

LONG SUTTON & WELL PARISH COUNCIL'S ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023

REPORT OVERVIEW - Councillor Jim Goodbourn, Chair of the Parish Council

Another year has passed in Long Sutton and Well and in support of the Annual Parish Assembly of 26th May I offer to all my annual report as Chair. As most will be aware, I have provided several updates on key issues throughout the year and, with the aid of my Parish Council colleagues, are summarised within this report. As ever, despite our being a relatively small community there has nonetheless been a number of challenges but equally matched, if not exceeded, by a number of really positive events and outcomes.

Before I provide an overview of these, I hope that you will indulge me, in my offering my thanks, not just on my behalf but also on behalf of you, the Parishioners, to the dedication and unsung support to the community of Councillors Roger Bright, Mark Bartlett, Shona Bennett and Frazer Hamilton. Their updates below represent their primary responsibilities and actions as Councillors but equally reflects only a small proportion of their time given to issues affecting our Parish in general. Further, our Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer, Susan Richardson, has been unstinting in her support to the Parish Council but works well beyond this undertaking duties considerably outside of those required by her role – where she finds the time, I do not know, and I offer to her our combined many thanks. My final thanks go to all of you who have found time to either attend Parish Council meetings or to email or chat to me or your Councillors outlining your concerns and, on occasion, also offering thanks. Your individual and combined comments and views are important to us not least to help us to take actions and/or make judgements on your collective behalf.

This year, of course, has had many events affecting us external to Long Sutton and Well. The sad passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth last September but then an uplifting experience of the recent coronation of His Majesty King Charles. The war in Ukraine has continued to focus our minds and does rather place our own challenges somewhat in perspective. I very much hope and pray that this conflict will be resolved soon whilst the path for this remains very unclear. Linked to this albeit indirectly and not limited to, is the cost-of-living crisis which, as a Council, we are mindful of the effects on you all.

Looking within our Parish there has been also a number of events and issues – as I note above, some good and some less so. Planning issues have as ever dominated the Parish Council year, and this is reflected in the longer than usual commentary provided below – please be assured that both Big Meadow and the proposed Solar Farm do have the focus of your Parish Council. We have also had some Highways issues, not least, HGV vehicle damage through the Village, speeding traffic in general, and, as a Parish Council we are also concerned about the general appearance of the Village and infrastructure. I, and my fellow Councillors, are also very aware of the concern and disappointment by many with the recent closure of the permissive footpaths. I have personally engaged with the landowner concerned in an attempt to resolve the situation in favour of re-opening the footpaths, but I regret that I have not been successful. On a more positive and unrelated note, we now have a 7-year agreement with Lord Wandsworth College (as the landowners) for use of the Recreation Field and also in place a further agreement with Odiham and Greywell Cricket Club to use the field in support of

cricket by all ages, albeit not exclusively so as the Recreation Field is also available to the community. With this in mind, the Recreation Field is available to all Parishioners for family events by pre-booking through Councillor Bennett as well as always being available without pre-booking for picnics or just to walk.

Finally, as we recover now from the pandemic years, as a Parish Council it is heartening to see a more coming together of Parishioners. This not least marked by a well-attended and most enjoyable lighting of the Christmas tree last December, with the wonderful choir of Long Sutton Primary School singing carols and a special visit from Father Christmas! Many of you commented on the excellent Christmas tree lighting, with my thanks to Max Wildsmith for kindly donating the tree and the Parochial Church Council and Pete Spreadborough for assisting with the tree lights electrics. The Village Panto in January (many thanks to Lars Mosesson) was sold out, and the Coronation weekend festivities with a Parish Council held pop up Pimms at the Pond event, the Sunday picnic on the Recreation Field following a Church Service, led by our Reverend Gillian, and litter pick on the Monday were all again very well attended. I look forward to the Church Village Fete on Sunday, 2 July which I am sure will be equally well-supported by you all.

Last, but certainly not least, there remains an excellent relationship in place with Lord Wandsworth College, in addition, to staff residents there (who are Parishioners in their own right) and their combined many and positive contributions to Village life are very evident. In this, I am particularly grateful to the Headmaster, Adam Williams and the Chief Operating Officer, Baz Bennett. If you have the time, I would urge you to support the culminating events celebrating the Lord Wandsworth Centenary year on Friday 23 and Saturday 24 June, respectively.

To conclude, it has been another busy year and so do please read the following sections of this report, prepared by your Councillors, and if you have any comments and/or observations then your Parish Council would be pleased to receive them.

REPORT ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS AND ISSUES - Councillor Roger Bright

Before reviewing planning activity in the parish during 2022/23, it's perhaps worth reminding ourselves in broad terms how the planning system works and in particular how a Parish Council like ours fits in to it.

Nationally, planning policy and planning law is set by Government and Parliament. The main vehicle is the National Planning Policy Framework, in which the Government of the day sets out the general principles it wishes to see applied to planning and development and is supplemented by more detailed guidance on specific topics.

It's the responsibility of district councils (in our case Hart) to prepare local plans for their area, covering all aspects of planning, such as housing, economic development and employment, infrastructure, leisure, landscape protection and sustainable development. The plan has to be approved by Government to ensure it complies with national policies, and once approved it provides the framework for individual planning decisions within the district. Hart's Local Plan

was approved in 2020 and covers the period from 2016 through to 2032, although it is subject to regular review. It can be found on Hart's website.

Some of the larger Parish Councils in Hart (such as Odiham, Hook and Fleet) have also prepared a Neighbourhood Plan which sets out more detailed proposals about where they want to see development (mainly housing) to be located within their area. But preparation of such plans is very time and resource intensive, taking several years to complete, and as a Parish Council we have taken the view that thus far, our parish is not of a size or scale to justify the time and resources which would be required to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for our area. But this can be revisited at any time if our circumstances warrant it.

All individual planning applications are decided by Hart, NOT the Parish Council. But Parish Councils are deemed to be "statutory consultees", which means we are consulted by Hart on every planning application before it reaches a decision. While Hart should take any views expressed by the Parish Council into account before reaching its decision on an application, they are not obliged to accept or agree with our views – and they quite often don't.

In considering whether, and if so how, to comment on a particular planning application, the Parish Council always strives to strike a fair and reasonable balance between what the applicant wants to achieve and the impact on the wider interests of the surrounding community, the local built environment and landscape. In many cases, the application is relatively minor and uncontroversial - for example a modest house extension – and if the impact is negligible we are likely to enter "no objection" or not comment at all. But if an application is likely to be more significant and contentious, we will aim to discuss what the Parish Council's comment to Hart should be at an open meeting of the council, to which of course the public are invited.

During 2022/23, the bulk of day-to-day planning applications in our parish have been for the most part minor and uncontroversial, with just a handful requiring more thorough consideration and debate before we expressed a comment. But two planning-related issues in particular – while not currently the subject of 'live' planning applications - have loomed large for the Parish Council over the past year: the situation at the Wingate Meadow housing development (known locally as Big Meadow) which has been wholly unacceptable to residents adjacent to and around the open space land, as well as being an eyesore in the centre of the village; and the possibility of a substantial solar farm development on farmland to the immediate west and north of Long Sutton.

WINGATE MEADOW

When Hart granted planning permission to the Wingate Meadow development in 2016, part of the agreement with the developer was that the remainder of the Big Meadow site (rather more than half of the whole site) would be landscaped and gifted to the Parish Council as public open space, thereby protecting the site from further development and preserving it as a recreational asset for the community as a whole. This is the subject of a legal agreement to which both the Parish Council and Hart District Council are parties.

As many will be aware, there have subsequently been difficulties with the developer; the landscaping of the public open space land has yet to be completed and as such it has not yet been offered for transfer to the Parish Council. Worthy of note, is that the Parish Council is not legally bound to accept transfer such that it must be confident that all liabilities, not least including drainage on the site and sewage management are resolved if it is to do so.

For legal reasons we cannot comment any further on the ins and outs of this, but the legal agreement remains extant, and we are in regular contact with Hart who are sympathetic to our position. In so far as we are able, we will continue to keep local residents informed of the situation. I would, however, finally add that it remains important to keep the Big Meadow 'alive' with Hart Planning, who have many challenges other than Big Meadow to manage, through the expression of Parishioner concerns additional to our efforts as your Parish Council. To that end, we did encourage the set up of a resident's action group to coordinate Parishioner concerns and it was thus disappointing that this had limited uptake.

SOLAR FARM PROPOSAL

Parishioners will be aware that proposals for a substantial solar farm to the west and north of Long Sutton have been around for quite some time, but now appear to be gaining momentum. As many will be further aware, the developers held a public exhibition and consultation on their proposals in Long Sutton Village Hall last month, which was well attended. At present, however, there is as yet no planning application for us or Hart to consider, although we understand one is imminent.

The Parish Council's current position is that, while we are, of course, aware that many are concerned about the proposals, we are being careful to keep an open mind pending the submission of a formal application. Once an application has been received, we intend to call a public open meeting (formally, an Extraordinary General Meeting) so that all parishioners have the opportunity to express their views on the application which we can take into account in formulating our comment on the application to Hart.

REPORT ON HIGHWAYS, VILLAGE MAINTENANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE - Councillor Mark Bartlett

We commenced the year with a budget of £2500 for parish repairs and maintenance with 40 hours for the parish lengthsman, having tasked them with a number of projects in the preceding year, including tree work around the pond, removing reed growth, and clearing silt traps. The willow tree has been pruned back by specialist contractors, as advised in the pond sustainability report and further work to remove reed growth will be required. A working party TBA at appropriate time. The dry and hot summer in 2022, exposed the clay beach and advice was sought as to whether this could cause long term damage. A wet winter has restored water levels with no sign of excess leakage; however, the reeds will consume water levels this summer unless addressed.

The Lengthsman continue to provide a valuable service, maintaining various parts of the parish, trimming back growth, and keeping our road signs clean.

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. A recent consultation took place with James Holt of HCC Highways and as a result, various measures have been approved for implementation during the next few months. SLOW markings and white lining at the junction of Woodhill /Hayley Lane have already been instructed. Further conversations are taking place on verge damage and traffic calming measures.

As a reminder to residents, all highway issues can be reported online via <https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/roadproblems> where you can view reported problems and track repairs.

Concerns over HGV traffic through the parish continues to be monitored and conversations have taken place with the directors of Top Soil. Whilst accepting in part responsibility, Top Soil kindly offered to repair the verge damage, however it is noted that school coaches (LWC, Robert Mays & LSPS), delivery drivers and school pickup/drop off traffic, increasingly contributes to this issue. HCC Highways are aware of the concerns and the Parish Council is in consultation with appropriate measures to address the issue regarding infrastructure.

FOOTPATHS - Councillor Frazer Hamilton

There have been very few matters reported this year even with a very wet winter. I have cleared a few areas when walking the routes with hand tools. The most significant issue was fallen branches on FP7 which took some time. We have been successful in applying for a grant to restore FP 3 from Copse Lane which has now become the main access to the paths towards South Warnborough. Other areas cleared include FP 5 and FP 8 at the shoes. There is a proposal to replace the stile on FP 8 with a kissing gate and that is being dealt with by Hants. Other minor activity included way signing and provision of temporary maps during farm works.

We obtained a grant to purchase a strimming equipment and I attended a course to qualify to use the equipment. This will be used to clear FP's locally as they are reported.

The loss of access to the permissible paths will be felt by many, as noted by our Chair, we should remember that the programme ended in 2012 and since then access has been through the good will of the landowner.

SPEED INDICATOR DEVICE (SID) - Councillor Frazer Hamilton

The SID continues to reduce excess speed through the village with analytic stats on the average speed and traffic volumes at peak times. The SID was relocated to the West of the village and was repositioned to alert drivers as they approach the 30 MPH signs at Woodhill Lane. This new position provides an accessible and safe environment to facilitate the changing of batteries which is required every three to four weeks. It also allows access data ports directly on site. I have now cleared the overhanging branches on the previous locations, this may be brought into use but does require significant road guarding. It is our intention to record data of traffic in both directions in the coming months.

RECREATION GROUND & LIAISON WITH LONG SUTTON PRIMARY SCHOOL - Councillor Shona Bennett

The recreation ground has been well used over the last 12 months by children, locals walking, dog walking and sports teams.

OGCC used the ground throughout Summer 2022 for cricket. Last years hot summer allowed plenty of cricket to be played. In the early December, we witnessed Father Christmas arrive by Chinook when he visited LS Primary School. An exciting visit to happen for the children, with LS residents coming to watch too. The recreation ground also hosted the LS Primary School sports day. The pavilion is showing its age, with repairs frequently needing to be carried out. However, it manages to keep ticking along and coping with the amount of people using it. The pavilion will be painted in the autumn once the cricket season is complete.

The play park passed its annual health and safety check. A few points were identified and have been addressed. It continues to be well used by the school and villagers. The Millennium Orchard continues to develop with the fruit trees hopefully producing a good harvest this year.

Odiham and Greywell Cricket Club (OGCC)

OGCC made good use of the cricket ground last year particularly due to the wonderful summer. The agreement with OGCC has just been finalised for the next 3 years. This took some time to complete due to few sticking points. However, they were eventually resolved and OGCC have now started the cricket season.

Long Sutton Primary School

The Parish Council have worked well with the school on a number of occasions this year. From Father Christmas arriving by Chinook and landing on the recreation ground, to supporting the Parish Council when Father Christmas visited LS at the pond for mulled wine, mince pies and carols, all beautifully sung by the school children. The children were all presented with a Platinum Jubilee pin badge from the Parish Council which was well received. Hopefully, continued cooperation between the school and the Parish Council will continue, after a few years of Covid inactivity.

FINANCES, GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION - Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer, Susan Richardson

The PC started the YE 2023 with a cash balance of £22,718 to which it added a Precept Demand of £18,500 against a budget set at £22,985.

During the year, the PC was successful in grant applications from Hampshire County Council to support our footpath warden equipment, training and personal PPE totalling £1,537.00.

The playing field, pavilion and playground remain the biggest areas of expenditure. The PC welcomes the opportunity, made possible with the newly negotiated lease agreement with

LWC, to charge Odiham & Greywell Cricket Club fees for seasonal cricket use. This income has been used to offset some expenditure such as electricity, annual legionella testing, annual fire risk & safety inspection, provision of fire protection equipment and annual maintenance.

The ageing pavilion and playground will, due to age, require increased maintenance expenditure in the future which the PC will monitor closely to ensure appropriate use of public funds.

The PC performed well against its 2022/23 budget with a spend of £21,684.77 against its budget of £22,985. This demonstrates accurate budgeting and controlled spending during the year.

We begin YE 2024 with a cash balance of £23,312.00 cash.

Jim Goodbourn
Chairman, Long Sutton & Well Parish Council

25 May 2023