

ASH PARISH COUNCIL
CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

2020/21

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has meant that the usual programme of Parish events has been very limited. A Covid Safe Remembrance Sunday Service did take place and Ash Parish Council did run a virtual "Ash in Bloom" competition.

We experienced a very empty summer in 2020 with no Ash Village Fete; it seems likely that the current pandemic may also prevent the Village fete for 2021.

Despite the lockdown restrictions, the Parish still had a very splendid Christmas tree at Ash Wharf, courtesy of a wonderful team effort. Surrey County Council via Councillor Marsha Moseley's Member's Community Allocation; the continued sponsorship by the Dover Garage, meant we were able to have even more lights than ever before; Bridges Estate Agents yet again kindly allowed the lights to be powered from their office and finally the Council's lighting contractor Prime One Maintenance who craned the tree into position. I am immensely grateful to them all.

I switched on the Christmas tree lights along with Father Christmas who still managed to visit, sadly without his helpers because of the social distancing rules. The ceremony was filmed by our Vice Chairman Councillor John Tonks who uploaded this onto the Ash Parish Council (APC) website for everybody to view and enjoy. I am confident that the community will come together again in even bigger numbers this coming Christmas when hopefully things will have returned to normal!

In November the Ash Parish Council Remembrance Day Parade was cancelled however a Full Service was held at the War Memorial in Ash Hill Road. Due to the last-minute tightening of the lockdown rules and the ongoing social distancing requirements there was a vastly reduced number of participants. Amongst those was the local Member of Parliament, the Right Honourable Michael Gove who despite his busy schedule again found time to join us. Full tributes were paid to all those brave people, service men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for us to keep our much valued freedom today. My thanks go to Father Keith Bristow from St Peter's Church for both organising and conducting the service on behalf of Churches Together. In the days leading up to Remembrance Sunday, local organisations who would normally take part in the Parade and wreath laying ceremony, were encouraged to visit the War Memorial, lay their wreaths and take photographs which would be displayed on the Council website. The Service was filmed by Councillors John Tonks and Ed Schofield and was uploaded onto the Council's website where it received multiple viewings. My thanks also go to all the staff and Councillors at the Parish Council who were instrumental in making sure this important but scaled down event was able to take place.

As mentioned above the "Ash in Bloom" competition became virtual. Residents were encouraged to send in their "In Bloom" photographs to Ash Parish Council which were then uploaded onto the Council's website and Ash residents were asked to take part in an "online" vote for their favourite picture in each of the Ash in Bloom categories. My grateful thanks go to the Kia Dover Garage who again kindly sponsored this event. Hopefully 'live' Ash in Bloom will be returning this Summer and I hope many will enter the competition themselves or nominate their neighbours. I am looking forward to seeing a splendid display of colour throughout the community this year to complement Ash Parish Council's own hanging baskets, planters and planted roundabouts.

Covid 19 has brought its challenges to everyone not least the Parish Council when it comes to finances. With the Ash Centre essentially being closed for bookings for most of the year, the Council's income has been severely reduced. Nonetheless, owing to the of sound financial management and planning strategy in previous years, the Council has been able to continue to make improvements. Ash Parish Council has still been able to commit substantial capital expenditure to improve the facilities in the services it provides to the Residents and the community.

For example, upgrades to equipment, improvements to the safety surfaces as well as essential repairs has continued to the play equipment in our five children's play areas. APC is responsible for 650 residential streetlights. Over the next two years we are planning to replace all our old concrete lampposts and upgrading all our streetlights to low energy LED which produces cleaner, greener, and cheaper more directional light. APC has also opened a new public toilet, which is fully Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant at Ash Cemetery. All these achievements show the Parish Council's commitment to high financial control and value for money.

Over the last 19 years Ash Parish Council has been able to keep the Parish Rate at an average increase of under 2%. This year, the Council recognises what a tough year it has been for residents and so by using specifically earmarked reserves that were carefully set aside in previous years, the Parish Council has been able to freeze the Council Tax and there will be **no increase** in the Band D equivalent of the annual parish rate for the forthcoming year. (2021-2022). For many years the Council Tax rate for Ash Parish residents was the highest in the whole of Guildford Borough. Thankfully this is no longer the case and has been so now for over 10 years.

The Parish Council also 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 Members Community allocation, towards projects being undertaken by Ash Parish Council, for the benefit of Ash residents.

Whilst Brexit has now been 'done', there is still a lot of ongoing uncertainty. This coupled with the unknown long-term economic effects caused by the continuing Covid-19 pandemic is a concern to us all. With increasing costs and a squeeze on the Council's income, along with the desire by residents for their Council Tax to be kept low, whilst continuing to receive excellent and diverse services, APC still faces difficult and challenging financial times. All current Ash Parish Councillors will strive to meet these challenges and to continue to improve Ash Parish for the benefit of all its residents. I would like to take this opportunity to remind all Ash Residents that all their Parish Councillors are volunteers and do not receive any remuneration, payments or allowances whatsoever and where they are able to claim expenses, none ever do. They are all totally committed to representing the community and are doing everything they can to looking after our Parish and to keep 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.

The following tables shows how our total income and expenditure has been made up for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021:

Service	2019/2020		2020/2021	
	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure
Cemetery	21,500.00	16,380.00	21,500.00	24,380.00
Street Lighting	0.00	68,000.00	0.00	68,000.00
Central Services	750.00	46,250.00	750.00	43,250.00
Allotments	3,320.00	600.00	3,220.00	5,600.00
Parks & Open Spaces	20,617.00	60,934.00	4050.00	38,467.00
Public Conveniences	9,360.00	2,300.00	9360.00	9,800.00
Ash Centre	36,350.00	44,150.00	36,350.00	44,150.00
Administration	250.00	305,522.00	250.00	288,022.00
Local Democracy	0.00	10,050.00	0.00	10,050.00
TOTALS	92,147.00	553,386.00	75,480.00	534,718.00

The municipal year 2020-2021 has been a very busy one for the Council, particularly with the pandemic affecting everybody in one way or another. The Parish Council continues to represent a powerful democratic voice for the local community and will continue to do so. Our 11 elected members, many 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
Ash Parish Council

March 2021