



Hadlow Down Parish Council Annual Report

Chairman's Statement

This is the fourth annual report to you of the activities of the Council over the previous 12 months.

The last 12 months, like the previous ones, continued to put a squeeze on our finances. As I explained last year, it is often not appreciated that costs to us which we cannot avoid such as litter and dog-bin emptying continue to rise, and there is little we can do about these. The latest target is that East Sussex County Council have reduced the amount they are budgeting for finger post repair and re-painting.

Finger posts are a quintessential feature of villages such as ours and we have decided that we want to keep the finger posts we have and to repair and paint them as necessary. This work has started and I hope you will agree that the smartened up posts are a big improvement. We are hopeful of a contribution to the cost from East Sussex County Council.

I am delighted that after 4 years below complement on the Parish Council we now have an additional recruit in Julian Michaelson-Yeates and are up to full strength. All Councillors also put their names forward in the election and have been duly elected which is very good news.

**Sandra Richards
Chairman**

Your Annual Report

Each year the Parish Council have to hold an Annual Assembly. This year's meeting was on the 21st April in the Village Hall and as with all Parish Council meetings this was open to anyone to attend. In addition to the normal attendees we were given a presentation by Katy Bourne, the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner, which was followed by a question and answer session. Superintendent Taylor also attended and took part in the question and answer session. We were pleased to see a number of villagers there who listened with interest and raised a number of questions.

This Annual Report is résumé of the reports from Councillors at the Assembly together with other items of interest.

Your Council

As there are always new people in the village we are again repeating this section so that all of you understand what the Parish Council does and how you can take part in the Council meetings if you wish.

The Council meets every month on the first Tuesday of the month and meets in the Committee Room of the Village Hall. There may also be additional meetings if there are urgent planning matters or where a particular topic is too lengthy for the normal meeting. All meetings are publicised on the Council notice boards in Main Road and outside the Village Hall together with the agenda. We are fairly strictly governed by law in the way we conduct our business and have standing orders which determine how we run the meetings. Within those standing orders we have set a time limit of two hours for our meetings as we feel that to expect people to give their best as the evening wears on is not fair on them or on the decisions needed.

As well as the Councillors, meetings are normally attended by our representatives from the District and County Councils as well as by our local police.

All Council meetings are open to the public unless there is a particular reason for a topic to be discussed in private. At the start of each meeting there is the opportunity for members of the public to ask questions of the Council but after this open question time the Council has to conduct its business without interruption.

Each year the Council raises the money it needs via your Council Tax. This is called the Precept and for Hadlow Down is about £7.90 per month per household. This year's precept has increased slightly as the Chairman's statement highlights and explains.

What we are involved in

Whilst our areas of responsibility remain the same, the tightening of budgets at County Council and District Council levels means that actually if we want our Village to be well looked after we have to take more responsibility for the things we care about. In some cases this means extra cost, as with the recent work on fingerposts, but we believe that these costs are justified to keep the rural environment as pleasant as possible.

Planning

Planning has seen further changes over the last 12 months and there seems to be new planning legislation and further relaxation of rules on a monthly basis. As the economy starts to slowly recover from the last 5 years, we are now seeing more developments, mainly residential, being started or continued from previous planning consents. The Uckfield regeneration project has been back and forth for consultation and has proved to be another controversial subject, mainly due to the removal of high street parking spaces, as well as the additional 1000 houses to be built in Uckfield out near the bypass, putting further pressure on local resources, infrastructure, transport and local authority. The Ashdown Forest 7km zone continues to be a challenge to various parties and is still a policy that has strong feelings on both sides, although the policy withstood several challenges last year, the use of SANGS now seems likely to be at the forefront of many development discussions.

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Emergency Plan, Planning

Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS) This is the name given to green space that is of a quality and type suitable to be used as mitigation for residential and where necessary tourism development likely to affect the Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area. It is considered that the provision of SANGS together with a range of on-site and other management measures at Ashdown Forest has the potential to provide an effective means of avoiding or mitigating harm from the effects of recreational pressure from new development. The pressure from central government to build more houses and the need for so called affordable & social housing will continue to put pressure on many communities in the south east, along with the added stresses and strains that this brings.

We have seen several further changes available commercially under planning and this again has further relaxed permissions required to convert to residential, shops for example. Not something that is likely to assist our high streets but will go towards the much talked about housing quotas. Planning for village halls and new community centres in Wealden is under constant discussion due to the restrictions of the Ashdown Forest 7km zone, and Hadlow Down Parish Council are keeping a very close eye on this for obvious reasons regarding the proposed new village hall at the playing field.

Cllr Damon Wellman attends the Wealden Parish Planning Panel meeting with WDC planners on behalf of Hadlow Down.

Highways, Rights of Way & Footpaths

Potholes and road surface problems – These continue to be an issue with repairs taking a long time in some instances but the Parish Council continues to press for action, raising it at every opportunity and to the most senior officers of ESCC.

Gully clearance – In an effort to encourage ESCC to prioritise the gully clearance programme Councillors took on the task of checking gullies in the Parish, including the A272, using maps from the ESCC website. We used a “traffic light” system. Red for urgent work, amber for those needing some attention and green for OK, to get some consistency in our reporting methods. Some notes were also made of road surface issues. Helen collated the results and the report was sent to ESCC Highways.

Drainage work is currently being carried out on the A272 and patch repairs are due to take place at Shepherds Hill from 8 May for three days between 7 am and 5pm when the road will be closed. Please continue to report potholes and blocked gullies to Highways and also to Helen. **Speeding vehicles** - the Parish Council is looking into various options for monitoring speed as can be seen in the Parish Council Minutes.

Wilderness Lane - remedial work has been done but we are aware some issues have not been resolved and these are being looked at again.

Hastingford Lane - complete resurfacing was carried out last May but this May ESCC will be carrying out surface dressing work. The work is expected to take up to three hours, during which time the road will be closed. An information postcard was delivered to the affected residents.

Fingerposts – Cllr Nathan James and Cllr Clare Emsden surveyed the Fingerposts in the Parish scoring them to a system devised by Nathan. We looked at the state of the paintwork, woodwork and lettering. We have a great variety of designs in the Parish in particular the crowns. It is hoped to have a rolling programme of renovation which will be monitored closely by the Parish Council. ESCC has also said it will contribute towards the costs. Councillors have been contacted when Fingerposts appear to have gone missing or parts gone for repair and this has underlined how much these features are valued in the Parish.

Strengthening Local Relationships.

What this means is meeting with those who provide services to us so that we have regular contact and both sides can see each other’s point of view. We have had two meetings with ESCC Highways since the last Parish Assembly. Both parties value these opportunities to have face to face discussions. There is a new Highways Steward who has been taken round the Parish by Cllr. Graham Terry and he is due to come and do this again in the next few months, so again we can highlight problems to him and press for action.

Footpaths and bridleways

Cllr. Clare Emsden attended the ESCC “Shaping the future of our countryside access meeting” on Tuesday 24 February. This involved joining in the discussions about exploring the needs of the Parish and looking into the future with regards to footpaths and bridleways. Progress on this initiative can be monitored at www.eastsussex.gov.uk/futurecountrysideaccess Byway 24 (A272 to Dog Kennel Lane) had the works delayed but these were completed last summer. Byway 25a and 25b (A272 through Gillhope Bank Wood to Brick Kiln Lane) have not yet scored highly enough to be included in the draft surfacing list for 2015/16. Please report any further deterioration in these Byways to our clerk Helen Simpson-Wells so they can be moved up the priority list.

Village Hall

The annual meeting was held in the Hall and we hope you appreciate all the work that has been put in by the Village Hall trustees over the last few years to keep the building going until the new one is built. In the last few years, additional insulation, new heaters, a complete new kitchen and in the last year a complete overhaul of the toilet facilities so that disabled can be accommodated.

The latest ventures are the completion of a website giving details of the hall and allowing on-line booking and the replacement of the ceiling tiles which are well past their best.

The TN22 Club and TN22 Plus Club for senior citizens and those with slight mental impairment are a major success story and are where residents can meet for lunch and a chat. The lunch provided is cooked by local volunteers.

On behalf of us all we thank all the volunteers who give up their time to run the facility and help in such things as the fund raising, coffee and tea events and the deep cleaning that are needed.

The Burial Ground

Our burial ground, by the church graveyard, is looking particularly trim at the moment. The contractors have been doing an excellent job in keeping the grass cut, the hedges trimmed, the paths swept and the overhanging branches pruned as necessary. Often when Cllr Graham Terry visits there he finds a gentleman, a resident of Marlowe House, sitting on the bench and enjoying the peace and quiet. We highly recommend you visit at some time this important village amenity.

Playing Field

There has been a lot of work behind the scenes at the playing field in the last year. Bob Lake and the Playing Field Committee have worked very hard to get grants for the drainage work that will be undertaken this summer. This will make a large improvement to the top half of the playing field. As well as the drainage the committee has worked tirelessly on maintenance and the upkeep of the play area and the playing field itself. The last year has once again seen two wonderful events happen at the playing field, first there was the village fayre which was well attended and then bonfire night celebration which was a great success. We would like to personally thank everyone who was involved with both events and a massive thank you to the Playing Field Committee for all their hard work. Last of all we would like to thank Bob Lake for all his hard work on behalf of the playing field.

Youth

There has not been much to do in the last year on this subject, but we hope that with the new drainage on the playing field we can start to get the younger members of Hadlow Down interested in some of the activities that will be held on the newly drained field.

Wealden Association of Local Councils

Wealden District Association of Local Councils:

- A Committee Grouping of all local Parish and Town Council elected representatives with Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council, Sussex Police, East Sussex Fire and Rescue, Sussex Ambulance.
- Meets 4 times a year and enables smaller Councils to come together over common themes / issues and raise concerns to WDC and ESCC.
- Has a sub-committee on planning policy

Issues raised over the last twelve months:

- Concerns over front line Policing in rural areas being scaled back due to restructuring.
- The lack of consultation of removal of car parking in Uckfield High Street which impacts on rural residents shopping in Uckfield
- Safety of our rural roads, and specifically dangerous pot holes in country lanes and speed of traffic in lanes (rat runs).
- Internet speed and mobile phone coverage in rural areas.

Other issues:

- Proposals for Gatwick expansion
- Localised flooding
- Parish funding and ESCC budget cuts
- Sale of Pine Grove, Crowborough
- WWI anniversary / war graves in Wealden
- Gritting during winter months in rural villages

Going forward:

- To recommend that the Parish continues to attend this forum because it's a useful platform for Parishes to raise common issues, and for Hadlow Down issues to be raised at a larger forum where multiple stakeholders are present.
- Overall Hadlow Down Parish Council has 'punched well above our weight' with getting various lanes re-surfaced, and pot holes fixed, drains repaired etc.
- We have challenged the removal of car parking in Uckfield High Street, along with other Parishes.
- We have also given evidence to the Gatwick consultation for future expansion and written to local County and Parliamentary representatives.

New Community Centre Committee

It often seems that this project grinds slowly but a large part of the current work has involved the playing field work which has been highly successful. The reason that this forms part of the Community Centre project is that when we come to raise the main funding, having a sports facility that is well used will give us access to sports funding for the pavilion part of the project. So what has happened? The local lottery is now just over 12 months old and has raised income of over £1,300 so far and is well into renewals for the next 12 months. Two further surveys have been conducted – and, yes, we do have bats locally! – and two grants have been obtained to repair and drain the sports area of the field. A huge amount of work went into these grants, led by Bob Lake, and their success will mean that once the work is completed we can encourage back the football we lost because of the unusable surface.

Two Lawful Development Certificates have been obtained. These mean that despite the current ban on building within 7 kilometres of the Ashdown Forest we can use the existing pavilion and hall as a base point and get a new building 25% bigger than their combined area.

The committee also achieved charitable status as a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation), which will again allow access to funding streams that non-charitable status would not. Finally, a public meeting was held and those attending fully supported the various measures being taken.

Community Plan

For those of you who are new to the village, approx. 4-5 years ago now, the villagers got together and produced a Community Plan. This identified the priorities for the future of the community up to 2026 in order to improve the quality of life for everyone in Hadlow Down.

We formed a committee to review the plan and to try to take forward some of the aims and targets. The key areas were:-

- To establish some circular walks of different lengths for different capabilities (e.g. adults & children) to try to allow people to see parts of Hadlow Down of which they were unaware;
- To establish some links between bridlepaths to help the many equestrians in our community cross over the A272.

The meetings were making great progress and walks had been identified – unfortunately, one of the key footpaths that we wanted to use is a 'licensed' path and, although it is still being used as a footpath, we are not sure that it will continue to be used and therefore the plans stalled somewhat. However we will now re-establish the meetings and try to take this project forward.

The next 12 months

We promised last year that the Community Plan as far as the circular walks was concerned would be taken forward. It slowed as we talked about earlier but we are determined to finalise at least one route in the next year. Now that we are at last up to full complement with Councillors we will give greater emphasis to the Emergency Plan and we will finalise the purchase of the land at the entrance to the Playing Field – a project of great importance to the future of the Playing Field and the Community Centre.

Our expenditure

Apart from the precept we also receive income from a number of places. For example, we share our clerk with another Parish and we receive a payment from them towards her costs. We also get income from the burial ground each year. The bulk, however, does come from the precept which is the amount that is added to your Council Tax bill each year at our request.

In the expenditure below, the largest amount is for the salary and expenses for our Parish Clerk. It is a legal requirement that we have a Clerk who is also the Responsible Financial Officer of the Council and responsible for the financial record keeping and our bank accounts. You may also be wondering why the amount of our expenditure is less than the precept by a considerable sum. The explanation is simple. We put aside money to pay for the purchase of the land at the entrance to the Playing Field but the purchase did not happen last financial year and the surplus money is therefore transferred into reserves where it will be used this year when the purchase is finalised.

Expenditure

Staff costs	10,301
General admin	2,609
Subscriptions	416
Donations	2,160
Burial ground	1,598
Playing Field	556
Litter/dog bins	1,330
Fingerposts/notice boards	660
Councillor's expenses and allowances	131
Election expenses	0
Play area	1,153
Councillor's training	120
Legal fees	998
Projects	67
Parish magazine	250
	22,349

