

## **CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2021/2022**

### **Introduction**

Once again, another challenging year. The restrictions necessitated by the Covid-19 Pandemic continued for much of the time and only in recent weeks have we begun to feel some semblance of normality return. That said the Parish Council was kept very busy. It was required by law to return to 'in-person' meetings with only the public allowed to attend by videoconferencing. This tested our IT skills, but we managed until all restrictions were lifted and we could welcome residents personally.

In my second year as Chairman, I have much to report as follows:

### **Staff and Councillors**

I am delighted we were able to appoint a new Clerk & RFO (Responsible Finance Officer), Julia McClung and a Deputy Clerk, Jane McKenzie who took up their posts in June and September respectively. Both live in West Horsley and have brought expertise, knowledge, and enthusiasm to their roles. Their ideas and suggestions have been a breath of fresh air into the way the Council conducts its business; for example, their monthly themed 'drop-in' sessions in the Village Hall are geared to increase our engagement with residents. They are also looking to broaden our presence on social media having begun with regular postings on Nextdoor, updating the website and shortly to come a Facebook or Instagram page. They have enabled us to commence two formal Committees: Planning and Environment administered by Jane and Finance by Julia. We thanked Joanna Cadman who had been our Locum Clerk since January 2021 and so enabled us to function satisfactorily whilst the recruitment process was run.

We saw a turn-over in Councillors. Sally Newman left in August, Angus Graham in March. We welcomed Guy Padfield Wilkins and Paul Dodgson. We requested a Community Governance Review by Guildford Borough Council for the number of parish councillors to be increased by 2 from 9 to 11. This is to reflect the increase in our population following the major housing developments that are underway and to enable us to fulfil the activities associated with our strategic plan. We should know the outcome in July ready for elections in May 2023.

### **Finances**

Our precept was increased from £83,172 in 2019/20 to £83,816 for this year; a 0.83% increase.

We continued our programme to improve the appearance of the village, refurbish some of our assets such as the noticeboards and tennis court and contract with Jason, our Village Warden. Once again we invested in the Village Hall by having new external doors for the Cedar Room and an industrial dishwasher installed in the main kitchen. We decided against building a new public toilet in the grounds as the costs greatly exceeded our available funds. We made £5,000 available as grants to local organisations, and this enabled materials to be provided for the Glad Rags Banner, guttering work at the Cricket Club and some climate change initiatives to be pursued.

Communication is vitally important so we invested more into producing our newsletters and their distribution via Royal Mail to ensure every household received them. We continued to contract with a planning consultant to assist us with the complex planning applications that have come through as a consequence of GBC's Local Plan implementation. We also submitted a list of community infrastructure needs for Section 106 monies associated with significant development in the Village. Some has been received such as replacement equipment in the Playground and the restored planters at the Village Hall whilst the rest is awaited. We only receive such funding once the developer has built a certain amount.

Underpinning this was the implementation of a financial accounting and performance management system which enables us to monitor expenditure on a monthly basis and readily see how we are performing including a forecast to year end. This has made us more effective and efficient in managing our resources and transparent in reporting.

Last year we were the beneficiary of a significant bequest. This year we received further monies and commenced the restoration project for the Village Orchard due to be completed this summer.

We gratefully received a grant of £1250 from Surrey County Council's Members' Allocation. This has purchased a new defibrillator to be installed outside The Hookwood Practice at the A246 end of The Street.

## **Planning**

This year we directly experienced the impact of removing our green belt status & the implementation of GBC's Local Plan with several developments underway concurrently. Despite the Council's best efforts to minimise this, there have been building sites in Silkmore Lane, Cranmore Lane, The Street, A246 and now underway, the development at Manor Farm. This will soon be followed by the development at Oakland Farm, Green Lane. Part of our activity has been to keep an eagle eye on the consequences of heavy traffic and the devastation lorries have caused to our verges and fragile pipework. Our success at getting correction, however, has been regretfully limited.

An even greater number of planning applications were received than previously; 148 compared to 123 last year. Of these, 80 were full applications, 50 residential extensions and 10 for works to trees. We objected to 34 of the 80 mainly on the grounds of non-compliance with policies in our adopted Neighbourhood Plan. Our continued concern over the apparent failure of GBC to appreciate the combined impact on our limited infrastructure resulted in a formal meeting with the Leader and Senior Officers in February. It appears that “expert opinion” by statutory authorities on flooding, sewage, traffic and school places rules the day regardless of local experience to the contrary and so further discussions are to be held with SCC to bring home the consequences of some of these decisions.

The major initiative launched by SCC, “Your Fund Surrey”, led us to submit speculative concepts for enhancement to the Village. One was for a piece of art sculpture and the other for a community sports hub in conjunction with the Horsley & Send Cricket Club and the Horsley Football Club. Encouragingly, both fit the criteria and now we need to embark on a full community engagement process to bring them, hopefully, to fruition.

### **Youth Council**

Last year, the notion of forming a Youth Council for those aged 13 to 18 living in the Village and engaging them in local affairs was developed. I am delighted to say in Spring 2021 it was formed by a group of 7 who elected their own Chairman, Clerk and Treasurer. They ran a successful photography competition, a stall at the Horsley Big Day Out to raise funds and set in motion the plans for an outdoor cinema event and tennis tournament in 2022. To notice their presence a dedicated noticeboard duly painted by the team was installed and now carries details of all their activities.

### **Initiatives**

There were two major initiatives this year. These were the Gig-a-Bit full fibre superfast broadband scheme for the whole Village and a total refurbishment of the Council’s Tennis Court in Long Reach. The first necessitated working in conjunction with East Horsley and Openreach and required a focussed campaign to achieve the level of sign-up needed; this was secured within six weeks. Since January 2022, households have been able to receive the new service. We have received positive feedback. The second has seen the re-surfacing of the tennis court, an improved entrance, and an online booking system. We hope it will be well used and enjoyed by residents.

All the Task Groups have been active. Here is a synopsis of some of their initiatives:

- highly successful West Horsley in Bloom competition, including ‘Potatoes in the Pot’, followed by the Teddy Bears Picnic and Christmas Lantern Parade. Planning now for the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee in June 2022 & the bi-annual Village event in September
- twice yearly litter picks

- installation of new noticeboards and design of a “Welcome Pack” for new homeowners due for release this summer
- installation of new and replacement bollards
- chasing SCC for the cutting back of hedges that encroach on and obscure pavements
- installation of vehicle speed detection device
- contract for the services of a Village Warden
- submission of evidence to apply for the extension of the AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) boundary
- planting of trees for the Queen’s Green Canopy and those gifted by SCC & the Forestry Commission
- commencement of the Village Orchard Restoration Project
- establishment of the climate change task group involving local individuals and representatives of community groups with an emerging action plan

**And finally .....**

I hope on reading this, residents will feel we have listened and taken on board a number of their concerns and interests. I should like to extend appreciation to Community Speed Watch whose presentation to Council in March showed the difference the service was making in keeping West Horsley roads safer, to the Village Hall Management Committee for maintaining the asset to a high standard and the Trustees and Staff at West Horsley Place whose collaboration on several topics has been very helpful.

As a Council we have appreciated enormously the work done by volunteers Martin O’Hara representing us on the Wisley Community Liaison Group, Tina Grice graphic designer for our publications and Judy Young & Team for organising our upcoming Village Event. I am indebted to the time, effort and commitment given by fellow Parish Councillors and our Clerks. My thanks too, to our Borough and County Councillors not only for their support but in keeping us abreast of matters which concern the Village; Catherine, Tim, Christopher and Colin, thank you. I hope everyone will enjoy the old postcard exhibition that accompanies this year’s report with special thanks to June Davey for her curation.

***Cllr Miss Elaine Best, Chairman***

***April 2022***

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