

Cuckfield Parish Council **Chairman's Report April 2010**

The Annual Parish Meeting is not a Council meeting but a meeting of the community for you to receive a report on the work of the Parish Council. It is also the occasion for you to question the Parish Council and to raise issues of concern. We also take the opportunity to have a presentation of interest that, this year, will be given by Matt Pitts of the High Weald Management Unit.

Firstly, on behalf of the whole community in Cuckfield, may I thank all the members of the Parish Council for the time they give so willingly in finding solutions, amidst the nightmare of government demands, to retain the unique place that is Cuckfield. The main burden of interpreting and responding to the complexity of Government papers falls to our Parish Clerk Frances Jones; who continues to provide us with an unparalleled level of understanding and support in managing some very complex matters. The office has also benefited enormously from the skills of Nicky who joined us last May; so enabling us to open the office for an additional day and deal more speedily with the many administrative matters.

Of even greater importance has been the work carried out by groups supporting the Parish Council on the 'Village Plan' and, more recently, the undertaking of a major work that will lead to Cuckfield having a 'Supplementary Planning Document'; the "Cuckfield Village Design Statement". Sincere thanks to Marie Dormer and to all those helping with this fantastic project. The team would be pleased to hear from anyone who wants to become involved. Contact the Parish Office.

Finance

Total income for the Parish Council this year was £225,964.00 which was made up of £134,820.00 from the 'precept' (the tax levied by the Parish Council) and £91,144.00 from grants, interest and other earnings; principally from burials and Queen's Hall rentals. There have been a number of surprises for us this year that we have managed to control through careful management of the budget and reserves and despite these problems we are confident that we can continue to provide the same levels of service on the same overall income in 2010/11. There will be NO rise in the precept in Cuckfield in 1010/11; a small decline in income in real terms when taking cost of living rises into account.

The Queen's Hall

We had some difficulties during the last winter with the new boiler, which had just settled down when the heavy rains flooded the cellar! As the main storage area used by the Parish Council, the Museum as well as some societies you can imagine our distress. Much of the damage will be covered by insurance but the new works, to ensure we are protected from flooding for the future, will cost in the region of £3200.

The good news is that following our redecoration of the interior and launch of the 'Queen's Hall' website www.thequeenshall.com, wedding bookings have soared (no doubt helped by escapees from the more expensive venues during the recession). As part of our cycle of maintenance the exterior was repainted this last autumn and new chairs purchased. We can now move on to addressing the problems in the 'Green Room' (small room by the stage) and new interior lighting.

Our thanks to Chris and Vicky our two caretakers for ensuring the high standard of cleanliness and a warm welcome to all our users.

Environment

A major piece of work this year has been to 'digitise' our burial records. This was made possible by part funding from the Edith Payne Trust. Our thanks to them for supporting this project. The digital records will eventually be available to genealogists via a web link.

The 'Old' burial ground is now full and the 'New' burial ground along Newbury Lane is now well established. Management of the ground does not happen by chance. We are grateful to Sandy Gallagher for her continuing work as our 'Registrar of Burials'; an essential job that goes on quietly in the background. As does the maintenance of our fantastic grounds. I cannot praise enough the diligence with which Dick and Brian respond to the challenge of making Cuckfield's burial ground a visual spectacle.

Work continues towards bringing the Observer Field up to the Natural England designation of a plant and wildlife sanctuary; which we hope will eventually encompass other areas adjacent to it. The Observer Field gets its name from the 'Cold War' observer bunker which is still sited in the field. An enthusiastic volunteer has recently been working on the interior to restore it and, once we have worked out how safe access can be managed for visitors, small groups will be permitted to view the bunker.

Other aspects of the Environment Committee's work covers provision of Christmas lights; we hope you enjoyed the new look this year. Also, the expansion of the allotment site at Whiteman's Green and planting of the hanging baskets which enhance the street scene each summer.

Planning

As a statutory body we continue to comment on planning applications, though the number of comments submitted to us by the public has dropped significantly since Mid Sussex District Council launched its web service for comments. The introduction of new planning laws, which have removed the requirement for many small works, has also reduced the volume. Major submissions before the Council have been the Baptist Chapel application, the Chatfield Road appeal as well as the submission by Rydon Homes for a site at Bylanes Close. We view all applications against the policy document set out for Mid Sussex, but for the future we look for the adoption of the VDS (Village Design Statement) by Mid Sussex District Council.

The 'Three Towns' of Mid Sussex tend to dominate many discussions, so this year Cuckfield, Ansty and Staplefield, Lindfield and Lindfield Rural Parish Councils formed a 'grouping' to ensure that the village voice had a strong presence on the MSDC 'Core Strategy' development plan.

Roads and Traffic

Whilst this is probably the area of greatest concern to many, the Parish Council can only 'influence' since the budgets are held by County; though we seek to push hard!

Of particular concern has been access to the Broad Street Car Park from the High Street. Investigation following accident claims made against MSDC, has revealed that this was not a

'public right of way' but a 'licenced' access given by the previous owners to Mid Sussex District council. The licence has expired and so the courtyard has reverted to private ownership.

A 'Vehicle Activated Sign has been installed at Whiteman's Green in an effort to slow traffic. The rugby and soccer clubs were supported by the Parish Council in their application for a new car park and we look forward to seeing that built. Many meetings have been held to find a solution to providing a cyclepath between Cuckfield and the Southern end of Haywards Heath; so far without any obvious solution.

Other matters

Under new Government regulations Quality Councils, whose Clerk and Councillors have been trained, can exercise a power of 'Wellbeing' in the community. It gives a Parish Council quite sweeping powers to protect certain aspects of community life. You will be pleased to know that your Clerk and Councillors all completed their training this year.

Robert Salisbury. Chairman Cuckfield Parish Council.