

# The Annual Village Report 2023-24

## For Birling Gap, Crowlink, East Dean and Friston



## ***Welcome to your Annual Village Meeting***

### ***14 April 2024***

*The cover picture below shows the new and updated village sign commissioned by the Parish Council to replace the old village sign on the Birling Gap Road. The rustic sign was conceived in 2021 by the Parish Council to commemorate the platinum jubilee celebrations on 2nd June 2022 and as a lasting legacy of Queen Elizabeth's 70-year reign.*



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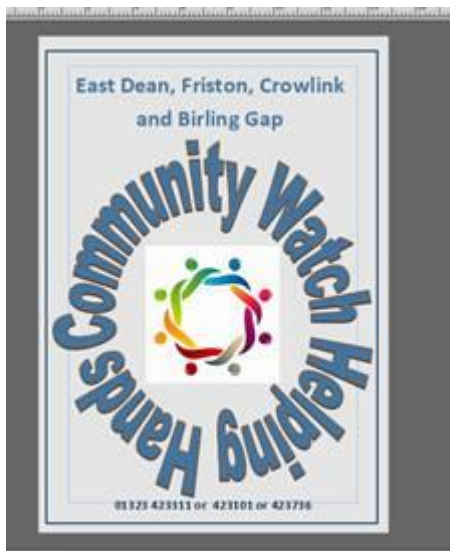
## Coffee for Carers

We continue to meet on the third Monday of the month in East Dean church (10.00-12.00) and is for anyone who cares for a loved one whether at home or if their loved one has had to go into a home. We also have some who have been through this difficult time and have useful information to share if needed. We are mainly though a self-help group where we can share our problems and anguish with one another and share laughter together, knowing we will never be judged for how we feel.

If you are a carer do come along with or without the one you care for.

*Steph Carter*

## Community Watch Helping Hands - in the community since 2012



Anyone who, for whatever reason, finds they could do with help for something they cannot easily manage themselves, is warmly invited to telephone the number for Community Watch to ask for assistance. Examples of requests we receive are for shopping, small DIY items, company for a walk, a computer query, exchanging library books, a lift to an appointment or village event. As soon as a call is received by our sympathetic call-taker, the request is discussed, and an available Community Watch volunteer is located who is then put in touch with the person asking for help. Don't hesitate to ask because we can turn our hands to most reasonable requests and, above all, the service is **free and confidential**.

*(Please note that we are unable to offer legal or medical advice)*

Our small team is ready to welcome anyone interested in joining us, whether as a member of the steering group, or as a volunteer to help with requests. We also ask for ideas to expand on what we offer, or even to tell us that the service is possibly redundant in this modern internet age! Maybe we should consider a different format. Whatever you think, please get in touch.

Community Watch co-ordinator telephone numbers are 423311 and 423736

Finally, we look forward to continuing to be an active part of the community and we are grateful to the Parish Council, and all residents who encourage and support us.

***Steering Group Members:** Christine Jeffery, Joanna Shawcross, Bob Ebrey, Lynn Sculpher, Stuart Walker, Joan Colin.*

## **Climate Friends**

### ***Nature Recovery in the East Dean & Friston Parish since May 2022:***

Climate Friends became an unincorporated association this year appointing a committee from its now over 70 members, including a chairperson, treasurer, secretary and communications officer. It also opened a bank account.

Following its initial grant allocation of £3,000 towards Climate Friends' Nature Recovery & Climate Action in the East Dean & Friston Parish Project made last summer, the South Downs National Park Authority decided to increase the grant to over £5,000, thereby, funding the project in full. The commissioned contractor, the Wild Business consultancy, began work on the Nature Recovery & Climate Action in the East Dean & Friston Parish Project on 1 December 2023. At this point in time, Phase 1 (to conduct a situation analysis of nature in the parish) is almost complete with Phase 2 (to identify and describe nature recovery and climate action opportunities) already underway.

A partnership of key stakeholders has emerged and continues to evolve to include the National Park, The National Trust, Forestry England, Natural England, landowners with tenant farmers, farmers on their own land, local authorities and the community. Interest in the project has also been expressed from the neighbouring parishes of Cuckmere Valley and Willingdon & Jevington. The project is linked into regional initiatives, such as the Seaford to Eastbourne Nature Recovery Project that includes the Chalk Coast National Nature Reserve as well as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Sussex. In future, it may even be possible to

connect the parish with the Weald to Waves project that is making progress to connect the sea kelp forest on the shoreline off the Adur estuary with the Knepp Rewilding Estate.

The Nature Recovery & Climate Action in the East Dean & Friston Parish Project is expected to be completed by the end of May with outcomes and recommendations to be presented to local communities and stakeholders at an open event as well as through other communication channels. Recommended opportunities for nature recovery and climate actions will focus on land outside of the settlement boundaries within the parish as well as land abutting the parish boundary. This will, therefore, complement the work being undertaken on biodiversity on land within settlement boundaries by the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group. The event will also focus on actions local residents can take to reduce their household's as well as the parish's carbon footprint.

Climate School, a programme of outdoor educational events, included two Climate Action Tours of the Seven Sisters Country Park led by a National Park Ranger during the summer months. Further events will be held this year.

Contact [ourbitedf@gmail.com](mailto:ourbitedf@gmail.com)

*Climate Friends - Residents for a Climate-Friendly Parish, covering Birling Gap, Crowlink, East Dean, Friston & Gayles*

**March 2024**



## **Bus Service 41**

Cuckmere Buses runs a fleet of 16-seater minibuses throughout the Cuckmere Valley area and beyond. It is run entirely by volunteers, there are no employees. There are over 30 fully trained drivers and 8 additional volunteers who all help run the fleet and keep the wheels turning.

The *East Dean and Friston shopping Service 41* runs twice weekly - on a **Tuesday and Thursday** per the timetable below. The Parish Council kindly sponsors the service. The bus will stop anywhere around the villages it is safe to do so – just raise your arm when you see the bus approaching or ring the bell if you are a passenger and wish to alight. It's like a taxi

service but without the related cost; it's the easier, more friendly way into Eastbourne and home again that's practically door-to-door. Use your concessionary pass or pay the driver - cash or contactless. (The maximum single journey fare on all our services is capped at £2 until the end of 2024).

<b>Timetable – Service 41 - Tuesday &amp; Thursday</b>			
<b>Eastbourne, Gildredge Road, stop G2</b>	1010	1155	1450
Eastbourne, Old Town, opposite Waitrose	--	1158	1453
Wannock, Village Hall	1026	--	--
Jevington, Eight Bells	1031	--	--
Jevington, Hungry Monk	1033	--	--
<b>East Dean, Village Hall Green Lane Car Park</b>	--	1205	1500
<b>Friston, Windmill Lane</b>	1038	1209	1504
Warren Lane, junction The Brow	1039	1210	1505
Hillside, junction Dene Side	1042	1213	1508
Dene Side, junction Peakdean Lane	1044	1215	1510
Peakden Lane (top)	1046	1217	1512
Dene Side (east)	1049	1220	1515
The Link (top of Micheldene Road)	1052	1223	1518
<b>East Dean, Village Hall Green Lane Car Park</b>	1056	--	--
Jevington, Hungry Monk	--	--	1523
Jevington, Eight Bells	--	--	1525
Wannock Village Hall	--	--	1530
Eastbourne, Old Town, Waitrose	1103	1231	--
<b>Eastbourne, Cornfield Road, stop C1</b>	1107	1235	1546

Based on the above you could arrive at Waitrose at 11.03 for a quick visit and pick up the return bus at 11.58. Or get into Eastbourne at 11.07, pop to the bank and catch the 11.55 back, or for a longer visit, arrive in Eastbourne at either 11.07 or 12.35 for a shop and lunch and return at 14.50. We look forward to welcoming you aboard soon. And we provide Private Hire facilities, too – check out our website.

**Stewart Fuller**  
[cuckmerebuses.org.uk](http://cuckmerebuses.org.uk)

## Table Tennis Club

The table tennis club are a friendly group of people who enjoy playing regardless of their ability. We range from beginners to more experienced players of any age.

Over the last year we have grown in number and now have added a fourth table tennis table. We meet on the second and fourth Thursday of the month at 7.30-9.00pm in the large village hall from September to May.

**Please come and join us. For more information call Stephanie Carter on 01323 422124**

## *East Dean and Friston Gardening Club 2024*

The Gardening Club is a friendly organisation which provides talks and social events throughout the year.

Talks on garden related subjects are normally held in the village hall on the second Tuesday of each month, except August.

Two or three coach trips to gardens and places of interest are organised each year.

A Strawberry Fayre is held in June with teas and various stalls or we organise an open garden trail within the village.

A newsletter with articles of gardening interest is sent to all members in the Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter.

Garden supplies of compost and soil are available for delivery in the Spring and Autumn at reduced cost.

For 2023 we published a cook book containing members favourite recipes from the garden. The Annual subscription is currently £8.50

The membership card lists details of speakers and the main events planned for the year.



A loyalty card for use at Tates Nursery, Newhaven (Paradise Park) and other sites will be issued by the club to all members.

For membership, please contact [Julie Wilkinson at edfgc.memberships@gmail.com](mailto:Julie.Wilkinson@edfgc.memberships@gmail.com)



## East Dean and Friston Art Group

East Dean and Friston Art Group has been meeting in the Village Hall for over forty years. The members meet every Tuesday morning from early September through to the end of May. During the summer months (June -August) we continue to meet weekly at outdoor venues around the village and local areas, sketching and painting en plein air, and we always finish these sessions with refreshments at a nearby café.

We are a sociable group of mixed ability painters who paint in various mediums: acrylics, oils, pastels and watercolours across a wide range of subjects. We enjoy regular workshops and demonstrations by visiting tutors, and always take a break to enjoy tea, coffee and cakes mid-morning.

We hold an annual Art Show in the Village Hall during early May Bank Holiday when we showcase and sell our works and raise funds for our nominated local charities with a raffle and tombola. As a Group we are looking forward to attending a number of external exhibitions around East Sussex and further afield.

If you would like to join us, just call in to the Village Hall on a Tuesday morning or contact our chair at the following email address: [Sue\\_currie@btinternet.com](mailto:Sue_currie@btinternet.com)

## **East Dean & Friston Local History Group**

The Local History Group has had a very good year and the membership has been maintained at over 100. The group meets in the Village Hall on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 2.30p.m, with the exception of August and December.

A unique feature of our Club is the production of booklets relating to Local History which are regularly commented upon favourably by our speakers and visitors. These are written by members on subjects of their own choosing for which they have a real interest. We now have nearly 70 booklets and we are indebted to Lloyd Brunt, our Publications Secretary, for their production.

At last year's AGM, it was suggested by the members that we increase the subscription to £10 per year which was duly implemented by our Treasurer. Not only does this cover our Speaker costs, Hall hire and incidentals, it also provides tea and biscuits at every meeting for which we must thank our wonderful tea volunteers!!! Visitors are welcome at a cost of £4 per meeting.

We have reluctantly said goodbye to two of our hardworking committee but we are indebted to John Wilton for stepping up as our Programme Secretary. He has provided us with an excellent programme and we look forward with enthusiasm to future lectures.

We have a very small committee to whom I must offer my grateful thanks for all their hardwork and enthusiasm. We would welcome some help by way of two committee members to spread the load. As I write this in February, we particularly need a Secretary and a Membership Secretary. Jonathan Timberlake has been great and I believe that the database is fully set up and just needs regular updating. I am sure that he would be happy to talk to anyone with the skills to do this important job.

Since the Covid lock down we have recorded lectures, these are available to members for later watching as we realise that not every Local Historian is retired and able to come to meetings! Mike Keller is responsible for this membership benefit.

We are a very friendly group and we would welcome new members, just come along to any of our meetings and introduce yourself to our Treasurer, Linda Keller who is on the door.

**David Lester - Chairman**



## Micheldene W.I

We are a friendly and welcoming group that meet on the **first Monday of each month in East Dean and Friston Village Hall at 19.00 for 19.30.**

Our monthly meetings are varied. Sometimes we invite an interesting speaker or hold activity evenings. Our quiz, music and themed evenings and the all-important Christmas Party are very popular. We also offer an additional range of activities that vary according to the interests of the members and are a great way to get to know members in smaller groups.

These include the Walking Group, Book Clubs, Gardeners' Group, Bridge Club, Craft Groups, Family History Group, and the Supper Club.

In addition, we take trips to theatres and exhibitions, gardens, craft fairs and local places of interest. We have a full programme of events planned for the coming year and are always looking to try new things, welcoming suggestions from members.

We are a registered charity and raise a significant amount of money each year for local charities, as well as helping in practical ways to support the local Women's Refuge and Matthew 25 Mission.

Come and meet a group of diverse and interesting women who would love to welcome you at one of our meetings.



We hope you know all about our Residents' Association and that you are one of our members. If not, this short article will give you a flavour of what we get up to and hopefully inspire you to pay the very low membership fee and join us.

It's been another busy year for our committee and they have worked extremely hard, giving up their time willingly, to enhance the experience of living in our beautiful parish.

The 2023 Summer Fete was a resounding success, despite the weather trying it's best to scupper it! Both residents and friends enjoyed a lovely afternoon at what is one of the very few traditional village fetes in East Sussex. This year's event is scheduled for the 20th July. The Haggis Hurling is not to be missed!

We have made grants to local not for profit clubs, have made donations to the Parish Magazine and raised over £1000 for charity. The money raised at our recent very successful Entertainment Evening will be going towards purchasing two new benches for the village. Members pay reduced ticket prices for all RA organised events.

If you have enjoyed looking at the magnificent wild flower displays, the daffodils brightening up the estate and noticed the lack of litter around our area then you will be seeing the visible results of just some of the efforts to enhance and protect our environment. Our thanks go to our dedicated team of members who lead litter picking events and generally get involved.

We send out regular emails to our members about village matters and always try to respond to issues that are of concern. For example, we organised a visit from our Police Community Support Officer recently. He spoke about how to stay safe from scammers, an issue that many of you have been in contact about. Helpful resources have been sent out to members, and we hope to run some additional drop-in sessions for those who wish some extra advice and guidance.

We have organised a range of visiting speakers, attended relevant meetings with other village organisations, and most importantly been here to represent your views in the Neighbourhood Planning process.

Always keen to make sure that we communicate with residents in a variety of ways we have recently commissioned our own bespoke website – take a look at [www.edfra.org.uk](http://www.edfra.org.uk)

These are just a few of the things the Residents' Association has been doing and we hope you can see what good value being a member is, and how with your fees we can continue to support our community.

Warmest regards

*Lesley Durso (Chair)*



## East Dean Downlands (Roads) Ltd

The Roads company is a private limited company, set up on 2 March 1984, with the prime objective of looking after the five miles of roads and over 200 gulleys and related soakaways on the Downlands Estate. These responsibilities were taken over from previous owners who did little to maintain the roads. It was clearly felt essential at the time to take the matter into the hands of the residents, and this was followed by the transfer of appropriate covenants and enforcement rights to EDDR.

The Estate roads are classified as ‘private streets’ meaning they are public highways with public rights of way. However, as the roads are not adopted by the Highways Authority (ESCC), they need to be privately maintained. That’s where we come in. Although we don’t own the roads, we arrange the maintenance, including pothole repairs, resurfacing, and gully clearances.

The roads were originally built of concrete, now layered with tarmac. They were not designed for the high volume of vehicles nor the large number of heavy trucks we see today. This high usage inevitably leads to a higher degree of wear and tear, and potentially could adversely impact the underlying sub-structure.

We are funded by annual receipts from residents on the Estate. For 2023 the fee was £95 and for 2024 it is £110 per household. The annual fees are set to meet the ongoing road maintenance but are unlikely to be sufficient to meet any substantial remedial works which may be needed in the future. We are grateful to the vast majority of residents who pay the annual fee in full; it is regrettable that not all are so community spirited.

We’ve had a busy three-month start to 2024 with resurfacing, road repairs and gulley and drain inspections on the Estate. Several drains have been jet-washed and cleared but some need excavation works to clear blockages; contractors have been arranged. We’ve also been in discussion with Openreach about the installation of fibre cables on the Estate, most being pulled through existing ducting, but some needing new runs requiring road excavations.

Estate residents are encouraged to become shareholders in EDDR, over 40% are already. Shareholders who have fully paid current and past annual fees are entitled to vote at the AGMs. To become a member (there's no charge), please email us.

The company has two directors - Robert Corbett (Chair) and Stewart Fuller (Secretary), and we are supported by an Administrator - Rowland Hoar. We need more support, please. Rowland is standing down at the end of 2024 and we are looking for someone to replace him, and someone to provide support with IT and another for engineering matters. If you'd like to join our team, or help out in any way, please email us and we'll arrange a chat.

Finally, emails are a quick and easy way to communicate with you. We hold email addresses for over 70% of households on the Estate on our secure database. This allows us to send global emails or target specific roads. If we don't hold your email address and you would like us to communicate with you in this way, please let us know.

**Robert Corbett, Chair**  
[eastdeanroads@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:eastdeanroads@hotmail.co.uk)

## **East Dean and Village Hall Trust**

Our Village Hall provides a wonderful space whatever event you are planning. With two Halls of very different sizes, a modern kitchen and excellent parking facilities, we can accommodate most types of event.

We are especially proud of our Community Events. We have a small events team, and while it is headed up by Trustees, they are supported by a large team of enthusiastic volunteers from the village.

Thanks to them, monthly coffee mornings, afternoon teas and village lunches are organised offering home-made treats, warmth and company, and all are amazing value for money!

The events team and volunteers also organise regular Film events, Quizzes and Bingo Evenings in addition to special events. Most include meals and are often completely sold out, a testimony to their popularity!

Details of events are always available on our website or on the Village Quarterly Diary in addition to fliers on the Village notice boards.

Additional volunteers are always appreciated and if you are interested in getting involved either regularly or occasionally, please contact one of the Trustees.

Local clubs and societies meet regularly in the Hall and in addition, our Hall Manager, Tina, and her assistant John, are happy to discuss private events such as weddings, birthday celebrations and wakes to ensure that your special day is a great success. For further details please contact Tina, her email address is [tina@edfvillagehall.org](mailto:tina@edfvillagehall.org).

*Bill Hallett – Chair of the Trustees*

*East Dean and Village Hall Trust*

*March 2024*

## East Dean and Friston Village Show

**East Dean and Friston Village Show** dates back to 1906, although there is no record of the show being held between 1914 and 1947. It was also interrupted for the two World Wars and again in 2020, 2021 because of Covid 19.

This is very much a village show, held on August Bank Holiday Monday. It is solely reliant on the residents to enter each year and on sponsorship in order to pay for the judges, administration and general running of the Show.

There are no members, therefore no subscriptions, just a small hard-working committee. Despite the peculiar weather conditions for the past two years the show has been extremely successful and the committee sincerely trust that with residents' participation will long continue.

## East Dean Greensward Limited

East Dean Greensward Limited (EDGL) is a Company Limited by Guarantee with a single asset – The Greensward on the Downlands Estate – but no shareholders, only members. The purpose of EDGL is to ensure the continuing amenity value of the Greensward for the enjoyment of all residents and to protect it against future development. Any householder in the parish can become a member of EDGL at no cost.

In 2023 EDGL introduced a native wildflower meadow covering about 100 m<sup>2</sup> towards the southern end of the Greensward. The aim was to bring summer colour to the Greensward

whilst adding more pollinator-friendly flowers to increase diversity. An interpretive board was added to inform residents about the initiative. Once in bloom, the brilliant display of poppies, cornflowers, corncockle, and other annual flowers lasted for many weeks and drew much admiration from residents and other users of the Greensward. After seed had been set the area was tidied-up for the winter by our mowing contractor. For 2024 we have extended the meadow to create a more natural shape and sown some perennial wildflower species.

An area at the upper end of the Greensward with a high level of botanical diversity was selected for a trial no-mow area in the summer of 2023. This gave wildflower species already present a chance to flower and reseed. This resulted in a flourishing of Cowslips, pyramidal orchid, wild thyme and more recently, hairy violets! This area will again be left unmown for the summer before an autumn tidy-up. There will be no fence or any restrictions on access.

As part of the South Downs National Park Authority 'Trees for the Downs' project, four native species of trees, two hazel and two whitebeam have been planted at the southern end of the Greensward to create a more wooded area, increasing the diversity of the trees already there. EDGL will continue to accept donated trees to replace trees lost through disease or damage.

If you would like to participate in the Greensward management, we are always seeking new Directors to the EDGL Board. If you prefer just to provide feedback, your views on wildflowers, tree planting, benches, etc. will be very welcome. For all enquiries, please contact our Secretary at [greenswardeastdean@gmail.com](mailto:greenswardeastdean@gmail.com).



## REPORT by the PARISH COUNCIL CHAIR

This report covers the period from April 2023 to March 2024

As life has returned to the 'new normal' the Parish Council has been able to focus on day to day issues in the village and ensure, that where possible, continued improvements are made.

The Council has had a full compliment of Councillors for the year. However, at the time of writing, there are three vacancies as Councillors Chris Lees, Hollie Milligan and Graham Street have decided to step down. The Parish Council wishes to thank Chris, Hollie and Graham for their input and hard work whilst serving the village.



We have a vacancy for the position of Flag Master as Cliff Hirschfield passed away earlier in the year. Cliff more than played his part keeping us up to speed with which flag should be hoisted when, and our thanks go to him for undertaking this role.

If anyone is interested in applying for any of these roles, please speak with, or email the Parish Clerk in the first instance.

We are delighted to welcome Mr Sam Adeniji to the role of Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer. Sam has made a good start to the position and the Council looks forward to working with him in future.

Dr Katrina Larkin has decided to retire at the end of April. Katrina has been a true servant to the parish over a number of years having been Parish Clerk and then Deputy Parish Clerk. Dr Larkin has assisted and made sure of the smooth running of all full council meetings, planning meetings, neighbourhood plan steering group meetings and other ad-hoc gatherings. The Parish Council are indebted to Katrina for her service, and we wish her a long, healthy and happy retirement.

Graham Street and David White joined the Parish Council as new Councillors in May.

We also welcomed David Greaves, a local resident, who has attended Parish Council meetings in his capacity as Wealden District Councillor. David was elected to this position in May 2023.

The full council comprises:

Paul Seeley – Chairman

Tim Bryant – Vice Chairman

Michael Bustard – Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group Chairman and Environmental Lead

Grant Fowler – Planning Committee Chairman and Pavilion and Recreation Ground Lead

Phillip Hill – Rights of Way Lead, Tree Warden and Defibrillator Lead

David White

3 Vacancies

All Councillor's attend the main Council and Planning meetings. Cllr. Grant Fowler and Cllr. David White also serve on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee.

The Council are indebted to the continued support and assistance from Mr David George, our Hon Solicitor, and regular helpers Ron Franklin (Bus shelters) and Jan Smith (Pavillion).

Highlights over the last 12 months include:

- Finances are healthy and the precept for 2024 / 25 was set at £73,500, up from £68,000 last year. However, this equates to £1.42 a week for a Band D property which is excellent value.
- We continue to cut grass at The Greensward, Village Green, around Friston Pond and various open spaces and maintain the many public bins around the village.
- Electric Vehicle charging points are being installed in the village car park.
- Friston Pond has been cleared and now looks in a very healthy position.
- Various trees have been lopped in the village public areas.
- New Bollards have been installed at the junction of the A259 and Gilberts Drive.
- The bus shelters have had replacement glazing installed where required.
- A new village sign at the southern extremity of the village was installed welcoming people to the village.
- The Parish Council notice boards have been replaced.
- Grants have been made to various organisations in the village and also to the RNLI and Beachy Head Chaplaincy.
- The Jevington Road has been resurfaced and we continue to push ESCC Highways on all drainage and highway issues.
- Telephone problems with land lines in the village have been addressed.
- We continue to work with the Roads Company and the Residents Association on the private estate.
- Speed limit surveys are due on Upper Street, Lower Street, Michel Dene Road and Windmill Lane. If successful, then the next phase will be to seek funding for 20mph limits on these roads plus all roads within the private estate.
- The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has had a very productive year and further details will be given at the meeting.
- The Parish Council was awarded Foundation Level Award by the Local Government Award Scheme. This level demonstrates that the Council has the required documentation and information in place for operating lawfully and according to standard practice. There are three levels of Award, the next two being, Quality Award and Quality Gold Award.

Planning remains a priority for the Parish and there have been 29 applications this year which is lower than in previous years. 44 in 2022/23, 48 in 2021/22 and 56 in 2020/21. The Parish Council recommended approval in 18 cases (two with conditions) and these were accepted by the South Downs National Park. In a further 5 cases the Council did not object and four of these were approved. The fifth is still under consideration. We recommended refusal for two applications and one of these was withdrawn. The second was approved by South Downs. A further 4 cases have still to be determined. Over half of the applications are for extensions and the ability to maintain a stock of smaller properties is reducing as a result.

Plans for 2024 / 25 will include:

- Progression of the Neighbourhood Plan to a successful conclusion including a public presentation and ultimately a referendum on the plan voted on by all villagers. This will also deliver some new policies for the Council to take forward.
- Progress and apply for the Quality Award under the Local Council Award Scheme.
- Progress of the 20mph speed limit proposals.
- Review of the Cricket Pavilion, Tennis Court and other facilities at the Recreation Ground. Any development proposals will be brought to a public meeting in due course for consideration.
- D Day 80 celebrations at The Recreation Ground on the evening of Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2024 including lighting of the beacon.
- Continued maintenance and improvement to all Council owned assets.

The Parish Council will continue to play an active role in the village and do our best to ensure that the voice of villagers who raise valid concerns are addressed wherever possible.

*Paul Seeley*

*Chairman of the Council*

## Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Last year, the news at the Annual Village Meeting was that work on the Neighbourhood Plan had been paused, though only for a short while. The idea was that when a new parish council was elected (in May 2023) it could take up the recommendation from the Steering Group that a professional planning consultant be engaged to take the project forward, focusing on the updating of the current Village Design Statement. We knew that central government intended to downgrade the status of village design statements, and that putting the content into a Neighbourhood Plan could upgrade it again. At the same time, the opportunity came up for the parish to provide a Parish Priorities Statement to the South Downs National Park Authority (our local planning authority) and engage with their revision of the overarching Local Plan.

The new parish council has picked up the torch and the Steering Group reconvened in July 2023 with Alison Eardley as its planning consultant. A great deal of ground has been covered since.

One of the most vital aspects of a Neighbourhood Plan is that it takes into account the views of ALL in the community. In the past six months we have been consulting the community about the parish's priorities and gathering the data we need to put a Neighbourhood Plan together. Neighbourhood Plans are about much more than future housing provision, they also encompass protection and enhancement of our natural environment, green spaces, heritage assets, community facilities, business and local economy. We held a Consultation Evening on Monday 29th January 2024 at which displays were mounted showing the likely direction of the Plan and seeking your views on what is proposed across all these topics, with interactive map displays where you could, for example, mark views that ought to be protected, or places where a public right of way would really improve connectivity. **Thank you to everyone who responded.**

### **Key questions**

We have found that the following fundamental questions keep coming up, and here we provide some answers:

- **What is the weight of the Neighbourhood plan – how is it of benefit to the community?** The NP will be a legal document of planning policy, and that is why the process of creating one is long and detailed. Once it is in place, it will be up to the parish council to use and quote the policy in all its recommendations to the planning authority, to keep it front and centre of attention. This particular NP will also have some content which in former times would have been part of a 'parish plan' – setting out other local aspirations which are not for land use but are projects that could be led by the parish council, or by others.
- **How is this being communicated to ensure good representation and engagement?** Engagement for anything is not great, but the parish magazine is used, plus emails to local organisations and to individuals who have shown an interest, and there is information on the parish council website and the new RA website, as well as on the village website and social media. A full record of all comments received in previous rounds of engagement will be available on the night of the Annual Village Meeting in the small hall. The Steering Group has worked on a communications strategy, and there will be at least two more rounds of public consultation coming up. All suggestions for improving communication will be welcome. If each person present at the Annual Village Meeting could tell five more people that would be a big improvement.

- **What is the actual challenge/problem in the area?** Behind this question there often lies another unspoken question: is the NP being prepared because the planning authority wants to allocate more houses to the parish? The short answer is ‘no’. Neighbourhood planning began in 2011 with the Localism Act and was intended to be an opportunity, not a requirement. The SDNPA is supportive of parishes wanting to do their own plans but it is entirely voluntary. There is no requirement for the NP to allocate sites, and this parish’s Plan will be more about protecting the local area and setting the criteria against which policies from the overarching Park-wide Local Plan should be tested. **We aim to support householders in celebrating our built heritage and protecting and enhancing our natural environment, whilst promoting healthy living and connectivity for the benefit of all.** However, the Plan cannot veto future development: if a higher authority such as the SDNPA assesses a need in the future, and/or a local landowner brings forward proposals on a rural exception site, it could happen. But if that did happen one day, the Neighbourhood Plan would at least be able to guide the development and make it as appropriate as possible for this locality. It can ensure that if such development is undertaken it should reflect the priority to provide homes on smaller plots, suitable for downsizing for existing residents as well as for attracting and retaining younger people, and contributing to net zero environmental targets wherever possible. **Our statistics show that by far the most common type of planning application in the parish is for extensions.** The NP will ‘catch’ *any development that requires planning permission*, and guide its design and sustainability, while promoting biodiversity and zero carbon to the fullest extent that legislation allows.
- **How do you strike a balance between development and protection of the local area?** This question is related to the previous one. In the foreseeable future there is no new housing development proposed. The Plan will chiefly guide planning applications that relate to existing properties, promoting good design, sustainability, biodiversity, and progress towards zero carbon. It has to be said that the latter has very little statutory support from central government at present, but the trend is for Building Regulations to tighten the requirement that will contribute to zero carbon.
- **How do the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan differ and how do they connect?** The planning system operates in three tiers, with the National Planning Policy Framework setting out the highest level strategy, and the Local Plans which each local planning authority is legally obliged to prepare nesting under it (the SDNPA’s Local Plan is currently being reviewed). The parish’s Neighbourhood Plan will sit under the Local Plan and fill in detail to tailor its policies more specifically to the local area.

**In the coming months you will have the opportunity to comment on the first draft of our Neighbourhood Plan.** Please do look out for this and give us your views! In the meantime, if you have any questions or suggestions about the Neighbourhood Plan, you can email us at [admin@edfparishcouncil.org.uk](mailto:admin@edfparishcouncil.org.uk), call us on 01323 811870 or drop us a line using the Village Hall post box.

*Cllr Michael Bustard*

*Chair of the Steering Group*