

Bolney Parish Council Chair's Report for 2024

I would like to share what the Parish Council has been doing since the Chair Report last May.

The Parish Council

2023 was a year of change for the Parish Council.

Our previous Chair, Tony Steer, stepped down after 14 years as a Parish Councillor, 12 of those years serving as Chair, as did Pete Berry and Del Walsh. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all for the time they gave to the community, and for their involvement in the Bolney Volunteers. Tony was one of the original instigators of the Volunteers which worked on projects around the Parish for many years ensuring the village was well maintained and tidy. We now have five new Parish Councillors and are back to our full compliment of 9 councillors and remain a politically independent council.

The Parish Council meets on the third Tuesday of every month. Our meetings are always open to the public and it was good to have several of our meetings very well attended this year. To keep up to date with issues that may impact on Bolney, members of the Parish Council regularly attend briefings held by Sussex Police concerning Road Safety, meetings on the proposed expansion of Gatwick Airport, planning hearings for the expansion of the Rampion offshore wind farm, meetings of the Mid Sussex and the West Sussex Associations of Local Councils and briefings with Mid Sussex District Council on the District Plan Review, of which more below.

A new Parish Council website launched this year www.bolneyparishcouncil.gov.uk. Please find time to look at the new website where you will find information about the Parish Council, a calendar of events, agendas and minutes for the Parish Council meetings and details of who to contact if you have an issue to report such as pot holes or fly tipping for example. You can also subscribe for news updates.

District Plan Review

The MSDC District Plan Review process began in January 2022 and has continued to dominate much of the Parish Council's time this year.

Despite the large number of objections submitted by the Parish Council and residents to the inclusion of the site at Foxhole Farm in the first draft of the District Plan published in 2022, the Parish Council was disappointed that the District Council did not listen to the Parish Council and the community, and retained the Foxhole Farm site in the final draft of the Plan. This final draft was put out for a second Public Consultation in January and February this year.

To assist residents complete their responses to the consultation, members of the Parish Council's Planning Committee ran weekly drop-in sessions in the Rawson Hall café throughout the six-week consultation period. The Parish Council retained the services of a specialist Planning Consultant who had previously worked on the Bolney Neighbourhood Plan, to help it prepare a robust response to the inclusion of the Foxhole Farm site for submission in this final consultation.

All responses submitted are now with MSDC and we wait to hear when the documentation has been submitted by Mid Sussex District Council to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination.

Other planning matters

The Parish Council Planning Committee is currently made up of five councillors and meets every month to consider all planning applications in the Parish. This year the committee has considered 47 applications and submitted comments on each of these applications to MSDC.

The Planning Committee has objected to four planning applications currently being considered by MSDC for large scale Lithium-ion battery storage facilities which may impact on residents in the south of the Parish. Concern has been expressed by the Parish Council about the potential risk of fire and explosions at these facilities, and the lack of existing fire fighting facilities and poor water supply in this rural area for firefighting. The Parish Council has also expressed concern for the health and safety of its residents from the highly toxic fumes emitted by Lithium-ion fires.

Working with our District Councillors, the Parish Council has involved the Enforcement Department at Mid Sussex District Council in several planning breaches at sites across the Parish including at the former Marylands site and at Nailards Wood. The Parish Council has recently submitted a comprehensive response in the appeal brought by the owner of Nailards Wood against the decision of MSDC to refuse planning for HGV parking at the site which is currently being considered the Planning Inspectorate.

The Parish Council is a registered Interested Party in the Rampion 2 planning application to expand the offshore wind farm currently being examined by the Planning Inspectorate. The Parish Council has submitted several written representations in the Examination process concerning the use of roads in the Parish by construction traffic and the proposed core construction hours. A member of the Parish Council has made oral representations on behalf of residents on these issues at the hearings this year before the Planning Inspectorate.

Earlier this year the Parish Council received a presentation by the owners of land at Glebelands in the north of the village for a proposed housing development. Although the Parish Council welcomed the inclusion of Affordable Housing in the proposal, it expressed its concerns about the location of the site, access to the site and the lack of infrastructure proposed for the current and future residents of the village.

Parish assets and maintenance

The Parish Council is responsible for the cost of the electricity and maintenance of 15 street lights in the village area, 3 of the dog bins and ensuring that the 13 salt bins across the Parish are full at the start of each winter season. We are responsible for the maintenance and repair of the Parish notice boards; village bus shelters; War Memorial; 12 finger posts across the Parish; Speed Indicator Device (SiD); picnic tables and benches on Batchelors Field, and of the Bolney village gates and signs.

The Parish Council receives its income through collection of a precept from parishioners. The precept is set after a budget is prepared each year to cover the costs of the running and maintenance of these assets, insurance, forward planning, and other expenditure for the following financial year. Once finalised and agreed by the Parish Council, it is submitted for payment by Mid Sussex District Council and then collected by them through monthly Council Tax payments.

Volunteers

Following the recent decision of the Bolney Volunteers to disband, the Parish Council has taken over the coordination of the group's activities. The group has recently undertaken the clearing of the footpath along London Road, and the clearing and tidying of the verge opposite the petrol garage on the A272.

If you would like to join the group or have a suggestion for a future project for the Volunteers, please contact Cllr Mark Darby at m.darby@bolneyparishcouncil.gov.uk.

Roads and footpaths

Last year the Parish Council submitted an application for a Traffic Regulation Order to reduce the speed limit in the village centre to 20mph for the safety of pedestrians. This has been approved by WSCC and signs have now been put up around the village centre advising the new speed limit. Another application is currently being considered by WSCC to reduce the speed limit in Stairbridge Lane to 40mph, for the safety of residents living on the Lane.

Councillors regularly walk the Public Rights of Way across the Parish and report any issues to WSCC. WSCC has advised that the PRow 18Bo from Ryecroft Road to the village school is soon to be resurfaced and the footbridge on PRow 23Bo from Bolney Chapel Road to the Bolney Mill ponds is to be replaced in the 2024/2025 financial year.

With the support of our County Councillor, progress has been made on the flooding issues on the A272 near the petrol garage and the gulleys under the road have recently been cleared to help with drainage. Work has also been carried out by WSCC on Ryecroft Road to aid drainage.

Grants

The Parish Council supports local groups and village societies through grants.

We support the maintenance of the churchyard through an annual grant to the Parish Church and another to the Rawson Hall for the cleaning of the public toilets. This year we made a grant to the Parish magazine for production costs to ensure it continues to be delivered free to every house in the Parish. At the end of the financial year, we also made grants to charitable organisations which have supported residents in Bolney such as 4Sight Vision and the St Peter and St James and St Catherine's Hospices.

Bolney Ultrafast Broadband

The Parish Council continues to work with Openreach and residents to complete the Ultrafast broadband project and many residents now benefit from high-speed full fibre broadband. The last few properties at Hickstead are still waiting, but it is hoped that the whole project will be completed within the next few months.

And finally

I would like to thank my fellow Parish Councillors who volunteer their time and expertise for the benefit of our community. And a special thank you to Debbie Thomas, the Parish Clerk, who has now worked for the Parish Council for 16 years. Debbie is the first point of contact with the community, the County and the District Councils. She prepares the monthly agendas and minutes, the monthly and annual financial reports and ensures we comply with our regulatory obligations. The Parish Council is extremely grateful for everything that Debbie does and the Parish is fortunate to have such an experienced and proactive Clerk.

Cllr Nicola Hanley
Chair Bolney Parish Council
May 2024