

Hampshire County Council needs to fill a £132 million budget gap and aims to cut back on virtually all non-statutory services. Similarly East Hampshire District Council plans to reduce the services it currently delivers. Meanwhile, parish councils are expected to continue to provide for their local areas and indeed to take on some of the responsibilities previously funded by the District and County.

As you are no doubt, aware, we receive an annual precept which is collected on our behalf by the District Council and is paid by residents in addition to the County and District taxes. You can see how this is spent by looking at the accounts online. None of your councillors is paid, our clerk receives remuneration for 10 hours a week (but often does more!) All the time given by your councillors in work they do to benefit the village is voluntary.

As the first tier of government, we can be the first point of contact for anyone concerned about a community issue. Our task is to do what we can to improve local services and amenities. But we can't do everything and are increasingly relying on volunteers within the community. We last year appointed a rights of way warden - Brian Biggs, who every two months produces, a detailed report on all the Byways Open to All Traffic (we have 11) in the parish which is sent to HCC for them to act on. In the autumn, our tree warden John MacKinlay stepped down, and we will remember with gratitude all his advice and hands-on work including planting trees (not least the Coronation Tree, and Platinum Jubilee Tree). His role has now been taken on by Richard Dampney who continues the tradition of looking after the parish's trees and advising the Council. Most notable of these is the ancient, Yew at Frogmore which we are told is very old and has been registered as a "Notable Tree" with The Woodland Trust. Other volunteers come forward to help with litter picking and cutting of The Glebe Hedge and car park hedges. We greatly appreciate all the work carried out by Alastair Dudley Williams around The Green and allotments. We also have East Meon Nature diligently recording and protecting our toads, newts, river fly, hedgehogs and birds and TWiG (Tree Working Group) planting trees and hedges on Parish land - last year a mixed hedge at the front of The Green and this coming year trees round the edge of the football pitch. For the first time The Hampshire Monday Group did some volunteering for us. We purchased all the materials needed and they sanded down and repainted all the railings in Frogmore and did a fantastic job. They also cut back some undergrowth along the footpath from Frogmore Lane to the Recreation Ground. Each year the SDNPA Volunteer Rangers come and clear the river of willow herb. This November was one of the wettest days of the year ... but still they came and over more than 4 hours removed all the excess weeds. We also have our Lengthsman who is paid by HCC to work for 40 hours a year in the village. He cuts back hedges and nettles on footpaths, cleans village signs and clears ditches and footpaths.

During the past 12 months we have been able to secure grants to contribute towards resurfacing the All Sports Court (total cost £14,300) and the purchase of two trees and stone plaques to commemorate Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee and The Coronation of King Charles III.

General maintenance consumes most of the precept, grass cutting, repairs to the 2 children's play areas and the football pavilion. As you may have heard the pavilion suffered a major leak last winter. This necessitated a mass of remedial work which was at last completed in the summer, funded largely thankfully by an insurance claim. We purchased new football nets for the pitch for the use of villagers. We have arranged for the path across The Green to be replaced with something flatter and wider to suit both old and young alike, with work scheduled to begin in the spring.

Sadly ash die back is rampant in the parish. We commissioned a detailed survey which identified trees which needed attention in the short and medium term and are in the process of getting the required work done. We are having to take down the Rowan on Washers Triangle and will be removing all the ivy and dead wood from the Frogmore Yew.

The allotments at both Frogmore and Workhouse Lane continue to be popular and are well cared for. We have introduced a new charging system so that now the cost of water consumed is shared by all allotment holders at each site.

Sadly Harvest FC have moved to a ground nearer where all the players live and we are actively looking for a new club to take up residence. We are hopeful that we have found the perfect team but need to sort out finances. We cannot run the pitch at a loss.

Although it may seem unimportant we have after 7 years of correspondence at last registered formal ownership of both the Recreation Ground and the Frogmore Allotments. We knew that they were owned by the village it just took time for the Land Registry to accept this!

And now on to sewage which continues to be a major problem, bubbling up from manhole covers on Workhouse Lane and in residents' gardens whenever we have heavy rain. Southern Water has at last started to take our complaints seriously. I have already written about the issue of FOG (Fat, Oil and Grease) blocking the main sewer and now have SW regularly jetting the whole stretch to the Water Treatment Plant. Here I need to pay tribute to Mike Critchley who in all weathers is out recording videos of sewage as it leaks onto the street so that these can be sent to SW.

2023 saw more planning applications than the previous year, mostly due to an increase in changes to dwellings. 2023's applications are broken down as follows :

2023	No objection	No objection with comments	Objection	Total	<i>Total last year</i>
Dwellings	16	18	0	34	27
Trees	10	1	0	11	9
Farms	0	0	0	0	2
Other	3	0	2	5	3
Total	29	19	2	50	41

The Planning Committee visited the sites of all applications, no matter how large or small, before submitting a response. Details of the Parish Council's comments on all East Meon planning applications can be accessed via the SDNPA planning website : <https://planningpublicaccess.southdowns.gov.uk/online-applications/>

The 2 objections were to an application to erect a storage building and other facilities on a plot of land on Westbury Park (not related to Westbury House), and to an application to install a 60m communications tower near the reservoirs by Wether Down Lane (both applications are still 'in progress').

Building work on the development of 12 new homes on Coombe Road is almost complete (at last!). We were very disappointed that no affordable homes provider was interested in taking on 6 of the dwellings for social rent. This raises questions about how continuing to require new homes in small villages such as East Meon can support the SDNPA's (and Government's) objective of providing more social rented housing. The Parish Council has worked with SDNPA planners to insist that conditions placed on the development are met, especially with respect to drainage, landscaping and land set aside for nitrate mitigation.

The SDNPA asked Parish Councils to prepare a Parish Priorities Statement (PPS) as part of the evidence base for the review of the South Downs Local Plan. The Parish Council prepared and

submitted its PPS, with great support and input from our community (thank you!). Our clear message was that our infrastructure (sewerage and roads) and protection of the River Meon need to be given priority over yet more housing development, at least in the medium term. In addition we have given feedback to East Hampshire's Local Plan as part of their consultation. Although we are outside the scope of this Local Plan regarding housing, we are impacted by, for example, increased traffic resulting from development in areas south of East Meon.

Finally I would like to record my thanks to all the Councillors for their work over the past year. My especial thanks go to David Cooke and Sharon Sillence who stepped down after, in Sharon's case 8 years and in David's an astounding 23 years on the Parish Council. They will both be much missed. Their places have been filled by Trudie Lang and ?????????????? both of whom will, I am confident, prove to be equally capable and dedicated members of the team.

Last but not least my thanks go to our very efficient and patient clerk, Sam for going above and beyond in everything she does for us!

Susan Davenport
Chair East Meon Parish Council