

Chairman's Report 2024

Welcome to the Worth Parish Council Annual Parish Meeting 2024. The following is a report summarising the last Council year from my perspective.

2023 was an election year for Parish Councils. For the first time since I have been involved with Worth Parish, we had contested elections in both Wards, so all 17 current Councillors are formally elected.

All eight incumbent Copthorne Councillors were successfully re-elected.

In Crawley Down we said goodbye to three colleagues and welcomed Cllrs Bingle, Kipps and Wilson into the group.

At the Annual Council Meeting following the elections, I was then honoured to be voted in as Chair of the Council for my third year.

To say it has been a challenging year is an understatement, but in this report, I do not want to dwell on the issues and problems we have had, but rather highlight the positives from the year – of which I think there are many.

We revised the committee structure and meeting schedules of the Council introducing the Assets & Amenities Committee with a remit to support and better understand the Assets & Amenities within both our villages – regardless of whether they are owned by the Council or not. Early indications are that this committee is working well, with meetings well supported and engaging.

We also established the Coordination Group, which is a working party aimed to provide a more informal forum for Councillors and Officers to discuss improvements to the operating processes and consider Council plans and strategies. This is not a decision-making body but can make recommendations to the Council's committees for consideration. Again, this group is in its infancy, but we sincerely feel it will allow us to continue to move the Council forward to becoming the delivery-focused and resident-focused body we desire it to be.

We currently have three major projects underway – the Copthorne Rec revitalisation that will introduce a MUGA and an all-new play area along with a car park to support these and other facilities. The Bowers Place parking scheme in Crawley Down will give much-needed additional parking in the village centre. We are also close to implementing the CCTV infrastructure and initial cameras in both villages that will give better safety and security to our residents.

Going forward, there are other significant projects we will embark upon including the replacement of the Crawley Down play area and an assessment of the streetlighting throughout both villages. The Vision Document that will outline the short to medium term goals of the Council is currently being reviewed and should soon be updated.

What is clear from our experience to date with these projects is we need to improve our processes to ensure we deliver such initiatives in a more efficient and timely manner. It is fair to say we are on a very steep learning curve, but learning we are, and we must continue to do so in terms of project delivery and reporting both internally and to our residents.

In the last year we have also seen a particularly high number of changes of staffing within the Council. We lost our Deputy Clerk last year as she pursued other employment opportunities. We also said goodbye to two long-term employees of the Council at the end of 2023 and beginning of 2024 and wish them both a long and happy retirement. Even as recently as last week another valued member of staff decided to leave despite our efforts to retain them. But as the saying goes, as one door closes and another opens, and through that door walked Hannah and Gill our two new Assistant Clerks, and Leanne as part-time Accounts Admin. Although this means we have lost a lot of experience in the office, these latest recruits are already showing impressive progress and the future is exciting. We also very recently welcomed Colin on board as a new Groundsman and again he has very much hit the ground running (no pun intended) in an area we strongly believe we can make real improvements in the short-term.

Undoubtedly one of the major successes within Worth Parish in the last year has been our provisions aimed at our Youth. We were very excited to sign a contract with SCYP (Sussex Club for Young People) last year who recruited a full-time Youth Support Worker on our behalf, and we started to gain some real momentum. Unfortunately, SCYP then disbanded, and the rug was well and truly pulled out from under us. We resolved the situation very quickly by taking on Drew as a direct, full-time employee and this has proven very successful. With Orson employed part-time to assist Drew, the Youth Clubs in both our villages are thriving. So much so that we may have to start turning people away from both clubs to maintain safeguarding and I will take this opportunity to reiterate to residents that we desperately need volunteers to come forward to assist with these clubs so that we can continue to grow the Youth provision in the way we want to.

Thanks to some great work and perseverance from our Clerk, we also secured a nearly new, fully equipped play bus from SCYP absolutely free, and this has been instrumental in extending the services we can offer to our youth. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that we are ahead of the curve in the provision of youth services and are the envy of several other local authorities who are looking at what we are doing as a shining example.

So, as testing as the last year has been, I believe the future is bright for Worth Parish Council. I would like to thank all my fellow Councillors (especially Kerry for support as Vice Chair) for the work they have put in and the time they have volunteered (despite the popular belief that we are all paid!). I would also like to thank all the staff for their continued support and look forward to continuing the journey with you all.