



# West Horsley Parish Council

## CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2025/2026

*Cllr Elaine Best, April 2026*

The Council, once again, has had a busy year during which the Village has experienced disruption due to road closures, increased traffic and inconsiderate parking. It has also had several memorable times as mentioned below. As my sixth year as Chairman comes to end, I account to our residents as follows:

### **Staff and Councillors**

Our Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer, Julia McClung, has continued to ensure the Council operates effectively and efficiently. Once again, the Auditors have commended the financial management of the Council's affairs. Both she and our Deputy Clerk, Karen Young, continue to ensure the Council is responsive to residents' needs and enquiries. Karen diligently administers the Council's Planning Committee and Roads Task Group dealing with numerous planning applications, potholes and parking issues.

We said a fond farewell to our longest serving Councillor, Mel Beynon, who for 40 years had served the Village with dedication. We welcomed Charlie Walker before saying goodbye to Vanessa Buosi who worked tirelessly to improve our communications; with newly styled newsletters, noticeboards throughout the Village and signage. We now have one Councillor vacancy to fill on a co-opted basis for a year as our four-year term concludes with elections in May 2027. We would be especially interested in anyone with planning knowledge and expertise to get in touch.

### **Finance**

Our precept went up from £105,452 to £108,112 in line with inflation. This has allowed us to keep abreast of inflationary pressures and support several community initiatives. We received £6,403 Section 106 monies towards the installation of a new boiler at the Village Hall. Still awaited is £16,540. This is the outstanding amount from the Manor Farm development to reimburse us for the refurbishment of the tennis court. Also awaited is money required for improvements to the Village Hall to cover replacement windows and roofing.

We were able to give grants to local groups totaling £4,000. Our budgeting has become very robust and expenditure throughout the year as been in alignment. We ended the year in good health to go forward to 2026/2027.

With thanks, once again, to Surrey County Councillor Dennis Booth, whose Highway Fund has seen the Window Box roundabout completely re-surfaced and the pavement from Cranmore Lane to Walnut Tree Gardens reconstructed. Through other funds, he has provided a new piece of nursery equipment, replaced the wet-pour under certain items of existing equipment in the Playground, and replaced the bench at the top of Long Reach. All this has made significant improvement to safety and appearance across the Village.

## **Planning**

Our Planning Committee continues to be kept busy. As a statutory consultee, the Committee has considered 131 planning applications, nine more than last year, over the past 12 months. These include 65 full applications, 35 associated with 'discharge of conditions', nine for work with trees and 22 other. The Parish Council objected to 21 applications on the grounds of non-compliance with policies in our adopted Neighbourhood Plan. To date, Guildford Borough Council has approved 39 Full/Tree applications and 27 other, and refused nine Full/Tree and 14 other, with 39 awaiting a decision. There is one application at Appeal.

## **Youth Council**

Our Youth Council continued to excel. I am delighted they will be making their own presentation to the Annual Parish Meeting in April 2026 on all their activities over the past twelve months. The highlights have definitely been the Family Fun Run, a Movie Night at the Cricket Club and the Clothes Swap. Their commitment, enthusiasm, creativity and organisational skills are a joy and demonstrate the very best in our village youth. Two of the Youth Councillors left in September to take up University places, and we wish them every success in the future. We welcomed 3 new members one of whom accompanied me to lay wreaths at the Remembrance Day Service at St Mary's Church in November.

## **Initiatives and Events**

A major change was to bring the Council in line with other Government authorities by changing website and email addresses to carry ".gov.uk". The reason behind this was to ensure an extra security layer in all our communications. We have also adopted the National Association of Local Councils' Civility and Respect Pledge to govern all that we do.

Our strategic plan looks at the concept of well-being and what we might do or facilitate this through the work we undertake and the events we stage. Whilst we can point to successes, the initiative for the Student Study Hall to provide a quiet safe place for study leading up to and during school examinations proved unattractive to teenagers and take-up was very low. Similarly, so was the response to the well-being questionnaire, so we have concluded that the level of activity we currently undertake is sufficient and appropriate for the time being.

Unfortunately, the past twelve months have seen a rise in anti-social behaviour in several locations. We have and continue to work with the local Police and with the Safer Guildford Partnership to address these instances. One example has seen recurrent damage to the tennis court and hut necessitating the installation of CCTV.

Inconsiderate parking, an increase in traffic volumes and concern over the speed of traffic through the Village led us to commission a traffic speed survey at 12 locations across the Village. Our Annual Parish Meeting will receive a presentation on the findings but suffice it to say that whilst volume is higher at key times associated with school runs, with the increase in traffic also partly due to construction vehicles, speeds are mostly within recognised limits. We do thank the Community Speed Watch Team for doing an excellent job at their police approved sites.

Like last year, when we commemorated the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day, in May we remembered and celebrated VE Day with a coffee morning at the Village Hall and a special evening in the grounds of West Horsley Place. Our evening event attracted circa 2,000 people culminating in the reading of the Proclamation and the lighting of the Beacon. The weather was fine and virtually all the stalls ran out of food and drink so a grand evening was had and will be remembered.

Our twice-yearly Litter Picks were well supported again by an increasing number of Volunteers to whom we extend grateful thanks. The very successful West Horsley in Bloom and for children, the annual "Potatoes in a Pot" competition, took place in the summer to much acclaim; our thanks to the organisers, judges and volunteers for two splendid events. Despite inclement weather the Teddy Bears' Picnic in September was very well supported and the Lantern Parade brought much festive fun in the countdown to Christmas.

We now have a specific duty to promote biodiversity in our community. To this end, we have planted a wildflower border on the Village Green with another planned along East Lane at the Northcote Triangle, planted eight fruit trees in the Village Orchard and replaced trees at Cranmore Lane and Long Reach.

We began the year appreciating those who have gone before us in the service of others, so it was perhaps fitting that we ended our year celebrating those who continue to volunteer in so many ways to help and support others in this Village. Our biennial Awards for Service in the Community Presentation Evening was held in the Stone Room at West Horsley Place in April in the presence of Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Hibbs DL who presented the awards. Over 35 nominations were received and ten awards presented. Our congratulations to all nominees and the award recipients. My special thanks to the Judging Panel who undertook the very difficult job of deciding the eventual award winners.

As we enter 2026/27, we know significant change is on the way as Surrey County Council and Guildford Borough Council will be abolished in April 2027 in favour of a new West Surrey Unitary Authority. The anticipated effects and implications of this Local Government Reorganisation will continue to be a focus for the Parish Council over the coming months. We will do our best to keep residents informed as we understand the consequences for the Parish.

### **Finally A Word of Thanks...**

I hope residents will feel the Council continues to listen to and take on board matters that interest, concern and effect daily living and have found our channels of communication helpful. We welcome residents attending Full Council meetings that take place on the third Tuesday of each month except for August.

My thanks to the Steve Peach, our Village Warden for his unwavering care and attention to detail in maintaining the appearance of the Village, the Village Hall Management Committee, its Administrator and Facilities Manager for maintaining the asset to a high standard, to the Community Speed Watch Team for continuing to help make our roads safer, and to the Trustees and Staff at West Horsley Place for their collaboration and help in hosting several of our events.

The Council and I are most appreciative. I am indebted to the time, effort and commitment given by fellow Parish Councillors and our Clerks. My thanks too to our County and Borough Councillors Dennis, Catherine, Dawn and Ruth. Thank you all.