

Cuckfield Parish Council



Chairman's Report: 2019-2020



Andy Burton
Chairman, 2019-20
Cuckfield Parish Council

Introduction

I am pleased to submit my Chairman's report for this year as we complete our first year of a new four-year term, and my first year as Chairman. This report will be published at the Annual Parish Meeting, to be rescheduled at a future date, and will feature in our regular newsletter published in Cuckfield Life as well as on our website www.cuckfield.gov.uk.

Our primary focus is to serve the interests of the Cuckfield area and community. We have spent some time producing our Business Plan for the term, which contains a variety of actions to benefit our whole community, from the recent Holy Trinity cemetery pathway replacements and upcoming reinstatement of a Post Office in the Queen's Hall, to further traffic calming measures and planning the long term future of the Village Hall. This is in addition to the day-to-day activities of managing our two community buildings, the allotments and open spaces for all to enjoy, undertaken by our team of Council staff. I would urge you to take a look at the Plan and let us know your thoughts:

<https://www.cuckfield.gov.uk/administration/business-plan>

Who are we?

The Parish Council is the first tier of local government and is formed of ten locally elected residents (non-political) who give their time voluntarily to ensure we can run the Council for the benefit of the whole community. 2019 saw the first formal election for Cuckfield for some time, and we are delighted to have all Councillor vacancies filled with a mixture of new and returning Councillors.



Back row left to right:

Martin Sheldon, Andrea King (Vice Chairman), Andy Burton (Chairman), Steve Oversby-Powell

Front row left to right:

Adrian Podmore, John Dickie, Jill Butler, Andrew Symonds

Christine Jermyn and Fran Laing are not shown in this photo.

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. Mims Davies is the MP for Mid Sussex.
- West Sussex County Council is responsible for services such as Education, Highways, Social and Healthcare services. Your current elected representative is Cllr Pete 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.
- In 2019-20 the Parish Council ran committees for Assets, Community & Environment, Finance & General Purposes, Planning and Roads and Traffic. The core activity for the year is summarised in the remainder of this report.



The Parish Council raises the majority of its income through the precept (the Council Tax, collected by Mid Sussex District Council). You can find details of our budget later in this report.

2019 Council Highlights

This year our activity highlights include:

- responding to the current MSDC consultation on the location of new District Plan housing allocations. We are trying to preserve the village distinctiveness for years to come through implementation of our Neighbourhood Plan policies, in the face of extreme pressure from developers who see Cuckfield as prime territory.
- planning for the upcoming 3 month closure of Hanlye Lane for the Penland Farm roundabout construction in the summer, with a trial one-way system along London Lane.
- replacing the footpaths at the cemetery, with those closest to the church still to be done. These will be replaced with brick pavements to blend in with existing bricks in the vicinity.
- maintaining our new Horsefield Green open space, whilst being disappointed that after several years Taylor Wimpey has still not completed the necessary work to enable us to take over the Buttinghill open space.

- managing our Queen's Hall and Village Hall, important community assets. These generate income for us to assist with their upkeep. Weddings are a significant area for us during the summer. We have exciting news about the potential extension of the Queen's Hall gardens, which we will share as soon as we can.

The workload the Parish Council addresses each year increases, as does the complexity of the legal framework within which we are required to conduct ourselves. Our success in doing so is due to the great work undertaken by the Parish Council team, led by our Clerk Sam Heynes.

The Annual Parish Report and Roadshow

This Annual Report and the Parish Roadshow (Annual Parish Meeting) is our opportunity each year to share our activities in the previous year and to highlight the future activities we are planning on your behalf.

This year, we are trying something a little different by holding a Parish Roadshow, a networking event aimed at enabling local organisations and charities to highlight the important work they do in supporting the community. In these days where time pressures seem to ever increase, it's even more important that we all have the opportunity to connect with one another and remember that many activities in our amazing village don't happen by accident, but rely on numerous volunteers. We look forward to seeing you all at the Queen's Hall when we are able to reschedule this year's event, which had been postponed on the advice of the government, due to the ongoing threat of COVID-19 at this time.

Parish Committee Activities

Actions from the main Council are delegated to a number of committees whose activities are summarised below. Each worked in a specific area for 2019-20. These are:

- Planning
- Roads and Traffic
- Assets, Community and Environment (ACE)
- Finance (including Parish Council Accounts)

Planning Committee – Cllr Steve Oversby-Powell

Over the past decade or so the Planning Committee, working with others, has developed a knowledge-base that has been used successfully to curtail some of the excesses thrust upon the parish at the whims of government and developers. Cuckfield Parish Council is rightly proud of those successes. Whilst big challenges continue (more of which in a moment) it is important to consider the historic, indeed core reason why we have a Planning Committee representing the interests of the parish in all planning applications.

As a parish council we cannot determine planning decisions. This is a function of the District Council: Mid Sussex, and their planning department, but the Parish Council is a **Statutory Consultee for all planning applications**, and this is important. Some might see planning as a tick-box exercise, but for a considerable number of applications that we see, whilst there will be an undoubted benefit to the applicant, there will often be a negative impact on someone else (maybe a neighbour, the character of the street scene or sometimes the parish as a whole).

Our role then is to provide a sense check, and to provide a voice for the public that we represent. We have many eloquent people in the parish who are confident to argue their case when they disagree with a planning application. There are also many in our community who may be less able, or perhaps with less confidence, that do not feel able to make their opinion heard. Part of the work of committee is to provide a voice for those who, for whatever reason don't feel able to speak up for themselves.

District Plan

The District Plan was made in 2019, however whilst this has seen a couple of planning decision outcomes different to those we've seen in the past, the much higher housing target is an ongoing threat to Cuckfield. The District still needs to find space for another 2,000 dwellings over the plan period on top of those it had previously included. In November we submitted our response to the Draft Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) challenging the housing numbers allocated to the village. The Parish Council will continue to argue strongly to defend our Neighbourhood Plan policies, which aim to protect our settlement distinctiveness and environment.

Burgess Hill Northern Arc

From a planning perspective, this is both a blessing and a curse. Unlike Cuckfield, Burgess Hill are actively seeking to increase their mass, and use the funding opportunities that this will bring for much needed regeneration of their town centre. It's a blessing for Cuckfield as it absorbs a significant proportion of the District Plan's requirement for new houses. Let's not believe this will be more than a temporary stay though, as we have seen time and again that the Government's central planning apparatus is a beast with a seemingly insatiable appetite. The more it eats, the more it wants to consume (reminds me of a children's book I read recently!).

The immediate curse of the Burgess Hill Northern Arc development is the potential for increased traffic traveling up and down through the village, to the major employment centres of Crawley and Gatwick. Our local politicians have been inferring that a crucial A2300 upgrade to the A23 will be undertaken to mitigate against this, but funding to date has been unclear. Our new Member of Parliament has stated that this is a cause that she wants to champion and so we wish her every success at achieving this and getting an early win in her tenure.

Penland Farm

This development of 210 properties steamrollers on, gradually eroding the gap between Haywards Heath and Cuckfield.

Whilst the case for the development was robustly delivered by the developer Redrow Homes, their execution of it has been nothing short of shameful. I cannot recall a development that has generated so many complaints. The icing on the cake, without doubt, being the 3-month road closure (From 22 June 2020), to allow the construction of a roundabout at the junction with Balcombe Road, Borde Hill Lane and Hanlye Lane, effectively closing the North Eastern approach to Haywards Heath (see Roads and Traffic Below).

Redrow Homes will no doubt have had good commercial reasons for ordering the development in the way that they have, however this action is at significant detriment to hundreds of people. It was a commercial decision that Redrow Homes chose to take, the cost of which, we believe, should not be borne by local businesses and residents.

It should come as no surprise that Redrow Homes (or any other major developer for that matter) should behave in this way, their obligation being to their own shareholders, not the general public or, ironically (as is the case here) those very people they have just sold houses to!

The bitter pill is that the disruption is entirely needless; a condition could easily have been placed when granting approval for the development requiring the roundabout to be built prior to the houses. A temporary relief road could then have been created to avert the massive disruption that closing these 3 key roads will cause.

That's certainly something to think about as you are sat in a traffic jam in the summer!

This is definitely something we want Mid Sussex's planning team to consider with future planning applications, long after this episode has become a distant memory for the majority of us.

Planning Enforcement and Issues

There are a number of planning issues which the Parish Council is continuing to press MSDC to take, or continue, action on.

- The Buttinghill drainage pond is still in a state of collapse, and Taylor Wimpey are continuing to do all they can to avoid doing anything about it. CPC cannot take this land over formally as intended public open space until this is resolved. Discussions with Taylor Wimpey and MSDC continue.
- The Courtmead Road 'Play Meadow' (or legitimate building plot depending on your point of view) saga rolls on at significant cost to all concerned – thankfully not Cuckfield Parish Council! The latest in a long line of Court Judgements on the topic has seen the application to build on this site quashed at a judicial review, on 2 (of 3) grounds:
 - Ground 1: Failure (*Mid Sussex's*) to take into account relevant development plan policies (of which our Neighbourhood Plan was one)
 - Ground 2: inconsistent and unlawful approach to the extent of the "public benefit" arising from the construction of a single dwelling-house

One of the key issues picked up upon by the judge was the requirement to maintain the rural character of the location for all members of the public by preserving the open views of the countryside.

Which brings us neatly on to Denning Place...

- Planning Permission for the Denning Place development was granted on the condition that views of the countryside would be maintained as stated by the applicant. The applicant has then blocked those views they had agreed would be maintained and further contravened planning rules by building outside of the agreed development boundary. Whilst the applicant continues to use legal obscurification in an attempt to justify their actions to the planning authority, for us it's pretty simple i.e. stick to the agreed planning permission or face enforcement action. We wish Mid Sussex District Council every success in holding this developer to account for their actions.
- Cuckfield Golf Club continues to cause concern. Whilst this ultimately falls within the remit of Ansty and Staplefield Parish Council, due to its proximity and the potential implications for the village, we make a point of scrutinising all applications that are submitted in respect of it. A recent application for residential use of the club house was turned down by Mid Sussex, this was a decision that we agreed with and we aim to ensure that the site does not mutate into a residential development contrary to the plans presented and the stated intention of the current owners.
- For most planning applications that we see, we have far more letters objecting than letters of support, but that's not always the case, and the proposed new clubhouse for Haywards Heath Rugby Club is a good example of this. This is an application with a wide base of support and as such is an application that the Parish Council is actively supporting. However, as with any major planning application there are those that will be negatively affected by this development and it is important to listen sensibly to their views, and try to mitigate against their disruption where it is possible to do so.

Planning Applications and Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring

CPC continues its monitoring of the Neighbourhood Plan policies and targets, and overall this year there haven't been any significant breaches of the policies (aside from the ongoing sagas at Denning Place and Courtmead Road highlighted above).

Overall, the Parish Council formally responded and made recommendation on 34 applications. The number of applications for conversions and extensions have dropped off a little this year to 29 (last year was 37). And the vast majority of these that we see are of good quality and design. New dwellings were the same as last year at 5; we did not feel the need to object to any of these but MSDC took a tougher stance and refused 4 of them. There were eight applications in total (reduced from 9 last year) where the CPC recommendation was different to the MSDC outcome. Members of the planning committee assess each of these now to identify any particular reasons and trends.

We would also like to remind everyone that there is a ten minute item at the beginning of each planning committee agenda for anyone in the parish to raise any planning related issues. See website for details.

Cuckfield Parish Council working with Mid Sussex District Council

In the paragraphs above I have noted a number of instances where we believe that Mid Sussex could have adopted a different approach for a better outcome, but it's easy to be an armchair critic, especially with the benefit of hindsight.

For the vast majority of planning applications Mid Sussex deliver a good outcome within the legal and budgetary constraints placed upon them, and I think it's important to recognise the valuable contribution that they have made in helping to preserve our village & rural environment.

Roads and Traffic Committee – Cllr John Dickie

Highways are always a source of public concern which 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.

The scheme to provide widened pavements along London Lane between Glebe Road and the Chatfield Road junction was completed in August 2019. The resurfacing of the laybys has been completed in March 2020.

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

Our community speed watch group is still doing a great job. Any vehicles recorded breaking the speed limit will be reported to the police for action.

We are always looking to recruit more volunteers if you can spare an hour or two per month and would be interested in joining please contact our clerk Sam Heynes or Jill Butler our speed watch coordinator.

Assets, Community & Environment – Cllr Andrea King

This past year has been a busy one for this committee as in addition to the regular maintenance of buildings and grounds we have undertaken some major projects.

The official opening of the feather bench art installation on 28th September 2019 was very well attended as over 100 people stood in the churchyard to listen to the short ceremony. The gusty wind interspersed with bright sunlight seemed somehow appropriate for the occasion. It was good to see so many people, united in a common cause, chatting later over the refreshments in the Old School.

This project arose from the desire amongst Cuckfield parish councillors to provide some sort of art installation to acknowledge the many stillborn babies, and those who only lived a short time, who were born at Cuckfield Hospital and buried in unmarked graves in the churchyard. The burial records from 1855 to the current day are held by the Cemetery Registrar, P & S Gallagher, and some years ago they were digitised and can also be seen at Cuckfield Museum and online on the Parish Council website (www.cuckfield.gov.uk). They make sad reading and the practice of burying stillborn babies without specific marked graves continued into the 1990s.

Christian Funnell was chosen as the artist after one of our councillors saw his work “The Shoal” at Seaford and was so impressed that she asked him to come to meet councillors in Cuckfield to discuss the project. He suggested the idea of a feather; something that can float freely and has a symbolic meaning in many cultures with spirituality and the soul. We hope that this feather bench will give all those families who grieve a sense of wellbeing and comfort.

Other news in the churchyard has been the replacement of the hazardous old tarmac paths with new concrete ones which have made it much safer for all who use the cemetery. We have plans to replace and redo the old brick pavements around the immediate environs of the church too.

Our burial ground is a very popular resting place for many, both from within the village and outside, and we will soon have to consider expanding the cemetery. This is part of our planning for the future.

Another major project is the plan to lease land next to the Queen’s Hall to create a nature garden – watch out for further news.

We are not neglecting the Community aspect of our work as we have plans to have a visiting Post Office in the Queen’s Hall on two days a week. This was to have started from 24th March 2020, but unfortunately this has been delayed. The Post Office will be open every Tuesday and Thursday from 9.30am – 1.30pm, and will be located in the bar area immediately before the main hall and kitchen. A new date will be published as soon as it is available.

Rain or Shine Theatre gave two performances during the year which were much enjoyed by all who attended. Silver Saturday gave a good opportunity for the older generation to get together in the hall for a wine and cheese event. An Open Day for the national week celebrating Village Halls was very popular and gave a chance for all local societies to promote their work in the village.

The Christmas Street Festival was another successful event and planning has already started for next year. Any volunteers willing to help out there? If so, please do contact the Parish Clerk for more details.

Finance and General Purposes Committee – Sam Heynes

Finance information for 2019-20 is listed below (correct at 24 March 2020). We were underspent in several areas:

- Roads & Traffic - Traffic Calming, budget allocated to future plans to trial a one-way system on London Lane during the Redrow roundabout road closures in the summer of 2020.
- Finance & General Purposes – general underspend due to invoices outstanding in March 2020 e.g. Salaries.
- Environment – Income is down mainly against forecast for Burials. Expenditure is below forecast due to final invoice for Cemetery pathways.
- Cuckfield Village Hall – Hall hire income is lower than forecast, however expenditure is also lower as no progress on the proposed refurbishment of the hall. Also we have not been charged for water supply and waste in error.

We have several large items of expenditure forecast for 2020, including the continued resurfacing of the pathways throughout the closed churchyard, further investigation into traffic calming options for London Lane, the lease of the land adjacent to the Queen’s Hall with a view to turning this into a memorial nature garden, as well as the redecoration and damp repairs to the Queen’s Hall.

For more details of the plans for the remaining 3 years of this Council’s term, please see the Business Plan.

	2019/2020 Budget	Actual Net	Balance
Roads & Traffic			
Income	£2,000.00	£3,595.83	£1,595.83
Expenditure	£13,000.00	£5,328.19	£7,671.81

	2019/2020 Budget	Actual Net	Balance
Planning			
Income	£0	£0	£0.00
Expenditure	£2,500.00	£5,295.50	-£2,795.50
	2019/2020 Budget	Actual Net	Balance
Finance & General Purposes			
Income	£224,747.00	£224,362.94	-£384.06
Expenditure	£187,612.22	£171,373.87	£16,238.35
	2019/2020 Budget	Actual Net	Balance
Environment & Wellbeing			
Income	£67,360.00	£57,820.53	-£9,539.47
Expenditure	£85,066.75	£60,308.45	£24,758.30
	2019/2020 Budget	Actual Net	Balance
Queen's Hall			
Income	£39,250.00	£40,093.99	£843.99
Expenditure	£39,199.00	£40,171.19	-£972.19
	2019/2020 Budget	Actual Net	Balance
Cuckfield Village Hall			
Income	£18,500.00	£14,802.84	-£3,697.16
Expenditure	£22,121.00	£13,575.64	£8,545.36
	2019/2020 Budget	Actual Net	Balance
Total Income	£351,857.00	£340,676.13	-£11,180.87
Total Expenditure	£349,498.97	£296,052.84	£53,446.13
Net Balance	£2,358.03	£44,623.29	

Reserve Movements	Current Value 2019-20
Memorial Repairs	£4,000.00
Traffic Calming (London Lane)	£26,925.11
Grants	£200.81
Horsefield Green Landscape & Pond	£28,858.75
Horsefield Green 10 Year Fund	£104,375.83
Allotment Deposits	£3,300.00
Council Elections	£0
CVH Refurbishment	£9,042.00
Planning Committee Reserves	£999.50
Cemetery Pathways	£14,413.60
South Street Railings	£0
Allotment Maintenance	£444.00
Stage Curtains	£2,300.00

CCTV	£0
Nature Garden	£590.00
Lychgates	£1,000.00
Current Reserves Total	£196,449.60

Business Planning

The new Parish Council met in June 2019 to start the process of putting together a business plan for the current Council's 4 year term. This has now been completed and is available to view on our website <https://cuckfield.gov.uk/administration/business-plan>.

We welcome all feedback regarding our business plan, as well as any other areas we have responsibility for within the village.

Best wishes
Andy Burton
Chairman, 2019-20
Cuckfield Parish Council