



CHAIR'S REPORT

Barnham and Eastergate Annual Assembly 2023

Chris Allington, Chair Barnham and Eastergate Parish Council

After the success of last year, we are making this year's event more engaging and interactive. Around us is a selection of themed tables supported by Councillors and volunteers. We'd welcome your feedback on how we develop this annual event. Your feedback last year has influenced our Strategic Plan and our Community Infrastructure Investment Programme, more on this later.

Over recent years, particularly since the merger of Barnham and Eastergate Councils in 2019, we have been building capacity in terms of staff and volunteers to provide a Parish Council that has the capacity to represent and support our local community and not be just a talking shop. A close partnership with Barnham and Eastergate Community Trust has further enabled us to leverage grant funding and provide financially sustainable and well-run community facilities.

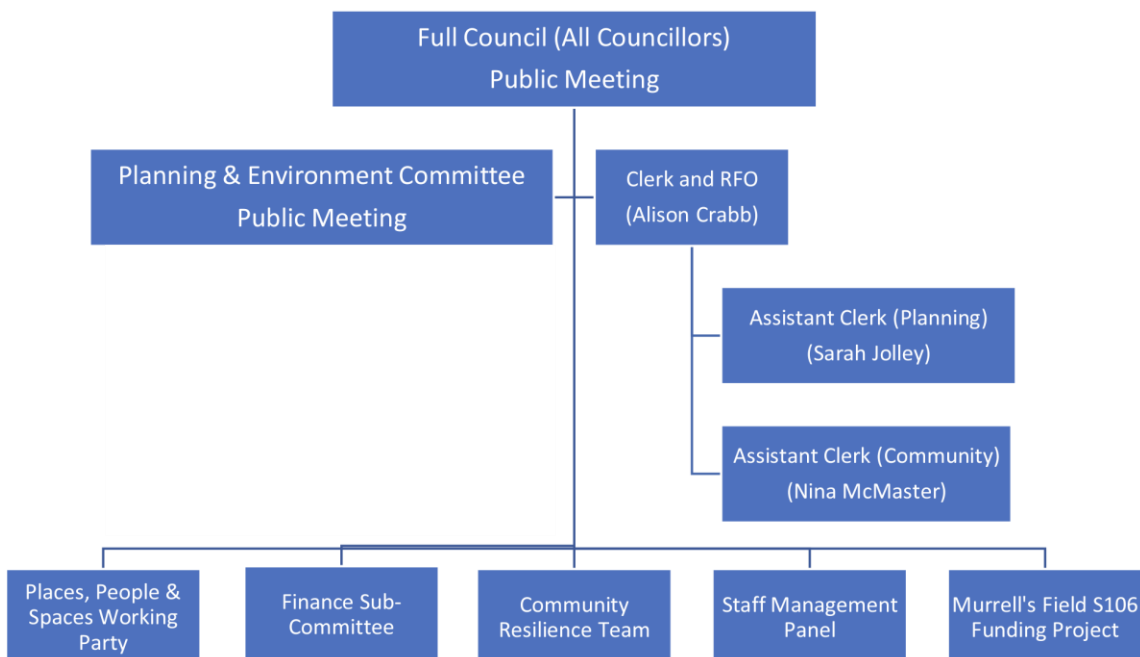
Everything we do is driven by a team of up to 13 elected Councillors, 3 members of staff and many volunteers. Three councillors decided not to re-stand for election. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Dean Holden, Isabel Thurston and Finn Middleton for their service. After the recent elections we have 10 councillors and therefore 3 vacancies to fill by co-option. On everyone's behalf I'd like to thank our councillors for their service and dedication to our community. I'd particularly like to highlight the work of our Clerk, Alison Crabb and our Assistant Clerks, Nina McMaster and Sarah Jolley. These are challenging roles particularly given the ambition of this council and I'd like to thank them for their fortitude and commitment. Without them we would not have been able achieve as much as we have.

In the spirit of this event, I will keep this review short and to the point, but I would like to highlight the following areas:

Organisation and Governance

Over the last year we have made huge progress in bedding in an organisational structure of sub-committees and working parties. This is very important because it increases our capacity and empowers smaller teams of councillors and staff to get things done without feeling too much of the weight of parish council rules and bureaucracy.

It also enables councillors to focus on topics or interests that motivate them personally and enables volunteers to be co-opted onto projects without worrying about becoming over-committed. The current structure is shown below:



Planning and Environment

We have a well-established Planning and Environment Committee that meets in public and is chaired by Sue Wallsgrove. This team are the guardians of our Neighbourhood Plan and notably representing protection of the environment in our parish. Our Neighbourhood plan does not give us complete protection from predatory housing developers and central government policy, but it is used to regularly send a clear message to politicians and policymakers as to how we want our villages to develop and how we want our rural environment to be preserved. As parliamentary election season approaches, we expect the roles of Neighbourhood Plans to strengthen and politicians and press will start listening more. The 'mood music' from the current government is that this will happen throughout 2023 and 2024.

For Planning and Environment, it has been a more than challenging year with the losses suggesting that central government policy is favouring development at any cost. Whilst the losses may be more readily remembered there have been some robust victories and we've successfully pushed back on some inappropriate development. In addition, valuable working relationships have been formed with major housing developers and generally these have borne fruit with developers changing their masterplans to deliver on some of our environment concerns even after a housing development has secured planning permission.

However, the pressures on this team created by the commercial interests of housing developers, poor political support from higher authorities and a poorly implemented Arun Local Plan has been immense and, at times, very demoralising. We must thank Sue and the rest of the Planning & Environment Committee, past and present, for their tireless efforts. The topic of greatest concern is ensuring that the infrastructure to support the combined scale of all the housing developments in our parish is adequate and is delivered first. This is a major unresolved challenge that is not in the gift of the Parish to resolve. It is also a challenge that is inadequately supported by the District and County Councils.

Strategic Plan

This is a huge topic too large to cover in detail here, but we are in the process of updating it as we do every year. I'd encourage every resident to review and have an opinion on it as it contains the following:

Strategic priorities

These are in addition to the core objectives of the Parish Council and identify what we will focus on over the next five years. The current priorities being proposed for adoption are:

- **Places, People & Spaces:** Develop projects and initiatives to increase community engagement, volunteering and community cohesion.
- **Community Programmes:** Facilitate programmes to coordinate, grow and develop the work of the volunteer led organisations in the villages to increase social connections and reduce loneliness. Our ambition is to deliver a vibrant and interesting range of clubs, societies and events that are valuable alternatives to other, more chargeable leisure pursuits which are typically 8 to 10 miles away.
- **Community Resilience:** Develop a defined plan and deployment processes supported by a stock of equipment and PPE to enable a local response to emergencies.
- **Expand Village halls, Sports Facilities and Children's Equipped Play Areas:** Capital investment programme funded through Precept, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106 contributions. Objective is to increase the accessibility, range of services and capacity of our community/village halls, playing fields and equipped play spaces.

For a copy of the current Strategic Plan use this link

<https://barnhamandeastergate-pc.gov.uk/media/13962/bepc-strategic-plan-draft-may-2023.pdf>

Community Infrastructure Investment

Barnham and Eastergate already has 15% of Arun's proposed housing development with only 3% of its current total population and the questions about the plans to deliver the facilities we need are endless but cover the following topics:

- Highways and transport – Roads, public transport, the needs of non-car users

- Healthcare - Doctors, dentists ...
- Education - School places
- Flooding and drainage
- Green infrastructure
- Library services
- Social infrastructure – Community halls, sports facilities

We have been working on this topic since 2019 creating the evidence base and reports to demonstrate that Arun District Council and West Sussex County Council need to create robust delivery plans. I'm saddened to report that there is lots of political posturing but little in terms of plans. I would characterise the main issues as:

- Major road schemes such as the A29 realignment, the Fontwell roundabout, the A27 Arundel bypass are all being developed in isolation with no wider area masterplan or strategy. For commercial and financial reasons there is low confidence in the integrated delivery of these schemes and a realistic fear that the villages will become grid-locked with traffic.
- In terms of the other items there is simply not enough money being committed to deliver the social infrastructure that any community should have.

Notwithstanding this slightly depressing big picture view we have secured some money for community infrastructure which is starting to flow to the Parish. For detail on this use this link

<https://barnhamandeastergate-pc.gov.uk/media/13963/bepc-community-infrastructure-investment-programme-jan-23.pdf>

Community Programmes

Whilst Planning, Environment and Community Infrastructure somewhat dominates, the Parish Council has been keen to deliver benefits to our community in terms of funded programmes and we have committed staff and money to support this ambition. Over the past three years our delivery partner, the Barnham and Eastergate Community Trust has run a growing range of activities to address community cohesion. These programmes have reached many people, enabling them to make new friends and develop new interests. The programmes are very inclusive from babies/toddlers, through to the elderly; people with health problems such as alcoholism and diabetes, through to fitness classes, films and concerts, sports and interests, social events and activities to combat loneliness. Between the Trust and the Parish Council we have raised nearly £230,000 in grants since the start of the pandemic in 2020.

Volunteering

Our eternal thanks must go to the volunteers and staff who have developed The Barnham and Eastergate Community Trust and the Parish Council over more than 20 years; built a Neighbourhood Plan that has legal powers; supported fundraising events too numerous to mention and; secured major grants. This has enabled us to secure the funding and services that our community deserves in an environment where higher authorities are cutting budgets and many cherished community services.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of our villages. Without them, our community could lose many of our sports clubs and societies; our community charities; and the Emergency Team. With their help we can continue to support all these and many more initiatives from cake baking to letter writing, movie nights to pantomimes. We try to capture and promote all volunteer-led services and our primary communication is via the village hall websites, social media, noticeboards, and word of mouth.

We would welcome more volunteers of all ages: opportunities abound, from being an event steward to litter picking, from leading research on a section of the Neighbourhood Plan to delivering food parcels. Please contact the Clerk Alison or the Assistant Clerk Nina who will be pleased to talk to you if you wish to volunteer.

Please tell us what is important to you. It is vital that all residents and the Parish Council have a two-way conversation so we can address concerns and take action. We are working on improving our website and social media coverage.

Big issues such as planning and development are important, but we maintain focus on every aspect of our community life to help make our villages good places to live, learn, work and play. Your Parish Council can hear your concerns about many matters including our Parish Facilities (sports fields and halls); planning applications; litter bins; car-parking and road user behaviour; anti-social behaviour; drainage and much more. The Parish Council is rarely the decision maker, but we can contact the relevant authorities and advocate for change.