

## **Houghton Parish Council**

### **Chair's Report**

After the demands of 2016/17 the Parish Council have in comparison had a much calmer year. The development at Kents Orchard that had caused so controversy is now finished, and the Parish have welcomed the new residents into the Parish. The Houghton Farmyard development was sold by the Bossington Estate to Wilton Homes Ltd and groundworks have started. With immense sadness, the ancient hedgerow that borders the development site and Field Path was removed in full within the first couple of days of the development commencing. Planning approval had listed the hedgerow to remain. The developers were reported to the Planning Enforcement team at TVBC and the hedgerow is to be replanted with mature native plants in due course. The damage is already done though and it shows that we must remain vigilant at all times as developers continue to ride roughshod over our Conservation Parish.

The Parish also lost 8 mature and healthy trees at Kents Orchard, despite objections being raised by the Parish Council and local residents. The Parish Council requested more information from TVBC on how decisions on Tree applications are made and received a standard response.

However, the application for a large house on the land opposite Meadow View was refused by TVBC. The land has now been subject to a Woodland Preservation Order. The Parish Council made representations to TVBC, objecting to development on this site. The site is the last remaining piece of woodland in the heart of the village and we were supported on this application by TVBC.

An application for a large detached dwelling on the land between Kents Orchard and Chapel Close was received in January. There were significant numbers of objections to the proposal from local residents and from the Parish Council. The Parish Council felt there was no need for an additional large house in the Parish and this application represented even further over-development. However, the application was approved by delegated powers by TVBC and wasn't referred to the Planning Committee as is usual practice for applications where there is strong local objection. The Parish Council made representations to our Borough Councillors as to our disappointment and Peter Boulton responded stating that as there was no specific reason or justification for referring it to the Planning Committee. In this case Cllr Boulton could find no planning reasons which would enable a challenge to the Planning Officer's recommendations for approval.

Otherwise in other planning matters, the Parish Council were supportive or made no objection to some smaller applications (extensions and tree works).

Our application for the whole of the Parish to be designated as a Neighbourhood Area was approved by TVBC and as such the Neighbourhood Plan has been started by a small committee of volunteers. The Neighbourhood Plan will form part of TVBC's planning policy in future. In order to assist with the Plan, the Parish Council have in conjunction with Action Hampshire and TVBC resolved to undertake a full Housing Needs Survey. This extremely important survey will be sent to residents in the next few weeks. Representatives of the Parish Council, Neighbourhood Plan committee and Action Hampshire will be present at the Village Hall Coffee morning on 28<sup>th</sup> April to answer questions from Parishioners on the survey and to assist with those who wish to complete it.

Moving onto Finance matters, the Parish Council made the decision not to increase the precept for the next financial year. The Council received £18,700.00 from the Kents Orchard development, in Community Infrastructure Levy. We are expecting another £5,794.63 in this financial year 2018/19. Community Infrastructure Levy funds can only be spent on infrastructure in the Parish. The Parish Council therefore made the decision to assist the Village Hall Committee with the fees for the

architect engaged on the Village Hall refurbishment project. More on this in the Village Hall report. There is another approx. £36,824 in CIL money due to the Parish Council in the future from other developments in the Village.

On a very positive note the Houghton Community Benefit Fund was registered as a Charity in the Autumn. The funds were transferred from the Parish Council Bank account to the new totally separate Charity Account. The Trustees of the Charity were appointed in December and they made their first grant to the WI for their Centenary Celebration booklet. The progress of the Charity will be reported at future Parish Council meetings and a full report from the Trustees will be given at the next Parish Assembly in 2019.

The Parish Council now has its own dedicated website! This is a huge improvement on communications with parishioners, all minutes and agendas are available on the site. Also available on the website are the PC's accounts, budgets and audited annual return. We are also supporting Lucy Gosse in her endeavours to build a new village website. There will be information pages on the website for all the village groups/organisations.

Geoff Butler and Philip Page stood down as Parish Councillors in the Autumn. Both worked extremely hard for the benefit of the Parish, in Geoff Butler's case for over 45 years. Geoff's immense contribution and influence over the Parish not only as a Councillor but also as the Estate Manager for the Bossington Estate is incalculable. During Geoff's time on the Parish Council he was Chair for over 10 years, he presided over the designation of the Conservation Area, was pivotal in the granting of land from the Bossington Estate for affordable housing at Alexander Close, the list is very long, but mostly Geoff (with the approval/support of John Fairey) aided and assisted the Parish Council and Parish in general at every level. From the management of hedgerow cutting and flood defences, to the removal of the old playground equipment, nothing was too much trouble, if he was able to help he would.

Philp was Chair of the Parish Council for about 7 years and during his tenure he oversaw some of the largest and most controversial planning applications in the Parish for decades. His professional expertise in planning matters was of enormous benefit to the Parish Council. He spoke at numerous Borough Council Planning committee meetings and also chaired the very difficult joint parish Council meetings between Longstock, Houghton and Stockbridge on the controversial planning application at Roman Road and oversaw the Solar Farm application and the subsequent decision to set up the Houghton Community Benefit fund.

I would like to thank both Geoff and Phil for all their diligence, commitment and overriding desire to do the best for the village.

We have now been joined by Peter and Llyn, but there remains a vacancy on the Council. Please do let me know if you are interested in becoming a Parish Councillor. Thanks must go to all the hard work our Councillors put in, particular thanks to Alan Young, now Vice Chair of the Council who spends hours each week on Parish matters.

We also had a change of Clerk in the summer. Amy moved onto the Hampshire Association of Local Councils and we were very fortunate that Clare Cotterell applied for the job. Clare has recently qualified as CiLCA Clerk.

I would also like to thank the Parishioners who regularly attend our meetings, their insight and participation at meetings is very much appreciated. More widely, our village does go from strength to strength and we are grateful for all the support we get.