

## Annual Report 26<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Incredibly, it is now over three years since our last Parish Assembly. With the onset of COVID and the requirement for lockdown, face to face meetings were cancelled and zoom calls became the order of the day. I think everyone will agree, it was a very difficult time for many in our community, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their support and help during the pandemic.

Our Annual meeting and AGM in May 2021 took place over zoom: John Hodson was re-elected as Chair and Joanna Wade as Vice Chair for another year.

With all Covid restrictions removed in July 2021, we were able to hold regular meetings again. After five and a half years in the role, Charlotte, our Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer decided to return to work as a dietician in the NHS and we welcomed Christina, who had previously worked in the civil service in the Information Centre and Library at Fort Halstead, Sevenoaks. The council agreed at this meeting to not proceed with the proposed affordable housing development in Four Elms. Although there was much interest from potential tenants, the majority of the community was against the scheme

We were able to set up the Bulk Refuse Freighter again in August which was warmly welcomed with additional dates in November and February, though Storm Eunice managed to delay that collection to March. The next collection is July 23rd

A Family fun day took place in August at Four Elms field behind the school, organised and funded by SDC with help from Town and Parish Councils.

Hever Parish Council were given an exclusive opportunity to purchase the pond at Four Elms and over the summer Nick Roberts worked tirelessly, raising awareness and more importantly sufficient funds to allow the purchase to go ahead. The council now owns the freehold and thanks to the generosity of donors, ownership of this beautiful asset has now been captured permanently for the parish. The Council also provided new fencing around the pond which enabled the previous unsightly metal barriers to be removed.

A working party helped clear up accumulated debris from the inlet/outlet drains and generally spruced-up the pond and surrounding banks. Thanks to all who gave their time and particular appreciation to Scott from Willerby Landscapes, for providing the use of a boat and a truck to transport compostable waste and for the use of the disposal sites at Willerby's.

In January, John Hodson decided to step down as chair of Hever Parish Council. John had first become involved as a Councillor in 2004 and was involved in many projects across the parish such as improving road safety, a new bus shelter, new storage for Fete equipment, playground equipment and outdoor gym as well as the Queen's 90th birthday party at the Castle. All the councillors thank him for his contribution and tireless commitment to the residents of Hever Parish and we wish him well.

Christina also decided to leave in January, but we have been very fortunate to now have Rachael on board and she has settled very quickly into the role, providing invaluable support to all of the councillors.

I am happy to announce that Edward de Ryckman has joined Hever Parish Council, filling the vacancy left by John. Edward lives in Four Elms with his family having moved from London in 2010. Edward has an engineering background and currently works in IT. We look forward to working with Edward in the future.

Throughout the year, Hever Parish Council act as a consultee on all planning applications within the parish with the Planning Committee volunteering their time to investigate, consider and formulating a view for Sevenoaks District Council. Applications can be anything from a new garden shed to a complete new house and although HPC may have a view, the final decision is made by the Planning Authority at Sevenoaks.

The highway improvement plan was revised and submitted to highlight speed issues in Markbeech and Four Elms. HPC has also requested restoration work to the verges in New House Farm Lane and in future, if diversions are required, to improve planning and provide clearer diversion signage.

New 'smart' rubbish bins have been installed in all three villages. They include sensors that alert the Council when they need clearing and they hold more waste and so save money and cut out wasted journeys which will be friendlier to the environment. Litter picks have also taken place across the Parish in April and once again thank you to all those who took part.

New benches and tables have been obtained for the field in Four Elms behind the school.

The state of some of the public footpaths has also been noted and HPC are looking at ways to help contribute to their repair

Several grants were made to local groups such as Eden Valley Museum and the Film Club and this year has already seen grants awarded towards the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations, Kent, Surrey & Sussex Air ambulance. Applications are welcome from other groups as some funding is still available.

The end of year internal audit has taken place to confirm Hever Parish Council is compliant with both financial and regulatory frameworks and has demonstrated good practice

Don't forget to look at [Hever.org](http://Hever.org) website for the latest information, meeting agendas and minutes as well as links to topics of interest such as Gatwick Expansion, Bus surveys and solar panel grants. Do let us know if there are any areas you would like to bring to our attention or any suggestions you may have to improve the content of the website.

Finally, I would just like to express my thanks to the Parish councillors, all are volunteers who give their time and commitment freely to help improve our local community.

I hope you enjoy the presentations that follow from our exciting range of speakers and thank them all for joining us today. Please do stay on at the end to enjoy the refreshments provided and have a chance to chat with our Parish Councillors and guest speakers.

And, see you at the Platinum Jubilee celebrations at Hever Castle on 2<sup>nd</sup> June