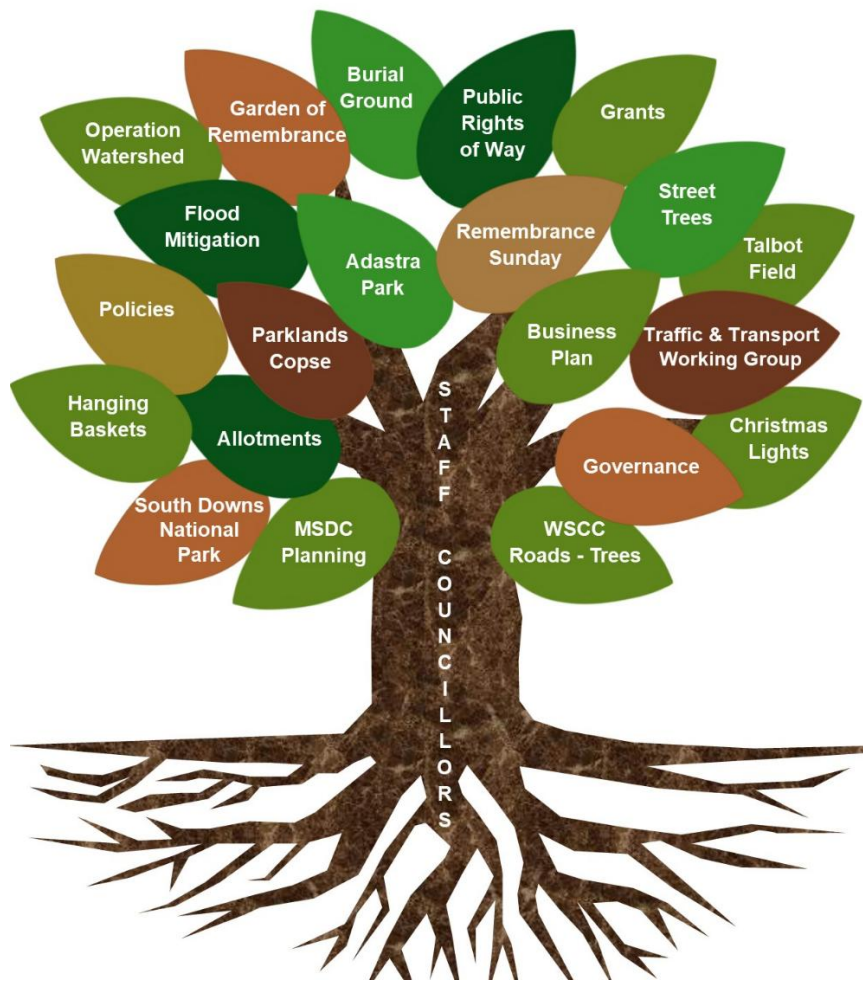




Annual Parish Meeting
21st May 2026
Annual Report 2025-2026



Chairperson's Report

TREES, TREES, TREES

We all know how Hassocks is enriched by a vast number and variety of trees.

For me a tree with deep roots, numerous branches and abundant foliage or fruit can be seen as a metaphor for the Parish Council. We are connected to, and interdependent on, the community that we serve and which we are a part of.

To be less lyrical, but keeping in mind all our interconnections:

This report will outline our main achievements through the work of Staff, Councillors, Committees and Working groups. It will also indicate how our activities have been enabled through the partnerships we have with community groups, volunteers and various levels of government; and it will be updating you on our projects relating to our Assets, Environment, Community and Governance.

Our Assets and Usage

Adastra Park

Park drainage improvements

After many years of trying to progress solutions to alleviate the historical flooding issues in Adastra Park, works finally took place in September and October 2025.

Our selected contractor installed drainage channels at locations around the park which had been highlighted on drawings made by one of our Councillors – an experienced drainage engineer. The work was funded from a mixture of developer contributions and Parish Council ring-fenced funds, reserved for this purpose.

There are still areas which will be prone to waterlogging, but the fields which became unusable for sports such as football or leisure have already been improved, as have sections of the younger children's play area.

More needs to be done here though and we are now looking at ways of exploring if planting in specific areas can add further benefits.

The Pavilion

The building is used by the cricket, football and stoolball clubs, and other independent hirers including art, drama and exercise clubs. Councillors have been aware for some time that the cost of maintaining it continues to be high and that it is in need of improvement and measures which will make it more comfortable and cost effective.

After many inspections by the Clerk and Councillors, towards the end of 2025 the Parish Council commissioned a thorough survey of the building, its mechanical and electrical operation, energy costs and external and internal condition. A programme of improvements is already underway and the coming year will see more substantial upgrading to the building.

It is thanks to our new Clerk and her knowledge of available S106*¹ funding and her proactively seeking out these monies, that we are now in a financial position to invest in this community building.

The alternative would have been to increase the precept more than we have previously and we wanted to avoid that.



Sports and Activities

Some notable changes, in addition to the improved drainage, have also been progressed.

As the weather warms up and the ground conditions improve, so the demand on the park increases as does the need to accommodate various users at the same time. This can create an operational challenge, and the Parish Council is greatly appreciative of the support and co-operation given by the sports clubs to ensure all goes smoothly! It is heartening to see the children's / teens play areas and skate park being so well used alongside the sports activities which are taking place in the park. In addition, the park is used by many for picnics, 'hanging out', relaxing and dog walking. Adastra Park also accommodates a well-maintained bowling green and thriving bowling club.

We are really pleased to invite all the club users of Adastra Park to this year's Annual Meeting, and it is hoped the gathering will form the beginning of us all getting to know one another better in collaborating and sharing ideas that will make the park amenity even better.

Throughout this year we have been supporting Keymer & Hassocks Cricket Club in their work to install permanent cricket nets on the eastern side of the South Field. The nets will

¹ *S106 funds are developer contributions from housebuilding

be a valuable addition to the activities of the club. So, also would be more female teams and the club is making efforts to encourage more girls to play cricket and join the club.

We have seen increased usage of the Adastra Tennis Courts and have recently introduced a membership option that enables users to access social tennis sessions through the Adastra Tennis Club for an annual fee.

In September 2025 the courts, which were newly refurbished in 2023, had their first jet wash and algaecide treatment. We have put together a comprehensive maintenance plan to keep it in the best condition possible.

Garden of Remembrance

Our volunteer group continues to help maintain the Garden of Remembrance. This year its members have been keeping the gardens tidy, pruning, weeding, edging the paths, beds and borders, litter picking and sweeping.

I would like to pay tribute to a former Parish Councillor, Jane Baker, who led and supported the group until she stepped down from the Parish Council in 2023, Jane was passionate about the upkeep of the Garden, she sadly passed away in 2025. Whilst a Councillor, she chaired the Grounds and Environment Committee for many years, with a firm grip on 'order', tempered with a witty eloquence. Jane was renowned in life outside the Council for her and her husband's work with the National Garden Scheme Open Gardens, which included their own garden at Clayton which over the years, raised thousands of pounds for charity.

The Parish Council has funded a bench dedicated to Jane's memory which will soon be installed – where else - but in the Garden of Remembrance.



Our gardening volunteers accepting a kind donation of shrubs from Tates Garden Centre

Allotments

There is a 3 year long waiting list of residents who are keen to grow their own produce.

Despite our efforts this past year to find suitable land for additional allotments, we have been unable to achieve this. We are not giving up however, and together with Rob Yates Chair of the Allotment Holders Association, we will continue to be proactive in our search and negotiations with any landowners. If any local people know of potential available land, we would welcome hearing from you.



Talbot Field

We are Trustees of this land and the basis on which it was bequeathed was to protect it as an open space.

This area, located near the western boundary with Hurstpierpoint, has been designated as a rural gap in our Neighbourhood Plan and acts as a green buffer, separating the built-up areas of Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint.

The Council is very appreciative of the tireless work carried out by the Woodland Floral and Fauna Group to protect and develop Talbot Field as a valuable nature reserve.



The Environment

Working with West Sussex County Council (WSCC) and Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) on projects and initiatives

20-mile Speed Limit

Since many residents have concerns about traffic speeds around the parish, the Traffic & Transportation working group of the Parish Council has worked closely with Hassocks Community Organisation and Greener Hassocks and Ditchling to request a 20mph speed limit at various locations around the village. Using data gathered by WSCC Officers, we undertook a draft study to then consult the wider community on whether there was support for a 20 mile per hour speed zone. The consultation garnered positive feedback and meant that we could submit a formal request to WSCC under a Community Highways Scheme.

The bid was successful and the proposal now moves onto the feasibility, costs and design stage of planning by WSCC Highways. We hope to see the scheme implemented during 2027-28 subject to funding.

Operation Watershed flood mitigation project for a property in Downsview Road

West Sussex County Council administers a scheme called Operation Watershed which funds projects to prevent flooding of high-risk properties. One such property was in Downsview Road, and the Parish Council was asked to support a bid for funds on behalf of the residents. We were pleased to do so and the bid was successful. However, this was not just a form filling exercise, Once the bid was approved, we then had to source a contractor and ensure the work was carried out correctly. Drainage works were finally completed in September 2025 after extensive procurement and monitoring by the Parish Council Clerk and Councillors. This was the first project of its kind undertaken by the Parish Council and is an example of how we are expected to take on more duties which are not statutory.

Parish Council Flood Working Group

This group was reinstated this year and continues to lobby West Sussex County Council on local flood issues and also seek its support for any mitigation measures. During heavy leaf fall, drains become blocked and this results in surface water flooding. We have been pressing Mid Sussex District Council for information on its schedule of drain and road clearance of blockages and have also been exploring ways of how the service could be more targeted either by MSDC or by clearing drains ourselves, even though this has traditionally not been one of our roles and would require extra resources.

I want to thank the WSCC Ward Councillors, Officers and members of the community who actively support all the above and attend and contribute to our Working Groups.

Public Rights of Way (PROW)

During 2025 the Parish Council continued its ambitious project to improve the condition of various public rights of way existing throughout the parish landscape. The many miles of footpaths provide opportunities for fresh air, exercise and the enjoyment of nature. The budget for footpaths has been well spent this year on upgrading four Public Rights of Way and we also have pressed developers to reinstate those which have been temporarily closed due to their building works. A summary of all the PROW completed during 2025/2026 is in Appendix 1.

Traditional White Fingerposts

There are various traditional fingerposts located around the village, which are a valuable historical asset. To save two of them from falling into disrepair and neglect, the Parish Council secured Community Infrastructure Levy funding from the South Downs National Park Authority and completed the refurbishment of two of these fingerposts; one being at the junction of Lodge Lane/New Road and the other at Clayton Hill.



Vehicle Parking

As the number of vehicles increases with the growing population of Hassocks, so does the pressure on parking places and car parks, not just from residents but also from visitors to our thriving main shopping and businesses areas.

We responded to Mid Sussex District Council's car parking charges consultation, opposing the introduction of new charges in the two village car parks and proposing alternative suggestions and pricing.



Community Relationships

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind ourselves that many of the volunteers I have referred to, including some of our own Councillors, are classified as older people and that those in their 70's and 80's and beyond, are very active as volunteers in this community.

Remembrance Sunday

This was the first time ever our civic Parish Council took the lead in organising Remembrance Sunday as a community event in partnership with Fr Alex of St Cosmos and St Damian Church, also working closely with Guide Leader Sue Davis.

The event was almost a whole year in the planning as there was much research and liaison involved and complex logistics to consider. The new Deputy Clerk rose to the task and credit goes to her leading on the administration, as well as to all the staff involved in support and on the actual day of Remembrance. Thanks go to David Angelaki-King who kindly completed a risk assessment on our behalf prior to the event.

Our appreciation goes to the proprietors of the Greyhound Pub at Keymer who kindly offered a meeting place for the Marching Band and refreshments for all after the ceremony at the Church memorial.

The weather was fortunately on our side, and the large gathering showed a community of all age groups coming together to remember those Hassocks recruits and officers who had sacrificed their lives in previous wars. The backdrop for such Remembrance in our peaceful and picturesque setting could not be further from the brutal circumstances of the past. I feel very privileged to have laid a wreath on behalf of the Parish Council in honour of those who once lived here and who died - I can only imagine - thinking of home.



Age Concern

The village has a popular and successful facility run by Age Concern Trustees. They do excellent work in providing social opportunities and lunches for the elders of the community and we have strengthened our collaboration with them this year. Sharing ideas and discussing ways of supporting those who feel digitally excluded from services and information has been an example of the issues which we have discussed.

Adastra Hall

This other great community building, on land leased from us but run by the charity Adastra Hall Hassocks Community Association, has proved a well - used hub for community clubs and activities. Our relationship with Chris Hobbs, the Chair of Trustees of Adastra Hall has been strengthened this year with ongoing communication and discussions proving valuable on issues of mutual benefit and interest.

Our growing village

The population of Hassocks is expected to reach 9500 within the next few years. The past year has seen the continuing phases of the Ockley Park and Friars Oak housing developments. The residents of all the new housing are now part of our Parish and we are particularly wanting to ensure they feel included in what we can offer. Most new housing is literally on the other side of the railway tracks and comparatively somewhat remote from the village centre where most community activities take place.



Governance

It is with great satisfaction that I can say we have achieved a huge amount of progress on our Business Plan and operational activities this year - as this report suggests. We have done this whilst also keeping the precept low and our spending within our budget.

Finance

The Policy Resources & Communications Committee has been actively working on financial management, policy development, and community communications.

It continues to balance careful financial stewardship with investment in community facilities and services, ensuring residents receive good value for their council tax contributions, via the precept which Mid Sussex District Council collects on our behalf. (Appendix 2)

- **Budget Development:** Approved the 2026/27 budget with a precept of £370,012 (£87.15 per Band D property annually) - notably lower than neighbouring parishes and the Mid Sussex average.
- **Banking Modernisation:** We have migrated to online banking in order to manage our finances in a cost-effective way. Our verification checks and monthly payment reviews have been updated, improving transparency and accountability. We have reviewed our savings and investments and moved to new investment accounts in order to achieve better returns on public funds.
- **Policy Development**

Several important policies were reviewed and adopted to ensure good governance. A list of these is being maintained by the Clerk for regular review.



Communications with Residents

The committee has regularised keeping residents informed:

- **Hassocks Life:** Bimonthly (every 2 months) articles are published covering council activities.
- **Social media & Website:** There has been Increased use of the Council's Facebook page and website for timely updates on consultations and projects.

Staffing & Structure

It has been a strategic decision and a necessity to attract, support and retain good staff as without these, no Council decisions would have been implemented and none of the successful activities I've written about would have materialised.

Starting 18 months ago and continuing into this past year, a small team of Councillors embarked on a programme of advertising, interviewing and recruiting new staff members, these have been Francis (Grounds person), Helen, (Deputy Clerk) and Elaine (Clerk). By the time of this Annual Parish Meeting, we will have also welcomed our first Community Engagement person who as the title suggests will be responsible for reaching out in person and by other various methods, to engage, listen to and inform our ever growing community. Our Administration Officers, Jane and Tracy who have remained from the previous team have helped make the transitions seamless.

I also want to emphasise the range of operational activities which are accomplished by the staff alongside and underpinning the Business Plan - and which are far too numerous to include here.

Working closely with dedicated Councillors, the staff have demonstrated a commitment to getting things done quickly and efficiently. I would like to thank them all.

Apart from the progression and review of the Business Plan, I will just offer some bullet points as to the direction of travel for the coming year in relation to the challenges and aims ahead.

Major projects for the coming year

- Taking over the toilet block in Adastra Park and refurbishing or building anew,
- Pavilion overhaul
- Potential Community Building at Ockley Park
- Community Engagement with existing and newer residents

Challenges ahead

- Government Reorganisation – stop, start, stop, start. Our Parish is already looking ahead at how our role can be invaluable.
- Funding – doing more for less without the stress.

Conclusion

I return to the metaphor with which I opened this report. There will be different perceptions and interpretations of what the picture says to us. The tree could well be a symbol, not just for the environment but also a metaphor for how we have worked as Hassocks Parish Council, whose aim is to make Hassocks a great place to live in, work, socialise and visit.

I have sought to encourage Councillors to contribute according to their strengths, skills and interests and am pleased to see greater collaboration between them.

I thank all my colleague Councillors who have contributed their time, expertise, local knowledge and common sense to serving the community, whether it be through researching, analysing, challenging, questioning, reporting and /or 'rolling up their sleeves'

I thank all the staff for their hard work, conscientiousness and support of Councillors.

And I thank all those individuals, groups and agencies who have collaborated and engaged with us.

Frances Gaudencio

Chairperson.

Appendix No 1

Footpath Upgrades / maintenance

Hassocks to Ditchling Footpath (PROW 8K & 9K)

- The section from Hassocks towards Ditchling was often impassable in winter due to soggy, flooded ground. We laid a new 1.4-metre wide, hard surface and installing proper drainage on the Hassocks section.



Footpath 8K

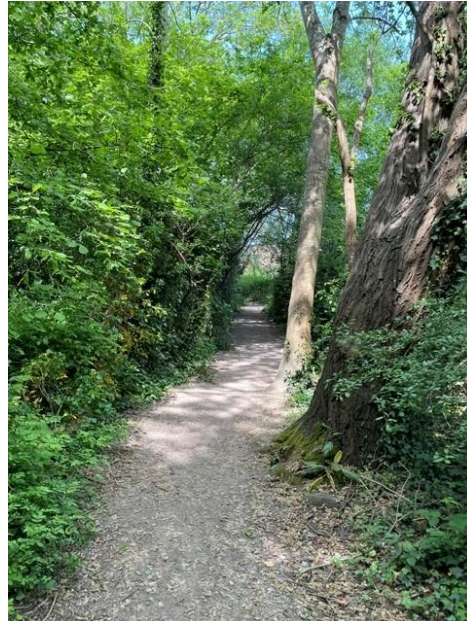


Footpath 9K

The project was possible thanks for extra funding raised by the local volunteer group, the Monday Group, which efforts alongside Council funds made a real difference.

Woodsland Road to Grand Avenue (PROW 19K)

- This path had become difficult to navigate safely due to uneven surfaces and overgrown plants. A 245-metre stretch was resurfaced, vegetation cleared, and a new 10-metre link directly into the Clayton Mills carpark was created for more convenient access.



Footpath 19k



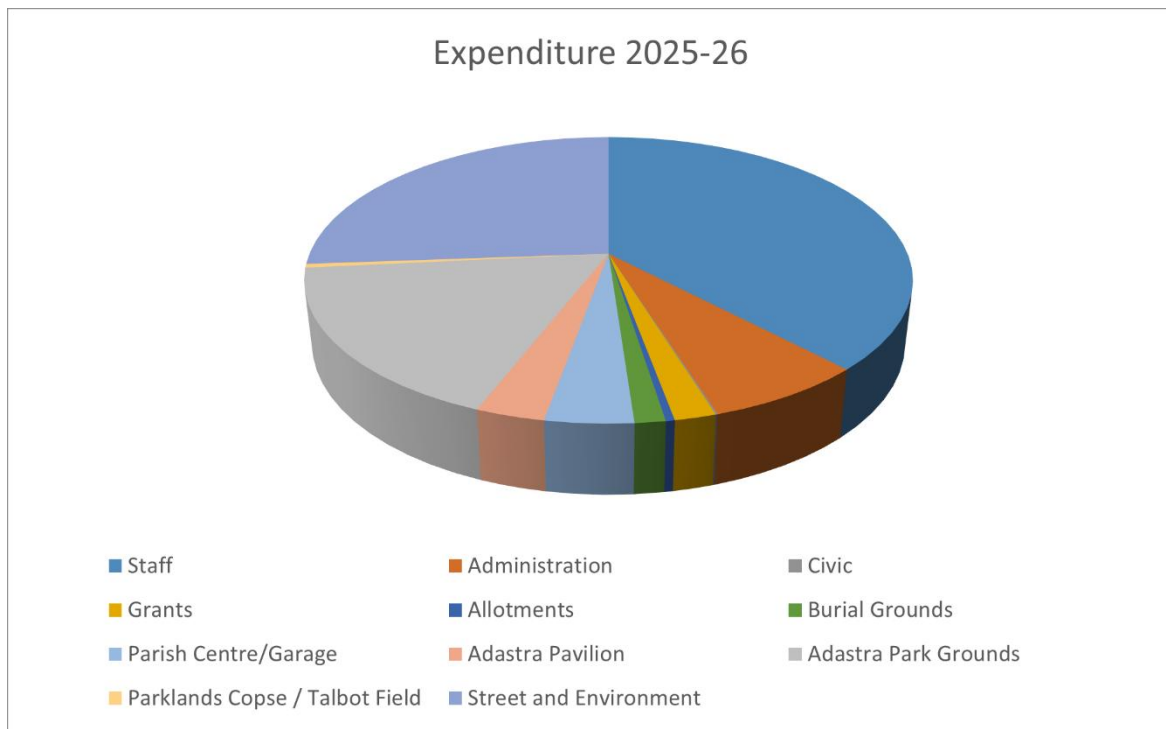
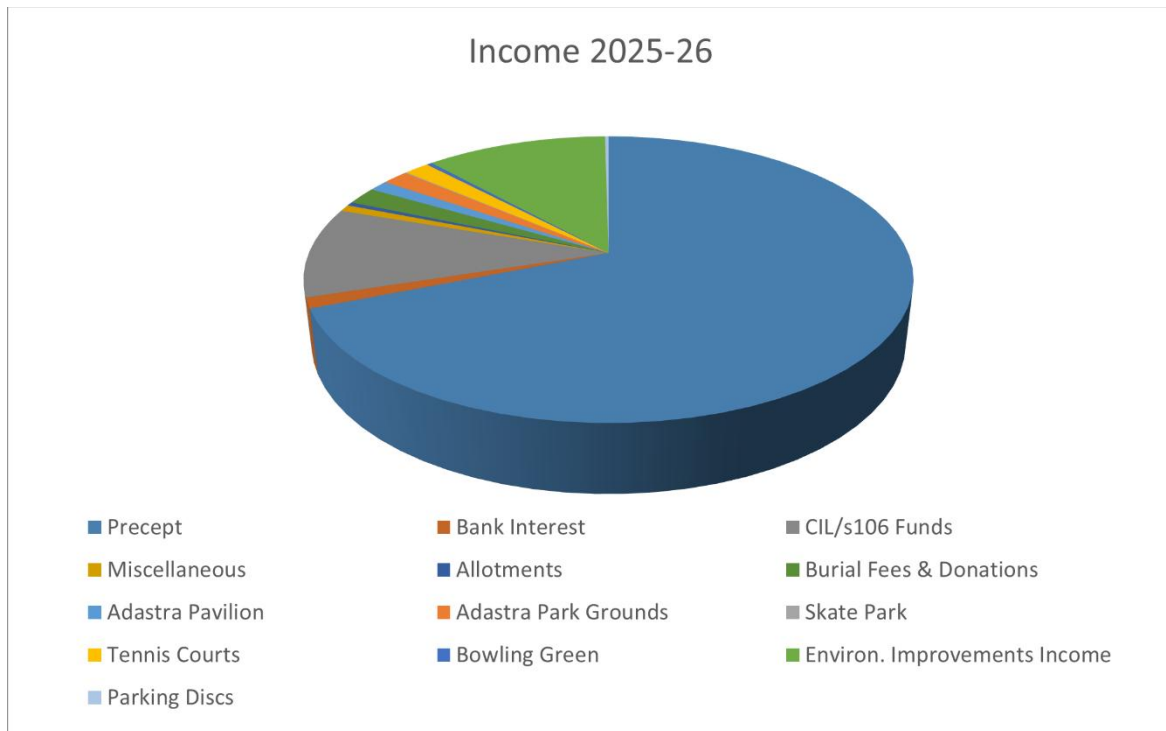
Crossways Lane (PROW 11C)

- This footpath is on the boundary with Hurstpierpoint, previous improvements had increased foot traffic, but the remaining section still was muddy after rain.
- A fresh 45-metre hard-surface and upgraded drainage was installed to keep the whole route open no matter the weather. This connects directly to Underhill Lane and gives lovely South Downs views.

Cinder Path to Clayton (PROW 14C)

- The Cinder Path by Butchers Wood, popular with walkers, was often flooded and difficult to cross.
- We raised, resurfaced and improved drainage on a 40-metre stretch so that this walk can be enjoyed through all seasons

Appendix 2 – Income & Expenditure 25/26



Appendix 3

Administrative Data – just a selection!

Over the last financial year:

- More than 4000 enquiries have been dealt with by telephone, in person and email.
- 23 street trees were planted in verges on various roads in Hassocks.
- 360 foodbank vouchers were issued to local families from our office.
- There were over 800 hours of Tennis Court Bookings.
- The Planning Committee have met for 15 meetings this year. During the last year we have dealt with around 164 Planning Applications.
- The staff have provided support and burial attendances to 13 families.

Appendix 4

Community partnerships – just a selection!

Age Concern

Hassocks Community Organisation

Monday Group

Flora and Fauna Group

Traders - Hanging basket scheme.

Greener Hassocks & Ditchling

Hassocks Allotment Holders Association

Adastra Hall

Downlands Community School.

St Cosmos & St Damian Church

Appendix 5

Grants

In 2025/26 we were pleased to give grants to the following groups:

Adastra Stoolball

St Catherine's Hospice

Greener Hassocks & Ditchling

Air Ambulance Kent, Surrey Sussex

Hurstpierpoint Gym Club

4 Sight Vision

St Peter & St James' Hospice

Oldland Mill Trust

Wilmington Close Residents' Association

We were also pleased to grant Hassocks Twinning Association an award of £3000 to support events and activities in connection with their visit to Hassocks

