

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2022/2023

Introduction

This has been another busy year for the Council during which we have experienced some highs and lows; success in our events and the low in mourning the death of Queen Elizabeth II. We have witnessed changes to our Village with so much new housing development and the consequent strain on our limited infrastructure.

As my third year as Chairman draws to a close, I have the following to specifically report.

Staff and Councillors

Our Clerk, Julia McClung and Deputy Clerk, Jane McKenzie have continued to make great strides in improving the efficiency of the Council. They have enabled us to run two formal Committees, Planning and Finance, improve our community engagement with regular liaison both with residents and with officers at Surrey County Council and Guildford Borough Council. We also have an updated website. The policies and procedures underpinning the work of the Council have all been reviewed and our budget setting is now a rigorous exercise.

We were sad to lose Guy Padfield Wilkins as a Councillor who moved out of the area, but welcomed Peter Colborne-Baber in his place. Peter has lived in West Horsley for many years and has gallantly taken on the brief for "roads". Our request for a Community Governance Review was granted by Guildford Borough Council and as a result we can have two additional Councillors from May 2023. Our justification for asking for extra councillors was in recognition of the increase in population following the major housing development so we very much hope to attract people new to the Village to stand for election.

Finance

Our precept was raised from £83,816 to £86,148; a 2.78% increase. We report monthly on expenditure against budget which is available to see in the Council agenda papers posted on our website. As at 31st January, 2023 we held £43,500 in ear-marked reserves for such projects as the Village Hall roof, expert legal advice, election costs and special events. Our financial position remains healthy.

We tendered for Village Warden services and were delighted to appoint Steve Peach; this has improved the appearance of our Village and ensured we were 'salted' during the icy weather. We increased our gardening maintenance contract to ensure that the trees we planted throughout the Village, including the Village Green and the restored Village Orchard, are well looked after and that the investment made from the Akerman Bequest is maintained. As usual we gave an annual grant to the Village Hall for upkeep and maintenance of the Playground. From our Community Grant Fund, were able to support some work at the Grace & Flavour Community Garden, the Glad Rags Mulberry Room community project and an archaeological dig at West Horsley Place.

Communication and engagement are essential and to this end we have updated our website so that it carries very current news, have introduced an e-bulletin board produced in the months between newsletters, published regularly on 'Nextdoor' and 'Horsley Hub' and have set up Instagram and Facebook accounts. This way we hope to reach as many people as possible in addition to those who have already signed up to our mailing list.

Section 106 monies derived from the major housing developments underway in the Village are slowly being released as the developer builds a certain amount. We anticipate much will be spent on roads infrastructure and traffic calming measures in the coming months. Surrey County Council and Guildford Borough Council have control over this but keep the Parish Council informed.

Planning

Planning continues to be a significant element in the work of the Council. This year we have experienced the direct consequence of approved planning applications with major developments underway at Manor Farm and Lollesworth Fields, and with work continuing in Cranmore Lane and Green Lane. We await the outcome of the application submitted for Wisley.

Our Planning Committee was established on 1st April and has met monthly since. Last year 148 applications were received; this year the number exceeds 180. So far this number includes, 74 full applications, 59 associated with 'discharge of conditions' and 13 for works to trees. We objected to 16 mainly on the grounds of non-compliance with policies in our adopted Neighbourhood Plan. To date, Guildford Borough Council has approved 80 applications, refused 19, 52 still waiting a decision and the remainder in progress.

We took the opportunity to make a full submission to extend the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) further into the Village. Such was the volume of evidence from across Surrey that there has been a delay in learning whether our submission had found favour. Very recently, maps for the proposed extension have become available. Consultation on the actual proposed extension has just opened. We will be submitting a response to ask for reconsideration of our evidence to warrant inclusion in the review.

In recent weeks, we have been informed that Surrey County Council has changed its criteria for projects seeking financial support from *Your Fund Surrey*. We are re-evaluating our two projects in the light of the new criteria.

Youth Council

Our Youth Council is developing well and has, as predicted, seen a changeover in personnel. It was so encouraging that the two eldest who have gone on to university had their experience recognised in the offers of their places. A new Chairman and Clerk have been elected and three new councillors have joined. During 2022 they organised a successful tennis tournament for 14- to 18-year-olds and a Movie Night for young people showing the film Grease. They are building on the success of last year and planning some exciting activities for 2023 including participation in some climate change initiatives. We congratulated and thanked those who have moved on.

Initiatives

This year was HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and we were pleased to work alongside East Horsley Parish Council in organising celebrations across our two Villages. We were delighted that over 800 people attended our Beacon Lighting event at West Horsley Place; the weather was perfect and the flame lit up the estate to perfection. We were grateful to the Piper, Utterly Unique for the music, Marsha for the hot drinks and West Horsley Place for hosting us; a truly memorable night.

It was so very sad that on the 8th September we learnt of the death of Queen Elizabeth II and set about mourning as prescribed by the Palace. This necessitated the cancellation of our Village Garden Party. For the first time in 70 years a Proclamation announcing the ascension of King Charles III had to be read and I had the honour of doing so outside the Village Hall on Sunday 11th September. This was accompanied by a true Village event, organised by Judy Young and her Team at short notice, with Sunflowers and afternoon tea served for approximately 150 people who came to witness the reading. It was followed by laying a wreath under the Village Oak in memory of our late Queen.

With so much housing being built concern had been expressed over how our limited infrastructure will cope in the light of a significant increase in population. To address this, we have set up a Community Forum. The first was held in November on a “Question Time” format to consider availability of school places for Village children. The panel included representatives of Surrey County Council, South Farnham Educational Trust and The Howard Partnership Trust, and was attended by over 70 residents. The outcome has raised a number of concerns and further work is being done to see if the situation for local children can be improved. The next Forum will look at health services and is planned for later in 2023.

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

- refurbishment of the Village Tennis Court in Long Reach
- very successful West Horsley in Bloom, including “Potatoes in the Pot”, followed by the Christmas Lantern Parade; planning is underway for the King’s Coronation
- twice yearly litter picks
- improvements to the appearance in the Village
- planting of trees to mark the Queen’s Green Canopy
- completion of the Village Orchard Restoration Project
- speed reduction on the A246
- provision of an e-bulletin board
- range of climate change initiatives including three community events, tree and hedgerow planting

And Finally a Huge Thank You

Once again, I hope on reading this residents will feel we have taken on-board their various issues, concerns and interests and have found our increase in communication channels helpful in raising awareness and providing information. I should like to thank the Community Speed Watch Team for their constant diligence to helping keep our roads safer, to the Village Hall Management Committee & Manager for maintaining the asset to a high standard, and the Trustees and Staff at West Horsley Place whose collaboration on our events this past year has been very helpful and appreciated.

As a Council we have appreciated enormously the work done by volunteers. I was delighted to host a garden party to personally thank so many last August; their individual contribution is highly valued and appreciated.

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.

Cllr Miss Elaine Best, Chairman
March, 2023