

Ash Parish Council

Chairman's Annual Report

2015-2016

There have again been many highlights during the year the most notable being the Celebration of Queen Elizabeth II becoming the longest reigning UK monarch, the Christmas Fantasia, and the charity Friary Guildford Brass Band concert in November.

The Fun Day was not held this year as attendance numbers had been dropping and it was felt that as the Queen Elizabeth II celebration was only a month afterwards, that this would not be organised this year. However, a Village fete event will be held in 2016/17 to be held on Ash Recreation Ground.

The Christmas Fantasia continues to draw on the success of previous years. The theme was Despicable Me. This event gives an opportunity for the many local organisations and charities to raise money for their various causes at the Christmas Fayre in the Ash Centre. Many visitors to this event travel some distances from outside Ash to enjoy this spectacular festive event. The culmination of the event is when Father Christmas visits Ash Wharf, to switch on the Christmas tree lights which were sponsored by Dover Garage. Bridges Estate Agents very kindly allow these lights to be connected to their power. Father Christmas and his band of helpers arrived on Santa's sleigh. The excellent tree this year and crane to put it in position were sponsored by Surrey County Councillor Marsha Moseley from her Surrey County allocation. And where would we have been without Duffy's Budgens, whose boundless generosity yet again, provided the mulled wine and the mince pies. A big thank you to them all. We hope that the new Co-op store will maintain this community spirit. Unfortunately due to Health & Safety, it will not be possible to hand out sweets to the youngsters in attendance for 2016 onwards, due to potential nut cross contamination affecting those with nut allergies and its effect. Ash Parish Council is seeking to find a free of nut trace alternative.

It is a truly special occasion and a great joy to see the smiles and pleasure on the children's faces, more so when it starts "snowing", thanks to Ash Parish Council's own snow machine!

I was delighted that the Ash Vale Ensemble was in attendance to continue to give Ash that special Christmas sound of a brass band playing Christmas Carols and hope this continues for many years to come.

There is indeed, a true community spirit throughout this event, with all age groups being represented and even more local businesses getting involved. The new sound system worked very well and even though the crowds were large everyone was able to hear. Thank you to everyone who makes this event such a success.

The Ash Parish Council Remembrance Day parade continues to grow with many visitors coming from the surrounding villages and towns. The very moving service by the clergy from 'Churches Together' was well attended by all the youth organisations, Scouts (explorer scouts, scouts, BP scouts, cubs and beavers), Guides (guides brownies and rainbows) and St Johns (adults, cadets and badgers), together with their standards proudly on parade. We were also joined by representatives of the Royal British Legion, Veterans and police

I firmly believe it remains important for us to remember all those who currently serve in our armed forces, not just those from Ash, who have been injured or who have made the ultimate sacrifice in present and past conflicts.

The two new benches commissioned by Ash Parish Council, with suitable inscriptions, for the Memorial Garden are being well used by those who wish to have silent reflection at this special memorial.

My thanks go to all the staff and Councillors at the Parish Council who make these now established annual events possible.

The Parish also held, for the 6th time, its own Ash in Bloom competition. The prizes were generously sponsored by Mike Duffy's Budgens, who have been a great supporter of Ash and its community. I would like to thank Mike and Jane Duffy for their support. Unfortunately, Jane and Mike decided to sell up and we do hope that The Co-op will continue with Mike and Jane's generous support. An awards ceremony was held at the Ash Centre for all those who entered, together with the prize winners of the community craft, cooking and gardening competitions to receive their prizes and certificates.

There were some lovely examples of gardens, planters and hanging baskets. A number of residents were nominated by their neighbours or simply by those passing by and seeing a splendid display of colour. The nominees are all surprised and delighted to be nominated and of course to win prizes. I know there are many more residents who take great pride in the appearance of their gardens, hanging basket and tubs, and I do hope even more will enter the competition this coming year.

During this year Ash Parish Council were successful once again in bidding to undertake work for Surrey County Council under their Lengthsman Localism Scheme. This enables certain works which would normally be undertaken by Surrey County Council, being undertaken by Ash Parish Council. The benefit to our residents is not only that Ash Parish Council is fully paid for doing this work, but, it is done far more quickly by our own workforce

The Parish Council organised for the third time a brass band concert and it was decided that for this year all the proceeds would go to the Surrey and Sussex Air Ambulance charity, a very worthwhile charity. £1523.92 was raised. What a fantastic sum!! The internationally renowned Guildford Friary Brass Band were absolutely fantastic. A great time was had by all. There will be another concert by the Guildford Friary Brass Band on 12 November this coming year. I hope we can raise even more money for a worthy cause. Ash and Blackwater District Rotary kindly sponsored the band and were also involved helping with car parking, raffle ticket selling and refreshments. They have also helped at the Christmas Fantasia. This is a new and exciting partnership, and I thank them for their continued support.

The Parish Planning Committee has continued to meet regularly to look at and make comments to the local planning authority on the various planning applications within the Parish. Ash has had a number of large planning applications to consider. Some application do cause some residents great concern and the Planning Committee has to consider all Planning Guidelines and government criteria when deciding what comments it makes to Guildford Borough Council, who are the Planning Authority. The committee has also reviewed and made comments on a number of consultation documents that have been issued during the year. These include:

- The Guildford Development Framework
- The new and emerging local Plan
- The proposed very large development across the border in Aldershot
- Surrey Mineral Extraction Consultation.
- The new NPPF National Planning Policy Framework

The Council has continued to make improvements in the services it provides to the community, while at the same time keeping the Parish Rate at an average of under 1.9% over the last 16 years. There is a slight increase in the Band D equivalent of the annual parish rate for the forthcoming year, which amounts to around 3 pence per week. It has not been possible to freeze Council Tax as costs continue to rise despite our staff having had a 3 year pay freeze in the last 4 years. Even in these difficult times Ash Parish Council has been able to commit substantial capital expenditure this year to improve the facilities provided within Ash. We are using specifically earmarked reserves that were carefully set aside in previous years to keep the Council Tax down. This is a remarkable achievement and shows the Parish Council's commitment to high financial control and value for money. For many years the Council Tax rate for Ash Parish residents was the highest in the whole of Guildford Borough. That is no longer the case, and has been so now for several years.

The Parish Council obtains its income from several other sources. We seek grants where these are available, either directly or through local community organisations. For certain types capital expenditure, we are able to secure Concurrent Function Grants from Guildford Borough Council. We have also been lucky in that our Surrey County Councillor Mrs Marsha Moseley has granted several amounts from her Surrey County Council personal Community allocation towards projects being undertaken by Ash Parish Council. This has happened for several years now, and I hope it continues.

We also receive interest on our earmarked and general reserves, which are invested in savings accounts, and we are always looking to get the best return on all our investments. Unfortunately, with the continued low interest rates, the return on the Council's investments has been severely reduced for the immediate future. However, the Council has sought to maximise the interest it receives by the use of some fixed term investments. We are also a burial authority and we receive income from the provision of plots in our cemetery and subsequent interments. The shortfall between this income and our planned spending for the forthcoming year is what determines the Parish Rate of Council Tax.

With ever increasing costs and a squeeze on this Council's income, along with the desire by residents for their Parish Council Tax to be kept low, and to continue to receive excellent and diverse services, difficult and trying times will, I fear, remain with us for some time to come. This Council will strive to meet these challenges and to improve Ash Parish for the benefit of its residents, whilst keeping a tight rein on expenditure. I would remind all Ash residents that their elected Ash Parish Councillors do not receive any payments or allowances and do not even claim expenses. That is how committed we are to looking after our Parish and keeping Council Tax as low as possible

The following table shows how our total income has been made up:

Ash Parish Council – Income

Service	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
Recreation Grounds and Car Parks	4,570.00	2,703.00	2,765.00
Ash Centre	33,100.00	36,590.00	36,900.00
Ash Cemetery	33,000.00	25,000.00	24,000.00
Lighting	0.00	0.00	0.00
Public Conveniences	9,360.00	9,360.00	9,360.00
Statutory Allotments	2,850.00	6,000.00	2,850.00
Central Services	32,650.00	27,450.00	47,790.00
Total	115,530.00	107,103.00	123,665.00

Our revenue expenditure, the day-to-day spending providing, maintaining and improving our facilities, is spread over a number of areas as follows:

Ash Parish Council – Expenditure

Service	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
Recreation Grounds and Car Parks	136,469.00	126,399.00	129,608.00
Ash Centre	97,039.00	88,746.00	86,531.00
Ash Cemetery	59,864.00	56,074.00	62,874.00
Lighting	59,502.00	67,211.00	67,461.00
Public Conveniences	11,538.00	10,027.00	9,535.00
Statutory Allotments	12,167.00	11,547.00	11,664.00
Central Services	168,530.00	178,759.00	197,458.00
Total	£545,109.00	538,763.00	565,131.00

Beyond our core responsibilities the Council continues to invest in opportunities that we believe will be of benefit to the wider community. Where possible we continue to work in partnership with other agencies, these include Surrey County Council, Guildford Borough Council, Rushmoor Borough Council, Blackwater Countryside Partnership, Thames Water, Network Rail and Surrey Police.

The municipal year 2015-2016 has been a very busy one for the Council and the Parish Council continues to represent a powerful democratic voice for the local community, and will continue to do so. Our 12 elected members, including the 4 new Councillors elected in May 2015, have a wide range of experience, the majority of

whom are in full or part time employment, work very hard for all the residents of Ash Parish and carry out their duties extremely conscientiously. This they do without any financial reward whatsoever, not even expenses, and they devote a lot of their free time to looking after Ash and its residents.

Finally, as we come to the end of yet another financial year, I would like to take this opportunity to record my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to The Clerk to the Council, Carole Olive, the Officers and Councillors of this Council for their commitment and Civic pride in helping to keep Ash a place where people are happy and proud to live.

Councillor Nigel Manning
Chairman of Ash Parish Council

March 2016

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