GRAYSHOTT PARISH COUNCIL – 2020

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

Following the elections of May 2019, this report is written as we draw to the end of the first year of the four year term of the new Parish Council and the end of my year as Chairman of the Council. 7 parish councillors were elected last May leaving 3 vacancies, one of which has recently been filled. This has placed considerable pressures on our two excellent part time officers and, to a lesser extent, on the Councillors themselves since we have been determined to discharge the statutory requirements of the Council in an efficient and exemplary manner yet also to set and deliver an aggressive Action Plan for the year.

The Parish Council and its Councillors are non-political. Debates can be lively, differences of opinion emerge but councillors act harmoniously in seeking to represent the different shades of opinion of residents. We do, however, come together with the single aim of trying to improve the quality of life for the people of Grayshott and balance the sometimes irreconcilable aims of preserving the character and facilities of our village yet embrace that which is good in an ever changing world - be it the protection of our green spaces, the demands on housing, changing shopping patterns and our reliance, until recently at least, on the car in a thriving and bustling small village.

It is neither for me nor my fellow Councillors to judge the outcomes of what we have achieved in our first year – that is for our residents. However, we do consider progress has been made on all of the key objectives in our Action Plan, as follows:

1. Grayshott's Open Spaces

   Recognising the importance and preservation of our open spaces in Grayshott is key.
   For those that have been fortunate to be able to venture outdoors during the current Covid-19 lockdown, the beauty and peacefulness of the green spaces on our doorstep here in Grayshott has brought home how valuable these amenities are, not only for recreation but for peacefulness, reflection and mental well-being.

   During the year a working group of the Parish Council, the Green Spaces Group, comprising residents of the village together with a parish councillor have researched and finalised the placing of additional benches in the village and are in the advanced delivery stage of four circular walks within Grayshott parish, accompanied by a walking guide with notable features and historical context. The first of these is scheduled to be launched in September this year with others to follow over the next 12-18 months or so.
   Agreement in principle has been provided by the Parish Council for a community orchard and edible hedge. Whilst a number of legal and Charity Commission hurdles need to be worked through, Green Spaces Group have undertaken excellent preparatory work on location, traditional tree types and how the community might be engaged in such a project. Watch out for other 'green space' initiatives in the village over the coming year as the work of this Group will continue when circumstances allow.

   As a true example of community spirit, one need look no further than the Hidden Gardens of Grayshott Group who organised such a fantastic weekend last May Bank Holiday together with residents who asked or were even cajoled to open up their gardens large and small to the general public. The gardens were excellent, each with its own story, the hosts welcoming. I can testify that the cakes, teas and produce were just as good too!! 1500 visitors and £15000 raised. A very big 'thank you' from the Parish Council as Hidden Gardens generously provide funds to the Council to help maintain the Memorial Garden and ensure the colourful hanging baskets make Grayshott truly a village in bloom.

   A thank you also to our village volunteer gardeners who unfailingly look after the plants and borders in our village and provide guidance to our occasional professional gardener.

   To all involved in maintaining our green spaces green, colourful, weed free and litter free – thank you!

2. SANG – (Suitable Alternative Natural Green space)

   As work on the Applegarth Vale development proceeded during the year, the Parish Council was in regular contact with CALA Homes and our colleagues at EHDC to ensure a smooth introduction of occupation for the benefit of new residents and the existing community. One key element of the development is the SANG which has been offered to the Parish Council as part of the long term management of this area. This is the area of green land and copse between the new housing and Headley Road. It includes a new children's play area and informal paths, designed for dog walking.

   The Parish Council is keen to acquire this land to protect the green space for the long term. I had hoped to be able to report that this land was now in the ownership of the Parish Council but the recent health emergency has resulted in legal negotiations coming to a halt and, most importantly, work to ensure the existing land is an appropriate state for handover has still to be completed by CALA Homes.

   We look forward to completing this purchase, for the use of all residents of Grayshott, in the coming weeks.

3. The Square

   The Parish Council believes that The Square remains a valuable asset for gatherings and community events. We accept the comments from some residents that The Square is rather unwelcoming and we are looking at options to improve the 'warmth' of the structures. The Council has approved specialist work to repair and re-render the planters to the front and

rear side of the Square. These will be resurfaced in a 'warmer' colour in June. Thank you to residents who were stopped and asked for their opinions. Your help in selecting the colours (almost universal agreement) was much appreciated.

4. Pavilion Improvements and new Parish Office

Those of you visiting the recreation field or driving along Headley Road will have noticed construction work at the Pavilion. Work has comprised various elements; the creation of new green hard standing overflow car park, subterranean drainage work near the pavilion; a large new pavilion canopy and clock, re-roofing; a new internal ventilation system for the changing rooms and a new Parish Office, which will relocate from a room rented from the Village Hall Trustees. The Parish Office will be accessible to those with mobility difficulties, will have a small meeting room, information boards and a welcoming feel. The Parish Council are scheduled to occupy the building in June. Do come and visit when circumstances allow.

All of the building works and fit out will be achieved without any additional financial levy on residents. It has been financed by a combination of low cost Treasury Loan, dispensation from the Charities Commission to partially use protected reserves, use of Community Infrastructure Levy funds and some of the reserves the Parish Council had earmarked for pavilion improvements and maintenance.

We feel the improvements will add amenity and value to Grayshott's village assets.

5. Community Transport

The Parish Council is acutely aware that public transport in a community such as Grayshott can provide a real lifeline to residents without a car, who no longer drive or simply wish to use public transport. Access to facilities in Grayshott and neighbouring areas is not only about travelling to obtain basic shopping and services but has real social benefits, particularly for residents living alone.

Recognising that the two hourly bus service is far from ideal for a short shopping trip, our local County Councillor did fight hard to ensure that the heavily subsidised bus service (approx £125k pa) did at least continue albeit with a changed timetable yet still heavily subsidised. The reality is that other than a school bus service, the hourly service was very little used. I understand that passenger numbers on the two hourly service are about the same.

Without wishing to replace the service we have, the Parish Council, together with our colleagues in Headley Parish Council, conducted a questionnaire on transport needs which was circulated to all households in January. Around 10% of Grayshott households responded. Of those responding there was low demand for new community transport services.

In response to the replies from residents the Parish Council will be issuing a flyer (and online) detailing all of the community transport services currently available. In addition, initial contact has been made with Haslemere Hoppa to examine whether the existing on demand service covering parts of Grayshott can be extended to all of Grayshott and Headley Down. More news on this in the future.

6. Traffic, Speed and Parking in Grayshott

This is a subject which, understandably, raises emotions in the village. I will try to speak to the facts, as I also have emotions about the subject!

Parking – after a period of consultation and monitoring I want to thank our District Councillor and his officers at EHDC for implementing the parking regulations within the village. Not all will agree with all aspects of the regulations but I do think overall the regulations are working very well. Evidence shows that other than on infrequent occasions parking spaces can be found in the Crossways Road or Headley Road car parks. Yes there needs to be some fine tuning, for example the removal of bays very close to side road junctions to give a better line of sight. A plea from the Parish Council - please be aware of the bay in which you are parking. If it is marked 'disabled' do please resist the temptation to park the car there if you don't have a blue badge even if for a minute or two. It is illegal but importantly one of our residents may really struggle if having to park further away because a bay has been inconsiderately occupied.

Speed in the village – the Parish Council have invested in a Speed Limit Reminder (SLR) with neighbouring parishes and deploy this on the main roads into and out of the village throughout the year. The data provides volumes of traffic, speed of each vehicle by time bands and days. We analyse this in various ways and year on year will provide information on traffic growth (or reduction) in the village. We aim to show graphs and data from each location when the Annual Parish Assembly is held later in the year. You may also have seen some initial data presented in the Parish Council section of Grayshott Today.

Finance

A separate Financial report will be posted online in due course following the approval of our annual audit. It will be available for the Annual Assembly. In summary the Parish Finances remain healthy. Annual expenditure was managed to a level below annual budget allowing the Parish Council to transfer almost £10,000 to reserves earmarked for future use on maintaining and improving our village assets and amenities.

Planning

The work of the parish council planning committee is to act as a simple consultee and to provide a reasoned discussion and conclusion on planning applications within and impacting Grayshott that are submitted to EHDC. Last year, nearly 70 applications were considered ranging from small residential extensions, tree works, significant works to the flats above Sainsbury, shop signage and illumination and works at Applegarth Vale.

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In conclusion, I would like to give my thanks and those of my colleagues to Floss Mitchell, our Hampshire County Councillor and Ferris Cowper, our East Hants District Councillor. Both Floss and Ferris continue to demonstrate their hard work, commitment and grant support to the residents and facilities of Grayshott and without them our interests at County and District level would be all the poorer. I would like to recognise my fellow Councillors for volunteering so much of their time and skills to help with the work of the Parish Council but particularly to Katie Weir, Clerk and Executive Officer and Laura Musco , Asst Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer.

In commenting recently about Grayshott, its Officers and its Parish Councillors, an independent national consultant from the Society for Local Council Clerks commented ‘ the Council is clearly well managed, progressive and clearly driven by a desire to achieve the best possible for Grayshott. The Council does not appear to be afraid or nervous of tackling large projects or considering issues which many Parish Councils of a similar size often baulk at. It is refreshing to witness a Parish Council where there appears to be absolute harmony between the Councillors themselves and their relations with the officers – this is a credit to all involved and long may it last’.

We are indeed fortunate to have our two officers who manage the Parish Council for the benefit of residents in such an exemplary manner.

Richard Lyon
Chairman
Grayshott Parish Council
May 2020