

PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMANS REPORT.

At the same meeting last year on 19th May 2015 there were just 14 people in the pavilion, five councillors, our clerk, Ray Huskisson and 8 members of the public assembled to witness real democracy in action. I made a promise to myself that this would not be the case if I were to chair the annual meeting of the Parish, and the subsequent meeting that elects the first line of British government.

In Walberton, Binsted and Fontwell this is a non-political parish council that deals with your local issues and not party politics.

This first line of government was given to us by an act parliament in 1894 that got rid of the old system of the more property you owned the more votes you had, (a throwback to the medieval feudal system) and it gave us **one man one vote**. Unfortunately women had to wait until 1928 to get the right to vote.

I believe we should all cherish this right, and use our votes whenever the opportunity arises.

Your next opportunity is June 23rd for the EU Referendum.

I was elected Chairman of the council last May almost by default! Following the resignations of five previous councillors and subsequent election and co-opting of five new councilors, the realistic choice for chairman was either Suzi Clark or I. Suzi was far too involved in organising the Neighbourhood plan, so I got the short straw!

Fortunately, what could well have been a challenging transition between the old and the new parish council turned out to be just a particularly quick and steep learning curve for all involved.

Most significantly, there were no clashes of personalities, no clambering to proclaim authority or impose personal egos. Just a bunch of like minded parishioners with an astonishing amount of diverse skills, all from extremely different backgrounds and all eager to volunteer their time, experience and knowledge to help the communities of Binsted, Fontwell and Walberton.

The council is made up of three committees, Planning, General Purpose and Finance; several other sub groups are also formed and dissolved as necessary to complete certain tasks such as organising village events.

The Planning Committee.

This past year we have been particularly fortunate to have Edmund Camerer Cuss as the chairman of the Planning Committee. Apart from the normal building extensions, conservatories, and tree pruning applications, the big challenge for Edmund and his team has been the application from Dandara to build 400 homes on Fontwell Meadows.

A public meeting was held on the 12th June in the village hall, (barely 3 weeks after the council had been formed) to give parishioners a chance to ask questions and to voice their opinions on the development.

The outcome from this meeting was a resounding NO! to any development on Fontwell Meadows.

Although I chaired the meeting, without Edmund's and Sue Wallsgrove's knowledge of the site we would, as a council, have been woefully unprepared for many of the in depth questions from parishioners.

Following that meeting and a subsequent meeting with Nick Herbert the application that had been approved by Arun DC, was "called in" by The Secretary of State, Greg Clark in December.

This is only a temporary "stay of execution" and we won't know for certain until the end of the year whether or not the development will go ahead.

Working together with Eastergate and Barnham parish councils, we have joined forces to form a cluster group to spread the financial burden of legal advice. It's a sad state of affairs when one section of government has to line the pockets of lawyers to do battle with another

section of government. However, the legal advice will be used to help support our case against the development at the public hearing in November.

To help fund these additional legal costs, the precept for the next financial year has been increased by the equivalent of about 20p per household per week and, in addition, we have launched the P.O.P fund.

The POP fund (Protect our Parish) has been incredibly well supported having now reached almost £14535, £5000 from council reserves £5000 from the precept and £4535 in funds donated by you. This fund will be maintained to provide support whenever the council needs to seek legal representation against undesirable planning decisions.

So, give yourselves a round of applause!

The catchy "P.O.P" fund (*pop a cheque in the post*) phrase was the brainchild of our designer in residence Angela English. Angela has also been the inspiration behind designing the layout for The Neighbourhood News and Walberton Neighbourhood Development Plan policy document, along with most of the posters and banners advertising parish events!

Watch out for the next issue of "Neighbourhood News", which is now a joint publication between the Neighbourhood Plan team and parish council.

The General Purpose Committee.

I like to call this the "almost every thing else" committee!

Since Suzi Clark took over as Chair of this committee in May last year, the workload (and meeting lengths) seems to have grown and grown. Everything from heating in the hall, mole catching on the playground, The Pound and The Pond, to overgrown trees and hedges gets dealt with by The General Purpose Committee.

Although it's a heavy workload Suzi manages it almost with military precision. Just a few of the achievements that the committee has worked on include:

The Orchard on The Village Green, new play equipment for the playing fields, new bus shelter at Walberton Park House, pond clearance, Community Speed Watch. (Almost 200 letters have now been sent out by the police as a direct result of the speed watch team), Two defibrillators one in Fontwell (in the old phone box) and one at the Village Hall, Ditch clearance in Barnham Lane to relieve flooding, finger post refurbishment, new bench seats on the Village Green and Walberton Binsted & Fontwell web site, (Now looking for new volunteers).

Not all these projects have been completed yet, but funding is in place for all of them and contractors have been appointed, where necessary.

Some of this work has been funded by grants that Richard Strickland and Sue Wallsgrove have worked hard to secure.

The "Walbinfont weekend" is being organised with help from members of the parish and parish council members. (Also looking for more volunteers!)

The Finance Committee.

I have been chairman of the finance committee for the last few years, mainly because it's an easy ride! Our clerk is also our responsible financial officer so he does all the hard work. Ray keeps a very tight reign on expenditure making certain we get value for your money and controlling the budgets.

We joined the 21st century this year, closing two old bank accounts and opening a new one that gives us online banking and simpler access to our statements and banking procedures.

Our account balance at the end of the financial year will be slightly ahead of budget in terms of expenditure, although a little behind in income against budget.

Overall, a good year in terms of financial control that will leave a small surplus to help fund next financial year's precept.

In addition to attending committee and sub committee meetings councillors take on responsibilities to represent various other village organisations.

Bob Rogers has presented reports from the Walberton Task Force, keeping us up to date on their valuable work around the village. Also, as the Walberton Allotment council

representative, Bob managed to organize an excellent recycling scheme, moving building waste from the Community Play Centre to help improve the car park surface at the allotments!

Local recycling at its best!

Another of his roles has been with the Village Hall and is currently working with them to update the old original constitution that was put together over 20 years ago.

Sue Wallsgrove is our representative with the Joint Downlands Area Committee making sure the parish voice is listened to by a wider audience and keeping a close eye on grant availabilities. Sue also (among several other things) sits on the Community Play Centre board of trustees.

Richard Strickland took over from Liss Norton when she retired from the council in July as the author of the Parish Council News section in the Parish News. This important task helps keep you informed of what's happening in the communities. Richard also secured the grants for the additional two defibrillators that will soon be in position. (Just in case you don't know, there is already a defibrillator at St Mary's Church.)

Any one of us, could have a lot more to thank Richard for than first meets the eye! But lets hope we never need to use the defibrillators!

Richard Moores joined the council in November last year and Jenny Parsons in January of this year, both have quickly settled in and are providing valuable contributions to council decisions.

Between them, Richard and Jenny have lowered the average age of councillors from this time last year by at least 25 years! So the rest of us thank them very much for doing that!

After this evening, there is another vacant space as I am retiring after 10 years on the council.

So, either the wisdom and experience of age or the courage and resourcefulness of youth is needed to fill the space.

The former helps bring stability and experience, and the latter, a brave new world!

Either, or better still, both would be most welcome. So why not think about helping the council with it's many projects. There is no need to sit on the council full time as we are always looking for volunteers to help with short-term projects such as the Walbinfont Weekend in July or longer term commitments like the recently set up Community Resilience Plan. If you would like to help out in anyway please contact our clerk, Ray Huskisson or any member of the council.

You now have a strong and committed parish council that is dedicated to helping maintain a community that is resourceful, progressive, caring and above all in tune with what you, the people of the parish want. Help is always welcome and help is always needed. Don't forget all parish meetings are open to the public; there is always an opportunity to ask questions. It's also possible to get your items put onto the meeting agendas. *(There are certain rules that need to be followed so please contact the clerk well in advance for details).*

Thank you for your support.

Andy Siragher Chairman Walberton Parish Council.

24th May 2016