

Joanna's Chairman's Report - Annual Parish Meeting 11th April '24

Welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting and thank you all for coming. I don't intend to take up too much of your time as I'm sure you're all keen to engage with our guest Speakers and then to enjoy the refreshments and the opportunity to talk to Councillors, if you so wish.

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

Finance and General Purposes Committee

The committee faced several challenges this year, including an unfortunate increase in the costs associated with service and utility provision. We also had to re-contract out our grass-cutting service due to concerns raised with the previous provider.

After many failed attempts to better the previous service provision, we are very pleased with the early season results this year, and feel confident once more that our grass cutting, street cleaning, park and street bin collecting services are once again provided to the highest possible standard.

Grant support - We have awarded in total £6,900 worth of grants to ten different local groups and organisations, from supporting care in the community projects, to local events such as the Vintage Rally festival, from supporting the excellent work of the 'Steining in Bloomers', to helping provide a more efficient sprinkler system at the bowls club.

In an attempt to foster better community engagement we have more regularly promoted events and parish council news within the Your Steining booklet and online service. Additionally, we are beginning to attend the monthly Farmers Market so that Councillors can be asked questions directly and in an informal environment - and we will soon be exploring a more engaging social media presence so that we can continue to increase the level of communication and understanding with our residents.

We are currently in the process of working on several projects that are slated to be completed in 2024. Among these is the proposed installation of CCTV cameras on the High Street adjacent the Bus Shelter, as well as provision which would protect play area and public building facilities across Steining. Although this will of course go out to public consultation, we are responding to the requests made by a number of residents and High street traders, as together we seek to resolve antisocial behaviour issues

Communities Committee

The work of the Community Committee falls into four categories;

firstly, working with HDC and WSCC to improve areas of our community that are their responsibility. To that end we have recently and after much negotiating, managed to get the High street waste bins re-painted.

Working with the Steyning Society and HDC we now have two new benches at the entrance to Fletchers Croft.

We have catalogued the many street and car park signage problems around the town and with the support of our District Councillors, are beginning to see real progress with High Street Car Park lines repainted, its unruly vegetation cut back, and support for our recycling bin installation.

At Fletchers Croft we expect to soon see the completion of the EV charging point installation and the reinstatement of this Car Park as a Long-Term Stay facility. We expect to also see that the street Car Park signage is improved and updated.

Lobbying has also brought about Car Park renewals, with Newmans Gardens being next for redevelopment and relining – likely by the end of this Summer.

At Fletchers Croft we have recently also agreed for the installation of measures to provide better site security to dissuade use by travellers whilst enhancing service provision and aesthetics at the same time.

Secondly, we do all we can to support the many volunteer groups that help make our town great; Abbey Road conservation volunteers and Steyning in Bloom and a new group called the 'Snow Angels' who have volunteered to spread rock salt on local footpaths during icy weather to name just three of them.

Third, we try to get the best service and value for money we can for the many contracts that are needed to help keep our town working well: grass cutting, tree surgery and general management, hedge cutting programmes, play area maintenance and inspections, Allotments management etc.

Lastly, we try and promote positive change in the place where we all live.

This last year this has included attempting to put in a parish wide systems of speed restrictions in place. However, having spent much time discussing and gaining a final WSCC approved scheme we found that both Council members and after consultation, residents both opposed the scheme they were suggesting – nonetheless we felt it was certainly worth the work to see what could be achieved or at least what was acceptable or not acceptable.

We have also installed memorial trees and 5 benches and a picnic table; upgraded play area facilities and equipment; planted new hedgerows and other trees; had new pathways designated; are involved with a number of new schemes for yellow line installations; and even replaced the odd gate or bin that had been demolished during a spate of vehicular 'fender benders'.

JPYC - Joint Parish Youth Committee

The committee, in collaboration with the clerks of the three local parish councils, are presently engaged in a significant project that represents one of the most ambitious initiatives across the three councils in recent times. This endeavour was necessitated as the previous youth service provider went into administration in May 2023.

After extensive deliberation and a thorough evaluation of all feasible options, it was determined that the most viable course of action was to establish an in-house youth service.

As of yesterday, an offer of employment was extended to the new Lead Youth Worker, with two support worker vacancies to be filled later this month. And a soon to be revamped and improved service for our local youth.

Planning and Premises Committee.

It has been another busy year for the Planning and Premises Committee, with more than 70 application submissions, as part of the Council's role as a statutory consultee. Councillors have been responsible for assessing potential property alterations and developments in terms of scale, character, relevant planning regulations and how they adhere to the requirements of the town's conservation area. The Committee has also commented on arboricultural applications, with the aim of reducing unnecessary tree felling, maintaining good tree maintenance and ensuring tree safety. Committee Councillors have brought a wealth of experience, from both professional and voluntary backgrounds, and this has greatly benefited Committee's decision-making process.

A major task delegated to the Committee early this year was preparing and submitting SPC's response to the HDC Local Plan at its Regulation 19 consultation stage. The Plan set out 12 sustainability and environmental objectives, and detailed several developments, including a large 265 house allocation at Steyning's Glebe Farm. SPC submitted a robust response, challenging the nature and extent of the proposed Glebe Farm development and its contradictions between the Plan's stated objectives, while supporting smaller 'in-fill' developments on brownfield sites within the town.

Turning to SPC premises, The Steyning Centre has continued to thrive as a hub for activities and classes throughout the week, and playing host to several weekend day-long events. Room and hall bookings have steadily increased throughout the year, with yoga and pilates being the most popular exercise activities. SPC has been instrumental in securing funding from British Gymnastics for a new regular seated exercise activity, especially for those with Dementia and their carers, and classes began last September. The SPC film night is now regularly producing a profit.

In terms of building improvements, the Steyning Centre has benefitted from several budgeted projects this year, including a new catering oven, black-out curtains for stage and screen productions in Coombe Court. Repairs to the flat roof are due to be undertaken over the next month.

To ensure that SPC operates in as environmentally aware way as possible we are considering for next year the installation of a more efficient heating system, greener utility providers and additional solar panels. This following a recent swap to LED lighting, improved insulation and better recycling processes.

Away from The Steyning Centre, the Committee has been responsible for improving accessibility to the bus shelter in the High Street. Quotes for this are now being discussed to see if this is to be one of the projects for next year.

The Chair would like to thank all the hard-working Planning and Premises Committee Councillors without whom the Committee would not have achieved all it has this year. And a very, very special thank you to Hazel for Clerking the Committee meetings so proficiently and for offering her invaluable advice and support. She has worked tirelessly managing all the works and activities of The Steyning Centre, calmly making things happen in the background. We will miss her enormously and wish her all the very best in her retirement.

The Council

As you will all know a new council was elected in May 2023, and a number of long-standing Councillors chose not to stand for re-election. However Steyning was the only Parish Council in West Sussex to have a contested election, with 17 people standing for the 15 places, a testament to how much residents care about our lovely Town. 7 new Councillors were elected with 8 existing Councillors re- elected. Consequently we are lucky enough to have a Council that combines both experience and new blood, bringing with it new ideas, approaches and enthusiasm. We are optimistic that, despite the challenges facing all of us, we can work together to successfully deliver both the projects, such as CCTV and redevelopment of the Children's play areas, and the day to day business of the Council over the coming 3 years.

I would like to thank Alison and Michael, our Neighbourhood Wardens, our Caretakers, Matthew, Steve and John G and John C, for all their hard work over the last year and John, and Tessa for keeping us all on track, juggling many conflicting deadlines and of course supporting all of us.

Finally, I would also like to give special thanks to Hazel, who, as many of you will now know, is retiring at the end of this month, after 26 years of service. She leaves huge shoes to fill and will be greatly missed, not only by Councillors past and present but also by the countless members of the community that she has helped over the years. We're not really sure what we're going to do without her.