Welcome everyone, thank you for coming to this year’s Annual Parish Meeting. I am delighted to see so many of you here this evening and it is lovely to be in Trinity Hall as a change.

Many of you know me already, but for those that don’t know me, my name is Giles Horner and I am the Chairman of your Parish Council.

My role today is to take you through some of the areas the Council has been involved in over this last year; and to answer any questions you have.

**The AGENDA is as follows**:

1. Apologies for absence and attendance register.
2. To Approve Annual Parish Meeting minutes from 2024.
3. Chairman’s report on Parish Council Activities
4. Report from Ashdown Forest Conservators – Mark Pearson send apologies
5. Report from PCSO – pending availability
6. Report from County and District Councils
7. Reports from local groups.
8. To receive questions from parishioners.

**2. Approval of the minutes to the meeting of 15th April 2024**

**3. Chairman’s Report**

I generally start by commenting and reminding people on the role of the parish council.

The parish of Hartfield comprises Colemans Hatch, Upper Hartfield, Hartfield and Holtye – with just over 2000 residents. The council’s role is to:

* Represent the local community
* Strive to improve quality of life in the parish
* Exercise a general consultative role on behalf of local people, including statutory consultation rights on planning matters
* Represent the views of all residents within the parish and listen to, and understand, the views and needs of different groups in the community

We are a voluntary group, interested in local matters. If you are similar minded and have any interest in joining, please feel free to contact me or Emma – we have a regular turnover of councillors.

I am going to start my report by updating you on the financial position of the parish.

**2024/25 financial position**

We aim to balance our books each year, though this is not always possible when we have some big expenditures (such as the £19,000 spent on the playground in 2020) or indeed when we get a large chunk of CIL money as we did in 2023 and this year. This past year, excluding the CIL money and Honey Run income we made a surplus of approx. £6,800.

I mention CIL, CIL is Community Infrastructure Levy which is a levy charged on new dwellings and is typically paid by developers or owners of the land in question. The funds have to be spend within 5 years of receipt and can be used to improve “Infrastructure” which includes physical, social and green infrastructure such as highways, cycleways, education facilities, sports and community halls and parks and play areas.

Income: precept was £106,623; flat rental at GYH was just over £19,000. We received £7,832 of CIL money. We also received just over £4000 from the Honey Run, but that is being distributed and reinvested in next year’s event.

Expenses:

We are seeing costs steadily rising in some areas and remain very careful on where we spend.

In this last year, we spent almost £39,000 on the town croft and other parish assets, including £19,000 on the croft and other ground costs, £5,000 on upkeep of the pavilion; £2000 on playground upkeep, and £1500 on the street lights. This is in addition to upkeep in finger posts, tree works and bus shelters. The pavilion costs also included £2000 on installation of CCTV which was felt appropriate after some vandalism.

We paid out £5,389 in grants to local organisations.

The single largest cost is the repayment of our Goods Yard House mortgage and interest, amounting to £21,574 (the loan outstanding is £156k).

£8,670 was spent on utilities, refuse and miscellaneous repairs on goods yard house.

There were other administrative costs, such as cost of employing a part time clerk, the newsletter, insurance.

I’d like now to talk about some of the activity that we have been involved in over the past year.

**Community and events**:

Firstly, a big thank you to all those people and groups who have helped put on events over the last year and are currently planning and organising events for this year. We only need to look at this hall, Trinity Talks and cafe The community is better for all the events that get run by the volunteers of the parish.

The council has always looked to support events, in various ways as and where possible. Events include the D-Day celebrations in June last year, the Honey Run and the VE Day celebrations being planned for 8th May.

**Parish and community services and asset**s:

We continue to fund the upkeep of the Croft and sports pavilion. The Pavilion roof remains a concern, we spend money on repairs but at some point in the coming years it will need to be properly refurbished.

In this last year, we have invested and completed repairs in many areas including:

* Fencing near the sharp drop in the pavilion car park
* More robust fencing around the playground last year
* Repairing Colemans hatch bus shelter and a number of benches
* Repainting the croft barn, and anti vandal paint on the youth shelter
* Redecoration of the pavilion a window replacement and also the outside WC door
* CCTV was installed at the pavilion

We continue to pay for the annual vertidraining, sanding and seeding of the Croft – c£4k and grass cutting is £2.5k. This allows use for sport throughout the year.

Community storage for the fete, scouts, guides, sport, horticultural society and others remains an issue and we remains an agenda item though there is no easy solution.

**Highways**:

We have regular conversations with East Sussex highways on all aspects of traffic.

The council recognises that parking has been a significant topic of interest, especially with those living in and around Hartfield village. We have engaged with East Sussex on various aspects, including use of double yellow line, parking enforcement with no obvious solutions.

Last year, we were informed that the 40mph reduced speed limit in Hammerwood to Holtye had been approved, after overcoming several objections. That has now been implemented.

A few years ago we attempted to stop tourists using the jib jacks hill road to walk from Hartfield up to Pooh Bridge through introducing signage. That was not effective and we have recently ordered new signs for the road and additional footpath signs which will go up shortly, hoping that it will stop people walking on the dangerous road.

**Environment and sustainability:**

We have agreed to lease car ports at Goods Yarde House to an EV company, and EV chargers are now installed

We recently had a member of the parish come to talk to us about recycling and ways we could bring greater sustainability to the parish. There will be more on this in our next newsletter.

**Devolution**

The other significant factor that is coming our way is the proposed consolidation of the country and district councils. This will be a momentous change and the bringing together into one authority the accountability for:

* Transport and local infrastructure
* Skills and employment support
* Housing and strategic planning
* Economics development and regeneration
* Environment and climate change
* Health, wellbeing
* Public safety

We expect elections in mid 2027 with the new combined authority implemented in 2028.

As a parish council, we are unsure how this will impact us and remain engaged in the process. It will mean that those services currently provided by Wealden would transfer to this central authority – being recycling and waste, planning and building control, housing and local tourism support.

**Thank you**

A final thank you to all those who get involved in the work of the Parish. All councillors are volunteers and spend many hours working in support of our community. Thanks also go to the Parish Clerk who works with the councillors putting their decisions into practice.

It is not just the councillors, there are many unsung heroes who volunteer regularly or on an occasional basis who make a big difference. But, if you are interested in joining the council, please feel free to contact me or Emma and we can talk you through what we do.

**4. Presentation by Mark Pearson, CEO of Ashdown Forest Conservators**

Unfortunately due to illness, Mark is unable to join us this year

1. **Presentation by our local PCSO – not available**
2. **Report from County and District Councils**
3. **Reports from local groups.**
4. **To receive questions from parishioners.**