



WEST HOATHLY PARISH COUNCIL

representing Highbrook, Selsfield, Sharpthorne, Tyes Cross and West Hoathly

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Annual Report of the Parish Council for year 2022/2023

Parish Council Update

The Parish Council represents the interests of the communities of Highbrook, Selsfield, Sharpthorne, Tyes Cross and West Hoathly. It does this in the following ways:

It:

- Looks after the assets that the Council owns;
- Changes/improves things by undertaking projects; and
- Lobbies and makes representations to other authorities and organisations on matters of concern to residents.

In the last year, your Parish Council has looked after the parish owned assets:

- Finche Field and the Allotments;
- North Lane Rec, Pavilion, Playground and Toilets;
- Sharpthorne "Old" Playground;
- Grit Bins, Dog Bins and Traditional White Finger Signposts.
- Bluebell Woods

In the last year, your Parish Council has been working on the following:

Bluebell Woods

After a break in early 2022, the Bluebell Woods working group have reconvened and met on a regular basis since September 2022.

The group recapped on the work that had already been done, which included the Land Condition Report and the clearance of a large amount of metal from the site. A recommendation on signage had also been received and it was noted that there is a large badger set on the site.

It was agreed not to apply for grant funding from Sussex Lund this year as for the application to be considered favourably a robust Woodland Management Plan is needed, along with clear objectives for the project.

The group have discussed the options available for the site, which were:

- Fence the area off
- Extract all the waste, including asbestos
- Or cover it

After discussion it was agreed to investigate the possibility of covering the site. There are good examples of where this has been done locally and the group agreed it may be a way to generate some income which could then be used to fund replanting etc.

The Parish Council were supportive of this recommendation and at the meeting on the 28th November 2022, the Council agreed to infill the Bluebell Woods site.

As part of the next steps an ecology survey has been completed; the results of the survey confirmed that there is an active badger set on the site. The current state of the pond and dryness (in October) made it impossible to determine whether great crested newts were on the site. The recommendation was that further Surveying work should be carried out in Spring 2023. This work has now begun but the results were inconclusive, the recommendation is now to carry out an eDNA survey of the "average" pond. This work will take place in late April/early May time.

Following the recommendation of the Ecology Survey a Dormouse survey was completed in early 2023, the dormouse nut search yielded no evidence of presence of Hazel Dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*).

Bluebell Woods is expected to be a long-term project but once complete, a great asset to our community, the group are next working on having a Woodland Management plan commissioned, this will enable the group to apply for funding and it will set out the aspirations for the woods.

Finche Field Steps

Following concerns over the safety of the steps leading from Vinols Cross to Finche Field the Asset & Highways Committee began work in Summer 2022 to prepare a scope for their replacement. Quotes were obtained and following a recommendation from the committee the Parish Council agreed to replace the steps as a matter of priority. The Council applied to WSCC for a footpath closure during the Autumn half term and the works were successfully completed in late October/ early November 2022.

Parish Tidy Day

The Council were pleased to be able to hold a Parish Tidy Day again this year. The event took place on the 5th March and further Parish Tidy Day took place in Highbrook later on in month. The attendance from members of the public was low, potentially because people were unaware of the events. Nonetheless the groups worked together as a community to help keep the parish looking beautiful. A further tidy day is planned for Saturday March 25th, 2023.

Queens Platinum Jubilee Celebrations

In May 2022 the Parish came together to celebrate the Queens Platinum Jubilee.

The Parish Council worked with local community groups to put together a series of events to celebrate. The Council also helped the Jubilee planning group secure a grant from MSDC towards the celebrations.

Portable SID

In previous years, West Hoathly Parish Council has had use of two portable Speed Indicator Devices. These devices are shared on a rota basis with neighbouring parishes and have been in the parish for six weeks at a time, four times a year. Unfortunately, one of these devices was vandalised whilst in place at a neighbouring parish, the other is broken and is awaiting repair.

The Asset & Committee agreed it would be beneficial to purchase a Parish owned device using allocated S106. In Autumn 2022 the Committee began work to prepare a scope and 3 quotes were obtained for comparison. Following a recommendation from the committee the Parish Council agreed to purchase a portable speed indicator device using S106 money. An application to release the funds has been submitted to MSDC and has since been approved.

The device will help with the continued effort to address the speeding issues on the C319.

Community Highways Scheme

In July 2022 following a recommendation from the A&H Committee and support from our County Councillor Garry Wall, the Parish Council submitted a Community Highways Scheme application for improvements to be made to the pedestrian crossing facility at the Fox junction. The Parish Council were successful in the application and the improvements will be added to WSCC “drop kerb & accessibility improvement” minor works program.

Planning

In its representative role the Parish Council:

Commented upon 71 Planning Applications. Of the 71 applications, 8 were for work on trees in a Conservation Area, 62 for building alterations or extensions and 1 for new residential dwellings at the Land adjacent to Cookham’s in Sharpthorne.

West Hoathly Brickworks

Following the sale of the old Brickworks site in Sharpthorne in October 2022, the developer Ashill Regen have begun pre-application discussions with Mid Sussex Council about a proposal to build residential dwellings on the previously developed area of the Brickworks site. The Parish Council is alert to the need to be in a position to comment once the application has been submitted and, on that basis, has appointed a Highways Consultant to support the Council with the response.

Chairman’s Annual Report

A full and comprehensive report of the activities of the Parish Council over the last year bookends my comments so I will concentrate on the major planning issue facing the Parish and will also add some commentary about issues and events in West and East Sussex that continue to impact upon our residents. I can do this because I was re-elected for a third year as Chair of West Sussex Association of Local Councils

(WSALC) and a member of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). WSALC represents nearly 150 Town and Parish Councils in West Sussex.

The Parish has continued to support the tree planting programme, originally launched as the Queen's Green Canopy under the auspices of the West Sussex Lord Lieutenant. Three further trees will be planted in Finche Field during March, marking the official end of the programme. I very much hope we will continue to plant trees and if you have any suggestions as to location on Council owned land, please do come forward.

Last year's Annual Parish Assembly was changed to a Zoom meeting at the last minute because I, amongst others, caught covid. I consider myself lucky in that I suffered for one night only but then had to isolate for eight days till negative. I am very aware that others have not been so fortunate and are still suffering long term effects or are grieving for family and friends so devastatingly lost.

Zoom meetings proved popular with residents and Councillors but with the removal of the pandemic legislation, meetings of all Councils, Parish, District and County, must be held in person. Pleas from across the sector to allow remote and/or hybrid meetings have failed to persuade the Government to relent.

The Government has also refused to reinstate sanctions against Councillors who bully, harass and otherwise intimidate Councillors, Clerks, other members of staff and members of the public. I am pleased to say that incidents are extremely rare but there is one Parish in West Sussex where the cost to the relevant District Council, of its monitoring officer's involvement, is now over £60k.

Committee Stage Amendments to the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill, currently in the House of Lords, include both the above points and seven other issues. They are proposed by NALC President Baroness Ros Scott with the support of WSALC President, John, Earl of Lytton amongst other Peers from all parties. On 22nd December a survey was sent to all Parishes in England asking them to answer 58 detailed questions concerning Reforms to National Planning Policy as part of the same Bill. Given the deadline of 2nd March this was beyond the capabilities of most Councils and so West Hoathly joined with a large number of other Parish and Town Councils in West Sussex and submitted a joint response prepared by a planning consultant engaged by WSALC.

Last year I mentioned housing development across West Sussex, especially in Horsham District. The intervention of Natural England stopping all development that is not 'water neutral' and prohibition of extracting more water from the River Arun is still causing major delays in housing approvals in Horsham. In Arun District the failure to adopt a District Plan has had the opposite effect and created a housing free for all. Horsham's Leader resigned earlier this year and last week Arun's CEO resigned unexpectedly. Arun is still to set a budget for the forthcoming year, with a week to go to the deadline.

Housing and budgets bring me swiftly back to the Ashill Regen proposal to develop the former Ibstock Brickworks in Sharpthorne. The Parish Council unanimously resolved to engage a transport consultant to advise it on the most contentious part of the planning application, being the impact of a massive increase in traffic movements in Hamsey Road, Station Road, Top Road and by extension throughout the Parish. I very much regret that this will involve a significant cost to the Parish but given the fact that the Brickworks development is the largest single housing development ever presented

to the Parish and is unlikely to be exceeded, the Council agreed that the cost was justified. The cost, of up to £5,000, has therefore been added to next year's precept.

The impact of this is that the overall precept is £88,018, an 11.6% increase (11.59% - a total tax of £91.52 for a band D property). Without the additional £5,000 the precept would have been £83,018, (5.25%- a total tax of £86.32 for a band D property).

Nominations for elections to the Parish Council will close during the first week of April. Elections for the Parish Council will take place on Thursday 4th May, alongside elections for Mid Sussex District Council. Unlike the higher tier authorities, the Parish Council is non political. The Parish Council owns and controls local assets such as two of our three playgrounds, Finche Field, North Lane Rec including the Pavilion, Bluebell Woods and is trustee of the West Hoathly Village Hall. It also considers all Planning Applications and the District Council is legally obliged to take account of the Parish Council's decision if it objects. I issue an invitation to residents of all ages to put themselves forward. This includes those in Highbrook, Tyes Cross, Chilling Street, Selsfield, Vowels Lane and Tickeridge, not just Sharpthorne and West Hoathly.

WSALC has had a video produced that features examples of three widely different individuals who are Parish Councillors in Sussex and have made significant contributions. It can be viewed on the West Hoathly Parish Facebook page.

I would like to say a special thank you to Leanne Andrews, our Parish Clerk, for the hard work she has undertaken during the year and to Anita Emery, our Responsible Finance Officer. Also, to say thank you to all my fellow Council Members who continue to contribute so much to the work of the Parish Council. Thank you to our local part time and casual staff who make such an enormous difference to the appearance of our internal and external assets and whose contribution behind the scenes is so important it would only be noticed if it was absent.

Douglas Denham St Pinnock, Chairman

Financial Matters (figures based at 28.2.2023)

Parish Council

- Income

During the financial year, the Parish Council received £93,176.

Of this

- £78,862 came from the precept.
- Other sources of income were allotment rent and football fees for use of North Lane Rec, Jubilee fundraising £5830 (£3500 in 2021-2022).

- Expenditure

The Council made payments of £81,932 covering salaries and other administrative costs, maintenance of parish assets and projects.

63% of the Parish Council's expenditure was spent on General Admin activities, 37% was spent on managing Parish owned assets.

Of the General Admin expenditure:

- 61% is salary related including pensions (38% of total expenditure)
- 4% is insurance, audit fees etc
- 7% is grants and donations.

The total grant budget is currently £5000. Most grants are small or given for a specific purpose. The largest grants are those made to St Margaret's PCC and Highbrook PCC in both cases for the maintenance of the churchyards and a donation to the Highbrook Village Hall Management Committee.

Focus for the year 2023/2024

In addition to ongoing tasks, the Parish Council plans to;

- Begin work to make improvements to the Pavilion and Public Conveniences on North Lane Recreation Ground
- Continue with the project to make Bluebell Woods a safe area for all to use
- Work with local community groups to plan events to celebrate the Coronation in June.
- Manage the trees and woodland on Council owned land
- Consider relocating some of the Lower Allotments plots
- Consider making improvements to Sharpthorne New Playground using allocated S106 funds.

The Parish Council will continue to make representations to other authorities and organisations about matters of concern to residents and will press for improvements wherever possible.

Trustees of West Hoathly Village Hall (figures based at 28.2.2022)

The Village Hall is the responsibility of the Parish Council as sole trustees. Its Management Committee is made up of 5 – 6 Councillors plus representatives from the various users, but unfortunately at the present time we do not have any representatives from any of the users though these would be very welcome to join us.

We meet three times a year, but the day-to-day running of the hall is undertaken by Leanne Andrews, our Clerk,

In the past year, West Hoathly Village Hall management committee has continued to work on the Local Archive store and staircase replacement project. A Topographical

Survey and Feasibility Study has been completed and work is ongoing to establish the best way to proceed with the project.

The Trustees of West Hoathly Village Hall agree their own budget.

- Income

During the period April 2022 to 28 February 2023, the Trustees received £14,809.

Of this

- £6050 came from the rental of the flat above the Hall.
- £1334 Mid Sussex DC Omicron Grant
- The remainder came from hiring of the Hall, equipment and bank interest.

- Expenditure

The Trustees made payments of £15,041.

This year the Village Hall had a total deficit of £1,566, however, this deficit has been subsidised by receiving the omicron grant of £1334. Which leaves a total deficit of £232 as at 28th February 2023.

The hall has again benefited from regular hiring from groups like the West Hoathly Pre-School, Rainbows & Brownies, Karate, Table Tennis and Pilates groups along with the Parent Toddler group.