

PARISH OF BILLINGSHURST
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
OF ELECTORS
BILLINGSHURST CENTRE
WEDNESDAY 12 APRIL 2023, 7.00PM

Present:

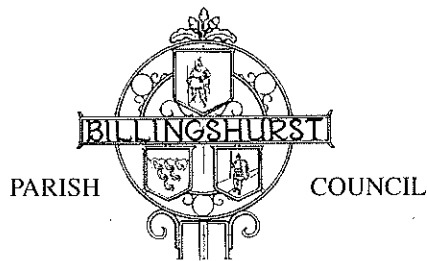
Cllr P Berry, Chairman of the Parish Council
G C Burt, Clerk to the Council
Mrs E Berry, Office Manager, BPC
Mrs Sarah Meyer, Admin Assistant, BPC
8 Members of the public, all Parish Councillors.

1. The Chairman welcomed all those present, explaining that the meeting was being streamed live to the internet.
2. **Presentation by Jennifer Cruse, Support Relations Officer with the Dogs Trust.**
The meeting heard about the work of the Trust, which was not just about finding homes for dogs. It included much work to assist new owners, lead on national campaigns and provide a home for dogs possibly too old to find new forever homes to name but three. Visitors to the Trust's various sites were always welcome. Much of the Trust's income came from bequests. The audience was very appreciative of the presentation and a raffle was held which raised £35 for the Trust.

Short adjournment.

3. **Approval of the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting on 13 April 2022.**
The draft minutes having been circulated previously were taken as read and **RESOLVED** that they be accepted and signed as a true record.
4. **To Receive the Annual Report of the Parish Council.**
The Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr P. Berry, reported on the activities of the Council over the past year, attached.
5. **To Receive the Audited Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2022.**
The Clerk to the Council, G Burt, gave overview of the Council's finances over the past year and looked to the year ahead, attached.
- 5 **Question and answer session with Electors.**
There were no questions.

Meeting finished at 8.12pm



**ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE YEAR
2022 –2023**

Cllr Paul Berry, Chairman of the Council

As usual, I begin with an update on any changes in Councillors over the last year; in May we welcomed by co-option Steve Thomas to fill the vacancy mentioned in my report last Spring.

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.

We have continued to stream meetings to the internet and at last seem to have overcome the gremlins which bedevilled us. We accept though that there is room for further improvement.

Members of the **PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** met on 14 occasions and considered a total of 128 planning applications. The Committee did not object to 116 of these; five of which were subsequently refused by Horsham District Council (HDC) who are the planning authority. Of this five, two applications are currently in the appeal process.

The Committee objected or strongly objected to 12 applications; two of which were granted permission, four were refused, two were withdrawn and four have yet to be determined.

In June 2022, there was a change in the Committee structure as Cllr Dave Homer and Cllr Garry Commins retired as Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively. Cllr Douglas Waller was appointed Chairman with Cllr Caroline Beresford Pratt taking on the role of Vice Chairman. At his first meeting as Chairman, Cllr Waller thanked Cllr Homer for the incredible contribution he has made to the Committee over 16 years of service.

Committee members were pleased to welcome representatives of Dunmoore Group to 4 meetings during the year to hear about the progress of the Billingshurst Trade and Business Park (Hilland Farm). Regular updates were given in addition to attendance at meetings and both Councillors and members of the public were able to ask questions and comment on the emerging plans.

The planning process continues to be disrupted by Natural England's (NE) statement on water neutrality. NE is concerned about the impact of new development on water abstraction and the effect this is having on protected habitats. Evidence collected by NE has shown that increasing demand for water as a result of development, is leading to an observable impact on a number of rare species, with some considered to be under threat of extinction, within the Arun Valley.

Water neutrality means the delivery of new development which keeps the level of water abstraction to the same (or lower) level as existing rates. Initially, NE expected HDC to only determine applications if it was critical to do so and that any such applications would have to demonstrate water neutrality. The matter has implications for, and further delays, the production of the new HDC Local Plan.

HDC has further delayed production of the Local Plan following a motion to pause the Plan which had been due to go to a Regulation 19 consultation in February 2023. Regrettably, rather than the limited number of housing in the district during the first five years of the Plan, this decision leaves the district vulnerable to speculative development. HDC issued a statement to the effect that as the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is to examine the high annual housing targets, it would not be appropriate to pursue the draft Plan.

The Planning Inspectorate allowed an appeal by Reside Developments Limited against the refusal by HDC of planning permission for a further 83 dwellings on land East of Billingshurst.

In November 2021, the Council decided to support a possible development to the west of Billingshurst in favour of one to the east as it was felt likely that another large scale development would present itself in the coming years. This matter has been ongoing during the past year. The Council has considered documents which would help ensure that if HDC decided to allow a development to the west of Billingshurst, developers would be committed to provide significant sports and leisure improvements at Jubilee Fields. At the time of writing this report, no such document has been signed as to date the council was not happy with the wording and the assurances they offered. It is worth mentioning too that the Council insisted that any costs it incurred for its planning consultancy and legal advice were met by developers!

The decision in November 2021 was never about encouraging development, supporting it or wanting it; it was the realisation that it was highly likely there would be continued house building in the parish and the Council wanted the best possible deal for the community. I know that many councillors who supported the west development over that of the east would much prefer that HDC did not allow either.

Billingshurst Parish Council is simply trying to help ensure that if HDC does allow a strategic large-scale development in the parish, that it and the community have as much say, and can get as much out of that development as possible. In fact, HDC councillors and officers have in the past encouraged the Council to engage with developers and have at times been critical of the Council for not doing so. Of course, we cannot win! If the Council doesn't engage with developers it risks being accused of not trying to get the best deal for Billingshurst and if it does engage it risks being seen as pro-development. I hope I have been able to reassure residents in this report that the Council does not take supporting any large-scale development lightly and it has only shown a preference to a possible development to the west over that of the east, as it felt that if HDC was minded to permit that development it would bring the best possible benefits to the community.

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:

- Further work has been undertaken to improve drainage at part of the site and we are looking to fund additional works planned by the Billingshurst Sports and Recreation Association (BSRA).
- The barrier at the entrance has been replaced with one far more user-friendly which should make it less likely to be left open and thus the site vulnerable.
- Following a new selection process, we have appointed a contractor to take forward a replacement skate park. Work should now start this year following a final public consultation and funds being confirmed.

At Station Road Community Gardens, work on the *Men's Shed* near to the Leisure Centre is now well underway.

We are grateful for all the volunteers who help look after the Gardens and Jubilee Fields and help make them remain the amazing community facilities they are.

We are reviewing with Billigreen whether we can extend areas of grass that can benefit from reduced mowing to assist biodiversity, plus looking at anything else we can do differently to help with the climate change agenda.

Elsewhere:

- The public conveniences in Mill Lane retained their Platinum in the 2022 *Loo of the Year* Awards.
- The project to replace the bollards on Adversane Green continues.

The **FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** continues to keep a close eye on the Council's finances. Again, I feel that the Council has sustained a good balance of maintaining current facilities in the Parish, updating others and increasing services and supporting the work of other organisations. The Clerk will say more about the Council's finances later in this report. However, I hope that when looking at the percentage rise in precept, people also look what this means in pounds and pence. The average 'Band D' property will only pay around an extra 15 pence per week, and I hope that with the services it provides, the facilities it offers and the way it tries its best to work on behalf of our community, you will consider that your Parish Council overall provides good value for money. Of course, many of the things which affect household finances also affect the Council's finances too such as increases in costs of services, insurances and utilities. Increases in the costs of providing Neighbourhood Wardens have also been passed onto the Council by HDC but as the wardens offer so much support to our community, especially to more vulnerable people perhaps which the cost of living situation might affect the most, the Council was determined not to reduce services.

The Council continues to fund regular youth sessions in the village and is looking forward to hearing of plans to increase activities at *The Depot* youth facility at 83a High Street. The upstairs flat continues to bring the Council a regular income.

We also support other voluntary organisations in the parish by way of our **GRANTS** programme and in 2022-23 awarded the following:

Applicant	£
Victim Support Sussex	75.00
West Sussex Association for the Blind / 4Sight Vision Support	400.00
Billingshurst Community Speedwatch	238.85
Billingshurst Centre	22,000.00
West Sussex Mediation Service	200.00
Billingshurst W.I.	350.00
Head2Head Theatre	1,973.00
Total	25,236.85

In addition, the Council awarded monies from its CIL fund to help groups with capital projects. See CIL update.

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 continued to allocate Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds to infrastructure projects, many to local good causes, as per the following since last April:

Further improvements to Women's Hall	3,000.00
Conversion of cupboard to house N/Wardens	5,000.00
Replacement bollards at Adversane Green - Phase II	6,048.00
x3 replacement benches at SRCG	2,448.96
Replacement height barrier - Jubilee Fields	4,604.76
Electricity supply - Men's Shed	5,446.70
Imps. to Billingshurst Centre	31,392.37
Drainage works at Jubilee Fields	3,980.00
Replacement bollards at Adversane Green - Phase III	6,048.00
Install fire protection in loft at Billingshurst Centre	3,273.63
Total	71,242.42

Frustratingly, the Council was very disappointed that West Sussex County Council (WSCC) declined our application for proposals to try to reduce and slow traffic in the High Street and East Street. Following a meeting, there is the likely possibility that WSCC will support progressing particular elements of the scheme, where they can be tied to specific S106 transport monies available for the parish. On the subject of road safety, the Council is delighted to see the Billingshurst Community Speedwatch Group doing so well and being so pro-active and is very pleased to be able to support them.

We continue to undertake the administration for the Annual Remembrance Day Parade working with the Royal British Legion. Last summer we were pleased to work with others on the program to mark HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and were delighted to lead on two elements, the parade and the lighting of the new beacon on Adversane Green; the latter was incredibly well attended and was a truly magical and memorable evening and was one of my proudest moments as Council Chair.

How sad that only a few months later the Council joined the nation in mourning the country's longest-serving monarch.

Last month we once again hosted a very successful Showcase here at the Centre, showcasing all the many groups and societies in the parish.

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 6 times per year.)

Daily management is left to an excellent team lead by Manager Sarah Newell; bookings continue to recover towards their pre-COVID levels. Major works are due to start shortly which includes refurbished toilets and new automatic front doors. Once again, the Centre hosted a fantastic Christmas Fayre.

Our Neighbourhood Wardens - Julie and Barry - 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 wide variety of the tasks they undertake.

The Parish Council often comments on public consultations and lobbies our District and County Councils to fulfil their duties and to make improvements within the Parish. It is good to see HDC at last undertake long overdue improvements to the bypass path.

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.

This of course has been the final year of this Council and I can't believe how quickly the last 4 years have gone. Thank you to all those Councillors who have served for either all or part of this term and I would like to particularly thank those who did not seek re-election. These include District Councillor Kate Rowbottom and from the Parish Council, Cllrs Commins, Homer and Barnes. Cllr Homer was the Chair of the Council's Planning Committee and Cllr Barnes the Chair of the Property Committee for many years and both went above and beyond what would normally be expected from committee chairs. Cllr Barnes has been a member of Billingshurst Parish Council for over 50-years. Think about that for a minute: that's over 5 decades of voluntary service in our community, an amazing contribution to parish life by any standards.

Last week, following the close of nominations, we learned that 14 candidates put themselves forward for the 15 seats and were therefore elected unopposed. Congratulations to all and we look forward to welcoming the 3 new Councillors. One vacancy, therefore, remains and this will be filled by co-option at our meeting on the 10 May. If anyone would like to be considered, please contact the Clerk ASAP.

I would like to again thank the Council's staff for all their hard work. These include the Clerk and his team in the Parish Office, the Billingshurst Centre Manager and her team and the Council's Litter Wardens.

Please consider signing up to the Council's email subscription service and following the Council's social media accounts. It also only takes a few moments each week to visit the Council's website to see if any new agendas have been added and what items are due to be discussed and decided upon. The excellent local Village Tweet publication also includes monthly updates from the Council. I know many parishioners have a real interest and passion for matters relating to Billingshurst. The Parish Council offers more ways than ever to be kept updated, as do HDC and WSCC. The Council works closely with our District and County Councillors and has representation on a number of other local groups.

Billingshurst Parish Council at 31 March 2023

Clerk
Office Manager
Assistant Clerk
Administrative Assistant
Litter Wardens

Mr Greg Burt
Mrs Liz Berry
Miss Jo Booth
Mrs Sarah Meyer
Colin Ellis, John Bicknell, Linval Thomas

PARISH COUNCILLORS

CHAIRMAN Mr P M Berry	8 Nightingale Walk, Billingshurst, RH14 9TY	paul.berry@billingshurst.gov.uk	07880 507666
VICE-CHAIRMAN Mr K Peters	31 Saddlers Close, Billingshurst, RH14 9GL	ken.peters@billingshurst.gov.uk	07511 170205
Mr B L Barnes	13 Carpenters, Billingshurst, RH14 9RA	barry.barnes@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 780660
Mrs E Benger	6 The Wadeys, Billingshurst, RH14 9UD	edna.benger@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 783684
Mrs C Beresford Pratt	2 High Street Billingshurst RH14 9PH	caroline.beresfordpratt@billingshurst.gov.uk	
Mr G C Commins	130 Forge Way, Billingshurst, RH14 9LN	garry.commins@billingshurst.gov.uk	07877638379
Mr P Day	14 Summers Place, Stane Street, Billingshurst, RH14 9GN	phillip.day@billingshurst.gov.uk	07404 634821
Mrs S Duck	189 Berrall Way, Billingshurst, RH14 9PQ	sandy.duck@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 786146
Mr C Gale	4 Groomsland Drive, Billingshurst, RH14 9HA	craig.gale@billingshurst.gov.uk	0782 6519432
Mr D K Homer	24 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst, RH14 9LA	dave.homer@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 782824
Mr J Marchant	Laurel House, 103 High St, Billingshurst, RH14 9QX	james.marchant@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 785041
Mr R E Margetts	47 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst, RH14 9NN	roy.margetts@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 784487
Mr S Thomas	110 High Street Billingshurst, RH14 9QS	steve.thomas@billingshurst.gov.uk	07920 260558
Mr D Waller	C/O Parish Office	douglas.waller@billingshurst.gov.uk	01403 257531
Mrs S L Wilson	37 Carpenters, Billingshurst, RH14 9RA	sarah.wilson@billingshurst.gov.uk	07990 755252



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

Tel: 01403 782555
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.

15 Councillors
Parish elections May 2023.

REPORT OF THE RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER 2022-23

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 by the Centre.
2. The Council continues to receive CIL funds, which it is obliged to account for and report on separately and are detailed on the website.
3. Public Open Space (POS) at Kingslea Farm in Marringdean Road was finally transferred to the Council in February; this was accompanied by a commuted sum of £420,126.92 which is currently in a 6 month Treasury Reserve Account. The Council will be considering how best to utilise this in due course.
4. Increasing interest rates means the Council is getting a better return on its reserves.
5. The cost of providing the Neighbourhood Warden Service, via HDC, was higher than expected, due to a nationally agreed backdated pay award; this of course has had a knock-on effect into the year about to start.

6. The Internal Audit at the year end advised that general reserves were on the low side. As a result, some earmarked reserves unlikely to be used in the short term were released back into general reserves and the Council put a hold on all non-essential expenditure.

Looking to the year just starting:

7. Overall, the Council will be asking for an extra £53,608 to fund its services. This is 9.67% more than last year. Once again, because there are more properties than last year, the overall take is spread over more payers. Therefore, the extra per typical average Band D payer, is £7.62 or 7.49%.
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
01/04/2023