

Chairman's Report

Shipley Parish Council May 2026

It has once again been a privilege to serve as Chairman of Shipley Parish Council over the past municipal year. I would like to thank all Parish Councillors, our Clerk Paul Richards, District and County Councillors, volunteers, and the many residents who continue to contribute their time, energy and expertise to our parish community.

This year has been one of continued activity and challenge, particularly in relation to planning pressures, highways concerns, environmental initiatives and preparations for wider changes in local government structures.

Planning and Development

Planning continues to dominate much of the Council's work. Throughout the year the Council carefully reviewed a significant number of applications affecting all parts of the parish, always seeking to balance the need for appropriate development with the protection of the rural character and sustainability of Shipley.

The Council strongly objected to several proposals considered inappropriate or unsustainable where concerns centred on flooding, overdevelopment, infrastructure limitations, water neutrality, biodiversity loss and conflict with the Shipley Neighbourhood Plan. Members also continued to scrutinise applications connected with the wider development pressures arising from delays to Horsham District Council's Local Plan.

At the same time, the Council supported applications where Members felt proposals were proportionate, sympathetic to the parish and beneficial to the local community and continued to exercise a responsibility where the default was to look to *approve* unless otherwise unable to, an important distinction to continue to maintain.

One particularly significant development during the year was the commencement of discussions regarding a potential joint Neighbourhood Plan area with Southwater Parish Council. While still at an early stage, Members agreed to participate in exploratory work to ensure Shipley's interests remain represented within future strategic planning discussions.

The Council also supported the potential commencement of a Community Governance Review with West Grinstead Parish Council regarding parish boundaries around Dial Post, although the proposal now appears unlikely to progress further until a district-wide Governance Review being undertaken by Horsham District Council is concluded over the next few months.

Roads, Highways and Rights of Way

Highways, speeding and road safety remain among residents' greatest concerns. The Council continued work on speed reduction initiatives, including the aborted attempt to fit a Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) at Shipley Paygate, and the more successful addition of the 5th Speed Indicator Device (SID) at the northbound entrance to Coolham which residents have already commented has had a noticeable impact on reducing speed into the village. In April, the council also approved the location and expenditure of four sets of village gates to the entrances into Coolham, to highlight to motorists they are entering a residential location, the application for which is currently sitting with West Sussex County Council.

Members worked closely with WSCC highways officers and Cllr Jupp on matters including, flooding and erosion damage following periods of severe rainfall, highway verge destruction caused by HGVs,

improvements to signage and road safety at locations including Bar Lane and Coolham, repairs to a local bridge in Shipley and public rights of way, and ongoing concerns regarding traffic speeds and inappropriate routing through rural lanes.

The Council also continued to press for improvements to footpaths, bridleways and local maintenance issues, while supporting volunteer-led repairs and environmental stewardship work where possible.

Environment and Climate Initiatives

Environmental matters remained an important area of work during the year, supported particularly by Greener Shipley and Councillors Tuck & Emrich, thank you to them both for their efforts.

Consultation work continued regarding future improvements and environmental enhancement proposals for Coolham Playing Fields. Residents were invited to participate in discussions around biodiversity, tree planting and habitat creation, the final proposal being signed off by members in April quickly followed by the first planting before the summer arrived. A variety of community engagement events and environmental visits organised by Greener Shipley continued and were enjoyed by many throughout the year as well supporting wider sustainability initiatives including refill schemes, thermal imaging support for residents and exploration of carbon reduction opportunities.

Finance and Governance

The Council has continued to manage parish finances prudently and responsibly during a challenging economic period.

During the year Members approved the increase of earmarked reserves for future playground equipment replacement and continued to maintain reserves for Greener Shipley, traffic management, general maintenance and other community infrastructure projects.

The Council also undertook work to modernise systems and improve resilience, transparency and compliance in line with our Financial Regulations, including changes to our banking arrangements, email migration and governance reviews. I would like to thank our Clerk Paul for his expertise and continued hard work supporting the Council through an increasingly complex local government environment.

To cap the year off we received the second CIL payment in 12 months, the first we have had for quite some time, totalling £52,000 which now gives the council immediate options for replacing the playground at Coolham Village Hall for example which I know is a pressing matter to address for many councillors and local residents.

Local Government Reorganisation

Towards the end of the year increasing attention was given to proposed local government reorganisation and devolution across Sussex. The Council has begun engaging with Horsham District Council and neighbouring parishes regarding the possible future transfer of assets, changes to governance arrangements and the implications for parish councils.

While much remains uncertain, Shipley Parish Council will continue to ensure the interests of parish residents are fully represented throughout any future changes.

Thanks

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Parish Councillors for their dedication, commitment and willingness to give their time voluntarily for the benefit of the parish. Thanks also go to our County and District councillors for their continued support throughout the year. I would also like to offer thanks to former Cllr De Zoete who retired from the council in January after more than ten years of service, we shall miss her frank and valuable contributions at council meetings.

Most importantly, thank you to the residents of Shipley Parish for their ongoing engagement, feedback and support, which was most noticeable and very much welcome when looking at plans for the playing fields. Parish councils work best when communities participate, and Shipley continues to demonstrate a strong sense of local involvement and care for its environment and community.

Cllr Matthew Payne
Chairman
Shipley Parish Council