



Annual Report 2012–2013

Mayfield and Five Ashes Parish Council



Published April 2013

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Chairman's Introduction

1. Probably the most significant event from the year was the retirement of our Clerk of some 7 years, David Thompson, in July. The Clerk forms the backbone of the Parish Council and David worked diligently on behalf of both Mayfield and Five Ashes to achieve many successes over the years. Perhaps for him personally, the most meaningful was the obtaining a number of Clerk's qualifications - which permitted the Parish Council to achieve 'Quality Council' status.
2. However the workings of the PC had to continue and while a replacement was sought, we were indebted to Victor Briggs and Diane Kirkness and a number of councillors who offered further help in ensuring agendas and minutes continued to be published.
3. The process of finding a new Clerk began immediately. We had several responses from an advert in the Yellow Pages and ultimately were delighted to appoint Janna Todd to the post. Janna lives in Mayfield and has had experience on a number of local committees. There is a considerable amount to learn but since starting in October she has already proved to be a real asset and we wish her well with her on going training programme to achieve the relevant Clerk Qualifications.
4. Although the departure of David caused a certain amount of upheaval, it nevertheless gave us the chance to review the way the PC operated in certain areas. Some of these changes are detailed further in this report but in summary we have embraced technology in a number of areas. A new accounts software package allowing up-to-the-minute financial status, online banking, easing the problems of waiting for signatures and allowing for faster payments and receipts from suppliers and customers. We've significantly cut down on office costs by sending agendas and minutes electronically rather than printing and posting. The amount of unnecessary photocopying has been drastically reduced and adopted a clean desk policy. We have rearranged the office layout to provide better meeting facilities and gone through and cleaned out endless files to create space for our filing system.
5. The burden of paperwork and red tape goes with the territory, but the above changes, though they may appear small, have enabled us to utilise the Clerk's time in a far more productive way. They have allowed for improved communication and the ability to respond to problems in a quick and effective manner.
6. The precept
It needs no further comment from me regarding the general state of the country's finances but inevitably this has impacted on us. In line with Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Councils' decision not to raise their council tax we decided to follow suit and keep the Parish Precept for 2013-14 almost the same as the previous year at £92,000. However this has meant we have had to look closely at our current

spending and although we have managed to make some substantial savings, it has meant we have little or no funds available for additional projects that would benefit our community over the coming year.

7. Having said that we do propose a number projects which will require substantial funding. It is our intent to publicise and make the case for these over the coming year and with this in mind we may need to increase the precept substantially next year.

8. . . . and finally

Since the Clerk's departure I have had the pleasure of working alongside a number of Parish Councillors who have stepped in to shoulder the extra workload. An awful lot has gone on behind the scenes and I would like to thank them all for their help and support over the last few months. With Lloyd McLean's resignation in January it has fallen to me as your new Chairman to help steer the Parish Council forward in these challenging times. Your new Vice Chair is now Chris Lilly and along with the dedicated team of councillors, I am confident we can continue to refine our working methods and be in a position to make some substantial improvements to the way we serve our community over the coming year.

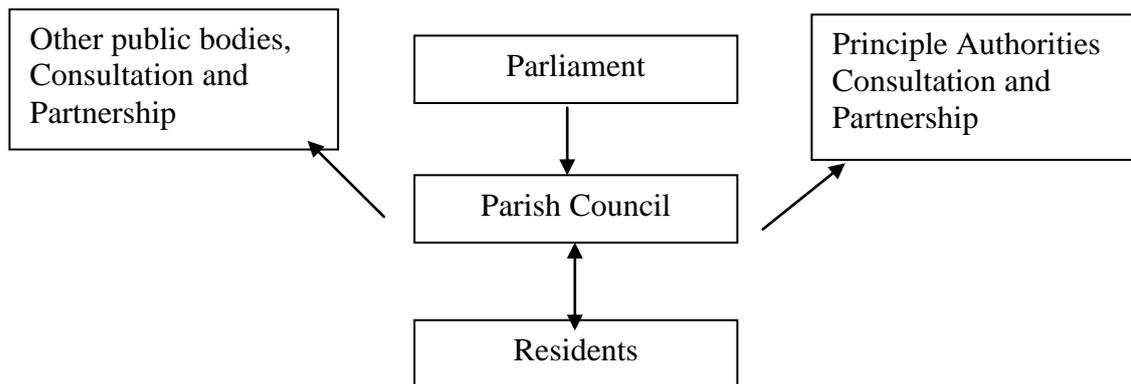
Jerry Watkiss

Chairman Mayfield and Five Ashes Parish Council

The Parish Council – an Overview

Below is a reminder of how the Parish Council is made up.

As the first tier of English Government, the Mayfield and Five Ashes Parish Council provides an increasing number of basic services, consults with the two principal authorities and a number of other Government bodies on behalf of the electorate and provides advice on planning and the protection of the environment as well as many other activities



The process of decision making required to carry out the Council's duties and responsibilities is carried out by 15 Parish Councillors, elected by residents and where necessary co-opted by the Parish Council. Parish Councillors represent residents from the three Parish Council electoral wards:

- Mayfield 11 Members
- Five Ashes 3 Members
- Rushers Cross 1 Member

Decisions for the community are made at meetings of the Full Council, which in Mayfield and Five Ashes meets monthly as follows:

- Annual Meeting – April/May
- Statutory Meetings – July, October and December
- Additional non-statutory meetings – March, April, June, September, November, January and February

Detailed work of the Parish Council is carried out by:

- Two Executive Committees – Planning and Finance and General Purposes
- Four advisory Committees – Community Development; Community Safety and Traffic; Rights of Way and Trees, and Governance.

In addition there are 15 representatives working with village organisations of various kinds.

The Advisory Committees and the sub-committees are assisted by no less than 16 lay members, drawn from residents of the community who give a great deal of help, advice and expertise to the successful working of the Council.

The Parish Council also employs a Clerk who carries out the decisions and actions of the Parish Council and provides management, administrative, and financial services. In addition the Clerk in conjunction with the Chairman ensures that all Council activities and financial transactions are conducted lawfully.

The year's significant achievements

- Moved from cash based accounting to income & expenditure system
- Introduced computerised accounting system
- Acquired land at Love Lane for car park
- Acquired Jubilee Wood
- Funded provision of community bus
- Funded Youth Drop In centre
- Provided financial support to keep the library open
- Negotiated with WDC to keep the South St toilets open for a further year
- Investigated options for increased car parking
- Reduced administrative expenditure

In addition the PC continues to provide / maintain (amongst many other items):

- Street lighting (electricity and maintenance)
- Litter and dog bin clearance
- Play areas at Mayfield and Five Ashes
- Court Meadow and the Five Ashes grass areas
- Some bridleways and footpaths where the County Council is not prepared to undertake the work

The PC provides grants/donations including:

- Mayfield church graveyard maintenance
- Church clock maintenance
- Minor Grants to various causes throughout the area

Finance

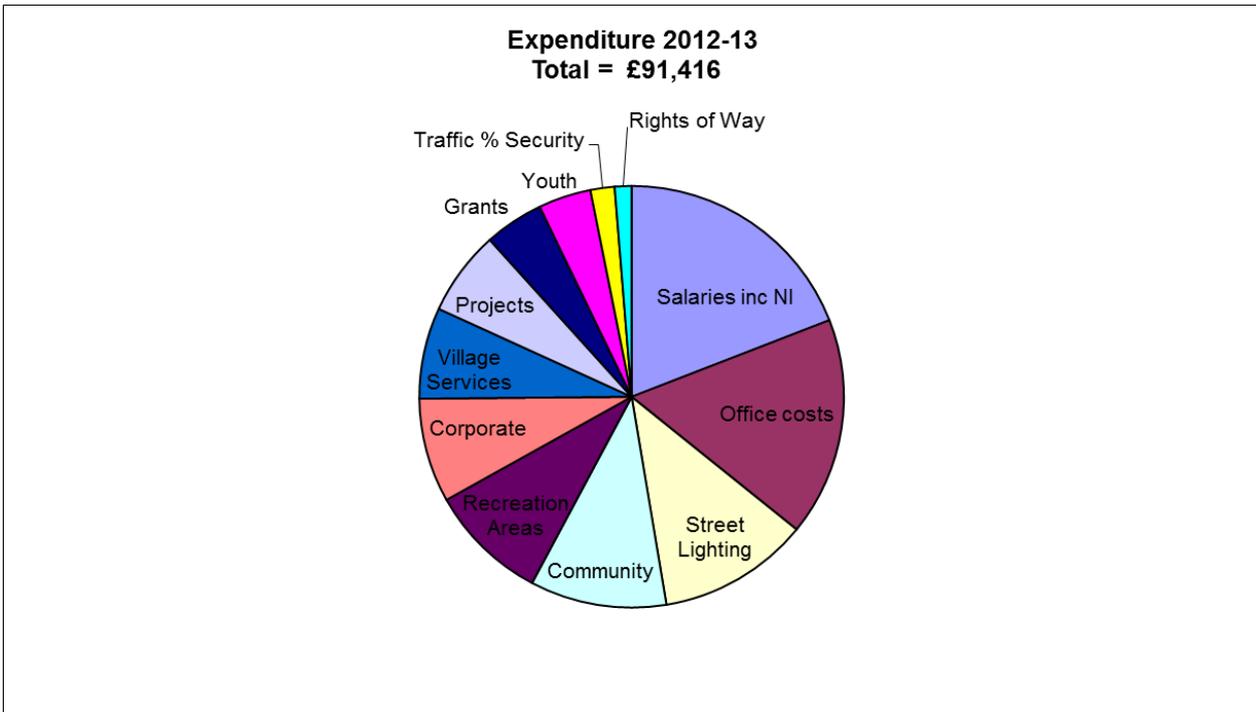
Overview

The year has been very challenging due to the change from cash accounting to income and expenditure accounting which meant that accruals from the previous year had to be accounted for in this current year, thereby putting intense pressure on the budget.

Nevertheless due to careful management we have achieved a balanced budget, which means that in future all expenditure in a given year will be accounted for within that year.

In financial terms our commitment to our village during 2012-13:

	As per RBS	Add accruals	Total spend in 2012-13	
	£	£	£	
Salaries inc NI	17,442		17,442	19%
Office costs	15,314		15,314	17%
Street Lighting	10,551		10,551	12%
Community	6,210	3300	9,510	10%
Recreation Areas	8,315		8,315	9%
Corporate	7,295		7,295	8%
Village Services	6,396		6,396	7%
Projects	2,445	3500	5,945	7%
Grants	4,129		4,129	5%
Youth	3,068	600	3,668	4%
Traffic % Security	1,677		1,677	2%
Rights of Way	1,174		1,174	1%
Total	84,016		91,416	100%



Accounts

A new computerised accounting software system has been implemented during the year which means that we now have total clarity regarding income and expenditure. The data entry and expenditure authorization processes that have been put in place now mean that invoices are now paid well within our target of 30 days.

Precept (rates) for 2013-14

The Council is pleased to be able to report that, due to expert husbandry of resources, we have been able to keep the precept to virtually the same as the previous year (only a 0.2% increase).

Future Major projects

During the year a number of expensive projects have been highlighted ie

- South St toilets (c. £6k pa)
- Memorial Hall car park extension (c. £15k)

We are seeking feedback regarding ratepayers' support for one or more of these and their appetite to accept an increase in the precept (rates) to pay for one or more of these projects.

Committee Reports

Community Development Committee

Report by Jane Driscoll.

1. Parish Plans:

Wealden District Council's Core Strategy Local Plan was adopted in November 2012 and it may be viewed in the Parish Office.

We completed our twenty year Parish Plan in 2006 and have been looking at whether to embark on a Neighbourhood Development Plan. This could not change national or local plan policies (there is no significant development aimed at Mayfield) and would involve considerable resources - consultation, a referendum and an examination. We are minded instead to look at completing a Village Design statement. This would be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document to our Parish Plan (which will be kept updated). A village design statement is concerned with the visual character of the village and how it might be protected or enhanced.

2. Court Meadow and the Green Sub-Committee:

Our 'Green Sub-Committee' completed its research on ways of giving extra protection to Court Meadow and the findings are attached. We are looking into including the protection of our playing field in a Parish Council Mission Statement and will look at including it more specifically in our Parish Plan. We will be able to include it on the Asset Register (item 3).

- Regarding Court meadow we are now maintaining our boundary to avoid encroachment by stealth.
- We are looking for funding to resurface the footpath that runs down the Meadow parallel to Fletching St.
- We have plans to put a temporary surface for car parking between the Memorial Hall and the Tunbridge Wells Road.
- The police have withdrawn the policing of Shaw's Fair but Mr Shaw has agreed to employ his own security guards to enable the fair to continue.

3. Assets of Community Value:

Wealden District Council has asked us to complete a list of Assets of Community Value. An asset is defined as being land or buildings whose main use furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community or has done so within the last five years and is likely to do so in the future. These are usually cultural, sporting or recreational assets and can include a shop, a library, a pub, a heritage building or an Open Space. This effectively stops the clock for up to six months on the proposed disposal of a listed asset and is designed to allow community interest groups the opportunity to put together a bid to purchase the asset.

4. Youth:

We invited the volunteer Youth Leaders to a meeting to discuss whether we could improve our Youth provision. Nick Voss, with the help of Gavin Ross, kindly volunteered to head a Think Tank to try and ascertain what the Youth feel about the existing activities and how they could be improved.

The Parish Council has been funding a Drop-In Centre at London House on a Tuesday evening. This has a rather low attendance and has therefore become difficult to justify in terms of cost.

One of the youth of the Parish, Rhys Jenner, is trying to raise money to extend the skate park. He has already raised some money with a sponsored Bike ride. Any additional help would be greatly appreciated.

5. Garden Plots:

We held a meeting with the South St garden plot holders to gauge how the project was faring. The allotment holders were very positive and helpful and a number of improvements have been identified.

Findings of the Green Sub-Committee –October '12.

The three options we looked at to give Court Meadow in Mayfield greater protection were as follows:

- Village Green status.
- Charitable status.
- A protective covenant.

These three options were rejected partly because Fields In Trust (F.I.T) would oppose our application to make the field into a Village Green. Rocky Sharrock from F.I.T came to a P.C. meeting and gave some convincing reasons why Charitable Status would give our Field extra protection. However the idea was opposed by the Sussex Association of Local Councils and Hedley's Solicitors. The Clerk of Crowborough Town Council which has King George Fields in Charitable Trusts also advised against it. The reasons they gave were mainly administrative but they felt it was preferable for a Council to have total autonomy over the Field.

Our research led us to understand that a Covenant could be overturned by a future P.C.

In conclusion the Sub-Committee are not recommending that Court Meadow changes its status in any way. However we were all of the opinion that the Playing Field should be protected from any encroachment/development for the enjoyment of future generations.

We would make two proposals:

1. That we should include the protection of Court Meadow (King George's Field) in our Mission Statement (with provision for community buildings).

2. Use the National Policy Framework (Section 8) to identify the Field for special protection as a designated 'Local Green Space'.
(This will need further investigation to see if it qualifies and to look at all the implications).

Jane Driscoll (Chair)

Rights of Ways and Trees Advisory

We are an advisory sub committee of the Parish Council and currently consist of 3 parish councillors and 6 lay members. It has been a busy year for us and the network of paths and bridleways now stretch to 82km (51miles). Apart from ensuring the paths are kept clear to walk and ride we are also responsible for the monitoring and upkeep of the following assets:

- 90 Bridges
- 143 Gates
- 19 sets of steps
- 159 Stiles and 261 Waymarkers.

We undertake to walk and check all our rights of ways over the year. Problems found are added to our workload list and an action plan is devised – more serious problems such as bridge repairs are reported to East Sussex County Council (ESCC). Lesser issues are dealt with at a local level either by writing to the relevant landowner or by our own volunteers.

One of the questions often asked when we alert a landowner to a problem is 'who supplies the stile?'. Unfortunately the law is that the responsibility for upkeep rests with the landowner. The county council no longer supplies stiles and dog latches free of charge, but they will supply these in kit form at a reduced rate for those interested.

Projects

The new bridleway (BW92) along the old railway track from Bassets Bridge to Rotherfield has proved extremely popular but we are still trying to resolve access problems to allow a complete route through to Rotherfield. Great effort is also underway to turn footpath 43a into a bridleway.

I have mentioned the hard work the ROW committee do, but I would also like to say a big thank you to the many landowners without whose cooperation would make our task extremely difficult. Repairing or clearing a ROW is not always at the top of everyones agenda especially when you have a farm or business to run but their help is greatly appreciated.

A further service we provide is the operation of a small clearance team. Again made up from volunteers working in collaboration with ESCC and the Parish Council, the group helps in the clearance of vegetation over paths or where there are particular problems, install and repair stiles, finger posts, waymarkers etc. When we're out, we try to ensure each job takes no more than two to three hours and we supply all the tools and materials. – As ever we are always looking to add to our volunteer base, so if anyone feels they could do with some exercise and have a chance to hone their carpentry skills in stile building – this is your chance. Please contact the Parish Clerk who will pass on your details.

The committee also looks after the trees in the villages ensuring that those with Tree Preservation Orders or in the conservation area are not damaged or felled. A problem to look out for this year is Ash Die Back. There have been a few concerns but so far all the trees investigated have not shown symptoms of the disease. Further checks will be made when the trees leaf out.

A common enquiry is regarding the 'Right to Roam'. This becomes especially important during the spring months when the bluebells and wood anemones are growing. At the end of the day, the public have a right to use a public footpath or bridleway but deviating from this is actually trespassing. Typically, in some of our woodlands, well-trodden paths have been created over a number of years by dog walkers and ramblers, and the majority of landowners accept this without any problem. However, ultimately it is up to the landowners whether they allow this and is quite within his rights to ask people to keep to the definitive path.

Finally, we have reprinted copies of our popular Mayfield Circular Walk booklet (free) together with new copies of A Guide to Village Walks around Mayfield and Five Ashes (£5) containing details of eleven walks. Both are available from the Parish Office.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the current members who all generously give so much of their time. Without their diligence and enthusiasm, we wouldn't be able to maintain the 50 odd miles of paths and bridleways within the parish to the standard we have come to expect.

As ever we have a pretty full agenda for the coming year but we hope our work and diligence is reflected in maintaining the environment around our villages so we continue to enjoy some of the most outstanding countryside in the area.

Jerry Watkiss (Chair)

Community Traffic and Safety

This committee is concerned with police matters, Neighbourhood Watch, roads, traffic calming, road signs, car parking and emergency planning.

Five Ashes

The road surfacing and linage at Five Ashes is a major achievement of the Community and Safety Traffic Advisory. Speed Indicating Devices are in operation and Community Speedwatch is now in operation. The intention is to slow down the remaining 15% of traffic that still insists on breaking the 30mph speed limit. There are disappointingly a few outstanding issues which need addressing by the County Council:

- Signage for the 30mph speed limit has not been completed as promised.
- Regular speed checks by East Sussex Police were promised but have not been implemented.
- A police camera van was promised to enforce the speed limit but has not been provided at the time of writing this report.

We are working to ensure that the remaining issues are addressed and the traffic calming scheme in Five Ashes is set to become a pilot village for others in the county where traffic calming is essential.

Liaison

A large proportion of time and effort for this committee has been spent liaising with different organisations:

East Sussex Highways

- Reducing traffic speed in Five Ashes.
- Pot hole filling
- Drain and gully emptying
- Repairs and maintenance of road signs
- Clearance of verges and roundabouts

Sussex Police

- Car parking enforcement
- Neighbourhood Watch reports
- Police crime reports
- Crime prevention
- Speeding issues
- Security for the Mayfield Bonfire Festival

Direct Technical Services

- Street light repair and maintenance

Grit bins

The Parish Council owns and is responsible for organising the filling and maintenance of eight grit bins, East Sussex is responsible for an additional nine. The bins are routinely checked and topped up as required.

Car Parking and Car Park Provision

We are constantly trying to find a solution to the lack of available car parking in the village. The development of Love Lane car park is progressing and we are looking in to the possibility of extending the Memorial Hall car park. Other possibilities for increasing the

amount of parking spaces in the High Street and to extend the two hour parking restriction to the top of Tunbridge Wells Road have been discussed and we await a parking review by East Sussex Highways.

Future Aims

To improve parking provision in Mayfield.

To decrease the speed of traffic the local community.

Resolve traffic problems and increase safety on the A267 and its environs.

To refurbish or replace the road's fingerposts. East Sussex Parish Councils are currently awaiting confirmation of ownership of fingerposts from ESCC. We will be advertising the possibility of adopting or dedicating a fingerpost to help towards the maintenance costs in next month's Mayfield and Five Ashes Newsletter.

Planning

The planning Committee is an executive committee of Mayfield and Five Ashes Parish Council and consists of four Councillors, one of whom is elected Chairman annually, and meets at three-weekly intervals. The three-weekly interval is to ensure compliance with Wealden District Council timescales.

The purpose of the committee is to review Planning Applications made within the Mayfield and Five Ashes Parish Council area and to reflect the views of the residents and Parish Council to Wealden District Council to provide local input to the planning process. The Parish Council either supports or objects to the application and provides comments and information to accompany the decision. The Parish Council liaises with Wealden District Council when decisions about contentious applications have been made and, if the application is to be discussed at a Wealden District Council Planning Committee meeting, a Parish Councillor may attend and speak to reinforce the Parish Council Decision.

In the annual year 2012, 133 applications were reviewed at 17 meetings, in which 111 were supported and 22 objected to. Wealden District Council provides feedback on the progress of applications and explanatory comments if the decision of Wealden District Council is different to that of the Parish Council.

Applications of particular interest in 2012 were the "Wincanton" site in Love Lane because of its size and mix of domestic and commercial building, and "Rock Cottage" in Fletching Street because of the challenges of a very restricted site and its position within the conservation Area.

Annex 1

Current List of Councillors

Jerry Watkiss	Chairman and Chairman of Rights of Ways and Trees
Chris Lilly	Vice-chair & Chairman of Finance & General Purposes
Monica Aitken	
Patricia Balfour	
Andrew Burnett	
Jayne Bramwell	
Warwick Child	
Rosemary Neal	
Jane Driscoll	Chairman of Community and Development
Robert Fitzsimmons	Chairman of Community Safety and Traffic
Lloyd McLean	
Ian Parker	
Graham Playfoot	Chairman.of.Planning Executive
Deveda Redman	
Elaine Wheeler	

Annex 2

MAYFIELD AND FIVE ASHES PARISH COUNCIL SERVICES, PROJECTS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Services Provided

- Litter collection Court Meadow
- Litter collection Mayfield conservation area
- Provision of litter bins Mayfield and Five Ashes
- Provision of dog bins
- Collection of recycled waste Mayfield collection point
- Collection of dog waste
- Maintenance of St Dunstan's Church clock
- Maintenance and care of Mayfield War Memorial
- Maintenance and care of Five Ashes War Memorial
- Maintenance of trees and hedges on Court Meadow and Five Ashes playing fields
- Provision and maintenance of wayside seats in Mayfield and Five Ashes and Court Meadow
- Provision and maintenance of bus shelters for Mayfield and Five Ashes
- Provision and maintenance of Parish Council notice boards in Mayfield and Five Ashes
- Maintenance of street lights to required standards
- Provision of Parish Council website
- Maintenance and care of playing fields in Court Meadow
- Maintenance and care of playing fields in Five Ashes
- Maintenance and care of Court Meadow boundaries and access roads
- Maintenance and care of skateboard park, multi-sport complex Court Meadow
- Maintenance and care of children's play ground and young children's playground Court Meadow
- Maintenance and care of Five Ashes play area
- Development and care of Court Meadow environmental area and 'Glade'
- Maintenance and care of the Mayfield and Five Ashes footpath and bridleway network
- Provision of walks publications
- Provision of footpath walks and notice boards
- Maintenance and care of Parish finger post signs
- Maintenance and care of Memorial Hall car park
- Provision of Youth drop-in centre Mayfield
- Provision of out of Parish youth events
- Hire of Court Meadow and facilities for village events including licence
- Provision of energy for street lights
- Maintenance and care of Village Sign
- Provision of Parish Council information desk in Open Door
- Provision of scrutiny and planning application consultancy

- Provision of hanging baskets in Mayfield High Street

Contributions

- Contribution and upkeep of Mayfield Church Yard
- To work with Neighbourhood Watch
- Support to village functions
- Management and support of Village of the Year competition
- Contribution and support of library service
- Contribution and support of Crowborough – Mayfield – Wadhurst bus service
- Contribution to parking and speeding enforcement

Grants

- Made to aid specific projects
- Made to help village organisations
- Made to aid organisations who in turn contribute to the welfare of the Parish
- Made to assist specific aspects of major projects (over £1 million)

Partnerships and Consultations

- Traffic calming project projects
- Road repairs and maintenance
- Car parking projects
- Road drainage projects
- Provision of Parish expertise and views on planning applications
- Provision of affordable housing

Communication

- Website service
- Monthly newsletter
- Public concern service
- Documentation of records transparency

Projects

- Extend litter collection in stages to cover Mayfield
- Create litter collection services in Five Ashes
- Provide more dog bins and litter bins
- Hanging baskets Mayfield High Street
- Extension of bridleway 92
- Provision of Victoria Road car park
- Provision of garden plots at South Street
- Provision of new climbing frame in Five Ashes play ground
- Provision of security barriers at Five Ashes playing fields
- Provision of winter weather services (grit laying)
- Improvements to structures on skateboard park
- Provision of new notice boards

- Improvement to boundary and drainage facilities Court Meadow
- Refurbishment and update of Village War Memorial
- Provision of Adult Exercise equipment in Court Meadow
- Provision of Second Recycling site
- Restoration of Court Meadow South boundary
- Provision of extra Car Parking facilities.
- Refurbishment of Five Ashes War Memorial.
- Provision of South Street public toilets
- Replacement / refurbishment of finger posts