

Herstmonceux Parish Council

Chair's Report 2020 – 2021

The Annual Parish Meeting of Herstmonceux Parish Council is usually at the Village Hall, but this year, as last year, things are different.

The purpose of the meeting is for us to report to you on what we've been up to and for you to raise any Parish issues you wish with the Council. This report is now being published on the Parish Council website and other places but please do not stop from raising anything you wish to either by email or telephone to the Clerk.

During the COVID pandemic the Parish Council has, where it can, tried to provide support to the parishioners whilst trying to continue our operations. We implemented our Emergency Plan, refocusing it on volunteer support for parishioners who were needing to self-isolate through the COVID Pandemic. We are all extremely grateful to the amazing volunteer team of Local Community Action Volunteer service, co-ordinated by Pippa Cross. This has undoubtedly been a great help to a number of people in the parish. We cannot thank the volunteers enough and are delighted that they have been awarded recognition from Wealden District Council for their efforts. Our thanks also to all of the local organisations and businesses who have donated their time, resources and goods, including packages of cakes, plants and glorious Herstmonceux Castle daffodils with the LCAV newsletters that have ensured our isolating friends and neighbours have not felt forgotten.

Further supported by LCAV, Vitality Villages, Herstmonceux Churches, The Pharmacy, the School, Pre-School, Tiddlers and Toddlers, we have also been able to roll out a grant, awarded by the Sussex Community Foundation, to our families who have been most financially hard hit by the pandemic. This confidential financial family support is still ongoing for families who need it.

We also just wanted to mention the utterly talented display of Christmas Cards that the school children produced for Christmas 2020. The artwork was a pure delight to see and we know that the printed and hand delivered cards were met with great appreciation from our self-isolating parishioners.

We are also extremely grateful to the owners and employees of local shops and services. Wherever permitted by regulations they have been able to help the parishioners throughout these difficult times. Their service to the community has been excellent.

As the lockdown eases we must do what we can to support these local enterprises. We do have a vibrant community with a variety of food shops and Post Offices, craft shops, hair and beauty salons, pubs, animal food shop, fish and chip shop, take away & restaurants, bakery, coffee shops and nurseries. The High Street may be dying in some areas but not in Herstmonceux! Please can you ensure that you can wherever possible help these local businesses.

Similarly, with the lockdown, many of the organisations, clubs and societies in Herstmonceux Parish, and our local venues, have been unable to operate and again we must, wherever possible as they are allowed to reopen, reuse the facilities and the services they provide.

So what have the Parish Council been up to!

We have managed to keep meetings going utilizing the Zoom facility. Unlike one particular Parish Council, these have always been conducted with proper decorum. As parishioners you are entitled to join in the meetings on the Zoom format. The link is always provided on the Notice of the Meeting.

It has been an extremely busy year. We now have a fully operational Neighbourhood Plan. It came into effect in July 2019 and has some very important factors.

The draft Wealden Local Plan was dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate. Our Neighbourhood Plan has planning policies that cover some of the gaps left by the lack of an up to date Wealden Plan. Apart from planning issues there are other policies.

Policy 4 sets out rules resisting the loss of local employment and Policy 5 restricts the change of use from retail to non-retail use. The Plan also has a design section that obliges developments to meet design specifications for houses so they accord with the surrounding properties in the Parish. Although we are not the Planning Authority and do not have the final say in decisions, we have used The Plan and the Design Guide to influence the design of new builds and, with the assistance of the Wealden Planning Department who do take notice of our legally approved plan, have improved some developments.

Very importantly we now receive 25% of all CIL money. What is CIL? It is the Community Infrastructure Levy. This replaces the funds from new builds which used to be dealt with by Section 106

agreements. The Section 106 agreements only used to cover major developments but now CI includes a lot more properties.

It is a fact that both the funds from the Section 106 agreements and the CIL money has already been used by the Parish Council for local benefit. We have spent over £80,000 providing , improving and maintaining child, youth and adult recreational facilities in the Parish and for the improvement of the infrastructure of the Parish.

The Neighbourhood Plan sets out what projects, after consultation with the electorate during the preparation of the Plan, the Parish Council would like to carry out in the Parish. We are delighted to report that we now have been able to complete some of these projects.

Road entrance to the Recreation Ground

This has been improved by clearance of vegetation on the vision lines and resurfacing. This will make the entrance much safer for all users.

Car Park on the Recreation Ground

This has been improved for users of the Recreation Ground, the Bowls Club and the school-teachers and staff. It is important to us that the school staff use this car park, as with the redevelopment of the Woolpack, there is now very limited parking on the Public Car Park at school drop off . and collection times.

A new footpath has been installed all the way from the car park to the Bowls Club and back entrance of the school. Lighting is being discussed, we are aiming for a solar and night skies lighting solution to be as environmentally friendly as possible.

A scheme of planting is being discussed along the new footpath and around the carpark new fence which will include plants for pollinators, native plants and hopefully a tree or two.

Children's Playground on Recreation Ground

Following consultation with local families with choices for new play items, this has been extended and upgraded with additional play equipment and replacement surfacing. This is linked into the potential play area to be built on the Lime Cross development site. We have had extensive negotiations with the developers at Lime Cross and have also consulted with you, the parishioners, on the type of equipment to be provided on this second and much larger play site. In addition to this new children

and young person's play area we will be consulting with you about the idea of adult fitness equipment or a fitness trail. The Lime Cross works are unlikely to be completed until late 2022 or early 2023 and therefore we decided to improve the Children's Playground on the recreation ground in the meantime. It looks very good and we know the children are enjoying it! Thank you for all of your positive feedback.

Other Projects

The Parish Council have taken on the responsibility and cost of re-opening and running the public toilets. We are still considering whether we can keep the public toilets open. To date this has been done on an experimental basis, knowing that this Wealden building and facilities need CONSIDERABLE improvement!

Bus Stops

Seats have been added in bus stops following resident requests. The Parish Council are also taking up the recent works to the Bus Stop in Gardner Street. The Gardner Street bus stop improvements were a further condition of the permissions granted by Wealden to the developer of Lime Cross. The Parish Council are absolutely not accepting the so-called improvement works to the Geo's side of the road bus stop, in which the raised kerb falls at the back end of the bus stop rather than the front, and have complained to East Sussex Highways, Wealden and the developer about the unacceptable replacement bus shelter, which is most clearly sub-standard to the one that was removed!

The removed bus shelter will be re-instated elsewhere in the parish. Following necessary approvals and licenses from East Sussex Highways, the Parish Council are hoping to install the bus shelter at the stop at Coopers Croft.

Upcoming Projects

Improvements to Footway (Pavement) between Woodland View and the Service Centre

Projects to improve by widening and resurfacing the pedestrian footway between the new Woodland View site and Herstmonceux Service Centre and also the path in the Rec that runs from the Children's Playpark to the top of the Rec, are part of the permissions granted by Wealden to developers of the Woodland View and Lime Cross sites. The Parish Council have been involved in gathering quotes and agreeing proposals for the improvements, of which we hope works will take place in this coming year.

Posey Green

The Parish Council have successfully sought to have the Posey Green land transferred to the ownership of the Parish following the Local Planning Authority planning application approval at The Horseshoe Inn. We are in the process of having the legal documentation drawn up. Once this is completed some enhancements can take place there such as some planting and seating. Some parking provision will also be included in the design.

Elections

In May, all things being equal, there will be local elections. If you lived in certain wards of the Parish it meant that you had to go to Hellingly or Bodle Street to vote. We raised serious objections with Wealden Election Department as to the inequality of this arrangement. With assistance of the Village Hall Committee, it has been agreed with Wealden that in all elections all residents entitled to vote will be able to vote in our Village Hall, whichever ward they live in. This is a great success for the Parish Council and we are grateful for assistance from some parishioners in this matter.

Our County Councillor

My thanks go to our County Councillor Bill Bentley, not an easy post to hold as he has been subjected to lots of issues raised by us, in particular, the seemingly never-ending issues on the roads. The County Council has a large range of responsibilities and obligations but the one that directly affects our Parishioners has been the poor state and condition and repair of our roads! Bill Bentley has been helpful in chasing the Highways Department to ensure repairs are done as quickly as possible. We do also let him know when we are not satisfied with the quality!

Some words from Cllr Bill Bentley

Unfortunately I am not available to attend (The Annual Assembly) on 26th April so would ask that you give my apologies.

As I explained at the (Council) March meeting, after 20 years of service as an East Sussex County Councillor I have decided to stand down and therefore my name will not be printed on the ballot paper at the forthcoming election. The time is right to bring this part of my life to a close however I have enjoyed my work at county hall representing the residents of Herstmonceux for 16 of those years.

It would be fair to reflect that in that time there have been a broad range of issues that we have faced, and together with WDC colleagues we have made a formidable team which, for the most part, achieved success for the varied Herstmonceux communities.

I will miss the role but take with me good memories of the strong personalities and characters of councillors past and present and forthright Herstmonceux residents.

In closing I would like to thank (the Parish Council staff) for (their) professional support, and the Chairman and Parish Council Members for their kindness towards me over many years.

Cllr Bentley, we thank you for all you have done for our Parish and we look forward to meeting our new East Sussex County Councillor and hope that we have as good as a working relationship with him as we have done with you.

Our District Councillors

Whilst 5 District Councillors serve our parish, our two familiar District Councillors are Pam Doodes and Ray Cade. They have been extremely helpful in a number of issues that affect the Parish. Their interest, involvement and commitment is greatly appreciated by the Parish Councillors, and the office staff. They are District Councillors for a large area and their knowledge and interest in our Parish is brilliant. We are so grateful to them.

Our employees

Jamie..... What can I say! We are delighted to have been able to employ Jamie to carry out so very many jobs around the Parish. He opens and closes the toilets, plants and waters the troughs and planters, litter picks around the Parish, empties the rubbish bins at the Rec, clears the footways of leaves and overgrown grass and mud, carries out weekly checks on the parish owned land to inspect and report any maintenance issues, plus he has kept us safe through the pandemic by twice daily sanitising the public toilet and the children's playpark, Jamie, you are a great asset to our community!

Whilst on the subject of litter picking, I would like to thank the dedicated parishioners in Cowbeech, Windmill Hill and here in Herstmonceux who voluntarily go around picking up the litter by the road-side. The mess left by careless and unthoughtful road users throwing their rubbish out of car and lorry windows is unacceptable. We cannot do anything to police this but, thanks to our volunteers and Jamie, we can try and keep the parish looking respectable.

Simon Goacher, our old Finance Officer, is still employed by the Council to carry out Payroll services and we thank him for his help with this important job.

As a result of our Responsible Finance Officer (RFO), Karen Crowhurst, resigning due to the pressures of her other job as Clerk for Ringmer Parish, Clare Harrison, our Clerk, has taken on the role of RFO. We thank Karen for her work and help. As Clare now has two roles to fulfil, we also now employ Maxine Hoad as our Parish Council Administrative Assistant to help Clare in the day to day running of the Parish. Maxine is settling in well and taking on responsibilities for the administration of the allotments. Maxine helps the Councillors keep up to date with developments. She is also researching and reporting to us on Environmental Issues and how we can improve our own practices. We, as a Council, are very keen to develop schemes to enhance the environment in the parish and reduce our carbon emissions. Maxine and Clare are supporting our Streetlighting Working Group Councillors to work with East Sussex County Council to develop a long-term project to make us more energy efficient and night skies friendly across the Parish.

Our Parish Clerk, and now RFO, Clare Harrison, is exceptional. I could spend the next three or four pages of this report singing her praises but..... She has grown into the job and is beyond helpful to the Councillors and the Parishioners. She works hard to ensure that all jobs are properly carried out and, in the future, has enormous responsibility to oversee and manage our various ongoing and important projects.

A big thank you to all the Parish Councillors. They give their time to ensure that the Parish is run smoothly and to ensure that where possible the Parish benefits from all the responsibilities and projects that the Council undertakes.

We are all so incredibly lucky to live in such a strong and vibrant community. We hope to build and develop this even more in the future. The more we can strengthen the community spirit, the better life will be.