

Chairman's Annual Report 2013

It has been a busy twelve months with lots of activity on different fronts. The Neighbourhood Plan occupied a great deal of time and this has been running alongside all the other issues, some of which are set out below. Following the resignation of Robert Salisbury from the Parish Council, we were very pleased to welcome Martin Sambrook to the Council. Other members continue to devote much time to the local community for which I am most grateful.

Neighbourhood Plan

It is a considerable achievement to be able to announce that the draft Neighbourhood Plan is now complete, we received good feedback from the recent public consultation. This is now being considered and we hope to submit the Plan to Mid Sussex District Council by the end of May. The Plan will then be sent for examination. Once the examination is complete, we will need to consider any changes proposed by the examiner and, once this is agreed, the Neighbourhood Plan will go to referendum in the community.

This document is a major milestone as it gives a genuine local voice to the residents and community of Cuckfield in terms of planning for change and investment over the next 20 years. The Plan, if approved by the community at referendum, will become a formal legal document that must be given due weight in all planning and infrastructure decisions. The detailed Plan is available on our website at www.cuckfieldplan.com where you will find all the policies and evidence that seek to protect the distinctiveness and character of Cuckfield.

A tremendous amount of time and effort has been put into producing the Plan by our many volunteers, sincere thanks to you all.

Queen's Hall

At long last the Green Room (the store room by the stage) is finished. It was literally 'falling down' with bad subsidence so had to be entirely re-built. This means that Hall has been refurbished throughout and, although the maintenance bill will remain high, no large scale building works should be required any time soon.

Planning

The work will be commencing shortly at the new development at the back of Bylanes Close for 42 new dwellings. Once the scheme is complete, the fields at the rear of the development will be transferred to the Parish Council for the use of local people. The management of this area will need careful consideration to ensure the best possible use of the land for all. We have no start date for the new development of 14 houses along Ardingly Road, and detailed plans are still awaited, but this too will involve the transfer of amenity land for public use along the frontage.

Road & Traffic

Progress on our traffic plans has been painfully slow. However, we were delighted when the puffin crossing was installed along London Lane and we understand that this has been much appreciated by the children. We are hoping that we will be able to move forward later in the year with the installation of some traffic calming in London Lane and some improved signage along Whitemans Green. There are also proposals for two pedestrian crossings along Ardingly Road.

Environment

The churchyard continues to be a lovely asset for the community and is beautifully maintained by our groundsmen, Dick and Brian. Later in the summer we will be starting the refurbishment of the public toilets. This will mean that they will have to be closed for a period of about six weeks but the works will modernise this well used facility. The waiting lists for our allotments continues to grow so the pressure on our existing tenants to ensure that their plots are kept well cultivated is growing - regular inspections are undertaken and appropriate action will be taken if the plots are neglected!

Finance

Finally, finances. The financial position of the Parish Council continues to be sound. Following three years without an increase, it was necessary to increase our precept (share of the Council Tax) by just over 2% to £137,021. This means that a Band D Council Tax payer is being charged £86.30 pa up from last year's £84.40 pa. The accounts for the last financial year have still to be finalised but income from the Hall, burial ground and grants stand at £116,611 whilst expenditure totalled £247,930. Reserves stand at £85,000, this includes earmarked reserves for traffic calming and the replacement of capital items.

Nigel Page
May 2013