

ASH PARISH COUNCIL
CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

2022-23

Now that Covid-19 pandemic is not the threat it once posed. we are finally seeing the return of normal life. There have been a number of highlights during the year including the summer Ash Village Fete, the Christmas Fantasia and the Ash in Bloom and Easter card on-line competitions.

The Ash Village Fete was very 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 live band which was received very enthusiastically by those in attendance. The refreshment tent returned this year and was very well received on a very warm and sunny day.

The Christmas Fantasia continues to draw on the success of previous years, prior to Covid. 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 again 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 received some sponsorship by Surrey County Councillor Carla Morson from her Surrey County allocation. The tree was craned into position by Ash Parish Council's own lighting contractor, Prime One Maintenance. A big thank you to them all. There were even more people in attendance this year. Father Christmas and his helpers handed out a huge number of nut free sweets to local 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 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. Due to the very large number of people attending, who stretch 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. Due to legislation changes, we now have to employ an external qualified contractor to manage the road closures.

The Ash Parish Council Remembrance Day parade, once again continued 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, 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. I was pleased that our MP Michael Gove again attended our Parade, despite his busy

schedule. Ash Parish Council improved its external sound system to enable a better quality of sound to all those who attend. This was well received with positive feedback..

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 continue to run the Ash in Bloom competition this year on-line. Many residents entered and the winning entries were voted for on-line also. The Ash In Bloom event this year will again also be on-line and 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.

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 continues to receive a large number of 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 many consultation documents that have been issued during the year.

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. During 2022/23 Ash Parish Council was again able to keep council Taxable at 1.9%. Despite the increase in the cost of living, The Council has been able to limit the rise in Council Tax to 1.93%, which for a Band D property is just 3 pence per week. This has been made possible by good decisions previously made by this Council, including fitting solar panels and signing up to a 3 year fixed utilities contract. Essential repairs and upgrades to the play equipment in our 5 playgrounds, maintenance of the recreation grounds, cemetery and over 1000 trees, together with increases to mandatory pensions, whilst justified, will cause further upward pressure on the budget. 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 650 residential street lights owned and maintained 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 and controllable LED lights, 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, the new toilet at Ash Cemetery which is fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), is now open and has been well received by all. 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 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. Whilst interest rates have risen recently, so have a number of running costs. The Council has sought to maximise the interest it receives by the use of some fixed term investments, whilst maintaining access to sufficient funds to meet immediate expenditure. 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 (Precept).

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. We are seeing a substantial increase in all our running costs, however 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.

The following table shows a reformatted finance structure how our total income has been made up:

Ash Parish Council – Income

| Service | 2022/23 |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| Cemetery | £27,500.00 |
| Lighting | £0.00 |
| Central Services | £500.00 |
| Allotments | £3,350.00 |
| Charity Carrington | £10,620.00 |
| Charity Harpers Rec | £10,250.00 |
| Parks & open spaces | £3,900.00 |
| Public Toilets | £0.00 |
| Finance | £10,000.00 |
| Ash Centre | £23,200.00 |
| Administration | £500.00 |
| Local democracy | £0.00 |
| Capital projects CFCG | £21,190.00 |
| Total | £111,010.00 |

| | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022 |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Service | Income | Income |
| Recreation Grounds & Car Parks | 21,367.00 | 3,765.00 |
| Ash Centre | 36,350.00 | 23,850.00 |
| Ash Cemetery | 21,500.00 | 33,000.00 |
| Lighting | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Public Conveniences | 9,360.00 | 9,360.00 |
| Statutory Allotments | 3,220.00 | 3,350.00 |
| Central Services | 35,750.00 | 34,650.00 |
| Total | 127,547.00 | 107,975.00 |

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

The following table shows a reformatted finance structure how our total expenditure has been made up:

Ash Parish Council – Expenditure

| Service | 2022/23 |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| Cemetery | £29,480.00 |
| Lighting | £85,000.00 |
| Central Services | £49,600.00 |
| Allotments | £7,000.00 |
| Charity Carrington | £10,700.00 |
| Charity Harpers Rec | £7,747.00 |
| Parks & open spaces | £48,720.00 |
| Public Toilets | £8,500.00 |
| Finance | £31,400.00 |
| Ash Centre | £81,670.00 |
| Administration | £333,095.00 |
| Local Democracy | £5,750.00 |
| Capital projects CFCG | £49,915.00 |
| Total | £748,577.00 |

| | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022 |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Service | Expenditure | Expenditure |
| Recreation Grounds & Car Parks | 107,184.00 | 52,267.00 |
| Ash Centre | 44,150.00 | 39,670.00 |
| Ash Cemetery | 16,380.00 | 38,030.00 |
| Lighting | 68,000.00 | 69,000.00 |
| Public Conveniences | 2,300.00 | 10,000.00 |
| Statutory Allotments | 600.00 | 6,600.00 |
| Central Services | 430,999.00 | 427,208.00 |
| Total | 669,613.00 | 642,775.00 |

The municipal year 2022/23 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 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 and 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 2023

Clerk to the Council

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