

Amberley Society

Acting Chair Report 2025

In 2007 I took over as chair of the Society from Mike Toynbee. At last year's AGM without any offers from anyone to take over, I reluctantly stated that, after 17 years in office, I would be standing down. I was prepared to remain on the committee and give any assistance, if required. Fortunately, soon after the meeting, Ian Galbraith stepped up to volunteer for the role if he could share it with Jeff Feakins. With your approval they will officially take over at this AGM.

The Society has been looking for some time at updating our constitution and with new co-chairs we have a good opportunity to restructure and reorganise. Ian Galbraith has completed a huge amount of work on the constitution to enable the Society to become a registered charity. Likewise, Jeff Feakins has been busy using his IT skills to bring many of our operational processes up to date. Mailing lists, membership renewals and, of course, the website which is becoming ever more important as an interactive tool.

Last April wildlife naturalist Michael Blencowe led a walk on the Wildbrooks with the focus on seeing new arrivals of summer bird migrants. It wasn't only migrants that we saw and for some it was the first time that they had set eyes on a White-Tailed Eagle. Michael always brings a great sense of humour with him and attracts a good turnout and this was no exception.

Unfortunately, we didn't hold an autumn meeting but there were plenty of other interesting talks and events staged by the 'Hallraisers' who were fundraising for the Church Hall kitchen refurbishment.

Long before I became chair there were planning problems with the Drewitts Farm development and after all these years there are still ongoing unresolved issues and yet another new planning application from O'Brien Homes.

The South Downs National Park Authority's Local Plan is being revised and we were alarmed to see in the Land Allocation Assessment for potential new housing, that the East Street Farm fields were proposed for 25-45 new Affordable Homes. Our previous allocation in 2014 was for six new homes which formed part of the Amberley Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2032. The latest large allocation does not comply with the SDNPA's Medium Dispersed Development Strategy and the land is outside of the Neighbourhood Boundary in open countryside.

The main argument against this development became apparent after Alex Briggs identified the chalk stream running through the site. The environmental importance of this 'Priority Habitat' is explained in his excellent Chalk Stream report. Another major concern was with the access through the village and entrance via Hurst Cottages. Sustainability and flood risk are big issues, and others included Relative Tranquillity, Dark Night Skies and Landscape views.

An alternative proposal was put forward for the land to be used for a new nature reserve to conserve and enhance the chalk stream.

The aspiration for a new Community Centre remains. Amberley Parish Council has also strongly objected to the proposal. It may take up to 18 months before the result of our objections are known.

As the Society moves forward my hope is for it to thrive and through the understanding of what makes the village and its surroundings special, continue to achieve its aims.

Grahame Joseph
Acting Chair