



## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2024-25



CUCKFIELD ROOF TOPS, NOEMI RIPERT, MARCH 2025

Andy Burton  
Chairman, 2024-25  
Cuckfield Parish Council

## Introduction – Chairman Andy Burton

Welcome to the Parish Council's review of 2024-25.

The Parish Council continues to be as busy as ever, being a year into the 2023-2027 Council duration. Most of the activities in our business plan are in full swing and I would encourage you to take a look and give us your feedback (see [www.cuckfield.gov.uk/administration/business-plan](http://www.cuckfield.gov.uk/administration/business-plan)).



CUCKFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

BACK ROW FROM LEFT: STEVE OVERSBY- POWELL, ANDREW SYMONDS, ANDREA KING, MARTIN SHELDON, ANDY BURTON, MARIE DORMER, JILL WHITE, ADRIAN PODMORE, PAUL CECCHERINI, (DANIEL MORGAN NOT PRESENT)

Richard Gill resigned from the Council in October. We thank him for his input since 2023 and welcome Daniel Morgan as our new councillor.

The Business Plan is guided and directed by our **Strategic Objectives**:

1. Reflect the benefit to Cuckfield in all council operations.
2. Efficient delivery of services. Responsible budgetary and financial control.
3. Improving community engagement and public profile.
4. Increasing sustainability and environmental enhancements in council operations and projects.
5. Maintaining the character and distinctiveness of the village.
6. Maintaining and improving community assets for the enjoyment of all residents.
7. Improving safety and reduction of noise on village highways.

Issues of particular note for Cuckfield this year include:

### **Cuck-stye**

The **proposed 'Cuck-stye' development** continues to cause considerable consternation within the community – you will recall that this speculative submission aims to infill most of the fields between Cuckfield and Ansty with a new urban area of 1,450 new houses. We continue to work closely with Ansty and Staplefield Parish Council, the Cuckfield Society and SCAG - the Stop Cuck-stye Action Group community - to liaise with MSDC, submit evidence to the Planning Inquiry and be ready if the proposal gains momentum. Having completed Stage One of the process in the autumn, the Examiner unfortunately decided to take a long-term

sabbatical and so the process has been in hiatus since. Combine this with the government's new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) rules and yet another mandatory increased target from 1,000 to over 1,300 houses a year for Mid Sussex, and a sceptic would suggest that the Planning Inspectorate is trying to work out what to do now!

As before, there can therefore be absolutely no complacency in our approach to ensure that the current character and distinctiveness of the village is not obliterated in a few short years. The Cuckfield Society therefore has a barrister on stand-by should Stage Two of the Inquiry (whenever that should happen) head in the wrong direction.



VIEW ACROSS THE PROPOSED CUCK-STYE SITE TO CUCKFIELD FROM ANSTY, BRAD WILLIAMS 2022

### **Local government devolution**

Central government is pushing for the biggest shake up in local government since the 1970s and consultation on how this will affect Sussex is ongoing until mid-April. Proposals revolve around joining East and West Sussex counties and districts and Brighton and Hove City to become a combined unitary Regional Authority, with an elected mayor. Mid Sussex District Council would therefore cease to exist.

From the direction of travel, this appears to be almost certainly a 'done deal' but it is not clear yet what it means with regards to town/parish councils, budgets, local assets and services, or for crucial issues to Cuckfield, like planning (another issue for the Examiner to grapple with – Mid Sussex may get its plan in place only for it to then become superseded). CPC is endeavouring to engage with MSDC, but it is clear that neighbouring authorities, such as Horsham, are being more forthcoming with their towns and parishes. There is considerable concern that local democracy will be significantly depleted – a bigger authority with fewer elected representatives is even less likely to know where Cuckfield is! Have your say at - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/sussex-and-brighton-devolution/sussex-and-brighton-devolution-consultation>

Of additional concern is the government's proposal to change the rules so that nearly all planning applications are approved by officer rather than elected councillors at committee. Another watering down of local democracy attempting to overcome often-inconvenient opposition perhaps.

## Annual Roadshow

Our **Annual Roadshow** provides an opportunity to discuss all of our activities and we welcome everyone in the community to join us at 7pm on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> March at the Queen's Hall.

We have excellent speakers attending, including a PCSO, Harvey Baker, who will be taking questions. Adrian Berendt will be discussing experiences of implementing 20 mph speed limits in other part of the country through the "20's Plenty" campaign, whilst Councillor Martin Sheldon will be discussing the 'Visit Cuckfield' website.

We will have representatives and displays from many of the village organisations and community groups where you can find out more and discuss with members over a glass of wine. It's these groups that make Cuckfield such a special place to live and work so come along and find out more - it's always an interesting evening about your village.

## 2024-25 Council Highlights

As the first tier of local government, our primary focus remains to serve the interests of the Cuckfield area and community and, as ever, we are keen to receive feedback on anything the council does. See [www.cuckfield.gov.uk](http://www.cuckfield.gov.uk) for contact details.

**Planning issues**, both large and small, continue to take up considerable CPC efforts:

- As mentioned, continuing to work closely with Ansty and Staplefield Parish Council, the Cuckfield Society and the Stop Cuck-stye Action Group (SCAG) to gather evidence regarding the **Cuck-stye proposals** for submission into the **District Plan process**.
- Other issues include:
  - The last year has seen the completion of the **Horsgate House** development at the old school in the north of the village – a site which we allocated in the Cuckfield Neighbourhood Plan. We welcome our new residents.
  - Detailed planning application was granted by MSDC for the adjacent **Hanlye Lane** site, which was allocated by MSDC for 50 houses in a previous revision of the District Plan. This was waived through contrary to multiple CPC feedback emphasising the poor layout and housing design lacking in local architectural vernacular (highlighted in their similarity to Kentish oast houses, despite the area not having any relationship with hops!).
  - The Golf Club continues to vex MSDC with myriad unauthorised developments, leading to retrospective applications, appeals and enforcement notices.
  - The council has reviewed 81 planning applications in 2024/5; the majority for extensions and alterations. It hasn't objected to any of these.
  - The Cuckfield Neighbourhood Plan was 'made' in 2014, refreshed in 2018 and hence CPC commenced the required five-year review.

CPC remains committed to preserving the village distinctiveness through implementation of our Neighbourhood Plan policies, in the face of extreme, continuous pressure from developers, who see Cuckfield as prime real estate but without any interest in its longer-term evolution.



HANLYE LANE, NOEMI RIPERT, MARCH 2024

**CPC events** continue to be successful and well attended this year, including the Christmas in Cuckfield Street Festival, Advent Windows, two 'skate jams' at our skate bowl (and others planned for April and the end of July), weekly Tea and Company and Silver Sunday cheese and wine events for senior residents. Look out for the Nuclear Bunker open days over the summer and another Rain or Shine Theatre Company production. As highlighted, a key theme of the Business Plan for the next few years is to run additional community events and, following the success of our Coronation Picnic in the Park in May 2023, we are planning for a similar **Big Picnic** event on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2025 adjacent to the new Whiteman's Green clubhouse – save the date!

Our two community centres – the **Queen's and Village Halls**, are great assets for the village and we have been looking at proposals for the future of the Village Hall. Holy Trinity School has recently announced plans to take over running the Cuckfield Pre-School Playgroup there.

We have reached substantial completion of the **Angela Fox Nature Garden** behind the Queen's Hall – the walkways, raised beds and centre fountain have been installed and planted up, together with our new fox sculpture added. It has been hard work but is a great asset for the community, which will soon be open during office hours as a sanctuary for all, as well as an addition for Queen's Hall functions.

CPC's **church burial ground** receives positive feedback on how tidy and well-ordered it looked, as does Horsefield Green. Waiting lists for our two **allotment** areas remain, whilst we push MSDC to allow us to take over the Glebe Road area.



VIEW OVER THE CHURCHYARD AND COURTMead ROAD ALLOTMENTS, NOEMI RIPERT, MARCH 2025

We continue to help approx. 30 local families most in need through our **food hampers**. We worked with the Holy Trinity Primary School and the Medical Practice for their distribution.

We are reporting **potholes** to West Sussex (which we also urge all residents to do - <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-pothole-online>) and keep a tally of **vehicle accidents** and drainage issues around the village – with Hanlye Lane being the regular hotspot – be wary of the disintegrating road surface and surface water!

We co-ordinated the upgraded **drainage works** at the end of London Lane with West Sussex County Council, to reduce the risk of flooding in that area following heavy rain.

We wrote to our MP to highlight the never-ending succession of uncoordinated **road works** in the parish and surrounding area, which West Sussex Highways appear powerless to control. This is all about convenience for the utility operators, with the significant inconvenience from resulting congestion (along London Lane and Ardingly Road in particular) being of no consequence to them. There surely cannot be anything left to dig up along Tyler's Green or the Balcombe Road!

Councillors and associates continue to run the **Speedwatch** programme, with the mobile radar gun which aims to reduce numbers exceeding the speed limit. We are reviewing the **vehicle speed limit** through the village and other measures to improve safety and reduce noise. Our County Councillor, Pete Bradbury, assures us that a West Sussex Highways assessment of speed, congestion and noise in Cuckfield is scheduled to commence imminently

We have worked hard this year to apply for numerous external grants to help fund our activities and balance our budget, and we recognise the difficult times for residents, but the inflationary pressures we are all experiencing means we've needed to raise the **council tax** precept by £4.68 a year for a Band D property against £9.25 for the previous year. We note that this is the lowest percentage increase this year across the four local tax-funded authorities.

The above successes would not be possible without the great work undertaken by the Parish Council team. We said farewell in the autumn to our clerk of several years, Sam Heynes, who left to take the position of East Grinstead Town Clerk. We thank her for the great progress she supported the council with. Noemi Ripert has stepped up to become the new Clerk, and we welcome Kate West as our new Communications and Admin officer. We also welcome Rafi Ibrahim as our new community building caretaker.

More details of our numerous activities can be found in the various committee reports below.

## **Committee Activities**

In 2024-25 the Parish Council ran committees for Assets, Community & Environment, Community Buildings, Roads & Traffic, Planning, and Finance & General Purposes. Reports on their activities are outlined below.

### **Assets, Community and Environment Committee – Cllr Andrew Symonds**

The Assets, Community and Environment subcommittee have had an active year.

The Assets include the cemetery, Village Hall, toilets, skateboard park and allotments. They have all been well used by residents and their maintenance continues to be high on the parish agenda.

The community events include two popular Silver Sundays with a free lunch. The Tuesday Tea and Company gathering in the Queen's Hall has seen a welcome increase in attendance. Once again, the Parish Council was able to deliver over 30 Christmas hampers to local families, identified by the school and medical practice. The Parish Council is also looking forward to presenting again this year the annual Christmas Street Festival on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2025 and repeating on the success of the Coronation Picnic, the Big Summer Picnic will be organised on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2025.



CHRISTMAS STREET FESTIVAL, NOEMI RIPERT, DECEMBER 2024

The environment element of the subcommittee has overseen the orchard at Horsefield Green growing into a valuable community resource. Sundry areas of verges have remained uncut to encourage the local flora and fauna. Occasional working parties in association with Greener Cuckfield have tidied up and planted neglected areas. Councillors have personally repaired seats and painted railings to enhance village's appearance.

The casual disposal of litter is an ongoing irritant. Please do what you can to ensure litter is placed in the many bins provided. Dog owners are also reminded to clean up after your dog and use the allocated bins for this purpose.

The Parish Council is committed to ensuring Cuckfield remains an attractive place to live and work. You are invited to join in with them.



## Community Buildings Committee – Cllr Andrea King

Both halls have been busy with steady bookings throughout the year. The Parish Council staff have again worked hard to make sure there are no problems and those that do arise are sorted out quickly.

Cuckfield Pre-School Playgroup and The Nest continue to use the Village Hall regularly as do various other hirers. All plans for a replacement hall have been abandoned at the moment and various minor improvements are being done to ensure the hall is viable for a few more years. Staff and councillors have again had regular meetings with hirers to listen to any concerns so that they can be addressed in a timely fashion.

Councillors are very conscious of our carbon footprint at both halls and have made considerable progress to try and improve matters. As the Queen's Hall is a listed building there are obviously constraints about how much we can do but we are looking at planning permission to install solar panels on the roof and secondary glazing in the office. We have recently arranged the installation of light sensors in the corridors and have improved the insulation in the roof area.

There continue to be many weddings at the Queen's Hall and the room has looked its best with the various innovative ways of decorating it that we have seen over the year.



QUEEN'S HALL GARDEN, NOEMI RIPERT, NOVEMBER 2024

The annual Bookfest is now a regular feature of the year taking place in October and was again very well supported. The Dramatic Society continue to provide us with excellent performances and this summer will see the return of the popular Cuckfield Summer Show.

Cuckfield Museum is housed in the Queen's Hall and is open four mornings a week. With the constant change of displays, many reflecting current milestone historical events, it is always worth a visit. The current display is about potholes and the state of our roads over the last few centuries. A very topical subject!

The Angela Fox Nature Garden is almost there. It has a year to go before it will be finally finished as it was always a five-year plan, but there is now a lovely, decorative water feature amongst the raised flower beds and an energetic fox leaping through the undergrowth at the far end of the garden. We look forward to enjoying many summer functions out in the fresh air once it is fully available.



ANGELA FOX NATURE GARDEN, NOEMI RIPERT, NOVEMBER 2024



The Rain or Shine Theatre Group came last August and again in January, when we had a full house, and delighted us with their talent. Their next visit will be early August this year when they will perform "The Rivals". This brand new adaptation combines Richard Brinsley Sheridan's masterpiece with Rain or Shine's fast and furious comic flair. We look forward to hearing Mrs Malaprop!

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### Roads & Traffic Committee – Cllr Jill White

It has been a frustrating year with little progress regarding traffic speed and density around the village. Our issues require significant expenditure and/or Traffic Regulation Orders which are expensive and time consuming to obtain.

Your councillors, who live at both ends of the village, understand the issues, but we cannot address them without funding from West Sussex County Council. Pete Bradbury, the WSCC representative for Cuckfield, and Andy Tuck, the Assistant Area Highway Manager, suggested that a full traffic survey should take place in 2025. This will look at all the issues, taking input from organisations such as councils, schools, transport companies, churches and also the public who live/travel through/work/visit the village. It will include school traffic congestion, car park charging, 20mph areas, Tylers Green speed reduction to 30mph, traffic lights replacing crossings on Ardingly Road, excessive traffic speed and accidents in Hanlye Lane. The intention is to build a work plan (signage, road markings, traffic lights, etc) to alleviate the concerns.

### Speedwatch (Education) Activities

We have two primary groups – north and south of the village who survey traffic for an hour at a time and then record the results on the Sussex Police computer.

The table below shows the primary areas surveyed and the total number of warning letters sent by Sussex Police. Speeding drivers receive a warning letter after the first offence, but a second offence within the year (across 2,607 sites in Sussex) will result in a warning that the Road Policing Department will take action. Drivers travelling above 50mph may receive a visit from a traffic officer.

Sussex Police records show that drivers receiving a letter do not reoffend, and this is evidenced by a compliance rate (i.e. one offence per driver) of 94.88% across the year. Of the 43,053 letters sent to those speeding across Sussex in 2024, only 2,640 were excessive speeders.

Towards the end of 2024 we received an updated radar ‘gun’ from Sussex Police that has a longer range than our previous device and it is unaffected by traffic moving in the opposite direction. We used it effectively when the weather allowed – but 2024 was a very wet year.

The table below shows previous years for comparison. The teams surveyed other locations, but their results were insignificant.

Road	Year	% Speeding	Speed 36-39	Speed 40-49	Speed > 50
Brook Street	2022	12.54	114	336	49
	2023	15.54	64	232	23
	2024	15.02	122	237	21
Dennings, Broad Street	2024	6.83	180	36	1
Wheatsheaf, Broad Street	2022	0.72	7	1	
	2023	2.76	7	2	
	2024	0.78	4		
Whiteman’s Green	2022	2.22	6	9	
	2023	10.90	24	21	
	2024	3.38	9	9	

### Speed Indicator Devices SIDs

Our SIDs have not been in use since May 2024 due to a lack of staff, but we will start them again early this year.

Lastly, please photograph and report pot-holes on the WSCC site - <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/roads-and-travel>

### Planning Committee – Cllr Steve Oversby-Powell

As in any given year, we have been working through the myriad Planning Applications affecting properties and sites within our area, and as usual, for the most part they have been well considered.

We have also engaged with local pressure groups on your behalf in respect of potential strategic developments (e.g. Cuck-stye) and have interacted with Mid-Sussex on proposed designs of upcoming developments to ensure they are of a quality and design that people here rightly expect (I’d like to be able to report that our thoughts and concerns had been heeded, but I wouldn’t want to mislead anyone).

If I had to sum up the last 12 months in a phrase, that phrase would unfortunately be ... “Hurry up....and Wait!”

#### **Why?**

For many years now (since May 2014) the Cuckfield Neighbourhood plan has provided a core set of policies that we apply when looking at those aforementioned applications, be they from an individual householder or a developer.

Cuckfield Parish Council is proud to have been instrumental in shaping the neighbourhood plan agenda, as it was one of the first in the country to be formally 'made'. However, it's now over 10 years old and whilst we have periodically obtained professional guidance to ensure that it is still fit for purpose, we would now, very much like to conduct a detailed review, and we have a capable 'working group' to conduct this task.

But neighbourhood plans work best if they consider the Local Authority equivalent, which in our case is the Mid-Sussex District Plan. So, it makes little sense to conduct our review until Mid-Sussex's new district plan has received sign off (or not!).

<https://www.midsussex.gov.uk/planning-building/mid-sussex-district-plan/district-plan-review>

The initial consultation on the new District Plan started in early 2022. In December 2023 this was approved (for submission to examination) by Mid Sussex, and on 8th July last year this document was finally submitted for Examination. Fast forward to October, when public hearings took place at the Council Chambers in Haywards Heath. And the case now sits with the appointed examiner Louise Nurser BA(Hons), Dip UP MRTPI, with a nominal timescale of "Early 2025" for a conclusion.

Ms Nurser's task is by no means easy. On the one hand, she is reviewing the document based on the September 2023 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)\*, but with a new Government, with new planning objectives, and their new National Planning Policy Framework having come into effect in December 2024 (reversing some of the changes in the previous NPPF), and a whole host of other planning white papers in the pipeline, the rest of her orbit will be enveloped in an entirely different set of rules. It must be like a Classical French Chef trying to prepare a 'Chicken and Mushroom Fricassee' whilst in the kitchen of a Chinese takeaway.

It is therefore entirely unsurprising that our Examiner has felt compelled to come back to the various contributing parties for additional information thus further delaying the process.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/revisions-national-planning-policy-framework-nppf-and-other>

*\*The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally prepared plans can provide for The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published its revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 12 December 2024.*

### **Cuck-Stye**

Will it / Wont it? It's the question that everyone asks me, and again, frustratingly, I must defer to the District Plan sign off (or not). Last year I noted "November 2023 and clearly still smarting from being left out of the proposed district plan, Fairfax and their team submitted a speculative application for 1,450 residential units, presumably looking for a determination on their application prior to the new District Plan being signed off!"

But the reality is that Mid Sussex District Council are highly unlikely to make a 'once in a generation' decision, for over a thousand homes, on an extremely contentious site (several hundred letters of objection received) when their own masterplan has yet to be signed off.

### **Planning Enforcement**

Cuckfield Golf Club – some new planning enforcement actions and the saga continues...

## **Finance and General Purposes Committee – Cllr Martin Sheldon**

2024-25 has again been a solid year for Cuckfield Parish Council's finances. This year the numbers have been significantly skewed by a circa £130K. (Operation Watershed with Grants from WSCC paid to CPC to pay invoices). Income at both halls has exceeded the original forecast due to unplanned new hirers, and the predicted shortfall at the Village Hall has not occurred. We have also seen lower income at the cemetery as we have restricted plot pre-purchases to residents of the parish. This is something we considered last year reflecting burial capacity reducing over time.

Key points of interest for 2023-24 are detailed below:

- Roads & Traffic – a quiet year from a financial perspective, although surveys exploring the support for traffic calming measures have been completed.
- Planning – we have delayed expenditure on the Neighbourhood Plan pending the publication of MSDC District Plan.
- Finance & General Purposes – income above original forecast due to increased VAT returns as well as S106 money.
- Assets, Community & Environment – income was lower than forecast at the cemetery due to the change in policy of allowing residents from outside the area pre-purchasing burial plots. We also had a windfall sale of the ride on mower now that maintenance has been outsourced.
- Queen's Hall – income slightly exceeded forecast thanks to a new regular hirer and wedding bookings. Expenditure lower than forecast although utility charges have not been billed and through to year end due to bi-annual invoicing by the provider.
- Cuckfield Village Hall – hire income at the Village Hall has also exceeded forecast levels. Expenditure is lower than forecast as the project to investigate the future of the Village Hall stalled. This will be revisited in 2026-27.

Looking forward to 2025-26, exploration of traffic calming options delayed by WSCC planning a survey for Cuckfield and the surrounding area. Development of the Angela Fox Nature Garden will continue at the Queen's Hall, and exploration of options to secure the future of the Village Hall facility will continue. Expansion of the cemetery also remains a concern.

Budget data current as at 7<sup>th</sup> March 2025

	2024-25 Budget	Actual Net	Balance
<b>Roads and Traffic</b>			
Income	£2,000	£1,343	£656
Expenditure	£9,700	£7,120	£2,579
<b>Planning</b>			
Income	£0	£0	£0
Expenditure	£2,500	£2,005	£495
<b>Finance and General Purposes</b>			
Income	£308,755	£332,378	£23,623
Expenditure	£239,959	£209,117	£30,841
<b>Assets, Community and Environment</b>			
Income	£224,250	£217,960	£6,290
Expenditure	£230,621	£225,259	£5,361
<b>Queen's Hall</b>			
Income	£32,000	£37,813	£5,813
Expenditure	£73,920	£71,669	£2,250
<b>Village Hall</b>			
Income	£24,000	£30,468	£6,488
Expenditure	£37,623	£19,517	£18,106
<b>Totals</b>			
Income	£591,005	£619,964	£28,959
Expenditure	£594,324	£534,690	£59,634*

\*Expected £30,000 still to be invoiced

Reserve Movements	Current Value 2024-25
Memorial Repairs	£4,000
Traffic Calming (London Lane)	£25,427
Grants	£2,155
Horsefield Green Landscape & Pond	£20,487
Horsefield Green 10 Year Fund	£98,092
Allotment Deposits	£4,578
Council Elections	£2,214
Allotment Maintenance	£444
Nature Garden	£4,426
Lychgates	£1,000
Legal Fees	£3,202
<b>Current Reserves Total</b>	<b>£166,025</b>