

HERSTMONCEUX PARISH COUNCIL

Financial Report for Annual Parish Assembly 2021

Report Written by: Clare Harrison, Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer

Looking Back over the last year:

Just a little preamble before giving you a run down on finances, I hope this is ok, it won't take long so bear with me. This has been a year of change for all of us and we have had to meet challenges head on and make changes to our routines and working environments.

Very initial responses to the Pandemic outbreak and lockdown were some serious hours of risk assessing. Every time a Government announcement resulted in more changes of what could and could not take place, further updates were needed to working practice and our records of how to continue to manage our business safely. I did get to a point where I would have been quite happy never to see another risk assessment sheet for the rest of my life!

And in the midst of all this, the initial planning for the Local Community Action Volunteering was coming into being and taking shape having been introduced to the Council by Pippa Cross, based on an idea from Ireland. Following the initial set up, recruitment of volunteers and implementing of a safety check system for those coming forwards to so kindly volunteer their time, the project quickly sprang into life and has been a life saver to many of the more vulnerable members of our community, keeping them connected and knowing there is always someone on the end of the line for them. Pippa and the team of LCAV volunteers, we salute you.

How privileged I have felt this last year to be a part of this amazing community. The number of community organisation reports that follow the Parish Council information will really help others from outside of the Parish to understand what a connected Parish this is and how much goodwill exists here.

Councillors and Staff:

So, in the Parish Council also there have been changes. Catherine Stirling – Reed had to step down from the Council earlier in the year. We will not forget her incredibly hard work in the footpath's management and improvements around the Parish, and her passion for all things environment. Cllr Nick Porter who has a wealth of business acumen has joined us as a Co-opted Councillor. We are hoping to soon Co-opt into our one vacant Council seat to put us back to full numbers.

Our former Responsible Finance Officer resigned and created an opportunity to rejig our staff set up. I now have a combined Clerk and Finance Officer role. This makes sense to me and to understand the complex finances of this Council, one has to have a good knowledge of the daily comings and goings, services and projects being

delivered. To take on some of the weight of the day-to-day communication, administration and researching for projects work, we recruited an Administration Assistant. We had many top class candidates applying for the role therefore it was a difficult recruitment in that sense, however, Maxine started with us in November 2020 and has immersed herself in her new role with fresh ideas, energy, enthusiasm, flexibility, commitment, always with a smile on her face, and thankfully has also been happy to relieve me of some of the social media responsibilities.... which I never very much enjoyed. Thanks Maxine!

You have already heard from Ian how amazing Jamie is, I can only second every compliment that was expressed. Jamie knows I think he is a superstar as I regularly reinforce this to him with offerings of chocolate! I would also just like to congratulate Jamie on very recently becoming 'Uncle Jamie'. I hope to resume Open Office mornings on a Thursday at the Parish Council office, contact myself or Maxine at any time if you have any queries.

Also, just a quick mention of your incredibly hard-working Parish Councillors. The Parish Council take the flack sometimes when things go wrong, and that's ok, it's all part of the role and the responsibility and why the individuals sit on the Council; to try and improve local facilities and the Parish environment. But I do just also want to thank the Councillors as they spend many hours at what they do, be it decision making in meetings; researching and pouring over planning applications; site meeting with developers for promoting the best interests of the Parish when faced with a fight for less than satisfactory developer activities; reporting planning permission breaches; Parish asset and common land maintenance and checks; representing the interests of the people of Herstmonceux at other events or discussions; relentlessly pursuing East Sussex Highways when potholes appear and drains need clearing and roads need resurfacing; investigating options to help slow down traffic and discourage unsociable driving and parking; planning for the future of the parish and improving of its infrastructure and amenities whilst considering the environment and global warming – such as reducing our carbon footprint in planning for better energy efficiency consumption from the Parish street lights; checking that contractors are carrying out works as according to project briefs and that the expected standards are met, and so much more.

Projects:

Coming onto finance related matters, I just want to very briefly explain about infrastructure income that comes to the Parish as a result of Local Planning Authority approved planning applications.

S106's are legal agreements between a developer and a Local Planning Authority – a commitment by the developer to improve the local facilities where they are building the houses. CIL income is Community Infrastructure Levy – really this replaces the older S106 agreements which have been phased out. CIL is a charge which can be levied by local authorities on new development in their area. It is an important tool for local authorities to use to help them deliver the infrastructure needed to support local

development. A proportion is retained by Wealden DC and a proportion comes to Herstmonceux Parish. Since receiving full approval for our Herstmonceux Parish Neighbourhood Plan, the percentage of CIL that the Parish receives increases to 25% (from 12).

The two big projects focussed on last financial year were the improvements to the Recreation Ground Access Road and car park (including necessary drainage) and the refurbishment of the Children's Play Area. Issues were dealt with as they arose, albeit being able to not do anything about the ridiculous amount of rain we experienced at the end of 2020. Whilst the projects stemmed from the Approved Neighbourhood Plan, the costs for these projects were partially absorbed by S106 funding from the Woodland View development, for which funding was specified for improvements to Offsite Play Space, an Index Linked, Commuted Sum of £50,918.51, with the remainder of the total for all of the works coming from the Parish Council reserves and CIL income. The Council need to provide a project brief to Wealden in order to draw down the CIL funds and evidence of spend and other monitoring information is required by the Local Planning Authority for both CIL and S106 funding.

A number of projects are arising for the coming year – the main ones being improving the footway between Woodland View and the Service Centre, improvements to the Recreation Ground footpath from the Twitten to the top of the rec area.

In addition to these but with no known timescale as yet are the new play and family recreational area at Lime Cross, for which consultation was undertaken last year. These all fall in the S106 agreements. The developer will pay a proportion of the new play and family recreational area cost and the Council will pay a proportion from CIL income. Consultation still to come will be for thoughts and comments on an all ages fitness type trail or area plus some green space landscaping. Again, some of the cost of these new facilities sit within the S106 agreements at a cost to the developer, although to improve on the basic facility that the developer would build, the Parish Council will input CIL funding to enable the creation of a more superior facility and space.

Looking forwards:

A review of the Neighbourhood Plan is due, (this is normal practice), and the Council will be considering the next tranche of infrastructure improvements that are outlined in the policies and business planning for these against the expected income from further CIL funds, reserves and other income.

For this reason, the Council wish to establish a Community Forum to involve members of the Parish who have ideas, visions and project planning skills and experience to help the Council consider the priorities for the next 3-5 years. If you have the time and enthusiasm to be involved in this, please do let me know.

Focus for discussions will be the need to cut carbon footprint and offset our environmental impact, plus other environmentally friendly activities that support locally delivered well-being initiatives. Larger capital projects needing Community Forum voice and support will be Policies 6 & 7 of the Neighbourhood Plan – moving forwards with the proposals for a new multi-use sports pavilion, and discussions for ideas and opportunities to develop the old Public Toilets into a new facility whilst retaining public toilet services. Exciting times ahead.

To finish my report, I have produced our end of Financial Year 2020-2021 figures, more detailed information will be available on the website following our Audit and signing off of these accounts. Or you are more than welcome to contact me if you wish to see specific information.

Reserves:

Local government legislation requires parishes to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure, when calculating their budget. There is no specified minimum or maximum level of reserves that an authority should hold.

Reserves can be categorised as earmarked (held for a specific purpose), general (held to cushion the impact of uneven cash flows or unexpected events), or ringfenced (held for one purpose only and cannot be transferred).

Earmarked reserves are a means of building up funds over several years to deliver a defined project, predicted liabilities or for known significant expenditure.

Ringfenced reserves are grants allocated for a specific project only, this money must not be used for any other purpose.

General reserves are funds which do not have any restrictions as to their use. The Parish Council are advised by their auditor that a prudent level of general reserves is the equivalent of 6 months' annual expenditure.

Please see our 2020-2021 Statement of Accounts (PDF doc) for full detail of the receipts and payments made in this Financial Year.