

## Chair's report APA 2022

We haven't been able to have one of these assemblies for two years so welcome back everyone and thank you for coming. I hope you'll have an interesting and informative evening and that you enjoy the food and drink that's been laid on for you. We've quite a packed programme this evening so speakers representing village groups have two minutes each and no more!

First I'd like to introduce Professor Sir Brian Hoskins. According to Wikipedia Professor Hoskins is a British dynamical meteorologist and climatologist based at Imperial College London and Reading University. He is part of the UK committee on climate change and also the intergovernmental panel. Welcome.

.....

**The** pandemic caused everything to stop and it felt like living in a parallel universe for a while. The council was able to carry on through the magic of Zoom, a phenomenon that was new to many of us, and some residents joined in which was good to see. To help non zoomers stay informed, two newsletters were published and distributed to every household, the monthly update in Pathfinder carried on – this is always published on the web site too – and the Hermitage Facebook page was used for more urgent messages.

But another thing the pandemic did was bring out the neighbourly spirit. This is the first opportunity the council has had to recognise publicly and thank the small squad of residents who collected and distributed groceries and generally made sure that those in need of any assistance were helped out. The council was pleased to pump start the funding for this and assist with obtaining grants.

**Hopefully** you've noticed that a new chair person is giving this report on behalf of our parish council. Ruth Cottingham stepped down last year – though she didn't step very far, serving as vice chair instead. Ruth has served on the council for 15 years, 14 of these as chair. She works hard, doing a sterling job, and is a hard act to follow. And the council has welcomed three new members, Michelle Bal, Fay Ashwood and Emma Chan, so is now at its full complement with the gender balance falling in favour of women. You may also have noticed that no district councillors are here tonight. Garth Simpson has six months leave of absence, we believe he's not well, and Hilary Cole now lives in Wales.

**Furze** Hill and the wildlife areas are a great asset in Hermitage and looking wonderful at the moment. Ruth looks after all of this on a daily basis with the assistance of her willing husband Chris Genge. Together they bring in volunteers, many from the West Berkshire Countryside Society, to help with the larger tasks. Recently a tree report was commissioned, something the council is obliged to do regularly, which found a good deal of Ash dieback. This has led to the felling of a number of trees with all of the wood having to be removed from the site to prevent the spread of disease. Usually any arisings are left in situ as this is the way a nature area is preserved. One or two other trees have been selected for some work but not quite as drastic as the Ash. Chris is also our go-to man for any small jobs that need doing which he willingly takes on – well if he moans to Ruth she doesn't tell us.

A new 10-year management plan for the whole of the Furze Hill area was also commissioned. This makes recommendations for how to keep the area thriving.

**Just** before the pandemic hit, Cold Ash Football Club began using the recreation ground for playing and training. The council's pleased to welcome back the two teams of youngsters and wishes them well. A short-term problem with car parking has been resolved with the kind permission of Gill Turner, head of the primary school, to use the school car park. This is very welcome so thank you Gill. You will soon notice two sets of pitch markings on the grass, one white and the other, slightly bigger in blue. This is because as boys get older they move into bigger pitch sizes. The club will also be putting a small shed next to the muga to store all their equipment in.

**One** item caused a bit of a stir and that was removal of the bus shelter opposite the school. After much debate the vote went in favour of replacing it but the new one will be very different and, hopefully, give the resident living behind the shelter more peace of mind. It will be placed further forward so that youngsters can't hide away and cause a disturbance unseen. There's a picture on the board.

**For** the past couple of years or so a small group has been working alongside but sponsored by the council to create a neighbourhood development plan. This is a time-consuming exercise but important for the future of Hermitage, how it's designed and what it will be like to live in. A presentation follows this so I won't say any more.

But current planning applications carry on with several in the pipe line. The houses being built around the Co-op are already on the market. Houses behind The White Horse pub are likely to start quite soon, all the permissions just about in place, and development of the land associated with the Old Farmhouse has almost reached the end of the planning process. And then there's the CALA Homes development at the end of Charlotte Close. This is all ready to go but with all of these sites we are never informed when work might start or what the schedule is.

**A** process even longer than getting rid of Covid is transferring land. HPC is taking on the lease for green area in the centre of Hermitage Green. This will mean we can see it's kept better with the help of Mr Lawrence, our stalwart outdoors contractor. The area at the bottom of Pinewood Crescent where the tall conifers grow is also coming in to the ownership of HPC, being transferred by Taylor Wimpey.

**Now** I need to make a couple of shoutouts, firstly in connection with CIL funds. CIL is the Community Infrastructure Levy, part of which comes to the council when new building has taken place. The rules around it are strict though – for instance affordable homes don't attract any CIL. And it has to be spent within five years on projects that improve amenities for residents to make up for having the development. HPC currently has 16 thousand pounds. The five years is up for some of it but we're hoping to hang on to it a bit longer to make it a more meaningful fund.

The plan at the moment is to spend this fund on improving the play equipment in Pinewood Park. The small bright green muga has been patched up many times but is now beyond repair. The amount of CIL we have won't make much of a dent in this project even with matched funding from somewhere like the Greenham Trust which is why we hope to save it for a bit longer.

But before any decisions are made we need to know what you think. Please use this opportunity to tell us. There is a sheet and post-it notes on the table to either offer new

suggestions or agree with our idea, maybe suggesting the kind of equipment you think would be a good addition to the park.

The second shoutout is for a green ambassador. There are projects around which Hermitage could be part of and West Berkshire Council runs the West Berkshire Parish Climate Forum. This is a job too far for the parish council but we would welcome someone who could take this on, reporting in to and being supported by HPC.

Finally I'd like to remind you all that Hermitage is celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee on Sunday June 5<sup>th</sup> with an afternoon of family fun. Everything will happen around the hall and the recreation ground with such things planned as a giant bouncy castle, hook-a-duck, the Hermitage choir and even free tea and cake. A list of what is planned currently is displayed but if you have any ideas or if you're prepared to help out please shout. But whatever you do please put the date in your diary and come along.

Thank you. I'd now like to hand over to Carolyn who'll update you on the plans for speeding vehicles in Hermitage – another project that has taken a great deal of time.