

## Chairman's report

Welcome everyone to our new Community Centre in Fontwell. This is the first Parish meeting to be held here and we aim to hold council meetings both at the Walberton Pavilion and here to ensure that more people have a chance to attend locally.

It has been another busy year and I am grateful for the support of our councillors, all of whom have other daytime jobs to attend to. We were joined this year by our new Clerk, Chloe Stevens, who has done a wonderful job and put in considerable time and effort to keep things running behind the scenes. Sadly Chloe is moving on soon and we will need to source a replacement. At the beginning of the month, Steve McAuliffe stepped down to focus on his other duties. We wish him well in his endeavours; he will still be supporting the Parish as one of our Arun District Councillors. We are also welcoming two new faces to the Council this year - Emma Cusden from Fontwell and Louise Higham from Walberton. We have also been supported by Victoria Harris who is working on managing projects such as the playing field path.

We have continued to try to protect our Parish against unwanted development. Our Neighbourhood Plan gained extra weight with the updated Government Planning Policy in December. This extra protection requires the Plan to be suitably 'recent' and to this end we have started the process of reviewing it once more.

We are well aware of the issues across the District with flooding and have been requesting so-called Grampian conditions be applied to applications requiring infrastructure be in place before developments take place, rather than the other way round.

Traffic data from the Speed Indicator Device is now being downloaded and published on the web site for anyone to examine.

We are still waiting for the publication of the Roads Investment Strategy 3 to see whether the A27 Arundel Bypass is included.

This year we have received this community centre from the developers of the Fontwell Meadows estate. Once the final snagging lists have been

fixed and the last pieces of legal paperwork completed we will be able to open it up for hire. We wish to give as many groups as possible the chance to use the centre for our residents. The new Fontwell allotments are almost ready to hand over. The new play areas are in use, though the lighting for the games area is yet to be completed.

Fontwell's new verge plantings have also begun, which have already improved the appearance of Arundel Road.

The path at the Walberton playing field is now under construction. While not yet as extensive as we originally envisioned - the costs were prohibitive - it will link the tennis courts to the existing path and improve the width and surface of the current one. The Avisford Grange tennis courts are being adjusted to bring them up to the required standard and we look forward to working with Colin Piper of Smash Tennis UK to manage them, including coaching. Colin already works with the Arundel Tennis Club.

Over the next year, these projects will all develop further. Work is also progressing on improving cycling connections through the Parish from Barnham to Fontwell and beyond. The Fontwell Meadows development work progresses and so we may see the paddocks being added in the near future.

We are also determining our longer-term goals and need your feedback as to what you would like us to set as our priorities over the next few years. We are looking at a number of projects, including pond maintenance, bus shelters, verge management, weeds on the green, green waste recycling, whether more benches are desired, such as by the Tennis courts or elsewhere, defibrillator accessibility, noticeboards, building upgrades. Your opinions are invaluable in refining our plans.

Our finances remain sound and no concerns have been raised by the Auditors in their recent report. However, this year we have needed to increase our part of the Council Tax levy (the Precept) by £1.25 per month for a band D property. This is the first increase in quite a few years. Unfortunately, inflationary pressures have been significant over the past 12 months. Costs of utilities (such as electricity and gas) have increased. Maintenance costs are up (such as the Play Area - simply replacing the Tea

Cup twister cost us approximately 6% of our precept income) and staff costs have also increased. Parish Councils have also been encouraged to take on additional maintenance responsibilities that higher tier authorities are having trouble undertaking such as weed clearance and verge maintenance. Your Parish Councillors continue to not claim any expenses at all, despite being entitled to.

All in all we are in a good position to start the new council year and are looking forward to the progression of these projects. We still need your help - please let us know if there is anything that would like us to look into, and please respond and encourage your neighbours to respond to requests for information we put out from time to time. If we don't know about your views then we can't take them into account. We strongly encourage you to attend our council and committee meetings either in person or online - the information is on the website.

Thank you for your time.