

Chairmans Report - Annual Parish Meeting 15th March 2021

Welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting which on this occasion will be covering the last two years. During that time Steyning Parish Council has gone through a period of considerable change. The elections to the council in May 2019 resulted in 8 new councillors being elected, which is over half the council. Of these 8 unfortunately two of them resigned in 2019 and then a further two in 2020, followed by another in 2021. This of course has had a significant impacted on the day to day workings of the council. I am in fact a relatively new councillor, joining in November 2019, and then became Chair, after the resignation of the incumbent, in September 2020, making me the third Chair in less than 18 months. So, as you can imagine, it has been a steep learning curve, not without many challenges. However, we have changed our committee structure and streamlined our meetings schedule in order to be more focussed, efficient and effective.

I'm now going to update you on the activities of our various committees

Finance and General Purposes Committee

Two significant contracts were retendered over this period of time last two years, the grass cutting and the street cleaning both of which have resulted in a much-improved service; a new lease was agreed with the Bowls club. We worked closely with Resident associations to complete the construction of the 'Welcome sign' on the road in from Bramber which I'm sure you've all seen and admired. We selected a new SPC Logo, which is now in use on all communications and our revamped website, which we will be making greater use of in the future to keep all residents informed so please keep an eye on it.

We supported through grants Vintage Years, Steyning in Bloom, the Steyning and District Partnership, Steyning for Trees, and the Steyning Chamber (Christmas Lights).

We as a council made two successful bids to HDC grant funding and were awarded £12,000.

The F&GP committee was reformed in August 2020 and since then we have had to deal with unprecedented pressures on our finances due to the Covid Pandemic. The income from the room rentals in the Steyning Centre has dropped to 25% of the budgeted figure and this put pressure on the year end forecast. As there was maintenance work that needed to be done,

it was decided not to furlough the caretaking staff, and similarly the office administration staff. Through prudent accounting, reducing costs and grants from HDC, the Clerk has forecast a small surplus for the year end. The Council agreed to the F&GP committee's 2021/2022 budget proposal and the recommendation that the precept was not increased for the new financial year. The challenges of Covid -19 will continue into the early part of the financial year, but it is hoped that by May/June 2021 we will be back to some normality, although with Covid-safe restrictions in place, which will enable the Steyning Centre to build its income back to where it was pre-Covid. Our thanks go to those that supported the Council by continuing to pay part of their annual rentals, without which our finances would have been put under even more strain.

Communities Committee

– an amalgamation of the Premises and Amenities Committee

Updates were made to the Steyning Centre, including enhanced Wi fi, the first phase of new ecofriendly LED lighting installation was completed, and a new Recycling strategy and bin emptying process adopted. In addition, the Staff put on 2 large well-attended stage productions as part of the HDC Year of Culture promotion.

The Abbey Road re-wilding and ecological enhancement project has involved a better grass-cutting regime, dredging and management of the pond and tree and hedge planting. In addition, an eco-survey has been undertaken. Our thanks go to Roger Brown for spearheading this. A similar project has been initiated at Chandlers Way.

In partnership with the Steyning Community Orchard Group, extensive landscaping has been undertaken with bush/scrub removed, hedges reshaped and replanted and new orchard trees planted.

At the corner of the High Street and Church Street the historic fencing which had been damaged has been restored.

A scheme to enhance the water supply to the Allotments has been initiated and new bespoke and locally sourced Allotment notice boards have been installed.

In November a Working Party was formed of Steyning Parish Councillors and representatives from the Business Chamber, The Partnership and the Greening Group, our County Councillor David Barling, Bob Platt, one of our HDC Councillors and an Assistant Manager from WSCC Highways. Our brief was to explore the possibilities open to us for a 20-mph scheme in Steyning. Two Parish Councillors from Bramber have now joined us.

A public consultation is now underway concerning the proposal for a speed reduction scheme to 20 mph for traffic using the High Street and surrounding areas.

Joint Parishes Youth Committee

A new three-year Youth service provision contract was agreed. We managed to keep a service open and available to the Steyning and local area's youth with the cooperative support of our service provider and under the most difficult of circumstances given the Covid -19 pandemic.

Planning Committee.

– continues to meet on a monthly basis and has completed a huge workload of planning application considerations

The Council

As a Council we have completed (and submitted) the Steyning Neighbourhood plan; held more virtual public meetings than any other Parish Council in Sussex during Covid pandemic; managed to keep the Public Toilets, Playgrounds and Steyning Centre open and Covid safe (as possible and when restrictions allowed), for the entire pandemic period, declared a 'climate emergency' with a commitment to a reduction of Steyning's carbon footprint through significant measures by 2030 and continue to maintain a robust defence against the proposed Soft Sands Extraction Site development at Ham Farm.

Finally, I would like to thank Paul and Michael, our Neighbourhood Wardens, for all their hard work over the last two years and John, Hazel and Tessa for keeping us all on track, juggling many conflicting deadlines, dealing with the ever-changing rules and regulations regarding Covid, and of course supporting councillors new and old. Without their expertise, patience and good humour I would have found the role of Chair significantly more challenging.