



WEST HOATHLY PARISH COUNCIL

representing Highbrook, Selsfield, Sharpthorne, Tyes Cross and West Hoathly

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Annual Report of the Parish Council for year 2023/2024

Parish Council Update

The Parish Council represents the interests of the communities of Highbrook, Selsfield, Sharpthorne, Tyes Cross and West Hoathly. It does this in the following ways:

It:

- Looks after the assets that the Council owns;
- Changes/improves things by undertaking projects; and
- Lobbies and makes representations to other authorities and organisations on matters of concern to residents.

In the last year, your Parish Council has looked after the parish owned assets:

- Finche Field and the Allotments;
- North Lane Rec, Pavilion, Playground and Toilets;
- Sharpthorne "Old" Playground;
- Grit Bins, Dog Bins and Traditional White Finger Signposts.
- Bluebell Woods

In the last year, your Parish Council has been working on the following:

Bluebell Woods

The Bluebell Woods working group continue to meet every couple of months to progress the project, in the past year the group have been working on the following:-

Ecological surveys:

- A Nut survey was undertaken by a local ecologist. Hazel nuts were collected from across the woods but no evidence of the presence of dormice was found.
- Great Crested Newts - Further to the habitat survey conducted last February, eDNA samples were taken from the main pond and the top pond by the ecologist. The samples were sent to the lab (Surescreen Scientifics) for analysis and the results confirmed there was no evidence of the presence of Great Crested Newts.
- Badger Sett - a camera was installed between 22 Oct - 06 Nov. No badgers were caught by the camera but there was evidence of deer, squirrel, and a domestic cat. There was also leaf litter in the entrances to the sett which indicates that there are no badgers present. Further, there is no evidence of active latrines or tracks.

Land Management

- A local contractor has agreed to help with the Woodland Management Plan
- The felling licence has been obtained and a quotation has been received for the felling work.

Landscaping

- An initial quotation has been obtained for preparing a planning application, work is ongoing to obtain further quotes for comparison.

Bluebell Woods is expected to be a long-term project but once complete, a great asset to our community.

Parish Tidy Day

The Council were pleased to be able to hold a Parish Tidy Day again this year. The event took place on the 25th March and a further Parish Tidy Day took place in Highbrook later on in month. Thank you to everyone that came along to help keep the parish looking beautiful. A further tidy day is planned for Saturday 6th April 2024.

Coronation King Charles III

In May 2023 the Parish came together to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III.

The Parish Council helped support local community groups to put together a series of events to celebrate, this included lighting the Beacon and a celebration Street Fair.

Portable SID

The Parish Council has now purchased its own Portable Speed Indicator device using allocated S106 funds. The device has been up and running for approximately 6 months. West Sussex Highways agreed three locations for installation, these are Eastbound outside Rocklands in West Hoathly, Eastbound at Cookhams in Sharpthorne and Westbound at Bulldogs Bank. The SID rotates round these locations every 4-5 weeks.

It is hoped that the device will help with the continued effort to address the speeding issues on the C319.

Community Highways Scheme

In July 2022 following a recommendation from the A&H Committee and support from our County Councillor Garry Wall, the Parish Council submitted a Community Highways Scheme application for improvements to be made to the pedestrian crossing facility at the Fox junction.

Unfortunately following the moderation meeting in November 2023, the scheme was unsuccessful in this round, however it is being taken forward for inclusion in next year's programme of Highway Improvements. A feasibility study will be completed this year to be taken back to moderation this autumn.

Planning

In its representative role the Parish Council:

Commented upon 64 Planning Applications. Of the 64 applications, 5 were for work on trees in a Conservation Area, 58 for building alterations or extensions and 1 for new residential dwellings at the former Brickworks site in Sharpthorne.

West Hoathly Brickworks

Following the sale of the old Brickworks site in Sharpthorne in October 2022, in April 2023 the developer Ashill Regen submitted a planning application for 108 dwellings and the provision of an onsite SANG. As the Parish Council were alert to the need to be in a position to comment once the application had been submitted a Highways Consultant was appointed to support the Council with the response to the application. The Parish Council strongly objected to the proposal. The full objection can be found here: [2310-parish-council-minutes-2023-04-24-incl-appendix-1-signed.pdf \(westhoathly.gov.uk\)](#)

The Parish Council further objected to the application in September & December in response to minor amendments. The objections can be found here: [2316-parish-council-minutes-incl-appendix-1-2023-09-04.pdf \(westhoathly.gov.uk\)](#)

[Parish Council Minutes \(westhoathly.gov.uk\)](#)

Chairman's Annual Report

As on previous occasions a full and comprehensive report of the activities of the Parish Council over the last year bookends my comments so I will concentrate again on the major planning issue facing the Parish and will also add some commentary about issues and events in West and East Sussex that continue to impact upon our residents. I can do this because I was re-elected for a fourth year as Chair of West Sussex Association of Local Councils (WSALC) and a member of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) representing over 10,000 Town and Parish Councils to government. WSALC represents nearly 150 Town and Parish Councils in West Sussex. I am also, I hope until another candidate comes forward, Chair of Mid Sussex Association of Local Councils (MSALC); more on that later.

The six trees planted in Finche Field for the Queen's Green Canopy are about to enter their second and third spring and I am optimistic that all will leaf and put on growth. The orchard, now about to enter its fourth year also looks promising. Talking of things Royal, we celebrated the Coronation of King Charles III. At the end of a sunny day, a large crowd gathered at The Fox on Friday 5th May for a kids' disco, food and drinks for all, before processing up to light the Royal British Legion Beacon, words and prayers, followed by fireworks. The celebration Street Fair on Monday 8th May was not so blessed with good weather, it being windy and overcast.

The Annual Parish Assembly in March 2023 was taken up by the fall out from the seven days without fresh water just before Christmas 2022. Senior Officers of South East Water attended and tried to explain the origins and cause of their failure. Since then OFWAT, the water regulator, has launched an investigation into South East Water to consider if it has failed to develop and maintain an efficient supply system. Also

because it imposed a hosepipe ban during last summer, apart from June a relatively wet summer, blaming people for working at home, ramping up demand and testing its infrastructure; finally because it lost £74.2 million in the year to March 2023. The conclusions are awaited.

I referenced Mid Sussex District Council, our own District, earlier in this report. Over the last few years there has been growing unease at the lack of interaction between the 24 Towns and Parishes in Mid Sussex and the District; this feeling in particular shared by the three Town Councils at East Grinstead, Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill. I am optimistic that agreement has been reached between MSALC and the District on a new relationship framework that has the support of the three Towns, the Parishes and the 7 Parishes in the south that are in whole or part of the South Downs National Park. We shall see how this develops over the forthcoming year, especially with a new leadership in control.

Some of you will be aware that our Parish will, from the next General Election, be part of a new constituency created through major boundary changes. We are currently part of Mid Sussex, much of which will be retained with some additions, but West Hoathly is part of a new constituency called East Grinstead & Uckfield. Whoever is elected to represent us will now have to build relationships with two County Councils – West and East Sussex, three District Councils – Mid Sussex, Wealden and Lewes, plus the South Downs National Park, as the constituency is from Handcross in the west to Buxted in the east and down to Offham near Lewes in the south.

The Government still refuses to allow remote or even hybrid meetings of all councils be they Town & Parish, District or County and still refuses to reinstate sanctions against Councillors who bully, harass and otherwise intimidate Councillors, Clerks, other members of staff and members of the public. Last year I reported that incidents are rare with only one Parish in West Sussex having problems. Sadly there are now three further Parishes where I have been alerted to problems. The outcome is usually the resignation of the Clerk with all the attendant disruption, sometimes for several months, whilst a new Clerk is recruited usually at higher salary and after the extraordinary costs of a locum Clerk are incurred. Councillors also resign, never the offending members, resulting in loss of skills and issues of quoracy. Then, just last week, the Prime Minister spoke from the steps of Downing Street and referenced similar issues throughout society yet put the blame on the people without providing support, such as sanctions, for a solution.

Housing development across West Sussex, especially in Horsham District, is a topic to which I always return. The intervention of Natural England stopping all development that is not 'water neutral' and prohibition of extracting more water from the River Arun, is still causing major delays in housing approvals in Horsham. The major housing developers have now come together to fund a legal action in the High Court against Natural England, the Environment Agency and Horsham District challenging the ruling. Arun District is still without a CEO after more than a year. As a result of elections for District Councillors in May 2023, the Conservatives no longer control Chichester, Horsham, Arun or Mid Sussex. Chichester and Horsham are controlled by the Liberal Democrats and they are the largest party in Arun and Mid Sussex. Adur District, with its two Parishes of Lancing and Sompting, holds elections in May 2024.

Reference has already been made to the objections we raised to the proposed development of 108 houses on the Ibstock Brickworks site. It is disappointing that West Sussex County Council, the Highways Authority, had no objections to the development; this after the Parish Council employed a highways consultant to report

on the impact of the proposed development and highlight the flaws in the developer's own highway assessment. If the development was to be approved, the Parish Council would like to see a permanent second access; certainly during construction, There are also concerns over waste water which will flow into the small treatment plant at Combe Farm, rainfall runoff which will flow into the Medway above Weirwood reservoir and the ability of South East Water to supply fresh water. The size of the SANG, 11.7 hectares, is absurdly large given the development is surrounded by open country and the Gravetye Estate which provides open access to all. A SANG this large, way above what is required for a development of 108 houses, adds to the attraction of the development for Mid Sussex, already a windfall development for Mid Sussex to reach its housing supply target because it is not in the District Plan, by providing offset SANG where there is no space for a SANG in proposed developments elsewhere in the District. It is possible that a decision will be made before the end of March 2024.

For the year from April 2024 to March 2025 the precept is £96,470, an 8.58% increase (a total tax of £99.37 for a band D property). This reflects increases in staff costs and administration expenses plus planned major improvements to Sharpthorne New Playground in conjunction with using Section 106 funding from the Bluebell Lane development. The increase is in line with most of the Town and Parish Councils across West Sussex.

Following the elections in May 2023, nine Parish Councillors were returned unopposed so we were left with two vacancies. I am pleased to report that a new member was co-opted in February 2024. Our Vice Chairman, Kevin Gould, left the Council and the Parish and I wish to record my thanks to him for all his support over the last four years.

I would like to say a special thank you to Leanne Andrews, our Parish Clerk, for the hard work she has undertaken during the year and to Anita Emery, our Responsible Finance Officer. Also, to say thank you to all my fellow Council Members who continue to contribute so much to the work of the Parish Council. Thank you to our local part time and casual staff who make such an enormous difference to the appearance of our internal and external assets and whose contribution behind the scenes is so important it would only be noticed if it was absent.

Douglas Denham St Pinnock, Chairman

Financial Matters (figures based at 28.2.2024)

Parish Council

- Income

During the financial year, the Parish Council received £99,282.

Of this

- £88,018 came from the precept.

- Other sources of income were allotment rent and football fees for use of North Lane Rec, Coronation fundraising £1605, bank interest £2076, S106 £3243 which was subsequently spent on the speed indicator device.
- Expenditure

The Council made payments of £73,890 covering salaries and other administrative costs, maintenance of parish assets and projects.

71% of the Parish Council's expenditure was spent on General Admin activities, 24% was spent on managing Parish owned assets.

Of the General Admin expenditure:

- 62% is salary related including pensions (44% of total expenditure)
- 4% is insurance, audit fees etc
- 9% is grants and donations.

The total grant budget is currently £5000. Most grants are small or given for a specific purpose. The largest grants are those made to St Margaret's PCC and Highbrook PCC in both cases for the maintenance of the churchyards and a donation to the Highbrook Village Hall Management Committee and the Trustees of West Hoathly Village Hall.

Focus for the year 2024/2025

In addition to ongoing tasks, the Parish Council plans to;

- Make improvements to the Pavilion and Public Conveniences on North Lane Recreation Ground
- Continue with the project to make Bluebell Woods a safe area for all to use
- Manage the trees and woodland on Council owned land
- Updating the Neighbourhood Plan
- Progress improvement work to Sharpthorne New Playground using allocated S106 funds.

The Parish Council will continue to make representations to other authorities and organisations about matters of concern to residents and will press for improvements wherever possible.

Trustees of West Hoathly Village Hall (figures based at 28.2.2024)

The Village Hall is the responsibility of the Parish Council as sole trustees. Its Management Committee is made up of 5 – 6 Councillors plus representatives from the various users, but unfortunately at the present time we do not have any representatives from any of the users though these would be very welcome to join us.

We meet three times a year, but the day-to-day running of the hall is undertaken by Leanne Andrews, our Clerk,

In the past year, West Hoathly Village Hall management committee has continued to work on finding a solution on how best to store the Local Archive. Work has been completed to improve the staircase to the Village Hall Flat.

The Trustees of West Hoathly Village Hall agree their own budget.

- Income

During the period April 2023 to 28 February 2024, the Trustees received £15,286.

Of this

- £6500 came from the rental of the flat above the Hall.
- £1000 West Hoathly Parish Council Grant
- The remainder came from hiring of the Hall, equipment and bank interest.

- Expenditure

The Trustees made payments of £11,344.

Currently to date the Village Hall have a total carry forward of £3,942 with additional general reserves of £13,462, however, this carry forward figure is due to a project going on hold and will be earmarked against this project for future year spend at this end of the financial year.

The hall has again benefited from regular hiring from groups like the West Hoathly Pre-School, Rainbows & Brownies, Karate, Table Tennis and Pilates groups along with the Parent Toddler group.