



# CUCKFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

**Chairman's Annual Report: 2017/18**



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Chairman

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## Introduction

I am pleased to submit my Chairman's report for this year as we complete our third year of a four-year term. This report will be published at the Annual Parish Meeting on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018 and in our regular newsletter which is published in Cuckfield Life and our website, [www.cuckfield.gov.uk](http://www.cuckfield.gov.uk).

The coming year will be the final year of the Council before new elections for Parish Councillors in May 2019. The Parish Council is formed of ten locally elected residents (non-political) who give their time voluntarily to ensure we can run a Parish Council, and the Committees which enact our statutory responsibilities, as the first tier of local government.

Our primary focus is to serve the interests of the Cuckfield area and Community. The Parish Council is part of a hierarchy of government and is tiered as below. I mention this for clarity to show who has responsibility and how decisions are made. Where the Parish Council is not a decision maker it acts as a consultee to represent the community in key decisions.

- Central Government defines national policies and statutory law, which are cascaded down to the County Council, District Council and lastly the Parish Council. Sir Nicholas Soames is the MP for the Mid Sussex.
- West Sussex County Council is responsible for services such as Education, Highways, Social and Healthcare services. Your current elected representative is Peter Bradbury.
- Mid Sussex District Council, with whom we work closely, along with the three Town Councils and Parish Councils form the rest of the Mid Sussex District. They are responsible for planning decisions, housing provision and local amenities such as parks and recreation. Cllr Robert Salisbury and Cllr Peter Bradbury are the elected ward councillors representing Cuckfield in Mid Sussex.
- The Parish Council runs committees for Planning, Highways, Community Buildings, Finance, Environment and Estates. The core activity for the year will be summarised in the remainder of my report.



This Annual Report and the Annual Parish Meeting is our opportunity each year to share the efforts for the previous year and to look forward. We have worked to continually improve the Annual Parish Meeting and to make it relevant to the community, with guest speakers who reflect the interest and feedback we have received during the year.

This year we are delighted to welcome two guest speakers. Firstly, the leader of Mid Sussex District Council, Cllr Garry Wall, who will provide a summary and update on behalf of the District Council.

Secondly, we are delighted to welcome Mark Trimmer from the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership.

I will summarise each committee shortly, but the focus has been on Highways safety improvements, running both the Queen's and Village Halls, ensuring we provide services for burials in the churchyard and investing in our allotments. We have also been working to transfer two land parcels which are being transferred to the Parish as public open space.

A major focus for this year has been working towards making Cuckfield's roads safer. Along with highways safety improvements we have managed to successfully setup a Community Speedwatch programme which is underway with trained volunteers and will be formally launched at the APM. In conjunction with Sussex Police, the programme is staffed with local community volunteers who will monitor and report speeding vehicles to Sussex Police who will then decide on what action to take.

We have also updated our fee structure and contracts for burial plots, allotment holders and hire charges for both community buildings. The Council has managed its costs and expenditure within our means and budgets, but these were necessary changes to ensure we can provide the right services to the Community.

The Parish Council does raise the majority of its income through the precept (Council Tax, collected by Mid Sussex District Council). To ensure we can deliver the projects and run the services described further in my report, the Parish Council has agreed to make an increase to the precept which equates to a £0.31p per week increase for the average band D property. We believe this represents good value for money, given the additional work the Parish is undertaking.

I was also pleased to host, jointly with Ansty and Staplefield Parish Council, the public meeting to raise community concern and objection to the proposal for inert landfill to remodel Cuckfield Golf Club. Whilst outside our boundary, the impact would have been very high on residents. The attendance and response to the public meeting was a credit to the community. We understand the application has since been withdrawn, but we continue to monitor the situation.

In general matters I would like to welcome Steve Oversby-Powell who joined as a Parish Councillor this year. You can find a list and contact details of Councillors on the Parish Web Site [www.cuckfield.gov.uk](http://www.cuckfield.gov.uk) and in the regular newsletter. I am also delighted to welcome our new Assistant Clerk, Caroline Hansen, who joined us in January to complement the team in the office.

I should also add that this will be my last term as Councillor and I will be stepping down from the Council at the end of April, due to a work relocation outside the UK. I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their support during my seven years as Councillor and Chairman. The Council will elect a new Chairman at the start of the Council term in May 2018.

## Summary of Committees

I am pleased to summarise the activity of our committees for 2017- 2018.

### Planning Committee – Cllr Burton

This year has been a slightly quieter year on the planning front than the previous few years. Whilst the business of the committee has continued to grow in the number of applications considered with responses to Mid Sussex, who are the Local Planning Authority, there have been no new applications that would significantly erode the distinctiveness of Cuckfield.

However, a number of applications came to fruition or were on the boundary of the parish, which had wider implications for the area. Notably:

- Broad Street, which is nearing construction completion now. Four large dwellings on the last remaining gap towards Haywards Heath within the parish. CPC objected at the Appeal to the proposal and you can read the Planning Inspector's comments if you wish. Unfortunately, he did not place as much weight on the importance of the gap as the council and the appeal was allowed.
- Penland Farm, at the end of Hanlye Lane where 210 dwellings are currently being constructed. Again, CPC objected to this, but the local housing requirement arguments once again trumped any concerns over the environment and the coalescence gap. We await to see what impact this has on the village, at least by way of further traffic increase.
- Burgess Hill Northern Arc. With 3,500 new houses, this is the lynchpin of the District Plan and is starting to gather pace, with the first of the applications being approved. The District Council is planning to upgrade the link road to the A23, but we suspect that traffic increases from such a large development are likely to have a major impact on Cuckfield going forward.

### District Plan

More than a decade on now, and Mid Sussex District Council continues to face challenges with its attempts to adopt the District Plan. It is clear the plan examination Inspector is motivated by "higher" in terms of

future housing numbers for the District, with figures recently determined as wholly unsustainable by the Council now being agreed. The Parish Council has significant concerns on the further amendments to the Plan and in the Autumn of 2017, submitted a report to the Inspector on the implications of these as part of the formal consultation.

Part of the work MSDC has been required to undertake is another review of potential housing sites. A Working Party is reviewing the long list of some 292 sites submitted for consideration, as well as checking this list against previously offered sites. We await to see the outcome of this which is unlikely to be available until 2019, and whether this will have additional impact on the Cuckfield Neighbourhood Plan. MSDC should refer back to Cuckfield's Neighbourhood Plan when assessing any potential sites within the Parish.

### **Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring**

In view of the potential District Plan revisions, the Parish Council has undertaken a monitoring review of the Neighbourhood Plan, by our planning consultant, Tony Fullwood. This was intended to evaluate the progress being made towards delivering the Plan's spatial vision and assess the extent to which the policies are being implemented. Most policies have Monitoring Indicators and Targets to provide examples of the council's intentions and enable some measurement of outcomes. These can be anything from the number of trees, hedges, ponds affected by development; to impact on listed buildings; to the loss of strategic views out of the village, as well as number and location of properties built. Records are being kept that we can review over time and action taken if targets are not being met.

His review concluded that the Plan was holding up well, and in particular the Parish was meeting its commitments on housing numbers. However, there have been some disappointments, with further loss of the coalescence gap, largely as a result of the District not having that all-important 5-year housing supply, which renders many of the NP policies 'out-of-date' in planning terms. He did not recommend any changes to the targets. Monitoring of infrastructure improvements has been undertaken against the Plan assessment, and highlights that we are doing well. Still more work to do, and this has informed the three-year business priority planning.

### **Current Developments**

At Buttinghill Drive, a number of discussions between the developer, Mid Sussex and residents over the drainage pond that has been in a failed state for four years, led to MSDC issuing an enforcement notice last year. Taylor Wimpey assures us that they wish to see the issue resolved and have undertaken further survey which they say resolves the matter. However, the banks are still in the collapsed state they have been for the last few years.

The dates for the land transfer of this open space is 3 years after final occupation, which means in the next couple of months, so this issue must be resolved imminently.

As mentioned, we have seen the Penland Farm development at the end of Hanlye Lane proceeding this year. The HGV impact has been high on Cuckfield at an increasing rate through the village, but there is very little we can do about this. We have tried but a lack of any planning conditions means there is no constraints on the route they take. It has been disappointing to see such a wide scale loss of trees and such environmental degradation in that area, and we know the local residents there have had major issues with the developers – particularly on lack of drainage and water run-off.

### **Extensions**

The number of applications for conversions and extensions has increased a little this year to 49 (last year was 41), as highlighted in the Neighbourhood Plan monitoring. Those we see are generally of good quality, design and construction and aim to retain the character and distinctiveness of the village.

## **Planning Decisions and Appeals**

The parish planning committee recommendations have differed to the final decision made by Mid Sussex planning authority by a decreased amount (7, against 12 last year).

## **Highways Committee – Cllr Mercer**

Highways are always a source of public concern and generates the majority of comments to the Parish Council. We take those very seriously. The majority of the issues are the responsibility of West Sussex Highways with whom we work very closely, but we do own and influence certain projects which we prioritise.

We are currently working with West Sussex Highways to provide a new scheme to improve the safety of London Lane. The scheme, once approved, is due to be built in 2018 /19.

The portable Speed Indicator Device (SID), which records the number of vehicles, type and speed which we purchased last year, is still being moved around the village. The data it provides will help us in considering future safety improvements.

We now have a community speed watch group set up. Their first outing was last week. Any vehicles recorded breaking the speed limit will be reported to the police for action.

## **Community Buildings Committee – Cllr King**

### **Village Hall**

This year at the Village Hall has been a year of consolidation. The initial decoration and refurbishment projects have been completed as far as possible at the moment and the Council has been watching the annual costs and deciding on a way forward to ensure that in future the hall runs within a set budget. The Pre-School continue to use it during term time and we are encouraging other usage as much as possible. The hall is already becoming known as a suitable venue for children's parties and other functions and we hope to continue to promote these bookings.

### **Queen's Hall**

This has been a relatively quiet year at the Queen's Hall after the major external redecoration and new hall floor last year. However, as with any old building, there are constant problems with the fabric and regular essential maintenance projects. Have you spotted the new flag?

The garden has been a major focus and we now have planning permission to erect a gazebo so that we can offer outdoor wedding ceremonies as part of our marriage licence. This will entail installing external lighting and garden furniture but it promises to make us a very attractive proposition in the wedding market. You will find some lovely photographs from recent weddings in the hall on our website.

The office staff are very busy dealing with potential hirers and our new booking system is proving very helpful in that regard.

## **Environment Committee – Cllr Dormer**

The Environment Committee is focused on the environment and wellbeing for the Parish.

### **Cemetery**

The Committee has worked hard to ensure the Churchyard and Cemetery is well maintained and provides a beautiful and tranquil environment for all visitors. We had introduced a new mowing regime last year in certain areas, with longer grass to encourage more wildlife and insects and this will continue, but only in the new part of the churchyard. At present we have only one full time Groundsman and we are currently recruiting for a part time groundsman to replace Brian Smith who retired recently after many years' service.

## **Observer Field**

Next to the churchyard is the Observer Field (Newbury Lane). This will remain a natural zone for wildlife and ecology. To ensure the ongoing security of the field we have kept the high hedge and a new gate will be placed at the entrance. We will continue to support the volunteers who have renovated and manage the Royal Observer Corps Nuclear Bunker within the observer field. This is an important historic asset which attracts many visitors at weekends during the summer months.

## **Christmas Street Festival**

Last December the committee organised a successful Christmas Street Festival. Despite the cold weather many people attended and raised money for our local charities. The event marks the start of the Christmas celebration in Cuckfield and coincides with the Tree Festival in Holy Trinity Church. We plan to run it again this year but do require the community and traders to get involved and it is an example of supporting your community with this family fun event.

## **Allotments**

Cuckfield has two allotment sites, one at Courtmead Road and the other at Whiteman's Green. A management and maintenance report was presented to Council, providing background to the allotment provision, making suggestions and recommendations for future management and maintenance. This was done to ensure the future viability and sustainability of both allotment sites. At present the allotment service is subsidised and Council wanted to look at ways of reducing internal and external expenditure and increase income, possibly by regular rent increases over the next three years, and to review the automatic seniors' discount rate. The report also proposed other ways to administer the allotment service and revise the allotment agreement, and led to the creation of a rules and regulation booklet in order to add background information and clarity for allotment holders. This has been done in consultation with the current allotment holders and we believe we have concluded a satisfactory outcome to both the council and allotment holders. Please contact the office if you would be interested in an allotment.

## **Other Community Assets**

The committee also has a responsibility to look after the public toilets and the village clock in the High Street and the Mantell Memorial at Whiteman's Green, which are seen as important assets to the village.

The Skate Park is a very popular at Whiteman's Green but does need regular repair for Health and Safety reasons. However, it is a worthy investment and attraction.

## **Bus Services**

Lastly, throughout the year the Council has been exploring the idea of a community bus service as Metro Bus and Compass Travel are not proposing to change the current service. Handcross Bus Company might be able to offer a once a week return service to and from the village on one of their routes. The company is manned by volunteers so this is only viable if there are enough people to use this service regularly. An article will be placed in Cuckfield Life with contact details for anyone interested in this service.

## **Estates Committee – Cllr Mantripp**

The Estates Committee is responsible for overseeing the transfer into Parish Council ownership and the later management of land parcels associated with recent construction, there are currently two such sites. Both land parcels are classified as amenity land for the use of the general public.

## **Ardingly Road**

As the name implies this land abuts Ardingly Road, its incorporation into the fabric of our village is a good example of how a robust planning process can serve the local community. The original application for this site was for a large development and if allowed to proceed on the original basis, would have led to significant loss of character and open space. After a hard-fought series of planning applications, with the Neighbourhood Plan playing an important role, a far smaller development was approved with the additional space transferred into Parish Council ownership in December 2017 as part of the planning conditions. It will be maintained by the Parish Council.

The land consists of a pond, paths, dell and areas of mown and wild grasses; there are also hedgerows and a stream. A landscape management plan is in place and a ROSPA report has been commissioned in order that the work necessary for safety on amenity land is understood. The land will be managed with a light touch in order to develop the ecology of the meadow that predated the construction. However, there are several areas where fairly major works are required and these are planned to commence shortly. The pond requires de-silting and the dell needs to be made safe by clearing the lower areas of debris, dead/unstable trees and to improve sightlines.

### **Buttinghill (Bylanes Close)**

Buttinghill is a large area consisting of two meadows to the north of the Buttinghill development and forms part of the High Weald AONB. It remains in the ownership of the developer whilst issues concerning the development drainage are addressed. Mid Sussex District Council is leading this activity with enforcement action on the original planning conditions. It is not yet known when these issues will be concluded, but it is hoped that it will be soon.

### **Finance and General Purpose Committee – Cllr Page**

The overall finances remain positive for the Council with respect to cash flow and reserves. The accounts will be available to the public after they have been audited by our internal and external auditors.

Expenditure in the committee projects discussed above has been within budget but to progress investment in our committees Council has agreed a circa 15% increase in our precept (collected through Council Tax). This may seem high but is relative to the amount we collect, the average cost for a band D property will be £123.28.

### **Looking Forward and Getting Involved**

The focus for the next year is to conclude the projects discussed in this year's report in conjunction with our business plan. We are always grateful for assistance with our projects and it is a great way to be more involved in your community. We are always looking for people willing to take part. Everyone one has a skill we can use and we would like to hear from you. For example, the Christmas Street Festival was only possible due to volunteers coming forward to run the event. Please do get in touch if you would like to see what you can do to help.

I hope this report is helpful to you to summarise the work of the Parish Council and please do get in touch if you would like to get involved in the Community and the work of the Parish Council.

Regards

**Nigel Page**  
**Chairman**  
**Cuckfield Parish Council**