



Chairman's Report April 2023

Believe it or not, it has been four years since our last Annual Parish Meeting, so unfortunately, I have a lot to update you on, so I hope you are all seated comfortably?!

To say a lot has happened since that last meeting would be a massive understatement. We had two years of a global pandemic that saw many firsts for all of us – none bigger than the whole nation going into lockdown for extended periods. We also had the disruption and distraction of the Community Governance Review (CGR) looking at separate Councils for our two villages that realistically put all but the basic Council activities on hold for around another year until it was resolved to remain as a joint Council, and we could continue business as usual.

Considering all the above, I feel I could be excused if we were reporting tonight that there have been few achievements in the last 4 years, but the reality is we have achieved a great deal and made significant progress in many areas. It is these positives I am happy to report and reflect on as we end the term of the current Council.

- During the pandemic, both villages set up support groups and the level of community spirit was clear and very heart-warming. Something I hope continues in perpetuity. Both groups received grants from the Council to assist with their invaluable work in our communities. On behalf of the Council and all our residents, we thank everyone involved for all their hard work during extremely difficult times.
- A Staffing Review was performed to scrutinise the Council structure and highlight any issues with staffing levels, skill sets etc. to ensure we remain able to fulfil current and future requirements. I am very proud to say that as a result of these initiatives we employed Stacey as our Comms & IT Administrator with a primary remit to raise awareness of what we do as a Council and invite people to engage with us and ensure we are truly representing them. Although Stacey has proven to be an invaluable addition to the team and made great strides forward with this, it is still in its infancy, and we are constantly trying to improve in this area. It also resulted in the promotion of our Groundsman Shane to a Supervisory role. His remit is to produce a management plan to tell us what is required to make both our villages even more attractive places to live, and what resources are required to achieve this. Then it is our duty as Councillors to investigate all avenues to implement any initiatives and give Shane everything he needs to achieve the goals.
- Our Deputy Clerk Tracy obtained the CiLCA qualification meaning that we are now fortunate to have two Officers who meet this requirement – albeit one slightly more experienced than the other! Also, both the Clerk and Deputy Clerk obtained FILCA certification (which relates to financial aspects of Council business) making us and even stronger Council.
- The Council formed a Governance Working Party to look at how it was managed, and whether this could be done more effectively and efficiently. Already this has led to improvements in the Planning & Highways committee process reducing the times of meetings considerably. Now the Working Party has reconvened, we will soon review our complete meeting schedule and Terms of Reference for all meetings and committees to ensure we are running optimally.
- We have established two Working Parties - one for each village – to discuss and investigate any work or initiatives that our villages require. I genuinely feel this give easier access to the Council for all our residents and allows us to bring things to formal Council with the knowledge we are speaking for a wider audience. There have been several initiatives already progressed as a result

and we've only just really started. These Working Parties must now work closer with other community groups to ensure that Worth Parish Council can truly be the voice of our communities.

- Through the Working Parties we have released our first Vision Document laying out our plans for the future of both our villages and the Council. It may be a bit rough round the edges as our first attempt, but it's infinitely better than we previously had!
- Two major projects identified in the Vision Document were the installation of CCTV and the parking improvements in Bowers Place. The implementation of both these projects were severely delayed by the pandemic and the CGR, but we have now made significant progress. The order for the CCTV (which will be monitored by the Police) has been placed and the infrastructure will be installed soon. Similarly, the Bowers Place parking initiative is planned and will start in a short while. This is thanks largely to the work of a particular Councillor who I am not going to name as we are currently in Purdah for the upcoming elections, but we all know who it is and thank them very much for their volunteered time and effort.
- At the end of last year, we employed a Youth Community Worker - Drew Sewell - via Sussex Clubs for Young People (SCYP) to work with our younger residents and give them the support and help they lack at present. This has been a long-term goal of both villages and is a major achievement without doubt. Youth Club sessions have started in Copthorne, and we hope to open at The Haven Centre after Easter. Thanks to the Haven Centre Committee who agreed to hire hall space to us, as it seems that a bad experience of a previous youth club at The Haven cast very long shadows!
- In February half term, we ran Health & Nutrition courses for our young people in conjunction with the TableTalk Foundation. These were hugely popular, and we got excellent feedback from attendees. We hope to provide similar events in the future and are already planning a visit for around 30 children to the Agrifood Centre at Plumpton College during the Summer holidays.
- We had the rollercoaster of both celebrating the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and then not too long after mourning the passing of the only Monarch most of us have ever known. On both occasions, both villages shone. For the former there were two fantastic events arranged that celebrated in exactly the right manner. For the latter, both villages paid their respects in a very honourable way. In all cases, again thanks to a lot of hard work from our staff, several of our Members and residents.

There may be other things I have missed, but I am happy this represents a comprehensive list of achievements we can all be proud of, and a confidence that the progress and improvements will continue. Indeed, there are already wheels in motion for new initiatives such as a complete revamp of the Copthorne Rec and improvements to the shop frontage in Crawley Down. Electricity supplies are shortly to be installed on both village greens, which will allow their use for even more village events. So, you can see, there is no time to stand still.

I would like to finish by thanking all my fellow Councillors for their hard work and continued efforts throughout this term, and believe I speak for us all when I sincerely thank the Clerk and her staff for the same. My time as the Chair of this wonderful Council has been an absolute pleasure, if not very hard work at times.

Tony Dorey, Chairman, April 2023