Lavant Parish council ward report

April 2024

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Welcome to the April report. Firstly, I hope you all had a lovely and restful Easter weekend.

**Ward matters:**

We’ve had yet another busy month! I’m pleased to let you know that we have issued more than £220,000 to businesses and community groups from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). This is from the £1.7 million that we were allocated in 2022. Money from the UKSPF is there to help encourage economic growth and improve the quality of life for people across the district, while the REPF is intended to support projects which assist with supporting businesses and community infrastructure to address the challenges faced by rural areas.

During the first round of the funding that we administered, 23 projects across the district were approved and these are due to be completed by April 2024. The funding has supported a variety of work - from small charities, to growing businesses and community organisations. The money has made a huge difference by helping them to expand what they offer to their customers and allowing them more flexibility in what they do. Some of the businesses have also been able to keep jobs in our district - and increase staff posts - which will support our local economy and ensure that our communities continue to thrive.

Cabinet have given the go ahead to bid for government money so that our coastal engineering service can develop a plan for the Chichester Harbour area that will help communities prepare for flooding and coastal change. The plan would also help to protect and restore the harbour’s habitats and ecosystems. A business case will now be submitted to the Environment Agency.

If successful, the money will help the council to develop an Investment and Adaption Plan for the harbour for up to the year 2100 and beyond. We all understand what a special place Chichester Harbour is, and what an internationally important site it is for migrating birds and other wildlife. One of the major issues we need to address is ‘coastal squeeze’. This is where important habitats are literally squeezed up against coastal defences as a result of rising sea levels and means that these habitats are at risk at risk of being lost. People were really shocked three years ago when Natural England classed the harbour environment as being in an ‘unfavourable, declining’ condition as a direct result of the pressures within the harbour. They estimate that the harbour has lost over 58% of its saltmarsh habitat since 1946 and continues to lose an average of 2.54 hectares of saltmarsh annually. In order to reverse this decline, and protect these vital habitats for the future, we really need to include them as an integral part of how we manage coastal flood and erosion risk in the future.

This is where this plan is key, as it will take account of all of these issues and how the different habitats interact with each other and the important features of each different habitat. If the funding bid is successful, then Coastal Partners – the council’s specialist coastal team – would lead on preparing the plan in partnership with our council, Havant Borough Council, regulators, other partner organisations, landowners and the affected communities. There’s no guarantee we will be successful with the bid for funding, but it is important that we are looking ahead and identifying solutions and possible funding opportunities. If we are successful, our communities and partners will be at the heart of decision making at all stages of the plan.

**District council matters:**

It's also hard to believe it’s been just over a year since the major fire in Midhurst. As you know, the council has stepped in to offer significant support to the town with a package of over £300,000, as well as business support on the ground and marketing activities to encourage people back to the town. The funding has been used to provide grants to eligible businesses, pay for a new website to promote the town and to provide coaching from a retail specialist. The Town Team is also developing a new Midhurst Business Partnership. All of these actions will make a significant difference moving forward. In addition, we have developed an events programme to encourage people to visit and spend within the town. We delivered a successful programme of events in September, and we are in the process of organising some more exciting events with Midhurst Town Council, which are due to be delivered in July.

Just a reminder that the council have secured £12,000 to increase tree cover and enhance community wellbeing through the creation of new community orchards in the district. This is thanks to a share of the government’s £2.5 million Coronation Living Heritage Fund, which has been developed to promote green spaces and connect communities with nature to mark the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III. We will be issuing grants to parish councils and community groups to support the development of community orchards within their local area. This is part of our successful ‘Tree Chichester District’ scheme, which has already supported the planting of seven community orchards in Selsey, Chichester, Fishbourne and Goodwood over the past year. If you are interested in starting a community orchard planting project, please get in touch with our Tree Project Officer by emailing treescheme@chichester.gov.uk or by calling 01243 521161.

**Events:**

Chichester Roman Week, which will take place from Monday 27 May until Saturday 1 June. The Novium Museum have also arranged for Europe’s leading Roman re-enactment group to take over the museum on Wednesday 29 May, offering a series of interactive talks and demonstrations. Look out for our article in the Spring initiatives (out in April), which lists all of the events coming up.

Cross Market & More dates for 2024:

The next Market & more event will once again be filled with artisan stalls showcasing some of the best talent from across the area including local students who hope to be our budding entrepreneurs of tomorrow! Having proved popular over the last couple of the years the team will be curating and delivering the events involving jewellery makers, clothing, street food, live music and much more. As before, the Cross Market & More event will operate between 10am and 4pm. 7 July (which also includes the fabulous Summer Street Party), 29 September and 24 November. I hope to see you there.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact me if I can help in any way.

Best wishes

Joseph