

Our local elections should have taken place in May 2007. It is unfortunate that insufficient candidates came forward. We retain our 'Quality' status as the new rules do not require a fully elected Council. It is our objective to have fully contested elections and we will be working to that end over the next three years.

Council Members

Ken Gregory is now our longest serving Councillor with Jane Revell, Ruth Macintyre, Pat Gallagher, Sue Burgess and myself continuing from the previous Council, now joined by Stephen Blanch, Colin Mercer, Stuart Gilboy and Andrea King. All have attended Parish Council meetings regularly and met as members of the council's committees to bring recommendations to the full Council meetings. Some act as council representatives on the management committees of a number of local organisations and report regularly to ensure that the council is kept informed. Members have also represented the Parish Council at meetings with West Sussex County Council, Mid Sussex District Council and other service agencies. Numerous consultation documents and reports have been received by the Parish Council for comment and we make every effort to fully participate in consultations that are relevant.

It has to be recognised that the power house of the Council is our Clerk, and we are truly grateful for the continuing diligence in both work and advice given by Frances Jones. It is often thought that the Parish Clerk is some sort of 'Customer Service' front of house for the Council who doles out bus passes! Nothing could be further from the truth, as Frances is a fully trained officer and her role is to advise on the legality of Council decisions and actions, liaise with County and District, as well as oversee financial regularity and prudence; along with management of our staff.

We have been working with our Community Police officer, PC Geoff Bennett and Police Community Support Officer Jayne Milne, who has attended Parish Council meetings during the year, reporting crime figures and keeping the council informed about Police work in the village.

Finance

The Parish Budget for 2008-09 has been approved and the Precept raised from your Council Tax for the forthcoming year will be £107,000, an increase of £11,000 from the previous year. This represents an additional £5.70 per annum on a band D property. Our annual expenditure is much higher at £172,000 but the Council has other sources of income from renting Queens Hall, burials, interest on investments etc. Careful management of both income and expenditure has enabled us to keep local tax at this level.

We do face increased expenditure in the future; particularly in managing the increasing workload devolved down to us. There is a clear need for increased office cover. Employment of an assistant for the Clerk with office accommodation to allow for that has been deferred too long; and will effect our efficiency for the future. We have also deferred the refurbishment of street lighting for the past three years, carrying out only essential maintenance. Both of these matters will have to be dealt with in the 2008/9 financial year.

Main Business of the Year

Nothing happens fast in local politics (18 years to get a weight restriction on South Street!) and we continue, in the main, work which was started under previous regimes. Past Chairman such as Colin Pitts, Colette Collins and Stephen Henderson will recognise some of the activities which are now coming to fruition. Safe Routes to School, the completion of the Meadowlands development, the skateboard to name but a few. This year some very hard work by your Councillors has demonstrated to both District and County that Cuckfield is a determined Council and we have gained support on a range of activities. Much work has been done to ensure that the Skateboard Park will be built this summer on the sports ground at Whitemans Green. It is particularly pleasing that the advanced specification was drawn up by the youngsters (of all ages) who will be using it. Wide

consultation with them prior to the build will mean that they will feel ownership; which is all important. The cost is in excess of £60k and is a major contribution to sporting activity in Cuckfield.

Planning matters continue to take up much time. The objectives of the Council in controlling gradual expansion whilst maintaining the medieval ‘ambiance’ of Cuckfield remains. The Ockenden Manor extension was the most contentious issue dealt with; though the continuing pressure for development in Mid Sussex will bring larger development issues to the fore shortly. The Chatfield Road site has received Government approval despite access problems. There is little doubt others will follow. Your Councillors continue to lobby hard with the planning authorities. We will need the help and support of all residents in finding solutions to ‘growing’ Cuckfield, so please do respond to our open mornings and consultations.

Roads and Traffic are areas where we are hamstrung by money. Getting change in traffic patterns to enable our children to walk or cycle to school is an ongoing project that is being pushed very hard by Jane and Ruth. The costs involved in anything ‘highways’ are phenomenal and have to be done by carefully wooing the highways department and other county bodies who have access to money!. Our objective is to see the streets full of children travelling on foot or bicycle with cars left at home! Parking and traffic speed continue as concerns. We have been working with our traffic advisor to find a resolution but as already mentioned, highway matters are cash hungry. Attempts to acquire ‘Tentercroft’ on Broad Street to provide additional parking and some low cost housing failed. In the end developers had more money! (though with partnership from MSDC we got very close). Discussions, with the objective of creating more parking in the ‘rec’ or on the verges along Broad St. continue; cost is again the issue.

Queens Hall continues to be used very well and our caretakers take a real pride in ensuring it looks its best for all using it; so thank you Chris and Vicky. It is wonderful that it continues as the great community centre of Cuckfield. It is now over seven years since the ‘millennium refurbishment’ and this year we have prepared a rolling programme of works to ensure it remains our village ‘jewel’. We have put in a new boiler and dealt with subsidence to the north side (no you can’t get insurance on public buildings to cover that!) and a complete rebuild of the rear access corridor. Altogether a cost of more than £60k. Future plans include a redecoration programme, updating lighting, etc. and possible work to the Green Room.

Not forgetting our unsung heroes who manage our ‘**Environment**’. The baskets of flowers, the neat twittens, removal of graffiti and flyposting, a bench to sit on and of course our wonderful burial ground. Much hard work during the year by Dick, assisted by Brian, has ensured that it remains one of the most beautiful. The Memorial Garden has been refurbished this year with the help of a very generous donation and the whole area provides a place for calm reflection.

Two major publications made available this year are the Cuckfield Conservation Area Appraisal. An in depth study of our finest buildings – available from the museum. Also the updated Cuckfield Parish Plan. This plan, I am pleased to report, was updated and produced by residents and will be the basis of our work for the next three years.

And last but by no means least we have maintained public toilets in Cuckfield!!

Your Parish Council has achieved much this past year and we are working well with other smaller councils to influence MSDC on Parish issues. If you wish to raise any issues, public question time is available at the start of all out meetings. We look forward to seeing you!

Robert Salisbury, Chairman