



## Chairman's Report – July 2021

Who would have thought that in March 2020 we would still be suffering the effects of Covid more than a year later? This report would normally be presented at the Annual Parish Meeting (APM) prior to the end of May which is not possible this year. However, we have had requests from parishioners to hold an APM and this will be on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> September when a resume of this report will be presented.

There was a physical parish council meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020, immediately before lockdown, so we were fortunate to be able to set up processes to help us through the last 15 months. The next in person meeting was not until 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

There have been many moments over the last year and some key words spring to mind.

**Community** - we must all be proud of how our villages came together and friends and neighbours helped out. We even had emails from outside our Parish asking for help with local elderly relatives.

**Gratitude** to so many people for their unending hard work and assistance – councillors, our Clerk, volunteers, local businesses, residents.

**Horror** - The Grey route for the A27 Arundel bypass still fills us all with horror. Councillors and a few residents have spent hundreds of hours on various aspects. Our Protect Our Parish (POP) fund is being used for legal advice. We shall continue to fight Highways England and need more in POP – you can help by donating – every pound counts.

**Zoom** - What would we have done without it?! Not the same as meeting in person but we were so pleased to see residents participating.

**New** councillors. Last May we were 2 councillors short which made life even harder. We are fortunate to have been able to fill both vacancies in September – but can you imagine what it is like joining a team when you can't introduce yourself in person?! We have also had 2 more vacancies this year, the first already filled. The majority of our councillors are working so we also need you to help be our eyes and ears around our villages.

**Zero** - Each one of us contributes to the running of the Parish Council through the Council Tax system where an element known as the Parish Precept resides. At present this is an average of just £60 per residence per year. Without this money,

the Parish Council would have no money at all to carry out village maintenance, a prime responsibility, or represent you as best we can on a broad range of other matters. We were pleased to be able to keep the parish's tax level the same as last year - zero increase!

For the few parishioners who still think the councillors get paid, the total pay to councillors is zero and the total of allowances claimed by our councillors is zero.

Looking back through the minutes of our Zoom meetings has been an interesting exercise. I have tried to pick out salient points – it might be my age (don't answer that!) but it is amazing how much gets forgotten along the way – including the vast amount and variety of work we get through in a year.

**Full council** - 8 meetings – plus 5 extraordinary meetings – many A27 related.

**Planning** - 11 meetings. We have reviewed 65 applications - some simple and others very complicated plus additional non-compliance enforcement notices. Fortunately, so far, those for additional housing, which were objected to, have all been refused by Arun DC. We await the outcome of the 30 homes near Walberton Green. Our Public Open Space is coming at Fontwell Meadows.

**General Purposes** - 9 meetings. Looking after all our assets – trees, playing field, play area, Pavilion, benches, bus shelters, car park, street lights and so much more.

**Finance and Legal** – budgeting, payments and policies.

Grants – we allocate £3,000 pa for local organisations and this has been increased to £6,000 this year. The restrictions meant that many had not spent last year's grant, so this year's application date is moved to August to enable them to hit the ground running once, we hope, lockdown has ceased.

**Neighbourhood Plan** – Four more years work to update our Plan culminated in our referendum on the 6<sup>th</sup> May at which we again had the highest turnout and Yes vote in Arun district – thank you for your support. What has changed? An allocation of 66 new homes plus policies on flint walls, biodiversity corridors, archaeology, views and vistas. This revised Plan will help us fight unwanted housing developments in our villages, whilst ensuring that those homes that are built meet our needs and comply with our policies.

As with everything in life, there are positives and negatives. One thing for sure is that even though we are a thoroughly professional hard working and well-regarded Parish Council, it hasn't all been plain sailing!

A huge thank you to every one of you for helping keep our villages a great place to grow up and grow old – particularly during such challenging times.

Suzanne Clark    Chairman – Walberton Parish Council.    July 2021