

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL HELD IN THE  
PARISH ROOM, SISSINGHURST ON  
THURSDAY 12TH MARCH 2015**

**PRESENT:** Cllrs. Bancroft, Bunyan, Cook, Fletcher, Goodchild, Holmes, macLachlan, Rook, Summers, Swann and Veitch. Borough Cllr. John Smith.

**APOLOGIES:** Cllrs. Fermor, Hazlewood, Hemsted and Marley.

The Chairman read out the following statement.

Members who had a personal or prejudicial interest, whether direct or indirect within the meaning of Section 51 of the Local Government Act 2000, or a personal or prejudicial interest defined by the Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council's Code of Conduct, in any of the matters appearing on the agenda were invited to declare that interest at this stage. Alternatively, personal interests can be declared at the time when the specific item is being discussed, if a member wishes to speak on an item in which they have a personal interest.

No interests were declared.

The Clerk read out a card from Cllr. Marley, thanking us for our good wishes. She is making a good recovery after her operation. Members were pleased to see Cllr. Summers at the meeting who was also recovering from a hip operation.

**MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:**

227: The Chairman, Cllr. F. Rook proposed that the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 12th February be adopted as a true record. This was seconded by Cllr. Cook and agreed.

**CHAIRMANS REPORT:**

228: The Chairman reported that whilst he was recently in hospital he had been involved in a conference call with the Courier reporter regarding the issue with the access to the Community Centre and the Co-Op. He had today had a meeting with Morrisons, the contractors for the gas works and the works are taking longer than anticipated. It is not just renewing the gas main, the works also entail making all the connections. Their contract is due to expire at the end of the month, they could extend but they are losing money on the contract – therefore in two weeks' time the works could come to an end although the job has not been completed. The Clerk informed Members that Martin Burke from Kent Highways is negotiating with the Gas Company to enable the works to be completed. The Chairman explained that Morrisons would have a duty of care to address the road surfacing for the next two years so any repairs necessary would be their responsibility to undertake.

**PROPOSED CHANGE OF AGE RANGE AT CRANBROOK SCHOOL:**

229: The Chairman welcomed James Peace, Chair of Governors – Cranbrook School and Carrie Beach, Headteacher and Ann Rook, Vice Chair of Governors – High Weald Academy. He invited James Peace to address Members. All Members had been given a copy of the original consultation letter and relevant information prior to the meeting.

Mr. Peace explained that it was proposed to change the age range in the near future. Cranbrook currently admits pupils at the age of 13+ into Year 9 but is now seeking to change the age range from Year 9 (13+) to Year 7 (11+). Historically 50% of the intake came from state schools and 50% from prep schools but the income now is dominated from prep schools. Children considered eligible for Cranbrook School, Year 7 are currently being educated outside of Cranbrook i.e. Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Grammar or Homewood, Tenterden and Uplands at Wadhurst. Cranbrook School wants to be community school and reach out to any children who are eligible to join Year 7. The School is consulting with all other local schools and with the community.

Carrie Beach informed Members that she had already written to Cranbrook School regarding the impact on the High Weald Academy. She stated that HWA were working closely with Cranbrook School. Angley School as many would remember was set up a wide ability school. The numbers had diminished demographically – the numbers in the primary schools has gone down. Looking at numbers – in 2008 – 14% of HWA students went to Cranbrook School which was 29 students. Since that time this has reduced to around 8 – 11% around 5 students. A bid has recently been agreed to refurbish the HWA over the next few years and a grammar stream was being considered. She asked James Peace how the School was going to secure the school to safeguard Year 7 pupils. She thought it nearly impossible to secure the School to work with pupils from the age of 11. They will need expertise and pastoral care. She stated that HWA is not in opposition but there is a creative alternative. HWA would be there for pupils aged 11 and age 13 and they would work with whatever the outcome of the consultation. HWA is changing dramatically and she tabled the prospectus which would leave behind for information. She also invited everyone to attend the very popular “lambing” event which is being held at the School over the weekend.

The Chairman then invited questions from Members. Cllr. Bunyan referred to the previous consultation when the parents of boarding pupils were against the proposal. James Peace confirmed that a lot of work had been undertaken to reassure boarder’s parents. Cllr. Summers stated that he had happy memories of local children from Sissinghurst and Cranbrook attending Angley School and being prepared in an A stream to then go onto Cranbrook School. He informed Members that in 2014 there were 48 students from Dulwich, 16 from Marlborough House and 15 from St. Ronan’s in the intake which was 81 pupils from the year entry of 90. This was a reversal of the historical balance and he felt that Cranbrook School should be a community school and an education hub for the area. There would need to be new classrooms and this would need careful consideration of where they could be put and staffing implications. He suggested that the existing teaching staff may not be experienced at this level and maybe some of the prep schools may soon have surplus staff should the proposal go ahead. There were also traffic implications with more school coaches. It could be good for trade in the town with more people bringing children into school. He supported what Cranbrook School is trying to do, schools need to work together. He noted that Cranbrook School is aiming to take around 20 day pupils into Year 9 and it is possible for the HWA to undertake the exams – some fail the 11+ but come through later on either via the 13+ or from the 6<sup>th</sup> form.

James Peace stated that Cranbrook and the surrounding community could be served by two thriving schools. With regard to the required extra accommodation there is already an outline application for the replacement of the Horsley Block and there would be other changes to cope with Years 7 & 8. The existing staff could not be stretched and new staff experienced with Year 7 & 8 would be sought. Security is a challenge – pupils must be safe day and night.

He confirmed to Cllr. Fletcher that there would be no additional boarders. Cllr. Fletcher suggested that if there were more boarders then this would increase the demand for housing in the area.

Ann Rook stated that the pupils would be super selected i.e. only the brightest selected which may not be local children. James Peace responded that pupils have to live in the catchment area and have the academic ability. Mrs. Rook reiterated that it would be the very brightest who would be selected rather than local children.

Responding to a question from the Chairman regarding timescale, Mr. Peace confirmed that it would be a minimum of three years to start. With regard to a question on whether Cranbrook School had purchased the former Gas Works site, Mr. Peace confirmed that the Trustees have purchased the site for investment purposes. He confirmed that the Trustees own the site and the buildings and the former Gas Works site was purchased as it could provide access to the back of School Lodge and to the land at the rear of Cornwallis. James Peace confirmed to Cllr. Bunyan that Autumn 2017 would be the earliest intake date. Carrie Beach suggested that it would not be until 2019/2020 before the intake numbers begin to round up and both schools need to be thriving by that date.

Responding to a question from Cllr. macLachlan regarding how many children were shipped out to schools outside the area, Mr. Peace confirmed that Kent County Council would be able to provide the numbers but the reality is that children are not going to schools in the community. Cllr. Bancroft suggested we should support children developing their education in the local community; we need to stop the children being transported miles to other schools.

Cllr. Bunyan stated that she had the greatest respect for the HWA but it can be divisive for children going from HWA to Cranbrook School, children can be fearful that they will not fit in and they miss the friends they have made. Some are sent by their parents to Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells with the idea that they will then go to Cranbrook at 13, but this often doesn't happen as the pupils have established their friend base.

The Chairman then invited Members to put forward a resolution. Cllrs. Bunyan and Cllr. Summers jointly made the following resolution, that

Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council support Cranbrook School in their intentions and endorse the proposals put forward subject to further consideration being given to points raised at this meeting.

This was seconded by Cllr. Goodchild and unanimously agreed. Cllr. Summers thanked James Peace, Carrie Beach and Anne Rook for attending.

The Chairman informed Members that he would be inviting Dr. John Weeds and Carrie Beach together with other head teachers to speak at the Annual Parish Meeting – the theme would be Education in and around Cranbrook.

#### CONSULTATION - SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT:

230: The Chairman reminded Members that they had been furnished with the documents and plans which related to our area together with our previous comments under the Draft Site Allocation DPD. The Clerk read out the differences between the Draft and the current version for Member's information. The Chairman then invited questions or comments.

Borough Cllr. John Smith informed Cllr. Holmes that uses within the town centre could have been changed because of differences in the use classes which could now permit certain changes of use. The Clerk confirmed that there was a copy of the Retail and Leisure Study in the Parish Office.

Cllr. Veitch was concerned about any impact with the loss of the text regarding travel plans etc. Cllr. Cook suggested that this could have been removed because of any change of statute which might have already occurred. Cllr. Rook agreed, stating that this could be out of the Borough control. Cllr. Veitch referred to the policy regarding the Community Centre and submitted to TWBC. Cllr. Bunyan stated that she had suggested to the planners that with regard to the large allocated areas in the High Street, that some small areas could be left outside the limits to build, these areas would then be able to be considered for some exception site housing. The Chairman explained the process of exception sites for information, they are always in perpetuity for local people and there is no right to buy.

Cllr. Bunyan went through our responses from the previous Draft and asked if Members wished to support our comments with regard to Gate Farm and the Long Field. Members supported the vision for light industrial at Gate House Farm. Cllr. macLachlan suggested that the Long Field would be better to be outside the limits to enable exception housing. The Chairman reminded Members that previously the housing association involved were not able to afford the infrastructure without an enabling development. All the other suggestions were supported including the continued wish for a new hotel within the area following the loss of several established hotels over previous years. Cllr. Holmes asked that our views be restated on the support for the Hop Pickers Line.

Cllr. Bunyan informed Members that as soon as the Site Allocations document is adopted the Borough will be reviewing its Core Strategy. The self-build Bill is about to become law and the Borough will have to support. Developers do not support, but builders will have to be encouraged to provide serviced plots for self-builders. When she attended the recent exhibition in the Vestry Hall, people were criticising the advertising of the events – the message was not getting out into the public domain. It had been suggested that in the future the Borough would ask Parishes to contact the local shopkeepers to put up posters.

Cllr. Rook then closed the meeting to enable members of the public to ask questions. Responding to a question on how the plans affect Sissinghurst, Cllr. Bunyan confirmed that there were no changes; the only site allocated was the former Primary School site which had already been given consent. The meeting was then re-opened.

Members agreed to the recommendation made by the Chairman that the Clerk responds to the Consultation on behalf of Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council.

Cllr. Bancroft asked whether there had been any progress on the former Sissinghurst Primary School site. Cllr. macLachlan stated that there had been three bids and one was moving forward.

#### COMMUNITY CENTRE COMMITTEE:

231: Cllr. Veitch stated that the next meeting is on Tuesday afternoon next week. TWBC and the Co Op met today to try to resolve the access problems and she had been told that they had made progress. TWBC are cautiously optimistic. Draft Head of Terms are being drawn up.

#### **POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE:**

232: Cllr. Swann referred to the report of the meeting held on the 10<sup>th</sup> March and mentioned specifics such as the reprinting of the walking leaflets and the elections due to be held in May. There are two wards – Cranbrook and Sissinghurst – people could stand for either. He invited questions. Cllr. Bancroft had concerns regarding the cost of the leaflet packs. Cllr. Holmes stated that he was talking to the Borough Council about a possible contribution together with the other parishes. Cllr. Swann then proposed adoption of the report. This was seconded by Cllr. Bunyan and agreed.

#### **PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT:**

233: Cllr. Bunyan referred to the Minutes of the two meetings held and invited questions. No questions were raised. The Committee had recommended approval for the application for Wilkes Field with comments i.e. the lack of usable chimneys.

#### **BURIAL GROUNDS & PROPERTIES COMMITTEE REPORT:**

234: Cllr. Bunyan in the absence of Cllr. Hemsted stated that there has been no recent meeting.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT:**

235: Cllr. Veitch stated that the next meeting is on Tuesday. On the agenda will be the play equipment in Sissinghurst.

#### **CRANBROOK CONSERVATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE:**

236: Cllr. Bunyan stated that the next meeting is at the end of the month.

#### **KENT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS:**

237: Cllr. Fletcher stated that he had attended a recent meeting when the amenity refuse vehicle issue was discussed. Sevenoaks had discontinued theirs, we are fighting to keep ours. Planning had been touched on and Hawkhurst had a problem with a call in, officers had already issued a decision despite the call in. A general discussion had been held when it was acknowledged that there was huge pressure on officers with the cut back in staffing levels. There was also a problem that the planning officers had little local knowledge. This would only get worse with more cut backs. Cllr. Bunyan reminded Members that previously we had been able to say to the planning officers that if the parish opinion differed from theirs that we could request it be called into the planning committee, this opportunity had been withdrawn.

Cllr. Fletcher reported that there had been a problem with hacking of e mail addresses and also a discussion took place on where the money is being spent from the Section 106 Agreements. Nobody seemed to know where the money is being spent. A new Planning Enforcement Officer had been recruited. The KCC Community Wardens have been retained. The issue of how the cut backs are biting into the delivery of services was discussed as was the possibility of a unitary authority. Cllr. Rook reminded Members that the borough councils are capped and have to cut their costs. Some serviced have to be discontinued i.e. amenity refuse vehicles. The parish councils are not yet capped – we are free to raise the precept. TWBC are ruining the day for not putting up the rates years ago.

#### **ACTION WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES IN KENT:**

238: Cllr. macLachlan had no issues to mention.

#### CLERKS REPORT:

239: The Clerk reported that despite having a one week window to submit an application together with quotes for a new bus shelter, she was pleased to inform Members that we had been successful with our bid. The next site on the list had been for Cleavers, Sissinghurst and the total cost was in excess of £4,000 but the only cost to the Parish Council would be £500.

The Clerk read out an e mail from Cllr. Hemsted officially stating that he would not be standing for election. He thanked all councillors and staff for their support during his term of office.

#### CORRESPONDENCE:

240: The Clerk read out a letter from St. Dunstan's thanking the Council for the Section 137 grant towards the Messy Church project.

#### ITEMS FOR INFORMATION:

241: Cllr. Rook felt that the Courier article regarding the Cranbrook town centre shops was somewhat overstated. He reminded Members that the lambing weekend was being held at High Weald Academy this weekend.

242: Cllr. Veitch stated that she would be outside the Vestry Hall this Saturday encouraging people to stand as parish councillors at the May elections.

243: Cllr. Holmes reminded everyone who had not had their refuse bins collected on Monday to put out the bins this Saturday for collection. Cllr. Rook stated that unfortunately there had been a murder at the Cory Environmental depot on Monday.

244: Cllr. Holmes stated that there would be an open evening at Sissinghurst Castle on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July between the hours of 6 pm and 8pm purely for Sissinghurst residents only.

245: Cllr. Cook informed Members that there will be an advertisement for a new head teacher for Cranbrook Primary School. He understood that the Acting Head will be applying.

246: Cllr. John Smith reported that Cobnut Close was a good example of a small development for local people which fits into the community. He agreed with Cllr. Bunyans summing up of the Site Allocation DPD and that the Core Strategy will be going forward for review to take into account the Government initiative of such things as self-build. The call in planning system is a democratic right and he was surprised that there had been a problem. He had always acted when asked to call something in for Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council. He mentioned the Bringloe exhibition and that there had been no further site allocations to those already set out in the Draft. The Gladman site and other fields could be at risk should a precedent be set. He had attended the exhibition which was for thirteen houses outside the limits to build.

Cllr. Holmes asked whether Cllr. Smith was in a position to respond on how much had been spent on the St. Johns's Car Park. Cllr. Smith stated that he was still awaiting a reply from Lee Collyer on the finance. He updated Cllr. Bunyan on the validation date for planning applications. If the application was complete the validation was from the date of receipt. If the application was not complete, the date started from when all the information was received.

The Chairman then closed the meeting to enable any questions or comments from parishioners.

A parishioner mentioned that the House of Lords overwhelmingly supported self-build as a model for local people. With regard to Neighbourhood Plans he understood that we have to work within the Core Strategy but there must be the ability to make decisions locally with local people deciding what is needed. He could see a transfer of power from the boroughs to the parishes. The Chairman agreed – stating that parishes would be run more as businesses. There are changes coming through in the planning system all the time. Neighbourhood plans are on the back burner whilst we see what changes come in following the forthcoming general election.