



Slinfold Parish Council

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Chairman's Annual Report 2016/17

I am pleased to report on another vibrant year for your Parish Council. During the year under review the activities of the Parish Council expanded significantly with the acquisition of the freehold on the Cherry Tree recreation area which is to be leased in part to the Tennis and Football Clubs, the acquisition of the Village Shop freehold and not to forget ownership of two redundant telephone kiosks!

A good part of council time is devoted to consideration of planning applications. The Planning Advisory Committee has been led by Gael Stenton-Chandler for many years and she has developed an encyclopaedic knowledge and understanding of the multiplicity of considerations and factors influencing our deliberations on these matters. During the year we commented on 74 applications and approved the development of 11 new homes. The Planning Advisory Committee also approves works to trees in the parish taking advice from our Tree Wardens. Due to their careful consideration and knowledge we have preserved as much as possible of our arboreal habitat.

I am pleased to say that we have now submitted our Neighbourhood Plan to Horsham District Council. We have been working on this vital document for over three years now and all credit must go out to Ed Skeates and his team of volunteers in the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group who have invested hours and hours of time on this. Our plan will protect much of our green spaces within and surrounding the village as well as enabling us to gain community benefits from agreements with developers. We have identified 5 sites dispersed around the village which are capable of supporting sustainable development.

Over the life of the plan, which runs to 2031, we envisage approximately 77 new homes being built in accordance with our preferred housing mix and design criteria. Given our current housing stock of 820 homes, this is a responsible and manageable growth rate, and, indeed is in line with our original forecasts at the start of the process. However, this is not the end of the process. The Neighbourhood Plan still has to be submitted for review by an independent external examiner, and of course, returned to the Parish for a final referendum vote. I am hopeful that we will be able to conclude this process in the coming year so we can all soon rely on the protection and benefits that this plan affords to all.

The Parish Council acquired the freehold of the Village Shop in August last year but unfortunately this coincided with a period of poor management and trading from the then tenant. As a result, custom was lost and there was a general air of dissatisfaction from shoppers with the lack of stock and offering. Following a meeting with the Parish Council,

the tenant advised that she no longer wanted to run the shop and agreed to assign the lease. Several parties were encouraged to contact the tenant with a view to taking over the lease and in December the tenant advised that it was her intention to assign the lease to a former tenant, Mr Shailesh Patel. The Parish Council agreed, subject to a new lease being negotiated and this was duly signed in February; our thanks go to Simon Lacey for his support in this matter.

While the shop has been re-stocked there is still a question mark hanging over the provision of postal services for which we are assisting Mr Patel in coming to a solution. I must acknowledge a generous donation from a resident who provided the new awning for the shop front. This, together with the resurfaced tarmac and new sign, is making the place look considerably smarter and appealing to customers.

The latter part of last year saw the start of work on the Cherry Tree development in Hayes Lane. This will see 23 homes built and also provides for a new football pitch (an actual level one!) and a tennis pavilion. The sports facilities will be handed over shortly, but it will take a growing season for the football pitch to become playable again. Construction on the housing has commenced and the Parish Council has been negotiating with both the developer and West Sussex Highways over the access arrangements for construction traffic. Most of this will now reach the site via the A29 and through the Industrial Estate. However, a few lorries have 'escaped' into Hayes Lane. We should all be vigilant and report any unauthorised traffic movements. If anyone is interested in purchasing any of the new houses which will be located in the new 'Brick Lane' please let the clerk know and she will pass on your detail; marketing has now commenced.

One of the biggest areas of complaints we receive as a council have been to do with aircraft noise. This is not surprising given our proximity to Gatwick and indeed many of you will have been relieved that airport expansion is now likely to happen at Heathrow. But the skies are getting ever more crowded and there has been a marked increase in overflight of our village in recent years. Indeed, we are grateful to Stuart Spencer who interpreted data from a noise monitor we asked to be placed in the village. The monitor provides the first empirical evidence of what we all suspected. Compared to 2012, when the village experienced little of no overflight, we now get 22% of all the traffic on one of the departure routes out of Gatwick, with 64% coming within a kilometre of the village itself. At peak frequency, we could experience 20 planes/hour over our heads, with just over half of those creating a noise in excess of 61dB! Hence shattering the peace of our rural solitude!

The council has put a lot of time and effort into making our representations heard. We objected to the Second Runway, we were one of the voices which led to the suspension of the disastrous ADNID trial and our feedback on nightflights was published by the Department of Transport. While it has been difficult to communicate through the labyrinthine supervisory and regulatory structures which obfuscate this issue we have had some success with direct communications with Gatwick. I attended a special engagement day for rural councils at the airport last November and we have joined with CAGNE's Aviation Parish Council Forum which seeks to achieve a fair and equitable distribution of arrivals and departures and has direct access to the newly created Noise Management Board.

The Parish Council hosted Slinfold's celebrations for the 90th birthday of Her Majesty the Queen on Saturday 11th June 2016. The bells of St Peter's rang out to launch the party at the Red Lyon pub, which was officially opened by our MP, Jeremy Quin. There was a dog show and the pub garden, bedecked with bunting and union jacks, looked very festive, with gazebos lined along each side. As well as face painting and games there were

activities galore provided by different village groups and the highlight of the afternoon was the Over 70's Birthday Tea at the Village Hall. Four 90th Birthday commemorative seats and a picnic table have been purchased and they have now been located around the village. Look out for them; they really are lovely.

Our Highways, Recreation and Environment Recreation Committee, led by Jane Slipper, pay special attention to maintaining our green and open spaces so that we can all enjoy our environment. This year, there have been more improvements to KGV field and thanks to the support from Adrian Roberts some much needed maintenance work has been carried out in Six Acres. Further work is in the pipeline. This coming year, we shall look at making parts of the Cherry Tree open space more accessible to the community.

Thanks to the direction given by our Finance and Establishment Committee and its Chairman Nic Lewis, our finances remain in good shape. The Council spends approximately £52,000/year in keeping your village neat and tidy and supporting community activities. Examples include paying for a Community Youth Worker and an Environmental Officer, conducting grounds maintenance and grass cutting as well as improving infrastructure such as drainage work. Oh yes, and we keep the lights on! There was a small increase in the precept for the coming year of 1.7% bringing the charge per tax payer to a modest £59/year. I am sure you will agree with me that this represents excellent value for money.

I would like to emphasise that Councillors give their time for free, and are all volunteers. Hence they really do deserve your support and recognition for their contribution to the community. It has been a year of some considerable turnover in Council Membership. I was very sorry to see five extremely competent and experienced Councillors move on: Simon Bailey, Gordon Constantine, Lesley Day, Camilla Gibson and Paula Redmond. However, I was delighted to welcome Hilary Sherwin-Smith back onto the Council. I am also delighted that we have seen even more applicants willing to serve our community and that we continue to maintain a full-ish complement of Councillors. During the year, we have been joined by; Nic Lewis, Thomas Nicklin, Neil Beer and Nick Parker, all of whom have started to make a contribution. We do have one vacancy if anyone is interested in applying.

This year, your clerk Mary Burroughs will be looking at how we communicate with our residents. Whilst we try to spread the word on noticeboards, in the Slinfold Magazine and by publishing the twice-yearly Parish Council News, there is always room for improvement. The website requires an update, perhaps a new look and we are currently considering entering the world of social media so you may be able to 'like' us soon on Facebook.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that your Council is here for **YOU**. We are always very pleased to see you at meetings, or to receive grant applications in support of local projects, endeavours or schemes that benefit the community. We do have funds available to make grants which meet our criteria and in the last year we were pleased to support: Slinfold PCC, Age UK, Slinfold Conservation Group, The Village Hall and the Royal British Legion.

Mark Wellesley-Wood

Mr Mark Wellesley-Wood, Chairman, Slinfold Parish Council

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