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Woodmancote Parish Council

Chairman's Report 2021/22

Finances

I would like to start by addressing the recent increase in precept. The council was advised by SALC in 2020 that our precept was extremely low and should be doubled. At the time WPC's precept was the second smallest of all the 32 parishes in Horsham district. Our precept was not even covering our costs, however as we were in the middle of a pandemic, we took the decision not to raise the precept last year, meaning the council survived last year by drawing upon our reserves – a situation that clearly couldn't be sustained. The council therefore took the decision at the end of last year to increase the precept by 50%, not by 100% as we had been advised. Despite this increase WPC's precept is still the 9th smallest out of the 32 parishes in Horsham district. We are hoping that the potential income from the playing fields will mean we will not have to have further significant rises next year.

Blackstone Playing Fields Lease

At present the council does not receive and income from the rent of this site to Sussex cricket, despite the parish owning half of this site. We therefore undertook a valuation of the playing fields last year and have negotiated a new annual rent of £5,000 with Sussex Cricket. We are currently in the final stages of negotiating the new terms of the leases which will give the Council an option to take back a small area of land in the future should the Council ever wish to build a community centre. The new lease will be for a period of 30 years and will go out to public consultation to obtain residents views prior to it being signed.

You may also have noticed our new signs that have been erected to encourage residents to use the playing fields. Unfortunately, the current play area is out of action following a recent safety inspection and we are currently working with Sussex Cricket on a way forward, which may be that installation of a new play area is considered.

New Councillors

The Council welcomed new Councillors this year which means that at the end of our financial year all 9 seats are filled. Len Fricker joined the Council in 2021 but sadly had to resign due to other commitments, we thank him for his time. We welcome Kelvin Donald, Libby Morris and Rob Hulkin to the Council and we look forward to working with them and having a full table at our meetings now!

Community Highways Scheme

Speed of traffic in the parish has been a concern for some time and the council, submitted an application for a community highways scheme over a year ago. The scheme has moved forward and it has now been confirmed that a 40mph speed limit will be submitted for the Swains end of the A281 and will continue right up to the 30mph limit when entering Henfield. A 50mph speed limit will be introduced at the western end of the A281. These will be subject to Traffic Regulation Orders and we are awaiting further updates on this from WSCC Highways, however we are advised that this work has been budgeted for 2022/23.

SID (Speed Indicator Device)

Unfortunately, our SID was involved in a road traffic accident and is now out of action, so we are currently making an insurance claim to replace this. We are also potentially looking to purchase more units later this year and will be looking at solar options.

Community Speedwatch

Progress with getting the Community Speedwatch scheme up and running has been slow, but we were fortunate enough to receive a grant from the Police Property Act Fund to purchase the equipment and we are hoping to be up and running soon. If traffic speed is of concern to you and I know it is to many, why not get involved with this project – we need further volunteers urgently, so please do contact the Clerk to find out more.

Planning

Planning matters continue to be a large part of our Council meetings and this year we objected strongly to the planning application to redevelop the Parish Hall site, which involved the demolition of this lovely old building that the community are keen to retain. The application was refused, and I understand that the site is now back on the market.

The garage site at Blackstone Garages continues to rumble on with further applications currently being reviewed by the Council.

Jubilee Celebration Preparations

We are all looking forward to the extra-long bank holiday weekend in June to celebrate the Queens Platinum Jubilee and Woodmancote Parish Council are currently planning a family Jubilee Picnic to be held on the 4 June at Blackstone Playing Fields to which all residents are invited. We look forward to seeing as many people as possible and hope for a sunny day, although marquees and the pavilion will be available should the British weather let us down!

We will also be planting a tree in November 2022 to mark this special occasion which is being supplied by HDC.

On a personal note, I was extremely pleased to observe the way the community came together during the pandemic, with neighbours helping each other out and members of the council support residents with prescriptions and food shopping. It was clear to me that there is a desire within the parish for neighbours to get to know each other better and it is my hope that the jubilee event will be the first of many events for us all to come together as a community, to build friendships and enjoy our beautiful parish.

Craig Dixon
Chairman Woodmancote Parish Council
8 April 2022