

Annual Assembly
Saturday 16th October 2021
Chairman's Report

First of all can I welcome you all and thank you all for attending this parish assembly, the first we have been able to hold since 2019. It's good to see so many people here. Whilst I am sure it's had no influence on your attendance, I would encourage you to join us for some refreshments which can be attained in exchange for your vouchers.

Now for the more formal bit, which is to provide a short report on the Parish Council's activities over the last year and to let you know of some of what we would like to do in the coming months.

Unprecedented has been a much-used word, but it does sum up what has been a very difficult 18 months. During this time the Parish Council has had to adapt to different ways of operating, not least being remote meetings. One unexpected benefit of this being more public engagement. This is a positive for local democracy, which we hope continues now we are back to face-to-face meetings. On this point, various local government bodies are currently lobbying central Government for a change to allow hybrid meetings. Many of us see this as a positive step.

The Parish Council has recently installed Wi-Fi at Winterton Hall. For those that don't know, this hall is the Parish's designated emergency building and nowadays Wi-Fi is essential to support this function. Whilst we all hope that it's never needed for an emergency, this hall also hosts many community events and Wi-Fi is considered part of the hall's service to the community. The Wi-Fi is not password protected and is available to anyone using the hall.

At the beginning of the Covid pandemic the Parish Council set up the Local Community Action Volunteer (LCAV) Scheme, which connected volunteers with those shielding or requiring assistance. The Scheme had lots of volunteers and the Parish Council offers thanks to everyone who stepped forward and offered to help. I would add that the Scheme is still running, so if you know of someone who might need assistance then do please let us know.

And if you were in the mood for volunteering yourself and would like to become more involved then we have the ideal opportunity with the Queens Platinum Jubilee next June. The Parish Council is looking for volunteers to join the steering group which will be organising our community celebrations. New faces and fresh ideas will be very welcome.

One of the planned projects that had to be put on hold last year was The Drive bus stop in Ifold and the plan to rejuvenate the bus stop area creating a conservation area and a safer waiting area for the school children. It is a project we are working on in partnership with Ifold Estates and we hope to be able to move the project forward in the near future. Angela Palmerton is leading the project and is

one of today's speakers and so no doubt will touch on the project later. I should also say that this is another project for which we would welcome volunteer help.

During the last year the Parish Council has continued to provide grant funding to local clubs and organisations which bring benefit to the Parish or its residents. By way of a few examples, we provide Grant support to the local preschools, scouts and guides, the youth club, first responders and Billingshurst Community Transport to name just a few. If any of you are involved in a local organisation and wish to be considered for a grant, then I would encourage you to look at the Parish Council's grants policy which can be found on our website. Since the last Annual Assembly, the Parish Council has launched a new website, which I'm sure many of you will have visited. The specific aim is to improve our communications and support the community and increase our transparency. Meeting agendas, minutes and reports plus much more are published, and I would encourage you to log on and explore the site.

In February this year we launched a biannual newsletter, which if you haven't done so I would encourage you to sign up to receive by email. The newsletter will keep you updated on Parish Council's activities and provide news and updates from other local partners. In June we ran a public consultation with the aim of helping us understand the community priorities and support that we provide. We received a positive response and some of the key results are being displayed today, with the full results and report to be published on the website. The Parish Council is in the process of considering the full results and turning these into project plans for coming years. One of the pressing areas of community concern relates to traffic issues. To this end, since the last Annual Assembly, the Parish Council successfully applied for a reduction in the speed limit along Plaistow Road in Ifold from 40 mph to 30 mph, we have purchased a Speed Indicator Device and support the Community Speed Watch group with the purchase of their monitoring equipment. Please do read the information on display that has been provided by the community speed watch group. Other areas of traffic concern which are currently being considered are in Plaistow Village particularly around the school and Rickman's Lane where children walk to and from school bus stops. In coming months, using evidence gathered from the recent consultation, we will be applying for more signage, seeking to implement a school crossing and to reduce the speed limit around the school. Also, we are looking to extend the 30 mile an hour speed limit along Rickman's Lane.

The Parish Council has an ongoing safer bus stop initiative which has the aim of improving the safety of bus stops in the Parish and encouraging greater use of both school and public bus services. A noted concern is the congestion in Plaistow during the key school hours and the Parish Council hopes that safer bus stop will encourage the use of school bus services. As part of this initiative and as a response to request from residents, the Parish Council will be installing a shelter in Plaistow which will provide a dry and safe area whilst waiting for buses.

Crouchlands is a recurring topic and Lagoon 3 remains an area of concern for the community. Unfortunately, I can report little in the way of actual progress. The Parish Council attends quarterly

meetings arranged by Chichester District Council in order to keep us updated and at this stage, following the failure of the lagoon owner to comply with the Enforcement Notice, we are advised that the matter is now with the Chichester District Council's legal services. We will of course continue to put whatever pressure we can on Chichester District Council and the Environment Agency, but as we have become all too aware, the planning process moves painfully slowly. Regarding the Crouchlands future development plans, the Parish Council has resolved that, as and when development applications are submitted, we will obtain expert advice. I should say we are mindful that a pragmatic approach will need to be taken. The farm clearly has a future, and this may well involve some rural diversification. So, I would stress that it would be incorrect to assume that this will be a fight and we remain open-minded to proposals which may bring welcome opportunities to the area. The expert advice will be to assist the Parish Council in assessing the plans and to help ensure that any plans are in keeping with the area and help bring positive change.

Another recurring topic is the Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council's Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group is made up of Councillors and volunteers and they have worked tirelessly in what can only be described as a deeply frustrating and time-consuming system. Our Neighbourhood Plan after many delays has finally been submitted to the Independent Examiner, only for the examination to be suspended whilst Chichester District Council completed a revised Habitat Regulation Assessment which has been required following publication of a statement by Natural England highlighting concerns for the detrimental cumulative impact of water supplies in the North Sussex area resulting from water extraction at Hardham. Natural England's concerns have had far-reaching ramifications on other neighbours plans and significantly on Chichester District Council's Local Plan. Both Chichester and your Parish Council have sought expert advice and for the Neighbourhood Plan it is hoped that additional policy wording regarding water usage will allow examination of our Plan to be completed on the Plan to be moved to referendum. However, with so many twists and turns and all I can say is watch this space!

I can report that following many requests for play equipment in Ifold, the Parish Council is very pleased to be working in partnership with the Kelsey Hall Management Committee who have agreed in principle to allow play equipment to be installed on their land. This project is in its infancy and there are many details to be worked out, but we believe this to be a very positive first step.

This brings us to the Lady Hope Playpark, which we are excited to be reopening today after many months of planning and pandemic delays. We hope that in a few minutes you will join us on the green to witness the cutting of the ribbon by special guests Mrs Carol Krol and Mrs Margaret Edwards. And to complete the Playpark we need signage - so please join us a little later for the judging of the Plaistow and Kirdford Primary School poster competition. The prize for the four winning designs is that their designs will be made into new Playpark signage.

In addition to our special guests, we have two guest speakers, and I would like to extend the Parish Council's thanks to Andrew Gale and Angela Palmerton for giving up their time today to speak to us about some of the other environmental projects happening in the Parish. Andrew, our Arboricultural consultant, is going to speak to us about our ancient Sessile oak tree on the village green. Angela of Natural Gardens specialises in wildlife gardens and will talk about rewilding and answer questions about creating an ecological diverse garden. Unfortunately, Paul of the Butterfly Conservation is unwell and he has sent his apologies. He was going to provide an update on the local project to save a rare wood white butterfly. However, we will ask for this update when he is well and post the information on our website.

Finally, I would like to say a personal thank you to my fellow Councillors who devote many hours and their evenings and weekends to ensuring the Parish operates smoothly and efficiently. And I am sure we would all thank our Clerk Catherine for her enthusiasm and dedication in keeping us on the straight and narrow.