

Ash Parish Council

Chairman's Annual Report

2017-2018

There have again been a number of highlights during the year including the summer Ash Village Fete and the Christmas Fantasia.

The Ash Village Fete was well attended and the local organisations, many of which were raising money for various charities, reported increased levels of fund raising. The centre piece of the Fete was the Ferret Racing which again attracted large numbers of onlookers. I would like to thank The Ash and Blackwater District Rotary for their continued help in manning the refreshment tent.

The Christmas Fantasia continues to draw on the success of previous years. This event gives another 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 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 was sponsored by Surrey County Councillor Marsha Moseley from her Surrey County allocation. The tree was craned into position by Ash Parish Council's own lighting contractor, Prime One Maintenance, free of charge. The Co-op, have continued their community spirit and were very generous in providing the mince pies. A big thank you to them all. There were even more people in attendance this year. Ash Parish Council found another source of sweets that had no potential nut cross contamination, which Father Christmas and his helpers handed out to the huge number of children.

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 replacement snow machine which created even more 'snow'!

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. My thanks also go to the Churches Together Choir for lending their voices to the Christmas Carols.

There is indeed, a true community spirit throughout this event, with all age groups being represented and even more local businesses getting involved. Due to the very large number of those attending, which stretched right across Wharf Road, the new more powerful external sound system provided much improved audio reception. 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), St John Ambulance (adults, cadets and badgers), and the Ash Manor School Combined Cadet Force, together with their standards proudly on parade. We were also joined by representatives of the Royal British Legion, Veterans

and the Police. During this Centenary period of the First World War, the names of those on our War Memorial who fell 100 years ago, during the period 11 November 1916 and 11 November 1917 were read out by young people from Ash Manor School. This will continue during these centenary periods. I could not lead the parade this year as being Mayor of Guildford I was required in Guildford. My thanks go to John Tonks the Vice Chairman of Ash Parish Council for stepping in. Unfortunately, despite being tested in the week leading up to the service and even earlier on the Sunday morning, the sound system failed. I apologise to all those who were unable to hear the service. Ash Parish Council now has a new more powerful external sound system, which proved its worth at Fantasia.

I firmly believe it remains important for us to remember all those who have served or 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.

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 8th time, its own Ash in Bloom competition. The prizes were generously sponsored by The Co-op, who since taking over the Budgen's shop have become a great supporter of Ash and its community. I would like to thank The Co-op for their support and Vanita Patel from the store for presenting the awards during the ceremony held at the Ash Centre, for all those who entered and won awards, together with the prize winners of the Village Fete 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.

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 2% over the last 18 years. There is a slight increase in the Band D equivalent of the annual parish rate for the forthcoming year, which amounts to less than 3 pence per

week. It has not been possible to freeze Council Tax as costs continue to rise. The introduction of the Living Wage and mandatory pensions, whilst justified, will cause further upward pressures. The soon to be introduced new General Data Protection Regulations will also increase compliance costs. 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 of 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 all 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	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
Recreation Grounds and Car Parks	2,765.00	1,150.00	1,150.00
Ash Centre	36,900.00	35,200.00	32,700.00
Ash Cemetery	24,000.00	24,000.00	22,000.00
Lighting	0.00	0.00	0.00
Public Conveniences	9,360.00	9,361.00	9,360.00
Statutory Allotments	2,850.00	2,850.00	2,950.00
Central Services	47,790.00	19,861.00	19,900.00
Total	123,665.00	92,422.00	88,060.00

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	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
Recreation Grounds and Car Parks	129,608.00	141,909.00	143,723.00
Ash Centre	86,531.00	90,301.00	92,860.00
Ash Cemetery	62,874.00	69,282.00	72,904.00
Lighting	67,461.00	68,975.00	74,256.00
Public Conveniences	9,535.00	9,711.00	12,960.00
Statutory Allotments	11,664.00	12,155.00	12,602.00
Central Services	197,458.00	180,015.00	168,754.00
Total	565,131.00	572,348.00	578,509.00

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 2017-2018 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, the majority of whom are in full or part time employment, bring a wide range of experience to the Council and work very hard for all the residents of Ash Parish, carrying 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 2018

ASH PARISH COUNCILLORS

Ash Vale Ward

Cllr Nigel Manning	01252 665999	nigel.manning@guildford.gov.uk
Cllr Marsha Moseley	01252 665999	marsha.moseley@guildford.gov.uk
Cllr Laurence Armes	01252 662956	laurence.ames@ntlworld.com
Cllr John Tonks	07754 679296	john.tonks@gmail.com

Ash Wharf Ward

Cllr Jayne Hewlett	01252 345212	jbonilla.ashparish@gmail.com
Cllr Pat Scott	01252 324941	scott.lpd@btinternet.com
Cllr Bill Cole	01252 664675	bill_cole@tinyworld.com
Cllr Andrew Gomm	01252 316411	Andrew.gomm.AG@gmail.com

Ash Rowan Field Ward

Cllr Paul Spooner	01252 338585	pmspooner@aol.com
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Ash South Ward

Cllr Jo Randall	01252 344929	jo_randall@yahoo.co.uk
Cllr Martin Burgess	07881 910797	martinburgess@gmail.com
Cllr Nigel Kearse	07941 878789	nigel.kearseapc@hotmail.com

Clerk to the Council

Carole Olive Ash Parish Council The Ash Centre Ash Hill Road Ash Surrey GU12 5DP	01252 328287	carole.olive@ashpcsurrey.gov.uk
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