

Bramber Parish Council Annual Report 2020-2021

The presence of COVID has meant that this year has been like no other. It has impacted all of our lives in varying degrees. Current numbers are encouraging so let's hope and pray that this downward trend continues and we can get back to some sort of normality. In our area the impact has been less significant than many other parts of the country and I want to start by paying tribute to and thanking the many organisations and volunteers who have stepped up to the plate, literally risking their own lives, in helping manage a way through this crisis and out the other side. The NHS, Ambulance Service, local volunteer groups, staff and volunteers at our Health Centre and vaccination centres, WSCC and Horsham District Councils, the HUB in Upper Beeding, teachers and other staff at or local schools, our own Neighbourhood Wardens and other individuals who have simply reached out to their neighbours and friends to help. Thank you all, we wouldn't have got this far without you.

Zoom Meetings

Total of 16 Council meetings, including 4 separate Planning meetings, have taken place this financial year. 20 plus Planning Applications have been assessed and comments passed to HDC and SDNP. A high number of tree applications have been received this year and many thanks to Lynne Broome, our tree Warden, for her assessments of the applications. A further 16 meetings of various sub-committees have been held which councillors attended to represent Bramber

Committees

Joint Parishes Cemetery Committee

Maintenance of the cemetery has continued this year and the main issue for the committee to tackle remains the lack of free space. There is currently estimated to be ground space to accommodate another 10 years so the search continues for more land to extend the facility.

Joint Parishes Youth Committee

Activities have been severely restricted this year. Some meetings/activities did take place in between lockdowns and 1 to 1 mentoring of those youngsters in need have continued albeit remotely.

Horsham Association of Local Councils(HALC)

HALC meetings have continued to be held this year and we have gained good, useful feedback from our representative on the various areas that have been presented and discussed at those meetings.

Management and administrative issues were encountered during the year with West Sussex Association of Local Councils (WSALC) which resulted in our support organisation SALC becoming financially unviable and therefore discontinued. The Board of WSALC has been replaced as a result and a new supplier of services to Parish Councils has been appointed. A HALC meeting of member councils is taking place tomorrow where the next Chairman and Vice are appointed in addition to the districts representatives on the WSALC Committee.

Chanctonbury Local Committee

Meetings cancelled through COVID but applications for Community Initiative funding still processed.

Village Hall Committee

A significant loss of revenue was reported offset partly by the £10,000 grant from Government. Reserves remain healthy at £49,000 in the bank. During the lockdown, some

rooms were redecorated with other works which including replacement flooring and repairs to the loft and roof

The meeting scheduled for January 2021 was postponed. A new caretaker had been appointed however, the Hall remains closed save for nursery classes for the children of key workers.

Neighbourhood Wardens Steering Committee

The Wardens usual activities this year have obviously been impacted by COVID and face to face meetings have been severely restricted. However, they have coped exceptionally well under these circumstances and worked closely with the Police in addressing issues as they have arisen. They have made contact with vulnerable individuals in the community to offer support, broken up non-covid compliant groups/meetings in the area, and worked with the 3 parish councils in addressing the identified priorities.

Climate Emergency and Steyning Greening 2030

We have joined up with Greening Steyning and Steyning Parish Council to address issues identified by residents as important to the well-being of the area now and in the future.

We have representatives on the 3 working parties as follows:-

TRANSPORT – currently looking at the pros and cons of implementing a 20 mph speed limit in Steyning and neighbouring areas of Bramber. On line survey available to give your input.

BIODIVERSITY – a successful session was held at the Steyning Farmer's Market where the Biodiversity Working Group demonstrated bird boxes and single use plastic recycling initiatives. There are also be a biodiversity training session scheduled to teach residents to identify different habitats with an aim to map the various habitats in Steyning, Bramber and Upper Beeding

the Biodiversity Working Group have received their necessary training ahead of an exercise to map different habitats in Steyning, Bramber and Upper Beeding

HOUSING – The Working Group have produced several videos, the latest being the operation of air-sourced heat pumps. More videos are planned.

It is planned to have a presence at the next Farmers market in May to bring visitors attention to the issue of CO2 emissions from houses and what measures can be taken to mitigate.

Many of these meetings have resulted in tasks for your Councillors to action so on behalf of the residents of Bramber, thank you for your time and commitment during this unprecedented year.

Neighbourhood Plan update .

Our proposed plan was handed over to HDC in January 2020 and was approved by the Inspector later in the year. I am please to say that the referendum for the plan is due to take place on May 6th in conjunction with the County Council elections so I encourage you all to go along and vote for it. It was a mammoth task to complete and took many hours of volunteers time in meetings and presentations. It is already being used in our regular activities and will be a sound basis for the future activity of the Council. Regardless of the outcome of the referendum I would like to thank everyone involved and congratulate them on a very well-conducted project.

Audits

External and Internal Audits have been completed this year with a few minor recommendations which have since been actioned. Thanks go to Paul our Clerk for a

successful outcome.

District Councillors

Many thanks to Mike Croker and Roger Noel our District Councillors for all they have done this year and for their regular and comprehensive updates on District Matters at our Council meetings.

The interim report of the Horsham Draft Local Plan consultation process has been published. Over 6,400 comments were received with the majority of responses referring to housing (with 1700 comments for land north east of Henfield alone). HDC have made representations to central government regarding the setting of unrealistic and unnecessary future housing numbers but to no avail. The target in the modified plan is currently set at 1200 new homes per annum.

WSCC Councillor

A special thanks for David Barling this year for all the years of dedicated service to the County and to Bramber especially. He has always been there to address issues as and when they arise and has been instrumental in making happen some of the more important initiatives in the Parish. He is standing down this year as he has moved out of the area and I wish him and his family well in their new home. You can vote for your new County Councillor on May 6th.

Parish Councillors

Trevor Bignell stepped down this year so thank to him for his contribution over the years and welcome to Tom Day, our new Councillor, and to Rachel Burstow, an associate Councillor, and hope you both enjoy being part of the team.

Clerk

Thanks go to Paul our Clerk for keeping us on the straight and narrow and for his excellent meeting administration. His association with other Councils and associated Committees has been a great asset and his input in getting Speedwatch off the ground and running essential.

Finances

Additional running costs have depleted our reserves somewhat this year so we raised our Precept to help address this issue. We should be operating with a reserve of around 50% of our operating costs and we are currently around 40%. We would hope to bring this back into order over the next couple of years.

Bramber PC has set a balanced budget for the next financial year. The impact for an average Band D council taxpayer is that the precept amount will increase by 13p per week (£59.36pa in 2020/21 and £66.07pa in 2021/22).

Speedwatch

The Speedwatch initiative is now operational and 3 volunteers from the Council have been trained and already carried out 3 sessions in The Street. Over 60 vehicles have been recorded as travelling over 25 mph already. Further training of volunteers is planned but we are always looking for more so if you are interested please let Paul, our Clerk, know. We are looking to deploy this on Clays Hill as well as The Street

Environment

- In Autumn 2020 a group of riparian residents met via ZOOM to organise the clearing of ditches in the Parish to ensure ground water in the Parish flowed out to the Adur. As a result ditches were cleared before the Winter including St. Mary's Ditch which is cleared by WSCC and the Environment Agency on behalf of the landowners of the plots on the field adjacent.
- Following the addition of some new volunteers, the Emergency Committee now had 14 members. A new co-ordinator has been appointed but more Members from the Maudlin area are needed. Cllr Croker is currently acting as co-ordinator for this area of Bramber.
- Drainage issues occurred at the lowest point of The Street caused by a build up silt swept down during heavy rain. Volunteers from the Emergency team helped to rod the drains through to give temporary respite. Since that time WSCC Highways have carried out a more extensive exercise with a promise to return to address some final issues.
- The recurring flooding problem at the bottom of Maudlyn Lane returned again this year and volunteers pumped the water away to provide temporary relief. WSCC Highways later carried a more extensive exercise. The clearance of the associated drainage ditch remains outstanding and WSCC are chasing the owner to address this.

Toilet refurbishment.

Cllrs Blakelock and Kitson have progressed this project and we have now selected a contractor and secured the Section 106 funding to give a much needed makeover to the public loo. Work should start imminently.

Newsletter.

Parish Newsletters have been distributed to residents in October 20 and February 21 and have been well-received. We have been encouraging residents to receive communications from the Council via email where appropriate to save on distribution and paper costs. So far we have approximately 50% of the Parish residents covered so we would encourage all to take up this option and provide email details to the Clerk to keep in touch in the simplest way. The Newsletters will of course be updated to the Parish Website as usual.

And Finally

As this is the last annual report I will be producing I would like to say how much I have enjoyed (most of the time) being part of the Council team. I hope I have helped bring some worthwhile changes to Bramber whilst having a bit of fun at the same time in a relaxed atmosphere and one which allows both councillors and residents to have their say. The Bramber ship is 'steady as she goes', with a destination and guidelines from its Neighbourhood Plan so I encourage you all to stay aboard, appoint a new captain and sail on!

Roger Potter - Chairman