

## **LONG SUTTON & WELL PARISH COUNCIL - CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT, MAY 2022**

This has been another intense year for the Parish Council, and it is worthy of note, that all Parish Councillors are unpaid volunteers who give up much of their personal time to serve the community in which they live. It is therefore appropriate for me to place on record my thanks to Councillor Nick Trew, my predecessor as Chair who, after a number of years serving the community in the role, left the Council in January prior to his move from the village. His efforts and service were exemplary steering us through a number of challenges most especially as concerns planning. Similarly, Sophie Radcliffe, stepped down from the Council just prior to the recent Council elections and again I wish to place on record my thanks to her for her unstinting support and service to the Community. Additionally, I add my thanks to both Councillors Roger Bright and Mark Bartlett who have continued to provide their dedication and support to the Council and local community and, again after a number of years in role continue to be valued members of the Council. We have a new Member of the Council and I offer a very warm welcome to Councillor Shona Bennett who, as well as her wider interest in supporting the community, brings strong representation of our Lord Wandsworth College parishioners and also considerable energy and new thinking to the Council. Finally in this section, but certainly not least, I offer my thanks also to Susan Richardson, who as our Clerk, has provided well considered timely advice, guidance and support to the Council, and most especially the Chair, throughout this year.

### **DEVELOPMENT PLANNING**

As many Parishioners will be aware, development planning applications have continued to dominate Council business. As a Council, we are very aware that some planning decisions and comments have been frustrating for some, if not a source of considerable worry and irritation. To that end, it is worth taking some time to articulate in outline the planning process.

The main planning authority for our community is Hart District Council, headquartered in Fleet. The Council is responsible for producing a Local Plan for the whole of its district, setting out areas for proposed land use across the district, such as housing, employment, retail and shopping, education and schools, transport and travel, recreation, environment, and heritage. Hart's current Local Plan was adopted by the Council in 2020 and covers projected land uses for the period up to 2032. The main issue of interest for a parish such as ours is the extent of new housing development envisaged in our area, and we were consulted on this at the time the current plan was being prepared in 2018/19. The Council took the view then that while Long Sutton was prepared to take an appropriately modest share of new housing, given the national housing shortage, we could not sustain large scale housing development because of our relatively remote rural situation, the very limited infrastructure and public facilities here, and the historic character of the village. This view was fortunately reflected in the adopted Local Plan, which does not currently envisage any large-scale housing development in the parish, but that does not preclude developers making speculative applications which Hart has to consider on their merits. Of note, the Local Plan runs until 2032, but it is likely that Hart will start to review it well before then (possibly as soon as within the next year or so) in response to further government housing targets or revisions, and as a Council we will need to be ready to comment on any changes affecting our area.

I should also state that significant parts of Long Sutton and Well are within designated conservation areas. Properties that are within a Conservation Area are subject to more restrictive and stringent planning controls than properties outside the Conservation Area. In particular, that means that anything which may change the appearance of that part of a house or garden which fronts on to a public highway in a Conservation Area is likely to need planning permission – for example, changing

the colour or style of windows or doors fronting on to the highway, adding or removing a gate to a driveway, replacing a garden hedge with a wall (or vice versa).

Hart is also responsible for development control, which in layman's terms means deciding on planning applications, ranging from major housing and commercial development proposals through to whether or not you can add an extension or conservatory to your house or build a garage.

Turning to the role of the Parish Council in the planning process. The Council's role in planning is termed a "Statutory Consultee," which means we have to be consulted by Hart on the draft Local Plan (when one is being drawn up). and also on all individual planning applications which they have received from within our parish. As a Parish Council we must comment within the same time frame as members of the public and in deciding our comments on individual planning applications, we try hard to strike a balanced and fair view between what the applicant wants to achieve, the interests of the community as a whole, and protecting the local environment and character of the area. Over the course of the past year, there have been no major or large-scale planning applications in the parish, only a small but steady flow of mostly minor applications from individual householders, none of which has been particularly controversial. Notwithstanding, it is important for parishioners to be aware that while Hart is obliged to consider our comments, they are not obliged to follow our comments and they quite often do not due to their view of wider planning considerations.

Hart also has responsibility for enforcing any terms or conditions of a planning approval it has granted and investigating any development which may be in breach of planning conditions or even taking place without planning permission at all. The Council has and will report to Hart any suspected breaches of planning permission it becomes aware of, but it is for Hart to investigate and take any enforcement action.

There is, of course, an ongoing and long-running planning enforcement issue relating to the spoil levels, landscaping, and drainage at the Wingate Meadow development at the top of Wingate Lane. Work on site halted due to the pandemic lockdown until early April when two houses were sold and the developer ME commenced work on the landscaping of the public open space. Unfortunately, this was soon to be curtailed for unexplained reasons by ME and the development is now subject to planning enforcement action by Hart District Council. This issue was further compounded when there was a malfunction of the site sewage drainage system, which combined with flooding due to water cascading from the site during heavy rain, directly affected properties on the northern boundary. The Council is aware that this has caused considerable distress and concern to a number of nearby residents. In turn, the Council has engaged, and will continue to do so, with the Hart Enforcement Team to attempt to resolve what is now a sizeable number of planning related issues.

Finally on the planning front, one further significant issue that has been emerging for some time now and will become more dominant this next year is the possibility of a large solar farm on farmland encircling the north and west of Long Sutton. We know that a proposal for such a solar farm has been drawn up by a developer, but it has yet to come forward as a planning application. Views will differ on the merits of such a proposal, particularly in the context of the need to combat climate change, as against the impact on an attractive rural landscape which is locally valued. As a Council we have argued, with the support of our local Hart District Councillors, that Hart needs to develop a strategic framework for evaluating such proposals, and, in particular, their cumulative impact, but so far without success.

## **HIGHWAYS AND VILLAGE MAINTENANCE**

The Council commenced the year with a budget of £2500 for parish repairs and maintenance. The Lengthsman continues to provide a valuable service, maintaining various parts of the Parish, trimming back growth, maintenance of the pond and keeping our road signs clean. They also provided/installed oak posts to prevent vehicle access to the recreation ground.

With a generous donation from a local business, Top Soil UK, the Council were able to replace the ageing duck house with a very smart and durable new home, launched in July and soon to be occupied by nesting residents. Our Lengthsmen have worked tirelessly to maintain the area around the pond with regular mowing throughout the growing season, emptying the silt traps and clearing debris. In a further year of pandemic lockdowns it has often been commented that the pond offers a focus of calm reflection for the many villagers that enjoy feeding the ducks and taking time out from working at home. Unrelated, the Council is also grateful to Andy Trimmer who provided an excellent repair to the Parish notice board at the village hall.

A number of highway maintenance issues have been reported throughout the year to Hampshire Highways, who have proved proactive in addressing repairs of signs, potholes and verges, with new deer crossing signs installed on Hayley Lane. As a reminder to residents, all highway issues can be reported online, using the link below, where you can view reported problems and track repairs.

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/roadproblems>

The Council has also been mindful of the continuing issue of traffic speed and volume through the village. The Speed Indicator Device (SID) continues to reduce excess speed through the village and also provides valuable analytical statistics on the average speed and traffic volumes at peak times.

## **LOCAL ORGANISATION LIAISON AND EVENTS**

As a Council we have continued to maintain close relationships with both Lord Wandsworth College and the Primary School. We have seen considerable engagement and support to the village by the College throughout a number of areas from which the community has greatly benefitted. I offer my thanks to them. Similarly, the Council continues to work with the Primary School served by a very capable Headteacher and Governing Body to provide support where it requires it. The Council is also indebted to them and their pupils for their support to village events. I would also encourage Parishioners to support Primary School fundraisers as and when they arise.

The Council has an agreement in place with the College for the use of the Recreation Ground which is part of the College estate. We expect this Agreement to be extended into a long-term arrangement in due course for use by the Community. Linked to this we now also have in place an agreement in principle with Odiham and Greywell Cricket Club (a number of young and older Parishioners play for their teams) for the use of the Recreation Ground for cricket whilst achieving a balance for use by the Community.

Last, but certainly not least, the year rounded off with a well-attended and most enjoyable lighting of the Christmas tree, with the wonderful choir of the Primary School singing carols combined with a special visit from Father Christmas! Many Parishioners commented on the excellent new tree lighting, with thanks to the church and Pete Spreadborough for assisting with the electrics.

## **2022 AND BEYOND**

Our year will begin with the Jubilee Celebrations for Her Majesty the Queen; as a community one which we will all be honoured to celebrate. Looking beyond this unique event, as Chair, I expect the

year to be dominated by planning challenges as ever. The Big Meadow issue will persist and the potential planning application for a solar farm will likely arise combined with the normal feed of planning applications for house developments from within the village. As a Council we will continue to make consultative comments to Hart in the interests of our community and we will continue to pursue enforcement issues with Hart with determination. I also intend that we will build inclusivity by working with not just the College and the Primary School, albeit with both we will continue to further our relationship as a Council, but also widening our engagement with other Parishioner organisations and groups within the village. I would welcome comment or discussions as to how the Council can assist or support. Please do contact me or one of my fellow Councillors

Finally, if any of you are interested in becoming a Parish Councillor, I would very much like to hear from you as I expect we will have a gradual 'change of the guard' over the coming year. It is a rewarding role in support of our community across Long Sutton and Well and one which I would ask you to consider.

Jim Goodbourn

Chairman

Long Sutton & Well parish Council

19<sup>th</sup> May 2022