly worked to help the Councillors. The purpose of the Design Statement is to enable us to provide approved Planning guidance to developers through HDC. This will include types of materials, house and building design, and general background information on the types of development the Council would approve of. As we start to look forward to the next round of planning activity in 2012, this brief will help us to define the type of development we get. New challenges in this area are appearing. Do we want developments in a broad local style such as Penfold Grange, or of a more contemporary design? Without doubt we probably should have cheaper and greener housing to enable everyone to be able to own their own home if they wish. Once the statement is completed, the document will be displayed in key locations throughout the Parish where there will be an opportunity to comment. In the meantime if you want to contribute please contact the Deputy Clerk in the office or via email Deputyclerk@billingshurst.gov.uk

Village Hall

The settlement experienced in the Village Hall continues to be a challenge. The Council decided to accept a financial offer from the builders after extensive discussion and feedback from our solicitors and will be asking Wadey's to commence work to undertake what is still investigative work followed by remedial work on the causes of the settlement. Hopefully work will start on site before the summer and by next year we will know the cause and hopefully been able to rectify the problem for good.

The separation of the running of the Village Hall from the Council is continuing in slow time. However, with the work to resolve the settlement now underway, and a new Council coming on board, the process of moving the "St Mary's Trust" from the Council to independent Trustees can continue.

The accounts for the Hall show a small loss for last year on a much greater revenue. This is primarily down to staff costs increasing inline with the revenue, as well as moving forward with the separation of the Council services, costs which were effectively hidden in the Councils administration costs historically. Forecasting forward, it is difficult to see the Hall making a profit. The space is utilised very heavily, not leaving many options but to potentially reduce costs or increase prices. The continual subsidy required for the Hall will remain a challenge for the Council and the new Trustees in the future. Balancing the need for low cost facilities for the community (the objective of the Trust), along with collecting enough income from external groups remains a challenge.

If you would like to volunteer to help run the Village Hall or want to use the Hall please contact the Village Hall directly on 787690 or via email at caretaker@billingshurst.gov.uk

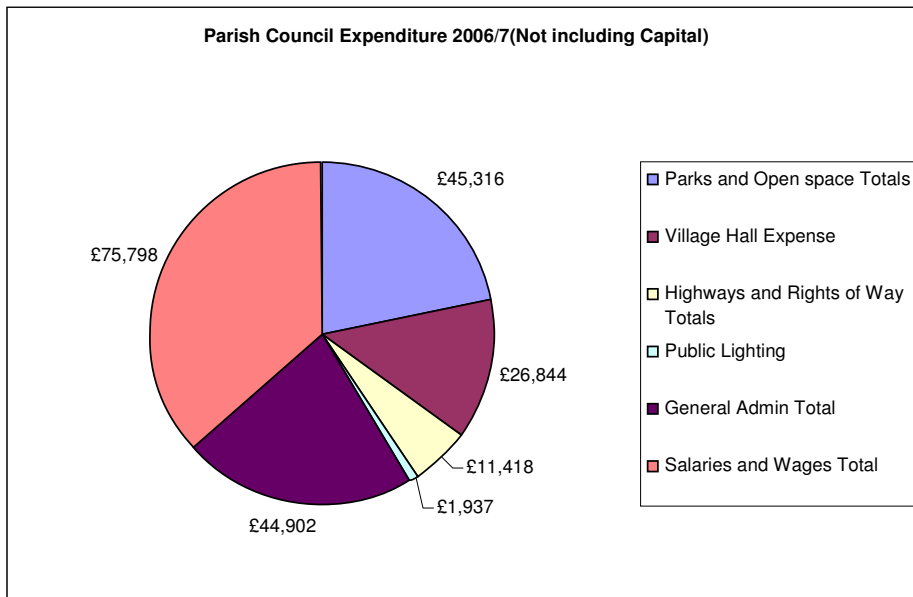
My thanks to Ian Pringle, Patrick Perks, Denise Campbell, Ken Johnson and Jake Edsor who have been running the Hall for the last year. They have managed to improve the number and types of bookings. The TAG group, now of some 25 regulars of 12-14 years old meet weekly, and at the other end of the age-range, the Luncheon Club of 40 older people meeting bi-weekly, along with Weight Watchers, Citizens Advice, Dance classes, Playgroup and Karate Clubs all show an increasing use of this facility by the community. The Dance nights (BilliRox) are continuing to be very popular with over 100 young people attending the last event.

Financial Report

The Financial report shown below which is presented to the auditors, shows the total income and expenditure for the Council in 2006/7. The total precept collected last year, from you the Council tax payers, was £211,000. The income and expenditure included a number of special items where for a number of reasons we receive monies from the grant givers and then pay the suppliers. The special payments in the last year include some of the costs of the Pavilion £302,000, landscaping of Jubilee Fields £5,900. These show a much higher income and expenditure than normal so I have removed these from the description below. After detailed negotiations, the Council received £23,000 from the developers to take over the maintenance of the open areas and play area at Cranham Avenue along with the successful S106 applications by the Parish Office staff totalling almost £9,000. Over £12,000 in interest was received from our Bank Accounts and the remainder from other grants, rent and services provided. Excluding the one-off payments the total income for the council last year was £241,000

The Council spent around £201,000 last year on supporting itself inline with its budget, and a further £10,000 on the Tennis Courts, Due to not spending any of the reserves, the Council was able to keep its precept increase down to 1.9% and put some more money (around £35,000) into its reserves for the future. The Council has a number of projects coming up, Station Road Sports Pavilion, Village Hall subsidence and running costs subsidy, improvements to the Xmas lights now the High street is completed. Street lights in Natts Lane and Lower Station Road and a general build of the play equipment reserve ready for the next play area to be renovated. The Council reserves going into the next year should be around £292,000 plus the £35,000 from this years surplus (Total C£327,000) The Council under government guidance has to keep 6-9 months income as a general reserve £146,000, leaving an available capital amount for projects of £179,000. We don't yet know the costs of resolving the Village Hall but have had preliminary estimates for £60 - £80,000. This along with the Memorial Gardens and play equipment maintenance will eat into this over the next 12 months.

The breakdown of the council's expenditure is shown below,



FINANCIAL YEAR TO
31ST MARCH 2006

| | <u>EXPENDITURE</u> | <u>INCOME</u> |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Parks & Open Spaces | 382,491.00 | 335,447.00 |
| General Administration | 124,292.00 | 7,064.00 |
| Village Halls | 27,045.00 | 883.00 |
| Highways | 12,027.00 | 12,475.00 |
| Public Lighting | 1,937.00 | 8.00 |
| S.137 | 1,017.00 | |
| Precept | | 211,374.00 |
| Bank Interest | | 12,788.00 |
| Vat | 52,834.00 | 105,220.00 |
| TOTALS | ----- 601,643.00 | ----- 685,259.00 |
| <u>RESERVES</u> | | |
| Reserves B/Fwd | | 274,939.00 |
| General Reserve | 187,610.00 | |
| Named Reserve | 170,945.00 | |
| TOTAL | ----- 960,198.00 | ----- 960,198.00 |

The Council and its organisation

Chairman: Mr Gavin Collins **Clerk:** Mrs Elizabeth Berry

Vice-Chairman: Mr Jake Edsor **Deputy Clerk:** Mrs Wendy Wright

Council Offices

The Billingshurst Village Hall,
Roman Way,
Billingshurst,
West Sussex
RH14 9QW.

Tel: 01403 782555

Fax: 01403 787699

Email: council@billingshurst.gov.uk

Councillors as at 31st March 2007:-

Mrs. H.M. Abbott
Mr. B.L. Barnes
Mr. P.M. Berry
Mr. S.N. Buck
Mr. M. Bobker
Mr. G.R. Collins
Mr. J.H. Edsor
Mr. A.C. Grant

Mr. C.P.H. Griffin
Mr. D.A.K. Homer
Mr. P.T. Leaney
Mr. K.B. Longhurst
Mr D.F. Rands
Mr. D.J. Sherlock
Mrs G.R. Yarham

The Council was formed in 1894. There are currently 15 Parish Councillors who are elected every four years. The next elections are due next month, May 2007.

The full Council meets the first Wednesday of each month and has three standing Committees:-

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Planning and Environment | meets monthly (sometimes with an extra 'Plans only' meeting being necessary) |
| Property | meets monthly |
| Finance and General Purposes | meets monthly |

Each standing Committee includes the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council. 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 Six Sub-Committees:-

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Working Practices | Local Plan |
| Safety | Station Road Pavilion |
| Design Brief | Memorial Garden |

and currently has two Working Parties:-

Emergency
Swimming Pool

The Council is currently the Sole Trustee of the Billingshurst Village Hall, and regular meeting of the Trustees are held, to ensure the objectives of the Trust are being upheld, which are to provide a Village Hall for the benefit of the residents of Billingshurst.

An Annual Parish Meeting is held for all electors in the Parish between the beginning of March and end of May each year.

Properties owned and maintained by the Parish:-

Jubilee Fields and Sports Pavilion
The Pavilion, Station Road, Billingshurst
Two Garages, Station Road, Billingshurst
Tennis Courts, Lower Station Road Recreation Ground
Billingshurst Village Green (High Street)
Adversane Green
Alicks Hill grassed area
High Street grassed area
Willow Drive Open Space
Clevelands Garden
Carpenters Open Space (rear of Carpenters)
Lower Station Road Recreation Ground including play equipment and Skate Park
Cricket Field, Station Road
Football Field, Station Road
Manor Field Playing Field and play equipment
Cherry Tree Close Playing Field and play equipment
Land Corner Coombe Hill/High Street
59 Street Lights
A number of Public Seats

Properties rented and/or maintained by the Parish :-

The Billingshurst Village Hall, Roman Way, Billingshurst
Adversane Hall, Adversane Lane, Adversane
The Churchyard of St. Mary's Parish Church, together with boundary walls, railings and fences.
St Mary's Church Clock
Five Oaks Recreation Ground

The Council currently employs one full-time and seven part-time staff.

It is a statutory requirement that the public can attend all meetings of the full Council, its Committees and Sub-Committees. The agendas for these meetings, itemising all matters to be discussed, are advertised on the Notice Board at the Village Hall. The agenda for the full council meeting can also be found in the library, as well as in other key locations around the Parish. Certain matters do have to be considered in private, i.e. contracts for tender, staff matters, etc. where the press and public are requested to leave the meeting.

The minutes of meetings are available for public examination and copies are distributed to the press and Library and are available for the public at each Council Meeting. Copies of ratified minutes are available to view at www.billingshurst.gov.uk

The role of the Parish Council

As a statutory consultative body, directly elected from the Parish by the people, a Parish Council is responsible for:-

1. Representing the views of the community to other organisations.
2. Supporting local voluntary organisations.
3. Providing representatives to other statutory elected bodies.
4. Managing and maintaining properties, recreation grounds, etc. owned by the Parish.
5. Enhancing a community spirit and sense of identity for the people of that community and to act as a focal point for matters of local interest or complaint.
6. Raising revenue for local expenditure for the benefit of local residents.

Activities of the Parish Council

The Parish Council makes representations to central government on consultation documents with regard to draft legislation and local government reorganisation. They also correspond on many topics to Government Ministers, the local M.P. and M.E.P. The Parish Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications.

The Council has close relationships and works in partnership with the County and District Councils in order to improve the provision of services within the Parish, some of these Partnerships also include numerous bodies from within the Parish.

- **West Sussex County Council:** Responsible for strategic planning, education, Social Services, Libraries, public footpaths, street lighting, state of pavements and roads, parking, speed limits, Highway safety, grass-cutting etc.
- **Horsham District Council:** Responsible for local planning, collection of rubbish, street cleaning.
- The Environment Agency and Southern Water

Organisations that the Parish Council has representation on:

Horsham District Association of Local Councils (HDALC)
Horsham Crime Prevention Panel
Trustee Dauxwood Playgroup
Trustee Adversane Village Hall
Billingshurst Action Initiative Team (BAIT)
Community Transport project
Billingshurst Youth Group

By law, all Parish Councillors must reside within three miles of the Parish and therefore they should have detailed knowledge of the Parish and its problems.

The accounts of the Council are audited by the Government appointed auditors (Messrs. Mazars) each year and inspected by the Councillors.

All the Parish Councillors give their time voluntarily, without any payment. Under a new scheme imposed by central Government in 2003 all Councillors can now claim legitimate expenses.