

Good evening and thank you all for attending this evening. Although this is an informal meeting, it is an important one for the Council for us to summarise what has happened in the last year, and to touch on some expectations for the coming year.

The main drive for the Council in the last couple of years has been to change our approach from a process-driven to a delivery-driven model. This has resulted in a 100% turnover of the Council staff, and an increase in resource in all areas to achieve the vision we have set.

We are still in the transition phase of this major change, but are starting to reap the rewards, and this will escalate in the coming year.

In the past year we have achieved some pleasing goals:

- The Grounds team are continuing to improve the maintenance program throughout both villages and have planted some areas that have met with some great feedback
- We have held our second Parish Awards evening that was extremely well attended
- Our Youth clubs are over-subscribed in both villages and are improving all the time
- Our social media presence is evolving constantly, and we now have over 1000 followers on our FB page
- The Planning & Highways committee have robustly responded to a number of local applications, and successfully fought against a potentially disastrous planning application in Copthorne that would have almost certainly led to the loss of our pub
- We successfully campaigned for a grant of over £90K for residential drainage improvements in Crawley Down

- We have continued to support a significant number of local groups and organisations through grants, initiatives and offering help wherever we can
- We finally implemented one of the larger projects by installing CCTV in both villages after many years of effort to complete. The CCTV is monitored by the police and has already been used by them in 14 investigations in Copthorne and 37 in Crawley Down

All the above is very satisfying, but we are very excited about what will happen in the coming year:

- We will continue to expand the Youth provision to include older age groups
- Our Grounds team will implement more estate management and improvements rather than pure maintenance
- More importantly, we will achieve two of the largest projects this Council has taken on for many years:
 - The Parking improvements in Bowers Place will start soon and be completed this year
 - The complete overhaul of the Copthorne Rec will start next Monday and will also be completed this year
- Both these projects have been many years in the making and although we understand how frustrating this has been for residents, you cannot begin to believe how arduous it can be getting everything in place to go ahead with projects this size in the public sector
- We sincerely believe that we have learned so much from these experiences that future projects will be more efficiently executed

Of course, none of the above is possible without the commitment and efforts of all our employees – Officers, administrators, Grounds staff and Youth support who would be the envy of most councils. My fellow Councillors who continue to volunteer their time and expertise. There are also numerous volunteers – individuals and groups – that work tirelessly to make our villages the fantastic places they are to live.

My heartfelt thanks go out to all of you.

I would like to finish by thanking you all again for attending, and to assure all our residents we remain committed to building on our existing achievements, listening to our community and working collaboratively to meet future challenges.