



ANNUAL REPORT

FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR

01 April 2007 – 31 March 2008

Gavin Collins
Chairman Parish Council

Chairman's Report

This as many of you will know is my last Annual Report as Chairman of Billingshurst Parish Council. Due to changing work commitments and difficulties attending all meetings I have stepped down as Chairman of the Council but will remain a Parish Councillor.

This year has been challenging for the Council as we have had a change of key personnel, namely our Parish Clerk. I would like to thank Liz Berry for her hard work and commitment to the Council over three years and am pleased to say she has agreed to remain in the Council's employ albeit in a part time role. Beverley Turner has stepped in to the role of Parish Clerk bringing with her eight years experience as Clerk to a neighbouring parish and community planning experience from her role as Parish Liaison Officer at Horsham District Council. Beverley brought with her the requisite qualification to enable this Council to achieve its goal of attaining Quality Status, recognition that this Council is providing a high standard of service. Quality Status is awarded for four years and this Council will need to prove it has maintained those standards for re-accreditation. Congratulations too to our Deputy Clerk on achieving her Certificate in Local Council Administration. We are one of only a very few Councils that benefit from both their Clerk and Deputy Clerk being qualified. All the Council's staff provides excellent support to our Councillors.

We lost a number of Councillors this year at the May elections and subsequently. We were sorry to see them leave but have welcomed new Councillors: Clark, Margetts, Milne and Russell.

2007/8 has been an extremely busy year for this Council and it has undergone some considerable change in its back office functions. Email addresses for all Councillors have been created and the Council has a new website which can be seen at www.billingshurst.gov.uk.

Investigations into the cause of the cracks in the main hall at Billingshurst Village Hall are almost complete, and it would appear that the problems are caused by a variety of factors. It is hoped that repair works will commence later this year; hall users will be given plenty of advance notice of the start of the works but we do hope to minimise disruption to our users. The Council decided this year that it no longer wishes to be the Sole Managing Trustee of the Village Hall charity and voted to separate and hand over the running of the Village Hall charity to locally appointed trustees. The separation is in the hands of the Council's solicitors.

Local residents called a Parish Meeting in November to hold a parish poll on a referendum on the EU constitutional treaty. A member of UKIP had wanted to chair the meeting, but as the Chair of the Council was present, law dictates that the Chairman of the Council shall preside. As Chairman of the Parish Meeting, I closed the meeting before a vote could be taken, and a parish poll demanded on a topic that is not a parish matter and could have cost the Council £3,500 for the poll. However, this meeting still bore costs on you the local Council Tax payer as Council staff had to facilitate the meeting.

The Council has had a number of guest speakers at its meetings including Ian Davison – Monitoring Officer to talk about standards before the Council adopted the Amended Code of Members' Conduct in September, Cllr. Philip Circus of Horsham District Council to talk about the parking situation at Jengers Mead and Paul Rowley Head of Strategic and Community Planning at Horsham District Council to talk about a Parish Plan for Billingshurst.

The meeting attended by Cllr. Circus attracted almost 60 members of the public – standing room only! As a Council we welcome members of the public to attend our meetings. Dates and times of meetings can be found on our noticeboards at Jengers Mead, Village Green, Billingshurst Village Hall, Adversane Hall and Five Oaks and on our website. Our main Council meeting is the first Wednesday of the month.

Our initial consultation on the old cricket and football pitch is now coming to a close. We have our last round of consultation underway now finishing at the end of June. Our plans are then to complete a final plan and layout for the area and then looking for funding and commencement of the work from September onwards. The cost of the types of facilities that people would like to have are significant and I would expect the gardens to take many years to complete.

We have initiated a consultation programme to develop our Parish Plan, this is to enable us to look further forward than normal and is intended to help us over the next 2 - 8 years setting a clear direction and strategy for the council to adopt.

The coming year presents a particularly strong challenge for this Council, as there is a consortium of developers who will be submitting a development bid for the east/north east of Billingshurst to Horsham District Council this autumn. As a Parish Council it is our role to ensure that our residents are kept informed of this process, given the opportunity to make their comments heard and to endeavour to negotiate the best settlement for all residents of this parish.

Planning and Environment Committee Report

This committee has met twice in most months and has commented on approximately 155 planning applications for this parish. Our meetings are open to any resident with an interest in any of the applications.

Most applications are for additions to dwellings or conversions and a few for new build. We have attended some Horsham District Council Development Control (area south) meetings to speak against applications where we have good reasons to object and worries about the impact on neighbours or the surroundings. We have been consulted by the HDC arboriculturalist about work on trees or felling of trees as we have the local knowledge and in principle protect trees in the parish as much as possible. With the help and advice of the Parish Clerk we have responded to various documents requiring our comments.

In March 2007 we and residents of Arun Road met with representatives of Saxon Weald to be advised of their plans for land adjacent to Arun Road, and throughout 2007 and 2008 have continued to meet and consult with residents and Saxon Weald. Another site belonging to Saxon Weald - formerly Townlands - has been cleared and we await an application for a number of affordable dwellings, which are still needed in Billingshurst.

This committee receives notice of any S106 monies (planning gain) due from new build in this parish and records are kept in the parish office. Recently the Chairman has attended site meetings with District planners and Councillors to meet the County Surveyor to discuss parking problems relating to conversions in Station Road and Myrtle Lane and new build behind Laura's Garden. We await decisions from HDC on two applications and result of an inquiry into the conversion of Hereford House, Station Road to two take-aways.

We have been very active commenting on applications and trying to achieve the best outcome for the parish.

Finance & General Purposes Committee Report

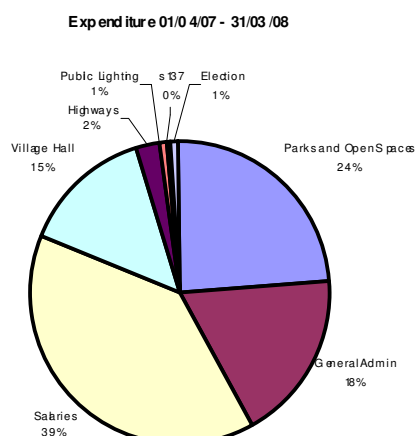
The day to day responsibility for the management of the finances of the council lies with the Clerk within the policies and procedures agreed by this Committee. This year the financial regulations, insurance policies and risk assessment, both financial and operational, have been reviewed. This together with a thorough examination of the asset register has been a necessary spring clean and has given a clear framework for effective financial management.

The setting of the budget for the coming year always exercises the committee greatly. After a very small increase over the last two years 0.2% in 2006 and 1.9% in 2007, the increase for 2008/09 of 9.9% is higher than we would have wished, but still only equates to an average of 3.9% over the last three years. A significant part of this is due to HDC's charge on Billingshurst for the swimming pool running costs amounting to £2.92 per annum for a band D property. However over the last three years the increase in the parish part of the Council Tax is still much less than the overall increase. Nevertheless wherever there is an opportunity to provide the parish with something they want such as the swimming pool, the Council will not shrink in asking the parish for more money to meet that demand.

The Council's income for the financial year was £303,355 from the precept of £223,603, bank interest of £18,693 up 37% on last year, s106 planning obligation monies of over £12,000 for the Trim Trail, maintenance sum for the Jubilee Oaks and bins at Jubilee Fields, Christmas lighting grant of £5,000, environmental cleansing grant of £7,297 from Horsham District Council and various charges for Council services.

The Council's expenditure this year was £255,581 including £23,322 from its capital budget for the final payment for the Jubilee Fields sports pavilion, structural engineer fees for the Village Hall and a new server for the Village Hall. The Council's named reserves have reduced from £170,945 at the start of the financial year to £121,623. The Council's general reserve has increased from £187,610 to £286,493 at year end. This is just over one year's precept and in accordance with audit regulations guidance that the Council should keep one year's precept in reserve for contingency.

The coming year brings some particular financial demands on this Council. Namely the repairs to Billingshurst Village Hall estimated at £90,000, £45,000 set aside towards the gardens in Station Road, £25,000 to improve the street lighting and £5,000 to improve the Christmas lights. The revenue budget to run the Council and its services including property is £286,889. The budget has been trimmed as tightly as possible and includes £12,000 for grass cutting, £10,500 for the provision of public conveniences, £20,000 for the Council insurance and £20,000 in loan payments for the extension to Billingshurst Village Hall.



Reserves at 31 March 2008

Cost Centre	Amount
Open Spaces	£10,354
Village Hall	£35,653
Memorial Gardens	£33,416
Civil Emergency	£1,200
Lighting	£25,000
Youth	£0
Play Equip	£11,000
Notice Boards	£0
Skateboard	£0
IT	£0
Xmas Lighting	£5,000
Total Named Reserves	£121,623

Year End Accounts 01 April 2007 to 31 March 2008

31 March 2007	INCOME	31 March 2008
£		£
335,447	Parks and Open Spaces	15,178
7,065	General Admin	5,799
882	Village Hall	27,190
12,476	Highways	12,620
8	Public Lighting	1
211,374	Precept	223,603
12,788	Interest	18,963
580,040		303,355
	EXPENDITURE	
379,960	Parks and Open Spaces	61,571
47,024	General Admin	46,608
76,948	Salaries	98,199
27,046	Village Hall	37,545
12,027	Highways	5,729
2,345	Public Lighting	2,340
1,016	s137	495
	Election	3,094
546,366		255,581
29,116	Net Income/Expenditure	47,775
31/03/2007	Balance B/Fwd	360341
	Plus Net Income/Expenditure	47775
31/03/2008	New Balance	408116

Donations were made to the following local organisations:

Billingshurst Scouts and Guides	£50
Billingshurst Scouts and Guides	£100
Royal British Legion	£20
Billingshurst Community Transport	£1,000
Billingshurst Community Partnership	£1,800
Billirox and TAG	£1,626
West Sussex Mediation Service	£50
St Mary's Church	£175
Rotary Club Christmas Lunch	£216
Sussex Air Ambulance	£100
West Sussex Association for the Blind	£100
Unitarian Chapel	£50

Property Committee Report

This Council can be described as a 'property-rich' Council, but with that brings responsibility and extra maintenance costs. The Council has worked hard on ideas for the future of the cricket field in Station Road culminating in two outline plans for gardens on the former cricket field. The Station Road pavilion presented some particular issues over its future use, and many hoped to see it re-opened as a youth facility. Unfortunately the general decay of the building meant it was uneconomical to repair and was pulled down this year. The Community Partnership is working on a project to install a building on the footprint of the former pavilion for a youth facility, but the project is in its infancy. The Council also agreed a lease to West Sussex County Council for land next to the pavilion for the Wakoos/C4C children's centre, building work has already commenced. Both Wakoos/C4C and the swimming pool should be open for business by late summer/early autumn.

Works are ongoing at the excellent Jubilee Fields facility to improve drainage. The now redundant changing rooms at Manor Fields were removed this year.

The Council has negotiated new leases for the Adversane Hall to the Adversane Residents Association and for the Dauxwood Pre-School in Natts Lane. Negotiations are ongoing for adoption by the Council of land known locally as 'the Bowling Alley'.

A Sub-Committee has been formed with the specific task of improving our Christmas lighting. Three suppliers have been invited to visit us in June and tender for the work.

The Committee has overseen ongoing maintenance work of our property including the creation of a Property Portfolio to catalogue all our property and maintenance issues. The public conveniences in Mill Way have had a deep clean, but are suffering from minor graffiti and someone stealing the toilet rolls!

We were very grateful to the Billingshurst Family Church for arranging a spring clean of Cleveland Gardens, and do hope this partnership working will become a regular fixture in the Council's calendar.

Last summer saw a summer of discontent with the parish plagued by petty vandalism from a minority. The Council has responded to this issue by working with Horsham District Council and the Police to bring in byelaws which are awaiting final approval by the Secretary of State.

During the year, the Parish Council responded to the following consultations on behalf of the local community:

- West Sussex County Council Speed Limit Criteria Review
- West Sussex County Council Rural Strategy
- Horsham District Council draft Statement of Licensing Policy
- Dept. for Communities and Local Government 'Orders and Regulations relating to the Conduct of Local Authority Members in England'
- Horsham District Council New Corporate Plan
- Planning White Paper
- Gypsy and Traveller Caravans in West Sussex Consultation.
- Horsham District Council Local Development Framework to 2018: Reserve Housing Sites Issues and Options Consultation Paper

And Finally,

As this is my last Annual Report as Chairman, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those public spirited people I have had the pleasure to work with over the years as Chairman of the Council.

Your support for the benefit of the local community is greatly appreciated and without your help, this Council would not be able to achieve all that it has. May I wish Gillian Yarham well in what I am sure is going to be a challenging time ahead for Billingshurst.

Gavin Collins

Billingshurst Parish Council at 31 March 2008

Chairman: Mr Gavin Collins
Vice-Chairman: Mr Jake Edsor

Clerk: Ms Beverley Turner
Deputy Clerk: Mrs Wendy Wright

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Parish Councillors 31 March 2008		
Mr G. R. Collins	3 Cranham Avenue, Billingshurst	07912 368805
Mr J. H. Edsor	7 Cranham Avenue, Billingshurst	07760 255433
Mr B. L. Barnes	13 Carpenters, Billingshurst RH14 9RA	01403 780660
Mr M. Bobker	38 Rowan Drive, Billingshurst	01403 783809
Mr S. N. Buck	66 Arun Road, Billingshurst	01403 782599
Mrs H. Clarke	23 Forge Way, Billingshurst	01043 785498
Mr A. C. Grant	Tanners Cottage, Lordings Road, Adversane	01403 784165
Mr C. P. H. Griffin	Smithy House, Stane Street, Five Oaks	07803 908695
Mr P. T. Leaney	11 Rowan Drive, Billingshurst	01403 783812
Mr R. M. Margetts	47 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst	01403 784487
Mr C. Milne	8 Rosehill, Billingshurst	01403 782505
Mr D. F. Rands	Billingshurst Parish Council Office	01403 782555
Mr J. M. Russell	1 Platts Meadow, Billingshurst	01403 784340
Mrs G. Yarham	9 Carpenters, Billingshurst	01403 782282

The Council was formed in 1894. There are currently 14 Parish Councillors and one vacancy (filled by uncontested election in April 2008 by Mr D. Homer). The next Parish Council elections are due in May 2011.

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 five Sub-Committees:-

Christmas Lights
Design Statement
Parish Plan
Station Road Gardens
Working Practices