

Hermitage Parish Council Annual Report 2019 -2020

For the public the main event of the year was undoubtedly the opening of the Eling Way, the Active Travel Route from which has been very well received. The ATR is for walkers and riders of cycles and horses and runs from Pinewood Crescent to Hampstead Norreys village hall. It was a very lengthy project.

COVID 19 has changed life for all of us. The council was impressed with the speed at which the support group was set up by Councillor Purchase, Andy Murray and Jon Turner and is grateful to them and the many volunteers who signed up to help. The council provided funding, to be reimbursed, for residents who do not have immediate access to cash. The residents will repay the council at an appropriate time.

HELAA, the Housing and Economic Land Availability assessment, is underway and unfortunately the public meeting planned by the council and the Neighbourhood Plan team to discuss this had to be cancelled. Two sites in Hermitage are considered to be developable or partially developable: the field on the B4009 adjacent to the primary school and the field between the old railway line and Station Road. The deadline for comments has passed but it is expected that late comments can still be made. The council does not intend to let this pass.

Planning applications:32 applications have been considered; some sites have appeared multiple times. Three decisions made by the planning authority have been taken to appeal, one of was upheld, one dismissed and the third is underway.

Road safety: traffic speeds along the B4009 have been well monitored in the last year. The SID (Speed Indication Device) was deployed three times and CSW (Community Speed Watch) four times. The SID data showed the need to use the CSW. As a result, a total of 49 motorists have been sent letters because their speed was greater than 35 mph. West Berkshire Council intends that new CSW equipment will be used in Hermitage once the current pandemic is over.

Health and safety: playgrounds were inspected in April; urgent work has been carried out and replacement parts are on order for Pinewood Park. All the trees in all the open spaces have been surveyed and the necessary work completed.

Additional public open space: the council has accepted the offer of the playground area at Hermitage Green, along with the remaining S106 funds, on a 75-year lease though it was hoped to have the site ownership transferred to the council. Taylor Wimpey has offered to HPC the strip of land with the conifers adjacent to Pinewood Crescent. Permission has been granted to fell all the trees. A new planting plan has been made by Charles Gilchrist, a Hermitage resident and professional garden designer. Before anything is done the neighbours will be consulted about the plans. Unfortunately, the consultation must wait until current restrictions are lifted.

Furze Hill Local Wildlife Site: the electricity network suppliers cut a 5m swathe of trees down in the woods. This left a huge amount of debris which was turned into dead hedges by the WB Countryside Volunteers. It revealed hidden bluebells and exposed the ponds to daylight. Testing in early summer showed the ponds ranged from 15 cm to at least 3m in depth. Furze Hill is a no fire site but that does not stop some people starting fires. The Preschool Woodland Classroom was dismantled because it was

repeatedly used as a fire pit. The fence around the exclusion zone, necessary for both human and animal safety has been repaired with metal posts.

Furze Hill has received publicity in LCR, the magazine of the National Association of Local Council because of its partnership work with the Countryside Volunteers and in Upstream, the magazine of the WBC Society.

Memorial bench: Hans Overeynder is the first person to be honoured by a plaque on the council bench in the Burial Ground.

By using reserves, the precept, HPC's share of the council tax, will rise by a modest amount of 1.6% in 2020 – 21.

Thanks are due to all the volunteers who work to help Hermitage, the Thursday team which does maintenance in the open spaces and West Berkshire Countryside Society which does much work in Furze Hill and councillors and of course the clerk Nicky Pierce and groundsman Mr Lawrence.