

Steyping Parish Council

Chairman's Report for 2017/18

Once again I am pleased to be able to address our Annual Parish Meeting as we come towards the end of another eventful and challenging year. We have been operating this year with our full complement of 15 councillors, so I would like to begin by thanking them for their efforts throughout the year.

In May last year, we introduced a new committee structure, reducing the number of committees from five to four by reallocating the responsibilities of the Playing Fields, Steyping Centre and Highways & Lighting Committees to just two committees under the new Amenities Committee and Premises Committee.

In June we were delighted to appoint John Fullbrook as our new Parish Clerk, and John has already proven himself to be a great asset to our team and equal to what can be a very challenging role at times.

Before I present to you the reports from our committee chairs, I would like to say a few words about some of the services we are happy to have been able to support again through the course of the last year.

Our Neighbourhood Wardens, Paul and Michael, continue to provide invaluable community support alongside our PCSO and our community policing team, and are not only a positive presence in the town to discourage and deal with incidents of anti-social behavior, but also work with all age groups and are a valuable source of advice on safety and security issues. Although employed and managed by Horsham District Council, all wardens remain accountable to the residents of the communities in the areas that they work and ensure that the aims and objectives of the parish council are met, and this partnership is developed through a local steering group.

In April last year, the provision of a community youth service was transitioned from SAYS (Steyping Area Youth Service) to a Joint Parishes Youth Committee which now contracts directly with the service provider, Horsham Matters. JPYC is a partnership between Steyping, Bramber and Upper Beeding Parish Councils. We are aware that Horsham Matters are currently going through some organizational changes and will be appointing a new CEO and a Financial Officer, however they have confirmed that they have significant reserves to continue to provide the required services and the joint committee has therefore agreed to continue with Horsham Matters throughout the 2018/19 financial year.

I will turn now to the reports from our committee chairs, beginning with the report from our Amenities Committee. The Amenities Committee is chaired by Cllr Phil Bowell, but I am grateful to Cllr Gill Muncey for compiling the following report in Phil's absence.

Amenities Committee Annual Report 2017-18

Chair Cllr Phil Bowell (Report compiled by Cllr Gill Muncey in Phil's absence)

This is the first year for the new committee, formed by a merger of the previous Playing Fields and Highways and Lighting Committees. It has been a busy year with a lot of long meetings trying to cover all the necessary topics.

Of the Highway issues the most prominent has been car parking. Last April Horsham District Council implemented car park charges against the wishes of this Council. A car park working party was set up with members of the Chamber of Trade and the Community Partnership and a monthly survey has been undertaken to monitor both the usage of the car parks and the on-street parking near the town centre. Negotiations were held with HDC which have resulted in the time limit for parking in Newman's Gardens and Fletchers Croft car parks being extended for 3 to 4 hours. It appears at present that the main adverse impact of the charges has been to increase the amount of on-street car parking which is causing a lot of congestion in streets like Breach Close, Station Road and Holland

Road. The beneficial outcome of the charges has been that HDC has agreed to renovate all three town car parks between 2018 and 2020, which will greatly improve their appearance.

The other topic which has taken a lot of time is the management of the allotments. A new tenancy agreement was issued which has been signed now by almost all allotment holders, and the allotments are kept locked and secure. Sadly, there are several empty allotments available for rent which quickly become overgrown and it has been agreed that after plots are vacated they will be tidied and weed suppressant membrane put down to provide better conditions for any new tenant. On 10th March a very successful clearance day was held with three skips provided as well as a lot of volunteer labour. We are very grateful to all those who assisted and plan to hold another similar event soon.

A hedgerow working group has been formed and has made recommendations concerning the ongoing maintenance of the hedgerows around the allotments. Much long-outstanding tree work has been completed this year. The new grass cutting contractors have completed a first season, with only a few problems which we hope will be resolved in the coming year.

A new agreement has been reached with West Sussex County Council over the display of advertisements on the corner of the A283 and Horsham Road, in conjunction with the Community Partnership, which at present appears to be working well.

More recently a playground working group has been established which is in the process of putting recommendations back to the committee for the equipment they would like to see in both the MPF and Fletchers Croft playgrounds. The Wilson Memorial Trust wishes to supply some adult keep fit equipment in Fletchers Croft and we are awaiting their detailed proposals.

Premises Committee report

Chair Cllr Michelle Syred

The Steyning Centre continues to serve our community well, providing a range of facilities, expertly managed by our Clerk and Deputy Clerk. The monthly film night is particularly popular and is now a regular slot for many of our residents. Repeat bookings of our function rooms reflect a high demand, despite some early concerns regarding the introduction of parking fees by Horsham District Council. A subsequent request by Steyning Parish Council for a four-hour parking facility, extendable with the use of parking permits, has allowed users to book function rooms in the knowledge that they can park for a longer period.

The Premises committee, together with our Deputy Parish Clerk have begun to implement a rolling maintenance programme. This year the Steyning Centre has been subject to many improvements, including the refurbishment of the Coombe Court kitchen extraction and ventilation system, a new cooker in the Saxon Room Kitchen, replacement flooring in the men's toilets and the installation of five new Roof Lanterns. Customers will soon be able to enjoy a cup of coffee from a new Drinks Machine!

Members of the Tennis Club will be delighted by their new premises, with the benefit of a slightly larger footprint, which now offers users of the Memorial Playing Field a toilet facility, available when the club house is open. The Town Centre toilets have also had some refurbishment carried out to improve facilities.

Steyning residents are extremely fortunate to have access to a wealth of local community groups, providing a range of activities and support. This year the Steyning Centre hosted our Showcase event with 38 local groups, providing an opportunity for Steyning residents to discover more about these local community organisations and meet volunteers. Our sincere appreciation goes to all those who helped make it such an enjoyable event.

On behalf of the Premises Committee, we would like to thank the Parish Clerk, Deputy Clerk, the Admin Assistant, our caretakers, volunteers and users for their hard work and continuing support, which contribute to the successful running of the Steyning Centre and premises.

Planning Committee Report

Chair Cllr Liz Trundle

The Planning Committee has had another busy year with around 6-10 planning applications being considered at each monthly meeting. In addition to these, committee members have regularly emailed their individual responses to the Deputy Clerk when an application reply deadline has preceded the scheduled date of the next monthly meeting. The Committee now meets on a Monday night so as to avoid delaying other PC committee meetings starting after the Planning Committee. This has eased the pressure to get through the required work load in just 30-45 minutes.

Most applications relate to building extensions to properties, loft and garage conversions as well as preventative maintenance and tree surgery, with relatively few applications related to the building of new homes.

As Chair of the Planning Committee I would personally like to thank each member of the Committee for their thorough and conscientious approach to their work this year. It has been a pleasure to work with all my colleagues and as SPC "consultees" to HDC planning decisions each member has taken their role very seriously. After a year of monitoring the impact of SPC input on HDC decisions (with reference to the National Planning Policy Framework and the HDC Local Plan Nov 2015) the committee are pleased to report that the majority of SPC Planning Committee decisions have aligned very closely with those of HDC. Our thanks to the Deputy Clerk for carrying out this task and for supporting the Planning Committee so efficiently with every aspect of correspondence, minute-taking & admin throughout the year.

The SPC long-term project to produce our own Steyning Conservation Area Character Assessment document was completed in mid 2016 and sent to HDC for their consideration, with minor modifications after our public consultation, and incorporating a few helpful suggestions from local residents. Since then SPC was informed that HDC was producing its own Conservation Area Character Assessment document taking our document and request for an Article 4 Direction for the Conservation Area as input. This HDC document was issued for consultation & response in August 2017 & the Planning Committee had a very busy few weeks preparing its response for the tight Autumn deadline.

Finally, it has been extremely useful to monitor active "enforcements" and their status in our regular meeting minutes, as public information. There has been a change in personnel in terms of the HDC enforcement team which has meant that enforcement has been spasmodic. However, monitoring has allowed us to follow this up when necessary.

Finance and General purposes committee report

Chair Cllr Steve Pearcey

True to form all committee members have played a full and active role to ensure that the fiscal responsibilities have been managed to a high standard. Looking forward to the new financial year of 2018/2019 proposed budgets have been presented to full council and accepted for the new period.

Numerous savings have been achieved in various areas, one of the largest benefits of these savings being the precept, which we have been able to keep relatively low for the second year running. Given that we had to allow for a significant increase in minimum wage rate and the provision of Pensions for all Staff, we were pleased to be able to budget for only a 1.62% increase.

The committee have overseen savings in system suppliers, and upgrades of the telephone systems are currently being implemented as are improvements to our website which will enhance its ease of use for both staff and resident's. Upgrades to the town's CCTV are still ongoing and repairs have been authorised to make repairs to the town's clock.

Our support of our joint parishes youth services has seen the contract reviewed and renewed with savings. This year has also seen the renewal of two substantial contracts in street cleaning and parks maintenance, with new contractors being appointed following a competitive tender process.

We have again been able to negotiate and been successful in receiving grants from Horsham District Council.

All of our policies and working documents have been constantly evaluated and updated. All in all, a good year, and in conclusion I would like to thank all the committee's and their members for working hard and diligently to ensure they kept within the budget constraints set and representing our parish to the best of their abilities.

-- end of committee chair reports ---

Please remember that our committee meetings are open to the public, and do include time for members of the public to make statements or put questions to the committees. In addition, the agenda and minutes of these meetings are available through the Parish Council website.

Neighbourhood Plan

My report would not be complete without a mention of our efforts to introduce a Neighbourhood Plan. Following Horsham District Council's reviewing of their approach to Neighbourhood Planning as a result of a Judicial Review overturning the Henfield Plan, many of us were of course very disappointed that our partner parishes in the SWAB cluster decided to pull out, this was despite their having been initially keen to continue with the process. For those who would like to know more about the closing of the SWAB project, I would draw your attention to the SWAB Closing Statement and the Final Q&A document, both of which are available on our website.

It is now our intention to proceed with a Steyning Neighbourhood Plan, and the council have now appointed a number of residents to a new NP Steering Group Committee following a recruitment process that has taken place over the past couple of months. We hope that the new team will be able to start its work very soon, though sadly this has been slightly delayed by the decision of Cllr Gill Muncey to resign as one of our two councillor representatives on the Steering Group. I am sad that Gill has decided not to continue in a role in which she had much to offer; her enthusiasm and capacity for hard work will be missed by the group.

We will shortly be appointing a new councillor representative to the Steering Group, and look forward to working with the team.

Closing Remarks

In closing, I would like to thank my fellow members of Steyning Parish Council, and of course the many residents who give their support to the council and our community, whether this is as an individual or as a member of one of our active local community organisations. Our sincere thanks also to our staff, John, Hazel, Tessa and the rest of the team who we are very fortunate to work with.

Cllr Steve Northam
Chairman, Steyning Parish Council