

ASH PARISH COUNCIL
CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT
2023 to 2024

I am very pleased to be able to be able to present this Chairman's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting.

As you know, we had an election in May 2023 and the make-up of the Parish Council changed as a consequence. There were not enough candidates for election to fill all the vacancies so a co-option process took place. We now have a Council where the majority of Councillors stood as Independents based on the belief that decisions at this level of local government are not party political. It does mean that our discussions at Council meetings are quite lively with a wide range of opinions.

As usual, we have a community that works well to support one another. We have some events that are run by the Parish Council including Ash Village Fete and the Christmas Fantasia. They are both very well attended. I had to miss the Village Fete because of a pre-booked holiday but it was the usual success story. I would like to say a big thank you to the people who organise it every year for all the hard work they put it.

Unfortunately, I had an accident in September and was not able to take part in Parish meetings for some months. My thanks go to the Council's Vice-Chairman, Cllr Carla Morson, for stepping in and doing such a great job of chairing the Council during my absence. I had to miss the Remembrance Day parade which was very sad as it is another opportunity for our community to come together to remember those who gave their lives for our freedom. Again, I thank Carla for deputising for me.

My first outing following my accident was the Christmas Fantasia. I had to follow most of it from a wheelchair which was a very unusual experience. Again, it was a huge success. I didn't get a chance to talk to all the stallholders, but the place was full and there were some amazing things on display. We have a talented community and an event like that shows just how great they are.

As usual, one of the highlights of the day was switching on the Christmas Tree Lights. The Ash Vale Ensemble kept us entertained and accompanied the carols. They must spend hours practising to keep up their high standard. Then there was the "snow". I am not sure who had most fun, the children who got covered or the Councillor who was operating the snow machine. He knows who he is!

Throughout the year, the Parish Council has continued to meet monthly as have our Planning and Amenities, Finance and Administration Committees. They go through items in great detail to report back to the full Council. The Planning Committee also performs the function of a statutory consultee on applications with the parish sending comments and recommendations to Guildford Borough Council as the Local Planning Authority. There continue to be a number of major planning applications in our parish for sites that have been allocated for development under the Guildford Local Plan 2019 as well as the Ash Road Bridge provided for in the same plan. I am aware that there has been a lot of disruption as a result of the building works. Guildford Borough Council has agreed to update the local plan to ensure that it is up to date but the 2019 Plan will remain the major policy document against which all applications are decided.

Our Parish Council have agreed to start a process for our own Neighbourhood Plan for the village which will mean we have our own, local policies, to make our case when commenting on planning applications. It will not override the Guildford Local Plan but policies must carry additional weight when decisions on applications are made.

We had some robust debates on setting the Parish Council budget for the financial year 2024/25 which was very healthy. In the end, we came to a decision to raise the precept by 1.84%. We kept it as low as possible because we are very aware that household budgets have been squeezed over the last few years while still making sure that we have sufficient funds to run the Council and provide good services to our residents. The parish precept received for the year 2023/24 was £547,587.00 which was an increase over the amount of £517,856.00 in 2022/23.

I attach details of Ash Parish Council Income and Expenditure calculated to 29th February 2024.

Finally, I want to say a big Thank You to our Parish Clerk, Dennis Wheeler, who will be leaving us at the end of this month. Dennis has served this community for a number of years and the Parish Council are grateful to him for all his work. In the same breath, I want to congratulate Ali Watmore on her appointment to the role of Parish Clerk at Dennis's retirement. She has been his very capable deputy so we are lucky that we will be in very safe hands.

Councillor Fiona White
Chairman of Ash Parish Council

March 2024

Ash Parish Council Income and Expenditure

		2022-2023	2023-2024 *
Cemetery	Income	£ 73,422	£ 60,058
	Expenditure	£ 21,782	£ 37,208
Lighting	Expenditure	£ 54,943	£ 35,804
Central Services	Income	£ 17,121	£ 3,474
	Expenditure	£ 93,211	£ 52,271
Allotments	Income	£ 3,685	£ 3,912
	Expenditure	£ 11,402	£ 2,227
Shawfield Recreation Ground	Income	0	0
Ash Common Recreation Ground	Income	£ 2,389	0
	Expenditure	0	£ 79
Charity - Carrington	Income	£ 10,267	0
	Expenditure	£ 10,267	£ 3,261
Charity - Harpers	Income	£ 10,962	£ 2,383
	Expenditure	£ 10,962	£ 9,733
Parks/Open Spaces	Income	£ 8,785	£ 7,333
	Expenditure	£ 46,569	£ 37,997
Public Toilets	Expenditure	£ 4,786	£ 3,114
Finance	Income	£ 596,534	£ 673,114
	Expenditure	£ 4,495	£ 432
Ash Centre	Income	£ 42,763	£ 38,552
	Expenditure	£ 69,554	£ 55,098
Administration	Income	£ 600	£ 2,219
	Expenditure	£ 305,249	£ 275,425
Local Democracy	Income	£ 900	£ 900
	Expenditure	£ 1,146	£ 2,640
Community Events	Income	0	£ 3,983
	Expenditure	0	£ 7,519
	Totals	£ 1,401,794	£ 1,318,736
* Income and Expenditure to 29 February 2024			