



Annual Report 2025

Introduction

The Emsworth Residents’ Forum (ERF) was formed from the merger of the Emsworth Residents Association and the Emsworth Forum in 2023 with a mission to:

- Be a clear voice for Emsworth in challenging times
- Represent the whole town
- Harness the strengths of the community to get things done

The following report summarises what has happened during the second year of operation.

Incorporation of the ERF

An EGM was held on November 28th, 2024, when the membership approved that the ERF should become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and agreed the terms of a new constitution. The intention was that the conversion process would conclude in time for re-launch on 1st April as a charity, but the timetable was derailed when the Charity Commission determined that the ERF’s ‘objects’ were not unambiguously charitable. This seems to be matter of drafting as the ERF is entirely focused on the public benefit and, moreover, there are already several Neighbourhood Forums registered as charities. A minor redraft of the relevant section of the constitution to ensure that the charitable mission is crystal clear will be recommended for approval at the AGM. A consequence of this turn of events is that the ERF will not formally convert until a date to be determined later in the year and the revised constitution and management changes (including the transformation of committee members into trustees) will not become effective until that point.

Committee

The committee members elected on staggered terms from 1st April 2024 comprised:

3yrs	Dwynwen Stepien (Chair)
	Mike Bateman
	Roger Tyrrell
	Andrew Caple
2yrs	Dan Grove
	Jill Millar (treasurer)
	Ellie Turnbull
1 yr	Mike Ridley (secretary)

During the year Roger Tyrrell decided to stand down from committee membership.

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Mike Ridley has indicated his willingness to stand for re-election at the end of his term and his name will be on the ballot list for the AGM for a further term of 3 years.

We aim to build committee capacity with the addition of new members to widen the skills pool and breadth of representation across the Emsworth community. Anyone interested in becoming involved will be warmly welcomed and should contact the secretary at secretary.erf@gmail.com.

David Harris, editor of the EMS, attends committee meetings as an observer.

The committee now meets on a 2-monthly basis for business meetings. There is an open invitation to all members to join these meetings as observers by prior arrangement with the secretary.

As reported last year, 3 standing sub-committees deal with core areas of activity on a delegated basis:

Neighbourhood Planning – a formal role of the forum in acting as statutory consultee for planning applications, curating the Neighbourhood Plan, and representing the ERF on the Emsworth Infrastructure Panel (EIP) chaired by Havant Borough Council (HBC).

Communications – Ensuring that the community is well informed about what is going on through publishing and distributing the EMS, monthly newsletters to members, maintaining the website and a range of social media feeds.

Emsworth Together – growing the membership and working with other Emsworth organisations, stakeholders and individuals to build capacity and get things done.

Finally, individual committee members take a lead on specific priority ‘themes’ reporting back to the main committee. Currently these are as follows:

Neighbourhood Planning	Mike Bateman
Young people	Ellie Turnbull
Environment	Dan Grove
Highways and public realm	Mike Ridley
Health and Wellbeing	
Housing and Community Facilities	Dwynwen Stepien
Town Centre	

Membership

At the end of March 2025 paid-up membership stood at 461. The committee had hoped to grow these numbers significantly during the year but pressure of work has limited recruitment activities. The target remains is to grow membership above 1000 and this is rolled forward to year 3.

Finances

The ERF operated within its approved budget for Year 2. A financial report is appended to this report together with a Year 3 budget for member approval.

Public and General meetings

Public meetings have been held during the year:

May 2nd	Local Elections – hustings
May 8 th	AGM including presentations on the community gardens and youth activities
Aug 26 th	Community Tent at the Emsworth Show
November 28 th	EGM to approve conversion of the ERF to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
January 30 th	Presentation about the King Charles III coastal footpath and its route through Emsworth
February 20 th	Presentation on HBC strategy by Cllr Phil Munday, leader of the council

Standing committees

Communications

The ERF website continues to be populated and refreshed under the direction of Dan Grove.

Credit again to editor David Harris for another great year for the EMS. After a successful pilot last year David has also published monthly bulletins which are now established as a regular element of the ERF's dialogue with its members.

Further steps have been taken to broaden the social media profile but this remains a comparative weakness in the ERF's messaging. The hunt for a volunteer to take this on continues: any member who is interested should contact Dwynwen Stepien (chair.erf@gmail.com).

Neighbourhood Planning

The ERF is a statutory consultee for planning applications and in that role, comments have been submitted on a number of applications. We have generally commented on major applications in terms of the scale of development proposed, and our guidelines

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for comments have been the policies set out in the Neighbourhood Plan (NP). It has been good to see the number of applications which have cited the NP alongside the currently applicable Local Plan, which applies across the borough of Havant.

Amongst the applications on which we have commented have been the refurbishment of the hotel and restaurant now known as the Ropemaker, where we agreed with local neighbours of the property that management of the car-parking needed to be monitored to prevent overflow parking on neighbouring roads.

We also commented more favourably on the proposed residential development on the site of Fowey Cottage which extends from Warblington Road to the foreshore, but the planning committee refused permission for what was proposed on the grounds of over-development. It is a site which has seen a number of proposals over the last few years, and we will no doubt see further proposals in the future.

The Interbridges site between the A27 and the railway station has been the subject of a recent application for light industrial use, but along with our councillors we have objected to the proposed development on the grounds that we are not convinced that the development can be carried out without jeopardising the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. An earlier application which was approved but has now lapsed proposed a light-controlled junction with a pedestrian phase to make the crossing to the railway station safer for all. We are currently pressing for the inclusion of this in the current proposal.

Emsworth Together

A prime purpose of the ERF is to help channel the capacity and skills of the community, its institutions, groups, clubs and individuals, to help Emsworth to flourish for the public benefit. Much of this is about supporting other organisations or hosting groups or individuals with shared interests to discuss challenges and formulate solutions.

We are very appreciative of the support given by our new cadre of elected HBC councillors and our Hampshire County Council (HCC) representative.

Themes

Young people

The young people working group continues to meet regularly and has hosted Young People Days with a wide range of activities. These are held at the Community Centre at half term with forty to fifty young people coming to each one. We are grateful to the large group of volunteers who turn up to make the days a success. Our thanks also go to the Community Centre for providing the venue, Tiers greengrocers for doing the fruit for lunch at cost and Dominoes Pizzas who heavily discount pizzas.

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Working with Bourne Quilters we started Young Quilters workshops in November. These have proved to be very popular and 4 have been run. Up to 16 young people attend and are always delighted to take home what they have made. These could not be run without volunteers from Bourne Quilters as the young people need one-to-one supervision.

We are investigating installing outdoor shelters where young people can meet and chat. We are hoping to get support from the Police Commissioners Anti-Social Behaviour fund. We have obtained some quotes and have consulted young people on designs and locations.

We made a successful bid to The Friends of Emsworth Community Health (FECH) for a grant to run activities in the recreation ground in the 2025 summer holidays. These will be run by Horizon Leisure supported by volunteers from the ERF.

Environment

HBC have started a Climate Change Partnership involving many community groups including ERF. The main activity of the Partnership to date has been focused on a bid for a grant from a National Lottery fund. If the bid is successful, the Council will give financial and administrative support to local projects aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions or increasing resilience to climate change.

ERF was represented at two HBC workshops which introduced their new Climate Change Action Plan (replacing the plan adopted in 2021) and Biodiversity Strategy.

ERF has submitted responses to two Southern Water consultations. The first was solely about the proposal to pump effluent from Budd's Farm Sewage Treatment Plant up to the new reservoir at Havant Thicket. The second consultation covered Southern Water's Water Resources Management Plan for the next 50 years, in which the proposal to recycle sewage effluent plays a crucial role. In both cases ERF opposed the recycling plan, pointing out that Havant Thicket was presented to the community as a unique chalk-spring-fed reservoir, which should not be compromised except as a very last resort. We are not confident that there has been proper evaluation of alternative methods of safeguarding future supplies of drinking water, methods which would involve less new infrastructure and less on-going use of energy.

Victoria Road Community Garden: A great team of volunteers, in partnership with Havant Borough Council, has developed the Victoria Road Community Garden with new beds, sheds and most recently a polytunnel. Funding and support has come from a wide range of community groups and individuals across Emsworth. The aim of the Forum was to take on this redundant and overgrown space and engage with residents to develop a vision and community group. There is a close symbiosis with the aims of the Emsworth Community Centre and the Trustees of the latter have asked to adopt the

garden and bring it under their leadership. The Forum believes this is an excellent outcome and are pleased to work together to ensure a smooth transfer.

Highways and public realm

Traffic is a perennial challenge for Emsworth, in its position straddling the A259 and with a growing volume of through-traffic as the coastal strip continues to be developed. There are many facets of the road network and public realm that would benefit from investment, but funding is scarce and competitive. We must be realistic with our ambitions and take full advantage of funds from planning obligations (section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy) and any focused funding pots from national policy initiatives (such as for active travel). A list of objectives has been developed to guide negotiations with HBC and the highways authorities, Hampshire County Council and Highways England:

1. Mitigating the growth in traffic on the A259 through investment in a spine road, linked directly to the A27, to serve the planned Southleigh development of 2,100 new houses
2. Calming the A259 to reduce its harmful impacts and make it safer and healthier for all users at all hours of the day
3. Improving the central roundabout as the gateway to the town
4. Calming traffic leaving the A259 and entering the town centre
5. Improving the public realm in the town centre as a place to dwell and socialise
6. Improving the public realm and safety of North Street as the prime communication link between North and South Emsworth and the route to the station shared between cars, cyclists and pedestrians.
7. Deterring unsafe driving on 'rat runs' and other domestic streets
8. Completing the safe cycling and walking network

It is expected that prospects for the Southleigh spine road will come into sharp focus over coming months with consultation on the new Local Plan.

Health and Wellbeing

We have continued to provide support for the Emsworth Health Alliance.

Working with our councillors the ERF has convened several meetings with councillors, council officers and local sports clubs to discuss the future of sports provision in the town and investment in the Emsworth Rec and Hollybank recreation grounds. The quality of the grounds has been in long decline with the squeeze on local government funding and there are concerns that we are providing our community with the facilities that are desperately needed – especially for young people. A partial upgrade of the Rec pavilion is taking place in 2025, and we are determined to ensure that this investment is

backed up by a sustainable strategy for the long term. In due course an option may be the transfer of these assets from council to community management.

Housing and Community Facilities

The Emsworth Community Land Trust takes the lead on housing in the town but there are overlapping memberships with the ERF which also takes a keen interest. Via the statutory consultee role we are continuing to assert the policies for housing design, mix and affordability set out in the Neighbourhood Plan.

In last year's report we were optimistic that a parcel of land at Redlands Grange, set aside under earlier planning consents for community use, could be developed to provide a multi-use building. A year later there is no progress to report but it is an opportunity we do not want to lose.

Town Centre

The future of the Town Centre is a central theme of the Neighbourhood Plan and there are numerous important ambitions set out for commercial activity, visitor experience, community facilities and public spaces. The centre has bounced back since the pandemic much better than many others but there is no room for complacency in uncertain times. The social value of a vibrant town square for meeting and greeting has never been more important.

The Emsworth Business Association (EBA) has recently dissolved after 20+ years of sterling service representing and promoting the commercial activities of the town. In the short term the ERF is assuming responsibility for legacy items such as the Christmas lights but there is a more fundamental vacuum that needs to be filled.

The intent of the forum is to bring together a 'partnership' of the stakeholders – businesses, institutions, clubs, residents and visitors – to work together on the themes articulated in the NP. This is a priority for Year 3.

Projects, Campaigns, Grants and other things...

Projects

A wish-list of infrastructure projects forms the core of the agenda for the Emsworth Infrastructure Panel, the 6-monthly meeting between the HBC Communities and Housing portfolio holder, council officers, Emsworth Councillors and representatives of the ERF to discuss upcoming projects and the allocation of the Neighbourhood Portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The project list is a 'living' document and under regular review. As a result of the limited housing development in the borough over the past 2 years, CIL receipts have been insufficient to make an impact on the wish-list.

The receipts that have been accumulated may be applied in the coming year if they can make a difference in securing the delivery of a suitable project.

Campaigns

As reported last year, the ERF has taken the lead in assembling a campaign to ensure that a 'spine road' linked directly to the A27 is provided as a necessary and prior condition for the strategic Southleigh housing development of 2,100 houses to go ahead. The membership of the group currently includes all Emsworth and St Faith's councillors plus the Havant Civic Society. Without this road it is likely that the already overloaded network in Emsworth and Denvilles will deteriorate further. The campaign was paused with the change in leadership at HBC following the local elections, but it enjoys cross-party support from councillors and our county representatives and will resume. The Southleigh residential scheme is likely to be a key contributor to Havant achieving its housing target, so this issue is becoming increasingly urgent. Next steps will be to submit written responses to the revised Local Plan consultation which will take place over the summer.

Grants and funding

Applications are invited for start-up funds for projects which are of benefit to the community and (ideally but not necessarily) align with the priorities of the ERF. In the past year we have supported the Bourne Bus service, Victoria Road Community Garden and Young People days.

Town Council status

Following the government's announcement on Local Government Reform (LGR), Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight have been selected as part of the Devolution Priority Programme to develop proposals for a strategic regional authority with an elected mayor. The current timetable anticipates that a mayor will be appointed during 2026.

In parallel, Hampshire CC and existing unitary authorities have been invited to make proposals for new unitary groupings. This seems likely to lead to HBC eventually joining Portsmouth, Gosport and Fareham in a 'Greater Portsmouth' unitary body.

This new structure risks diluting local and community representation within a larger entity so the final element is the creation of parish councils where they don't exist at present. This is particularly applicable to those parts of the unitary area that have distinct interests and their own identity. Emsworth, being a designated neighbourhood with a forum, and neighbourhood plan is an obvious candidate to be in the vanguard for this change.

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Town Council status has long been identified as attractive for Emsworth and LGR will provide momentum. The ERF has assembled a working party to examine the implications and prepare for a community petition - currently pencilled-in for Autumn 2025.