

Harrold Parish Council - Chairman's End-of-Year Statement for 2017/2018

2017/2018 has been another busy year for Harrold Parish Council, and has seen a small change in councillors. Mike Johnston stood down after a long service as councillor due to constraints on his time. Andrew Jones also stood down as he moved away from the village and Lindsay Duggan and Lucie Hoad joined us as councillors. Robert Tickle remained as Chairman and David Brough became Vice Chair following an internal vote. Robbin Brough remained as clerk for her third year. At year end 31st March we were at full capacity with 12 councillors. If there are no resignations then the current councillors will remain in place until the end of the four year term of office in May 2019, when elections will occur and the positions will be open for new candidates to apply.

For a fourth year running we made a tactical effort to bring down the level of cash reserves through a process of expediting projects and focusing on areas of the village that had previously been overlooked. These reserves had built up from "Section 106" payments from the developers of Roman Paddock and Harewelle Way.

Distribution of funding to local voluntary groups

One of the council's continued strategies is to distribute more funding to local voluntary groups through Section 137 Grants. These benefit parishioners by ensuring that voluntary organisations and services are able to keep functioning and to assist those that are newly formed. This year we granted the maximum allowance of £10k across the following groups:

1. £3k to The Friends of Harrold Odell Country Park. This money will be used towards constructing a new pond dipping platform. The platform will be used for school groups and others visiting the park to enable them to have a closer look at the wildlife living within the lake.
2. £3.7k to Harrold Snooker Club (based at the Harrold Centre) for new equipment and refurbishment of the snooker room
3. £500 to The Bridge magazine - an essential communication tool for the council
4. £1.5k to the United Reformed Church for a new cooker, to support their community group activities
5. £1k to the Harrold Centre (remaining £3k coming next month) to assist with their centre development loan repayments

Improving the look of the village

Another of the council's continued strategies has been to improve and smarten the look of the village. We have received quotes and chosen a contractor to build a **stone wall** to replace the unattractive metal railing on the North East riverbank by the main bridge. We would also like to landscape the area with smaller bushes and shrubs to allow the bridge and river to be more visible, but without opening up the riverbank completely for access. We have finalised the contract and the work should start soon.

We have approved attractive **new village entrance signs**, which are currently being manufactured. They are expected to be installed at three entrance points to the village and replace the current metal "Harrold" signs (where they exist). A drawing of the signs was displayed in the previous version of The Bridge.

We completely replaced the **playground at Harewelle Way** and have taken over a lease for the land. Getting to the stage of redevelopment was a very long process and involved: Pursuing the developer to transfer the land (and monies) to the borough council. Setting up a lease agreement with the borough council to allow the PC to take long-term responsibility for the land; creating a business plan for mayoral approval to receive the monies that were transferred from the developer; going through a lengthy process of financial approvals with the borough council. The climbing frame/fort at **Saxon House End playground**, which had reached end-of-life, has been replaced. This piece of equipment, and the soft surface underneath, was replaced with a similar style of apparatus.

Miscellaneous maintenance - larger items included: the missing bollards on the green (level with School Lane) have been replaced. We have approved the repair of the broken gate at the Harrold Centre playground and the repair of the fence next to Saxon House End playground which suffered wind damage. Two wooden bins

were installed on the Lower Green in an effort to reduce the amount of littering that happens in that area, especially over the summer months.

HPFA Sports Pavilion: We are continuing to work with the playing field association (HPFA) to deliver a new (or extensively renovated) pavilion and refurbishments to the Scout hut. The council has set aside £100k from reserves to fund this project and we are hoping to continue to assist the HPFA in developing a plan and to gain further sources of grant funding.

Developing the Neighbourhood Plan

The steering group has spent the last few months evaluating the village survey results and met with all landowners who had put sites forward for development. The process can seem never-ending but it will all be worth it if we can get the plan approved by the borough council as it will mean we have control over future development. The next stage is to develop a number of potential development options. These options will be put to the village for consultation in the next few months. This is the crucial time for the village to think about where future development should take place. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group is planning a series of drop-in sessions and presentations to village groups and clubs.

SpeedWatch group

The SpeedWatch group had another active year in a continued attempt to curb speeding in the village. We have purchased a portable speed sign for the village, which we hope to have in use during the coming year.

Finances for 2017/2018

Cash Balance: As at 31st March 2018 the cash balance sits at £171k, up from £141k this time last year. Despite larger items of expenditure, including £88k on the Harewelle Way playground, and transferring the remaining £43k to the Harrold Centre for their redevelopment, we received the commuted sum of £149k from the developer in relation to the transfer of ownership of Harewelle Way playground. We estimate that the overall cash balance will drop to approximately £25k once all the projects in this year's budget have been completed.

Spending: Ignoring larger projects in progress, in the 2017/18 financial year, the council's spend closely matched the budget that informs how we set the precept each year.

Precept: This has been retained at £72,645, despite an increase in the amount of Band D properties in the village. This is because we are satisfied with the budgeting process and that the current level allows us to cover costs. Larger projects will continue to be financed mainly from reserves.

As I'm sure you will agree, an extremely productive year for the council, and the coming year looks no different.

Robert Tickle Chair - Harrold Parish Council

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