

ASH PARISH COUNCIL
CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT
2019-2020

There have again been a number of highlights during the year including the summer Ash Village Fete, the Christmas Fantasia and the charity band concert by Friary Brass Band.

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 dog show which attracted large numbers of dog owners and 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 tree this year was again 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 only just had enough nut free sweets (15% more than last year) for Father Christmas and his helpers to hand out to the huge number of local children present.

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. 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 people attending, who stretched right across Wharf Road, the new more powerful external sound system continued to provide 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. Thanks go to the clergy from 'Churches Together' for conducting the service, which 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 from the

services Veterans and the Police. During this service the persons named on our War Memorial, who died of their wounds after the Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, were read out by Head boy and Head girl from Ash Manor School. I was pleased that our MP Michael Gove again attended our Parade, despite his busy schedule. Ash Parish Council now has a new more powerful external sound system, which proved its worth at Fantasia.

I firmly believe Remembrance Sunday 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 decided to have a break from its own Ash in Bloom competition this year, however this will be returning this coming year. I hope many will enter themselves or nominate neighbours. We already have a promise of sponsorship. I hope to see a splendid display of colour throughout Ash this year to complement Ash Parish Council's own hanging baskets, planters and planted roundabouts. We are contemplating making this a biennial event.

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 applications 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 which was approved by the Government inspector in April 2019.
- The proposed very large development across the border in Aldershot
- Surrey Mineral Extraction Consultation.

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 around 7 pence per week. It has not been possible to freeze Council Tax as costs continue to rise. Essential repairs and upgrades to the play equipment in our 5 playgrounds, maintenance of the recreation grounds, cemetery and trees, together with increases to mandatory pensions, whilst justified, will cause further upward pressures. The recently introduced General Data Protection Regulations continues to substantially increase compliance costs and the human resources needed. 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. There are over 625 residential street lights owned and managed by Ash Parish Council. We expect to have replaced all the old concrete lampposts over the next 2 years, subject to Scottish and Southern Electricity carrying out timely reconnections, which has not been the case in recent years. We are also upgrading all street lights to low energy LED, which produces a cleaner, cheaper, more

directional light. We are using specifically earmarked reserves that were carefully set aside in previous years to keep the Council Tax down. In addition, Ash Parish Council has commissioned the building of a Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant public toilet, for use by all, at the Cemetery, following many requests from those visiting their departed loved ones. It should be operational before Easter. 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 and the need for the Council to readily access funds for projects, 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. Whilst Brexit is a National issue, Ash Parish Council will not be insulated from any adverse effects, if any. This Council will strive to meet these challenges and to improve Ash Parish for the benefit of all 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.

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.

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The following table shows how our total income and expenditure has been made up for 2018/2019 and 2019/2020:

Ash Parish Council – Income 2018/2019

Service	£
Recreation Grounds and Car Parks	1,150.00
Ash Centre	32,700.00
Ash Cemetery	22,000.00
Lighting	0.00
Public Conveniences	9,360.00
Statutory Allotments	2,950.00
Central Services	19,900.00
Total	88,060.00

Ash Parish Council –Revenue Expenditure 2018/2019

Service	£
Recreation Grounds and Car Parks	143,723.00
Ash Centre	92,860.00
Ash Cemetery	72,904.00
Lighting	74,256.00
Public Conveniences	12,960.00
Statutory Allotments	12,602.00
Central Services	168,754.00
Total	578,509.00

Our revenue expenditure, the day-to-day spending providing, maintaining and improving our facilities, for 2018/ 2019

A reorganisation of the income and expenditure headings took place in March 2019. The following tables show the new budget headings and the figures for the appropriate service.

Ash Parish income 2019/ 2020

Service	£
Cemetery	21,500.00
Street Lighting	0.00
Central Services	750.00
Allotments	3,320.00
Parks & Open Spaces	20,617.00
Public Conveniences	9,360.00
Ash Centre	36,350.00
Administration	250.00
Local Democracy	0.00
Total Income	92,147.00

Ash Parish Council –Revenue Expenditure 2019/2020

Service	£
Cemetery	16,380.00
Street Lighting	68,000.00
Central Services	46,250.00
Allotments	600.00
Parks & Open Spaces	60,934.00
Public Conveniences	2,300.00
Ash Centre	44,150.00
Administration	30,552.00
Local Democracy	10,050.00
Total expenditure	553,586.00

Our revenue expenditure, the day-to-day spending providing, maintaining and improving our facilities, for 2019/ 2020

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The municipal year 2019-2020 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 2019, 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, 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 2020

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 Helen Gorham	01252 328287	helen.gorham@ashpcsurrey.gov.uk
Cllr John Tonks	07754 679296	john.tonks@gmail.com

Ash Wharf Ward

Cllr Tony Gorham	01252 328287	tony.gorham@ashpcsurrey.gov.uk
Cllr Jo Randall	01252 344929	jo_randell@yahoo.co.uk
Cllr Ed Schofield	07887858208	ed@schofield.xyz
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 Graham Eyre	01252 344929	gl.eyre1@gmail.com
Cllr Martin Burgess	07881 910797	martinburgess@gmail.com
Cllr Nigel Kearse	07941 878789	nigel.kearseapc@hotmail.com

Acting Clerk to the Council

Dennis Wheeler	01252 328287	office@ashpcsurrey.gov.uk
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Ash Parish Council
The Ash Centre
Ash Hill Road
Ash, Surrey
GU12 5DP