

Lavant Parish Council annual electors meeting. 14/05/2024

I must start by offering my apologies. We failed to call an electors meeting in 2023 and this meeting has been called with very little notice, but we will endeavour to be better organised next year.

As most of you will be aware, the parish council has undergone a period of considerable upheaval following the departure of Hannah-Louise O'Callaghan who was our excellent parish clerk until May last year. We engaged a new clerk who was also employed by both Westhampnett PC and Hunston PC but some months into the appointment it became apparent that the new clerk was not able to fulfil the requirements of the role and we issued notice in early January of this year. Upon the departure of the clerk, we discovered a great many anomalies in correspondence and record keeping, and a disturbing number of unpaid invoices. Since that time, we have been fortunate to have been able to engage the services of Paul Richards as locum clerk and Paul has spent many hours restoring our financial affairs into order and bringing our correspondence up to date. Paul will leave us on 1st June and his place will be taken by Faye Joice. Paul will continue to provide support and training assistance for the next few months. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Paul for his invaluable help and his calm and professional approach to a very testing set of circumstances.

One of the results of the investigation into our financial position was that we realised that the precept had fallen significantly behind inflation and was no longer enough to cover our annual expenditure. We had hoped to phase the increase over several years but circumstances beyond our control made that impossible, in the event we have been granted an increase in our precept from £33,000 to £47,000.

Significant events this year:

We have finally concluded the transfer of the Public Open Space and the Car Park extension and these are now owned by the parish. The developers will continue to maintain the Public Open Space until 23rd October this year but after that date we assume responsibility for maintenance and we are busy making sure that we have the support to do that. I am aware that there are some concerns over the lack of night time visibility in the car park extension so we are looking into appropriate lighting that will not transgress the SDNPA dark skies policy.

The new sports pitch was handed over in 2022 and has now been in use for two seasons, maintenance is an expensive issue and I can report that both Adrian Blades and I have now obtained Level 1 Football Grounds Maintenance qualifications which has allowed us to apply for a maintenance grant and we have obtained a grant of £10,666 spread over the next six years. We will need to investigate other forms of maintenance funding for the future.

The new Lavant footpath, from the Churchmead playground to Marsh Lane remains a project but we are progressing towards the approval of a final design and engineering specifications for the bridge over the river. I hope this will be completed this year.

We continue to support the Lavant volunteers and are very grateful for their work in keeping the footpaths clear and maintaining the green and the sports field. Whilst the parish council sets aside a sum to fund the volunteers work, we are keen to encourage donations towards their costs. It is for your benefit that they are working, and any sums would help towards maintenance of equipment and the purchase of new machinery as needed.

Plans are in hand to create a new car park for Lavant Primary School and as those plans progress, we will keep the parish informed.

CHIL. The Parish Council is supporting a new initiative to try to mitigate the impact of vastly increased traffic flows through the village. This is being led by Alan Taylor and Nick Reynolds.

The new development at Eastmead is approaching completion and we continue to maintain regular communication with the developers in order to ensure that all local concerns are voiced, and appropriate action is taken. At our request, the developers have installed two new wooden bus shelters at the entrance to the site.

Planning. Thus far we have had no major planning applications and no significant issues, and the volume of applications seems to have reduced somewhat in recent months.

We are very aware that the Lavant Neighbourhood Development Plan was published in May 20016 and is now eight years old. and, though it is designed to serve until 2030, we know that the planning inspectorate views it as having less authority with each passing year. We are therefore embarking on the process of putting together a Parish Priority Statement which will update the LNDP without the time and expense of starting the whole process afresh and will reinforce the existing plan's validity with the planning inspectorate.

We are aware that the LPC website is in need of improvement, and we are in the process of redesigning the site to make it easier to view and with a particular emphasis on keeping the content up to date !

I will close by saying that the Parish Council members are all available on the telephone or via email, our contact details are on the website, and we welcome and comments or questions.