

WISBOROUGH GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2010

Chairman's Message

Many of us feel that time passes quickly these days and it's been no exception for the Parish Council; yet another busy and enjoyable year has past. At the Annual Parish Meeting last year, Robert Armistead announced his resignation not only as Chairman but also from the Council. He contributed a considerable amount to the village during his 14 years on the Council, for which we are all incredibly grateful. As you can imagine it was quite some act to follow, but with slight trepidation, I took up the reins and was elected Chairman in May, with Andrew Jackson in support as Vice Chairman. I am extremely grateful for the help and support offered to me by all the Councillors and the Clerk during this year.

We have continued with our newsletters and have tried to keep you updated on the various issues that affect the Parish as they arise. I will therefore try to keep this summary as brief and interesting as possible.

Parish Councillors

We started the year with three vacancies. Fortunately at the May meeting we were able to co-opt Mike King and Patrick Mahoney and at the July meeting, Nigel Parsons filled the remaining vacancy. The Parish Council elections will be held in May 2011.

With the number of new councillors, a training session was organised in the Village Hall to which councillors from neighbouring villages were also invited. Not only did this allow for inter village discussion but helped reduce the cost to the Parish too! It was a valuable evening which fully briefed councillors on the role, expectations and legal responsibilities of being involved on the Council.

Meetings

During the past year, the Parish Council met on 10 occasions, on the third Tuesday of the month at 7.45 pm, in the Committee Room at the back of the Village Hall. Meetings were not held in August or December. Details of all meetings are published on the notice boards and website. Members of the public are most welcome to attend and a public questions section is included on every meeting agenda to allow members of the public to address the Council.

Newsletter

For the last few years the newsletter was produced by a Steyning publisher, but unfortunately due to publication and distribution problems, the Council concluded that a change was necessary. The first issue produced by Eyelevel Publishing of Pulborough was distributed this February. Again, it will be produced on a quarterly basis and printed and distributed at no cost to the Council. So far, so good! Any feedback would be welcomed.

Website

The website continues to be regularly updated by the Clerk and is full of useful information and contact details; forthcoming events, church service times, details of village organisations and business listing to name but a few. Do take a look and let us know what else would be of interest or use to you. If you would like your business listed, please contact the Clerk.

Planning

Details of the planning applications to be reviewed by the Council are published on the notice boards. The Parish Council reviewed 38 applications over the year which was down on the previous year; perhaps a reflection of the economic climate. Most plans are reviewed at the full Parish Council meetings, although the Planning Committee met on 2 occasions due to response deadlines. Again, details are published on the website.

Road Safety

The Community Speed Watch team has been operating the Speed Indicator Device (SID) in the village during the year. Observations and future plans will be discussed with WSCC Highways and Police representatives at a meeting in May. We are very grateful to Mike Akers who has coordinated the programme and to his team of helpers who have given up their valuable time to man the device.

The condition of rural roads is obviously a concern, particularly after the severe winter weather. WSCC has again allocated further funding to the work and are endeavouring to fill the holes as quickly as possible. Can we please remind you to use the on-line facility to report potholes directly to WSCC; details on the village website.

Parking around the Cricketers junction and on the double yellow lines is still a concern. Civil Parking Enforcement has just been introduced in the Chichester District which means that instead of the Police, the local authority is responsible for enforcing on-street parking controls. We will therefore be highlighting the problems in the hope that the area will be monitored and Penalty Charge Notices issued accordingly.

During the year we have continued with our investigations into the creation of lay-bys in Kirdford Road as well as extending the existing Durbans Road lay-by to remove on-road parking and improve visibility at the Cricketers junction. The extension of the double yellow lines in front of the Cricketers Arms is a fundamental part of the lay-by project and due to WSCC bureaucracy is unlikely to happen for 3 years. The quotations to create lay-bys were, unsurprisingly, substantial for a small parish and the Council has therefore decided not to proceed at the present time. We have joined the waiting list to increase the yellow lines and financial provision will be made over the next few years should the Council decide to go ahead. This will mean that other projects can still be considered.

Residents who live down the bridleway off Billingshurst Road were anxious that their properties were difficult to find and were naturally concerned in the event that emergency services were required. After historical investigations and consultation with the residents, it has now been named 'The Long Croft'; a nameplate will be erected shortly.

Environmental

After over 33 years keeping the centre of our village litter free, Joan Miles decided to retire and hung up her litter picking stick in December. Come rain or shine, Joan had become a familiar face to us all, and the Council is incredibly grateful for her support and dedication over the years. As such, Joan was presented with a gift as a token of the village's appreciation. We are delighted that Beverley Twelvetrees responded to the Council's advertisement and will now look after the Green. In addition, we again organised spring and autumn litter picking sessions which collected a considerable amount from the village verges. Our thanks to all those who helped.

In early summer the water level of the pond was reduced and a lily clearance undertaken. Although the start of the summer was rather damp, the very dry autumn took its toll on the pond. Having had a considerable amount of rain this winter, it has refilled and we look forward to seeing the benefits this summer.

The Green is a valuable asset for the village and is used by many, not only for sporting fixtures, but for general recreation as well as the many annual events that Wisborough Green is renowned for. Considerable work has been undertaken over the years but wetter areas were becoming more noticeable. This was obviously exacerbated when extreme rainfall coincided with events. Last September new land drains were laid to complement the existing system, as well as new lateral drains behind the Pavilion to help drain a particularly wet area. Unfortunately it was necessary for the contractor to return to realign one of the drains but this has now been completed. We do expect to see an improvement, however, be warned, lovely weald clay is notoriously poorly drained and there are limits as to what can be achieved. The work benefited from a £3000 grant from Chichester District Council, £250 grant from WSCC and a £600 contribution from the Sports Association, for which we are very grateful.

The Horse Chestnut trees are again symbolic of the village and another wonderful feature. We planted 7 new trees in 2008 and have continued to monitor the condition of all the trees. General pruning was undertaken last autumn but sadly a further tree on the eastern side of the Green succumbed to disease and was felled. A replacement will be planted as soon as a suitable variety has been sourced. The willows around the pond were also pollarded which is undertaken every 3 years.

In line with many villages nationwide, British Telecommunication identified the telephone kiosks at both Newpound and in the village as kiosks they no longer wished to maintain due to low usage. The Parish Council declined the offer to adopt the kiosks due to the potential long term maintenance charges and agreed that the kiosk in Newpound could be removed. CDC is endeavouring to 'List' the village kiosk to ensure that the facilities are retained as it is considered significant to the character of the location.

Some of the torrential rain this winter has highlighted blocked drains around the village. The jetting team was due to visit the village on the day it snowed. Rest assured they will be jetted before next winter!

It has become noticeable in recent years that the Green, particularly during the summer months, accumulates a number of different ad hoc signs, whether it is advertising notices for events and open gardens, temporary directional signs or the odd open garage sale! Very often these signs are not removed. In order to retain the beauty and character of the village, the Parish Council has now established a policy. Certain signs will be permitted with Parish Council approval, but any ad hoc signs will be removed.

We are delighted that following suggestions originally recommended in the Parish Plan and approved by the Parish Council, a new permissive path has been created on the east side of the village. It is on the north side of the A272 between the footpath from the village where it meets the road and the lay-by on the east-bound carriageway. The path is clearly waymarked along the edge of the field, over a stile, down some steps and through the wood to the lay-by and saves over 200m of road walking. The Parish Council is extremely grateful to Mr Geoffrey Preston-Jones, who pursued this path on the Council's behalf, and of course, the landowner, without whose support this new path would not have been possible.

Playground

At the beginning of the summer it was necessary to replace the cradle swings. Due to new legislation and the potential collision hazard it was only possible to replace with 2 swings on the existing site. We realise that this has reduced the play value for the younger children and are also aware that the other swings are of a similar vintage and will need replacing in due course. During 2010 we will be examining how to improve the facilities when financially possible. In addition, chain link fencing will shortly be installed to fill the gap in the post and rail.

Emergency Plan

Well the cold weather and subsequent power failure certainly caught many of us out at the start of the year. Although the Parish Council has developed an Emergency Plan which involves opening up the Village Hall, it is designed to cover more serious situations where residents may be forced to leave their homes and relocate to a safe refuge. We took the decision in January that it would be better and safer to take hot food and drinks to those in need rather than to encourage the older and frailer residents out in the treacherous conditions. We publicised 'self help' advice in the February newsletter and attempted to compile an "at risk" register to ensure help for those that might need it. Only one response was received so we can only deduce that good neighbours come to the rescue in times of need. The events perhaps highlighted some flaws in our plan and as such, it has now been reviewed; a copy will be available on the website in due course or on request from the Clerk.

Local Development Framework (LDF)

Being located on the border of both Chichester and Horsham Districts, the implications of both LDFs are important to us. We recently submitted comments to Horsham regarding the possible development at Adversane and Pulborough. Fortunately, this will not be pursued at the present time, although development on the east side of Billingshurst is highly possible.

With regard to our own district, a recent consultation document, 'Focus on Strategic Growth Options', identified some of the key issues affecting when and where development could be located. It set out 6 different strategic growth options including development at the City of Chichester, at the 6 settlement "hubs" including Petworth and Midhurst, and elsewhere in the District. The consultation was concentrating on sites for larger development which fortunately did not include Wisborough Green. CDC continues to prepare the LDF Core Strategy which they intend to submit to Government later this year. More information can be found on CDC's website. The Parish Council obviously continues to monitor the situation with interest and will keep you informed as plans progress.

All-Weather Sports Surface

The Council has continued with investigations into the possible provision of an all weather facility. Having raised the idea at the Annual Parish Meeting last April, we received numerous letters which generally indicated that such a facility would not be favoured on the Green. We therefore made other enquiries and received a positive response from the school, although to date, WSCC has not responded officially to the enquiry. Initial indications also suggest that this would be a huge financial undertaking for the village, but until such time as a possible site has been found, further consultation with the Parish cannot be undertaken. The school will have a new Head Teacher from September, and once she has become settled in her new position, the Parish Council will pursue further. We will continue to keep you updated through the newsletters.

A Youth Club will open!

This time last year we said that "after several requests for leaders, we are sorry to say that it has not been possible to establish a Youth Group in the village." How things do change! The Youth Club will open on Thursday 13th May in the Village Hall, with sessions being held from 6.30 until 8.00 pm for the 10 (Year 6) to 14 year olds, and 7.30 until 9.00 pm for the 15 to 18 year olds. The Club will meet usually on 3 out of 4 Thursdays in the month due to other Village Hall bookings. Thanks to the support of the Fete Society, a Youth Worker has now been appointed who will be responsible for planning and leading the sessions, but we still require volunteer helpers who would be willing to assist the Youth Worker on a regular or ad hoc basis. Exciting times lie ahead and with your support, we know that we can make this a huge success for the young people of the village. For further information or if you are able to help, please contact Mike King on 700713.

Objectives for 2010

So what plans do we have for the next year? We will support the Youth Club and ensure it is up and running successfully. We will continue with our research into the feasibility of providing an all weather sports surface and bring to a final decision as far as Parish Council's involvement is concerned. It's also been 5 years since the Parish Action Plan was produced. The Council will review the plan and agree when it would be suitable to undertake further consultation and to renew the plan. And for the younger members of the community, we will assess the current condition of the playground and consider the options available to us.

And finally, Explanation of Accounts for Year End March 2010

Income

The total income for the year was £47602.23 which was up by £6047 (14.55%) on budget due to the £3850 grant funding for the drainage work and contributions from the Village Hall Management Committee for improvements to the Village Hall. The additional Sundry Income was received from 3 local Parish Councils for the training session; their inclusion reduced the cost to Wisborough Green from £361 to £130. The Workhouse Rent was increased in October although the Insurance contribution was reduced due to renegotiation with the insurance provider. The income from Bank Interest was considerably down on previous years which was to be expected in the current economic climate.

Expenditure

The major expenditure this year was the drainage work undertaken in September. We had budgeted £8500 expenditure and although this was exceeded (£10033.50) with the grant income the total cost to the Parish was £6183.50.

Although a grant application was made for the pond work, it was deemed maintenance rather than restoration, and as such, was declined. The work therefore exceeded the budgeted cost of £150, costing £739.50.

Western Road was surfaced dressed this year costing £3200. It has certainly improved the appearance although the loose chippings did cause some concern. This dressing may well have helped to preserve the surface this winter.

An unexpected expense this year was the replacement of the cradle swings. Although we knew it was of an age that replacement was likely, with the commitment to the drainage project, we had not envisaged replacing this year but corrosion finally took its toll. The total cost was £2680.

The Clerk's salary was reviewed and Council agreed that it should be increased.

The Council continues to support village organisations with donations, as well as the Grant Fund. Applications from other outside village organisations were also considered and the Council helped those that demonstrated benefit to the Parish: Sussex Air Ambulance, St Catherine's Hospice, 4Sight, Victim Support, The Purple Bus, Girlguiding Dounhurst District and Sussex County Playing Fields Association. This money is taken from the Section 137 allowance which allows the Council to make donations to outside village organisations.

The Chairman overspent his allowance which was authorised by Council; 'thank you' gifts on behalf of the village for Robert Armistead and Joan Miles.

The Council again made provision for future repairs to the Village Hall and Workhouse by transferring £3000 and £1000 respectively to the reserve accounts. The Parish Council spent £4309 on the Village Hall which was reduced to £336 due to the contributions from the Village Hall Management Committee.

£127.50 was spent on the Workhouse.

There are a few maintenance items that were not completed before the year end and the expenditure will be carried forward into next year; playground fencing (£348), allotment gate (£148) and repairs to village benches (budget figure £400).

We anticipated a total expenditure of £49548.00 and ended the year spending £50641.31.