**APM**

**Chairman’s Speech**

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow Parishioners, Councillors and welcome to the 2023/4 Annual Parish Meeting, the first in this Memorial Hall.

Firstly, a word of thanks to fellow Councillors for the work they have invested this year as well as to our Parish Clerk Alison for her support to us in helping us to carry out our duties. Also a word of congratulations to Pieter Montyn, our local WSCC Councillor on his election as Chair of WSCC and to Donna Johnson and Val Weller our CDC representatives. *(A show of hands if they are here?)*

I hope I am able to welcome you to this meeting in greater numbers than in prior years. I hope that you received a leaflet notifying you of this event. We or more accurately the company distributing the leaflets has struggled to get all the leaflets to you in a timely fashion, but I am pleased to see you and hope you find the evening informative.

As you will see from the leaflet, we are stressing that the Council needs you and your input and this is a theme we will return to during this report. After this report there will be a question-and-answer session perhaps to answer in more detail some of your concerns.

It is our legal obligation to do an end of term report to Parishioners, explaining what we have done and how we have spent your money. You need to know that as well as Councillors need to know what we could do better or more or not at all. The lack of attendees that we have had in recent years means that we have had a democratic deficit in the important exchange between Parishioners and Councillors which has not been able to take place satisfactorily. So, this year we have been proactive in sending you a leaflet as a reminder. You may think we are doing a brilliant job, and you have great confidence in your Council so you do not need to attend, but we would like to hear from you in person at this meeting. You will find throughout this report we would like you to be involved in future and present projects, so we do need you to attend these meetings.

So, on with the show so to speak.

We believe we have a had a pretty good year. If you want to see one of the highlights, look around you. This newly refurbished hall is the fruit of a partnership between the Parish Council and Sidlesham Community Association, each partner investing £25k to refurbish the old leaking and decrepit hall.  The results are very gratifying, and the early signs are that this hall will be a positive asset to the community both in Sidlesham and the wider Manhood. The events that have taken place in the hall have been well attended and enjoyed.

The hall and the entire site are managed on your behalf by the Sidlesham Community Association. I am sure that you all know that all parishioners are de facto members of the Community Association. The SCA trustees need to hear from you that as to what you would like to see happen. We want to see a wide range of activities and of ages enjoying this amenity.  The hall and grounds are available not just for meetings and events but also for private parties, family celebrations and the like. There is a quality kitchen for all catering needs as well as bars.  Please chat to any of the Trustees about what you would like to see happen here, it is your facility. What the SCA also needs are more volunteers. Please don’t moan and blame the trusty few. They need your help. Think about leading an activity, get involved. The current Trustees have made a significant difference as you can see, both inside and outside to the gardens and murals on the walls, but there is a lot more work to be done.

Talking of outside, I can report that the football activity has progressed well in the year. We have at least six clubs using the ground and it is a great tribute to Mike French's groundsman skills that we have survived a very wet winter and preserved what is now widely regarded as a very good local football ground. Our lead senior club, Infinity, has been granted promotion to I believe the Southern Counties League so will be competing with the likes of Selsey and Pagham next year. Exciting local rivalries for your enjoyment. The rental income from the pitch hire will amount to around £4500 this year, a useful addition to SCA income.

**Finance**

I am happy to report that even with many new issues we have been able to close the year's expense within spitting distance of the budgeted precept.

The accounts have been modified to the new regulatory format. Thanks to the diligent work of Alison on this new format we are in good shape to control expenditure more closely. We also anticipate that auditory approval will come faster and cheaper than last year. In general terms we have tried to spend wisely even on major projects to reduce costs and eliminate surprises in future years. An example of this was the rebuild of the tunnel slide in the playground, a big expense last year but hopefully will generate less costs in the coming years.

In a similar vein we were able to, but had to replace the old main pitch pipe  from the Memorial Hall to the main drain in the road which had collapsed. This underlined the need to resurface the car park as it was becoming unsafe with increasing use. This was completed very recently which I hope you noticed on your arrival. We believe that these main ticket items represent money well spent.

**Planning**

Firstly, before getting into the meat of this many thanks to Adrian, Tricia and the support of Donna on this most contentious subject which we seem to spend on occasions a lot of time, because it is so difficult.

To explain, although we have no power, our role being advisory, we try with maximum effort to preserve where possible the essential rural and horticultural characteristics of the Parish. Against us, so to speak, are ranged at the upper end of the political spectrum, a government committed to maximum housing expansion whose policies are passed though the District Councils to the lower end, developers, national, local and even private who seek financial gain from housing enterprise often with little thought for consequences.

Into this mix, add the problems of infrastructure development, roads, schools, surgeries etc or lack of them, flood plains, the impending risks of climate warming, the protection of agricultural land, you can I think see that this is a very complex debate that all authorities must grapple with from District to Parish Councils.

For various reasons too complex to go into here we as a Council think we are not faring too badly compared with our neighbours in so far as no major sites. We do have issues and we alert CDC to our concerns. We often get a reaction. but in general, so far so good, as I have said before, thanks to our Planning workgroup. We handled 56 new planning applications in the year. It seemed a lot more. We look at the detail of every plan very carefully before submitting our recommendations to CDC.

There is however, one aspect I want to mention here as part of our dialogue with Parishioners, as it involves you and that is the Neighbourhood Plan. This is a legal document which gives an authority, in our case a Parish, some protection against unwanted development. Even in our Council there are differing views as to how useful this document is, but as a majority we decided to press on and see if we can achieve an approved Plan. The Plan has been severely curtailed by the Covid Pandemic. Only now are we reformatting a simpler version of the Plan. The plan is currently being proofread and the next stage will be a public consultation exercise. It is very important to show to the examiners that the Plan has public support so you will be hearing from us shortly with a view to these meetings.

We need your involvement.

**Highways**

This is another area where we try to exert influence but don’t have the authority although fortunately we do have a very influential WSCC Councillor, Pieter Montyn. We have therefore been able to achieve some success throughout the year. To begin with in support of the school we were able to introduce a 20mph limit for school start and exit times.

At the invitation of WSCC we did put forward a programme to improve roads at our accident blackspots, but this was rejected probably on the grounds of expense. We kept trying and thanks again to Pieters persuasion talents WSCC has finally accepted our proposal to extend the 30mph limit from Lockgate Road north to cover the Donnington Road Junction, scene of many accidents. Another brick in the wall.

As an aside when I lived in the Midlands, I thought that potholing was an underground sport in the Peak District. I now realise it is a very common local sport called avoiding and swerving. With thanks to the gang working round the clock we seem to be over the worst of the problem, until next year maybe.

Talking about the excellent work that Pieter has done this year, one of his hobbies is visiting sewage plants, one of which we have in Sidlesham. As he often says he has been up to his neck in it many times this year. But progress is being made. The Sidlesham plant will be getting extra holding tanks for holding extra rain water but more importantly the Pagham works will have improvements effective from July this year. It is ironic that when visiting our local nature reserve at Pagham harbour the whiff or stench of sewage leaves the greater impression.

Please remember that all sewage incidents of which we have plenty should be reported to our Clerk who will then channel to Southern Water. This system seems to work but Southern Water and the Environment Agency are not the quickest in reacting.

An increasingly important feature of modern life is the growing awareness of the environment, global warming, and climate change. Alongside this we need to be aware of the need for personal well-being. Together with our fellow parishes on the Manhood we are trying to respond to these pressures in a positive way. There are quite a few organisations on the Manhood working towards this and we are well represented in many of them.  For Sidlesham, the Manhood Wildlife group does an excellent job on pond clearing and wildlife support. They are also looking for volunteers and if you also want to be up to your armpits in it then please contact Bill Martin.

For the Manhood, projects under consideration include Green Lanes, Quiet Lanes focussing on reduced car use and car speeds for cycling and horse riding. The Greenway Cycling Project is gathering momentum and now appears to have WSCC support. The Project focus has shifted from being a commuter route into being a community and school link route. The northern phase from Hunston to the free school and Chichester city centre via the canal towpath is targeted as the priority section. Other sections will follow. This project has been running for many years but there is now light at the end of the tunnel or is that the canal.

As far as Sidlesham is concerned the focus has to be on drainage. Paul Bedford heads up an organisation called Swish, part of the umbrella organisation, the Manhood Peninsula Partnership. If you remember we received grants a few years ago, called Operation Watershed, to improve our drainage system. Despite the torrential rain of last winter we coped reasonably well in Sidlesham so the clear message tonight is please keep your ditches clean and free-flowing. Ditch cleaning is a summer job. We need your input or is that outtake.

**Regulation**

I mentioned earlier that to comply with new government regulation we have had to modernise our accounts package to a new regulatory format. Alongside that your Council has been obliged to carry out many policy updates handed down to us by CDC from central Government. These include:

The Civility and Respect Policy, now on our literature;

Standing Orders;

Financial Risk Assessment;

Freedom of Information policy;

Complaints Procedures;

These and other procedures can be viewed on our website. The website itself has been modernised to make it more user friendly. We encourage you to make use of it [www.sidlesham.org](http://www.sidlesham.org) and let us know what you think.

We are committed to improving communication between you and the Parish Council and the website is one such vehicle as well as the local newssheets and notice boards, which have recently been given a facelift.

Lastly and as you may have noticed the Government is increasingly conscious of security both personal and organisational. I am sure you have all heard about GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) under which we are being encouraged to make necessary security orientated changes which is likely to become obligatory for Councils, even small ones, like ourselves, later this year, probably after the election.

We are preparing for this and putting in new contact guidelines which mean that your first point of contact for questions and help will be the Parish Clerk who will act as a distribution post. Please contact her in the first instance by email. However, we are very conscious that we do not want to lose the personal contact for Parishioners, but we must comply with legislation. We are trying to find a friendly way through this. No doubt like many of you we as Councillors have had our email scammed so we do see the need for better security.

In that context may I recommend to you a presentation we are organising with CDC help in September (date not yest fixed) called "How to stay Safe from Online Scams and Cyber Crime.

**Community Involvement** ( where do we put this)

Finally, I know that you, the residents of Sidlesham are very proud of your community and justly so. But we do have people passing through who are not as tidy. We are therefore launching a community litter group under Corina Hall to do litter sweeps. If you could give up some time to participate, we all would be grateful.

Secondly, we need to clean up our finger posts for footpaths etc as they need some tlc, which I am sure you have noticed. We sent an appeal out through the Village Magazines and one kind parishioner has already stepped forward and adopted one near to them. We may have a second, but there are 5/6 still to be adopted. The Parish Council would pay for any materials used and if anyone else is interested in adopting a fingerpost near them, please contact Alison.

Thank you for your attention. We now turn to Tom M who will talking about farming and the Environment.