

## Chairman's Report April 2020

I hope this finds you all well and coping with staying at home and having to do all the jobs you have previously managed to put off.

I didn't expect to be writing this during in a pandemic and lock-down situation where all meetings have been cancelled and many of our staff are either furloughed or working from home most of the time. Fortunately, all the staff and Councillors are currently well and managing to carry out the routine business remotely.

Decisions have been delegated to the Chief Officer, Chairman and Vice-Chairman together (not singly) after comment upon the issues has been gathered from Councillors. So far, we have been called upon only to consider two grant applications. So business as usual but in a very different way.

In various ways the Parish Council is supporting residents through this awful time. Collection of prescriptions and assistance with shopping included. Should you need any help please do call me on 023 92 591 411 or call the Parish Office on 023 92 59 77 66.

The local MP Flick Drummond also will help with problems residents may encounter [Flicl.Drummond.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:Flicl.Drummond.mp@parliament.uk) and for general advice has set up a web-site: <https://www.flickdrummond.com/neighbourhood-help-around-meon-valley>

Unfortunately, the Annual Parish Meeting has had to be cancelled but you will find all the usual reports on our web-site.

We have co-opted three new members to the council, Cllrs John Lay, Brian Raymond and Derek Prosser. Sadly, Dr. Carolyne Jacobs decided earlier to stand down so we still have four vacancies should anyone be interested to join.

Welcome back Sarah Guy who has returned from maternity leave and is working three days per week.

Two members of the countryside team left earlier in the year and two new people will start during this month. Maintenance and management of our open spaces continues to the very high standard we now all expect but do not take for granted. Thank you to Matt and the team.

Unfortunately, ash die-back has taken a great toll on our trees and as I write many are having to be felled on the Lith. But the upside to this can be a positive. New and varied trees will be planted so that disease cannot affect so many at any given point. New areas may be left clear for other flora and fauna to thrive and overall the Lith habitat will be improved. Short term it may seem bare but land management is for the long term.

Last year there were "plans to build an extension to Jubilee Hall. This is now a reality and without Covid-19 was on course to be complete and in use during June. Currently all work is stopped so a new completion date will have to be set once building can re-commence.

Napier Hall has been refurbished but, of course both halls are currently closed as are the playgrounds. As there is no way of enforcing the playground closure, safety inspections and maintenance are continuing.

This is what I said about LEOH last year - sadly this still seems to be the position! "Land East of Horndean is progressing slowly following a change of developer. HPC will continue to be heavily involved in the provision of amenities and infrastructure and will work to secure the best result for Horndean."

Thank you to Carla Baverstock-Jones and the "office" team for all their hard work and for making the jobs of Councillors so much easier than they might be.

And finally, thank you to the Councillor team for their support, for me as Chairman, and for the staff.

## ***Finance and General Purposes Committee Report to Horndean Parish Council, for the Financial Year 2019-20***

I am happy to report continued stability in the Council's finances and its financial management.

### **Budget Report 2019/20**

As per the January management accounts, the Horndean Parish Council Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) forecasted an under-spend against budget for this financial year of approximately £40k, due to a combination of income being higher than expected and some expenses being lower than budgeted. Developer's Contributions have been used to fund some of the work completed.

The General Reserve at the end of March 2020 is forecast to be £174k, representing cover for about 5.5 months of our net expenditure (recommended level is between 3 and 12 months). Earmarked Reserves are forecast to stand at £122k at the end of March 2020.

### **Budget for 2020/21**

The 2020/21 budget was developed and delivered on time to EHDC. The agreed budget will draw approximately £13k from General Reserves.

Having increased the Precept by 4% last year, the committee recommended no increase for 2020/21, with confidence that The Parish can maintain sufficient reserves through the coming financial year. Contingency has been made to cover the cost of treating Ash Dieback throughout the Parish during 2020.

### **Halls**

The new linked building project for Jubilee Hall to improve facilities both for hall users and for visitors to the Council office is now well underway. Construction began in September 2019 with a move-in date expected before the end of 2020. The earmarked reserves that the Council has built up over the past few years plus s106 funds, means that the pre-approved Public Works Loan of about £481k will be requested once the allocated reserves have been spent. A tracking process for monitoring ongoing costs has been established by the RFO. The Parish liability for VAT on the construction project was clarified by hiring a specialist, and the total cost remains within budget.

The new Jubilee offices and workshop will bring together all Council staff on one site. Savings made when we move out of the current rented spaces for the office and Countryside Team are expected to cover the monthly cost of the loan repayments. A successful renegotiation of the lease on Tyfield House was completed to prepare for transition when the new offices are completed.

Napier Hall underwent refurbishment to both the interior and exterior of the building.

The review of the hall rental policy, terms and conditions, and charge rates was approved by Council and a simpler billing process was implemented in August 2019, including the option to pay via credit card. After remaining unchanged since 2011, rates were being increased by about 4% to offset some of the increased operating costs while remaining competitive with other facilities in the local area.

### **Policies and Procedures**

Work continues to be done to improve Council policies on an annual basis. A new Invoice Payment Flowchart was implemented to clarify the process and ensure suppliers are paid on time. A detailed review of Parish event costs was completed.

## **Grants**

A total of £4,430 in grants was made for community projects in the 2019/20 financial year. The committee carefully considers each request in relation to how many residents will benefit and what other funding sources are available. The Parish grant budget for 2020/21 remains at £7,000.

## **And finally...**

I would like to express appreciation on behalf of myself and the Committee to our RFO, Simon Ritson, for the continuing excellent work he does and the high quality of advice he provides to the Council, and to the Chief Officer, Carla Baverstock-Jones, and her staff, for all the hard work that goes into preparing reports for the committee and implementing the decisions made.

Cllr David Alexander, Chairman, Finance and General Purposes Committee, 31st March 2020.

## GROUNDS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN REPORT. APRIL 2020.

I say it every year but it is a real pleasure to sit on this committee and be involved in the management of the various sites that we have in Horndean for the benefit of the community. The Countryside Team is excellent and has been very busy this past year. We are very lucky that they are all so passionate and dedicated to our sites with each of them bringing a particular area of expertise to what they do.

Residents and visitors to the area will have seen for themselves the difference that the team makes. The team has a number of tasks as opposed to projects that are regularly carried out. I am pleased to highlight just some of the projects that have been carried out.

Dell Piece West:- The bramble reduction has seen a marked increase in the number of bluebells and wood anemones from what there was before. There has been willow coppicing from the pond.

Hazleton Common:- The heathland restoration works continued, new steps were installed in the woodland area, coppicing of willow woodland took place, a bench was installed, boardwalk improvement continued, hazel was coppiced under the pylons with vols (used materials from Yeolls) and ride management took place.

Catherington Lith:- The steps under the pylons were rebuilt, a bench was installed, bramble reduction took place and the ash die back plan was finalised.( We are currently waiting on works)

Yeolls Copse:- A hazel fence was created around the Wye Whitebeam with vols, hazel coppicing took place and pond clearance was undertaken.

Catherington Down:- Three new kissing gates were installed replacing the stiles.

Catherington Pond:- Pond clearance was undertaken.

Wagtail Copse:- The new area transferred to the Parish by Barratt Homes was tidied up.

Godwin Crescent:- The tree line around the properties was tidied up.

St.Giles:- The main bed (old church area) was planted up with roses, lavender and rosemary.

Various:- Across the area wildflower and tulip planting took place. A number of hedges were lowered as they were overgrown and too tall to manage easily. Butterfly and reptile transects were carried out. Finally, bollards were installed at Deep Dell.