

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
HELD IN THE PARISH ROOM, SISSINGHURST  
ON WEDNESDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2014

Present: Cllr. Francis Rook (Chair), Cllrs. Bancroft, Bunyan, Cook, Goodchild, Hemsted, Holmes and Veitch. Borough Councillor Smith.

Apologies: Cllrs. Fermor, Fletcher, Hazlewood, Marley, macLachlan and Swann

Approximately 15 members of the public

**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.**

The Chairman read out the above statement, no interests were registered.

**THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:** The Chairman proposed that the Minutes be adopted as a true record. This was seconded by Cllr. Cook and agreed.

**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:**

**Cllr. Francis Rook**

Cllr. Rook stated that last year he gave his report sitting down, this was due to a serious wardrobe failure so this year it is belt and braces and that is really the theme for all our deliberations and decisions.

The Council is often criticised for not doing this or that but those decisions we do make have to have an efficacy of a much higher order than we need in our private or business lives. Hence the seemingly endless round of meetings and discussions.

This now particularly applies to the Community Centre Project the Parish Council had taken over in January. His heart went out to those willing volunteers that had persevered with this since the turn of the century but when they got to the design stage, the demands of other agencies had driven them to produce a building that rivalled the Town Hall in Tunbridge Wells which proved totally unacceptable to all parties. It was at this point when he said enough was enough and went to see Guy Johnson, the owner of Wilkes Field and between us came up with a way forward which he took to his fellow councillors because as the gift of the land was to be given to the Parish Council they agreed that we should take on the project and build on the groundwork that had gone before and come up with a building that was now affordable, sustainable and of such an attractive design that it would be a credit to the town.

He took our proposals to the Borough Council and tensions dissipated and we all agreed that this would be a way forward especially with our track record of bringing the car park project to a successful conclusion, a task that no other Parish Council in the area has managed to do in as much as they are now parishioners car parks as the Community Centre will be a community centre run by your Parish Council, elected and answerable to parishioners.

The Chairman stated that this is a Centre that must be sustainable for the next fifty years. It must be flexible in design to cater for the ever changing demands of society. Many halls were built to meet the demand of the badminton fraternity, but when we have visited local centres, badminton was hardly ever played, yet their choice of floor, its markings and the height of the ceiling were all geared to this criteria causing unnecessary expense. Between us we are determined to reach a correct decision as to design both internally and externally but at the end of the day our design has to get passed by the planning department and this will probably be our biggest hurdle but I was confident that with the good will of all concerned this would be achieved.

Cllr. Rook then referred to the next big hurdle, money. This iconic structure will cost around two million pounds. Most of that coming from the public purse and this is where parishioners come in. This council needs parishioners help, we will be knocking on doors, we will be asking for pledges, we will be selling bricks or square metres.

He stated that for those who had lived and worked in this wonderful area perhaps a bequest in their will might be appropriate, he would make sure there is a roll of honour to record their generosity so that their children and grand children could see that as a part of this community they contributed to its wellbeing and society. So if anyone could offer any time, money or ideas on fundraising please see him after the meeting or call in at the parish office.

In one year's time we are all up for election and he knew that many of his fellow councillors who had dedicated their time and efforts over many years are standing down. So if anyone felt they could spare any time to step into their shoes please consider it as we need you and Cranbrook and Sissinghurst needs you.

Councillor Veitch would be reporting on what we are doing with the car parks, Councillor Bunyan would be reporting what is going on in planning, Councillor Holmes will give a report on the Economics Committee and in the absence of Councillor Swann, Councillor Veitch will give a report on Policy & Resources with Councillor Hemsted reporting how we are looking after the burials and properties under our control.

The Chairman mentioned thanked the Clerk, Coral Kirkaldie ably assisted by Lori Ham. Coral has been the foundation on which this Council has grown. It cannot be underestimated the wisdom and integrity that she has brought to this Council. You will hear this many times this evening but I assure you the praise is well deserved and there are many in this Parish who had reasons to be grateful to Coral.

He invited questions. No questions were raised.

## Finance Report for the Year 2013/2014

This report looks at what the Parish Council has done from the perspective of its finances for the financial year 2013/2014.

The accounts show the precept and expenditure for each committee as follows:

	<u>Precept</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>	
	£		£
Policy and Resources	147,500	146,894	
Burials and Properties	20,500	27,348	
Economic and Community Development	7,000	7,973	
Environmental Management	64,500	42,252	
Planning/Preservation/Housing	Nil	Nil	
General, including Contingency Fund	5,000	1,397	
	244,500	225,864	
Earmarked Funds not spent from 2013/14 Budget (put aside for future projects) including Car Parks (£20,000):		£44,050	

We have a reserve in total for future expenditure on the car parks of £56,000.

Our staff – the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, our Parish Warden and Vestry Hall Caretakers – are our most essential resource and we could not run the Council without them. Our staffing costs, including National Insurance and pensions amounted to £86,578.

Other significant items of expenditure were as follows:

	£
Insurances	9,437
General Administration	12,085
Street Lighting	10,864
Vestry Hall - Rates & Utilities	8,119
- Repairs & Maintenance	7,328
Benches & Noticeboards	897
Burial Grounds – Business Rates	2,110
General Maintenance of Cemeteries & Churchyard	2,507
Contracts for maintenance of Grounds, Cemeteries, & War Memorial	29,735
Playground equipment, repairs & maintenance	427
Allotments	976
Recreation Grounds – Repairs & Maintenance including Crane Valley Drainage	3,431
Crane Valley – Upkeep of Nature Reserve	3,500
Angley Cottage	3,690
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	7,973
Car Parks	29,725

These and all our other payments were funded by the precept of £244,500, various grants, monies earmarked in previous years and the following income:

	£
Bank Interest	744
Rents Received	4,008
Sale of old photocopier	1,850
Hire of Vestry Hall and Council Chamber	20,886
Burial Fees	10,775
Tomlin Murton Playing Field Trust	7,000

At the end of the year there was £200,350 held as a reserve earmarked for future specified expenditure, and £122,429 held as a general reserve. £40,000 of the general reserve is to be used for making a start on the Community Centre.

The accounts are examined by our Auditor from Kent County Council and then sent as part of our Annual Return to the Accountants appointed by the Audit Commission for approval. Once approval has been received the accounts are available for inspection at the Parish Council Office.

**Cllr. Brian Swann**  
**Chairman – Policy and Resources Committee**

#### **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**Cllr. Brian Swann - Chairman**

In the absence of Cllr. Swann, Cllr. Veitch informed the meeting that the purpose of the Policy and Resources Committee is to oversee the workings of the Parish Council, including its finances, staffing, general administration and the setting up and granting of contracts issued by the Council. We also set the overall policies of the Council.

The membership of this Committee is the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Parish Council together with the Chair of each committee. We may invite others to attend. She thanked all the committee chairpersons for their hard work both within and outside the committee room. A lot goes on in their own time.

The real value of this Committee is that it is a discussion point, a plain talking shop, where ideas are tossed about. We discuss what has been happening in the Parish and what we can do about any problems and what we would like to see happening in the future. These ideas are then taken to our various committees.

We work closely under the wise guidance of our amazing Parish Clerks, Coral Kirkaldie and Lori Ham, without whom we would not be able to function. A big thank you is due to them.

The Parish Council aims to improve the “Quality of Life” for its parishioners and the economic viability of the Town and of Sissinghurst Village. More specific reports of what has been going on will be given by the various committees.

The Parish Council has an excellent website [www.cranbrookandsissinghurstpc.co.uk](http://www.cranbrookandsissinghurstpc.co.uk) which is kept up to date with all the news of what is happening, giving much information about Cranbrook and Sissinghurst. There is a Parish Diary onto which events can be logged, this will hopefully increase the attendance and will help you choose a date that does not clash with other events.

People can also be kept informed about things happening in the Parish by signing up to our “Be in The Know” email circulation.

Please keep coming into Cranbrook to shop and join in the many things going on in the Town and in Sissinghurst, and enjoy the free parking which we hope we have secured for many years to come.

Cllr. Veitch invited questions. Mrs. Linda Clifford raised a query on the precept and why it had still gone up when previously there was a one off payment on the car parks. Cllr. Veitch confirmed that it had gone up in year 11/12 not just for taking over the car parks but also for ongoing maintenance. This will be ongoing for a period of at least 10 – 15 years. This is a permanent increase; it will not be coming down. There was however, no increase in the car parking budget just a very small overall increase to cover such things as insurance and utilities. Cllr. Rook stated that unfortunately the Parish Council has to pay business rates on the car parks; we had some rate relief on Jockey Lane as it is associated with the Ball Field recreation ground.

Mrs. Clifford asked in the future whether residents would be charged for parking, this would help with funding. Cllr. Veitch stated that there were approximately 50 – 70 resident’s cars being parked overnight and there is nothing in the leases which would prevent us considering this but there are no current plans to consider this. In the first instance we needed to concentrate on taking them over and getting them running smoothly. If we were to charge there would be administrative costs and a knock on effect that people may well then park in the nearby residential roads and cause congestion. There were for and against.

Mr. Brian Clifford, Chairman of St. George’s Institute noted that £40,000 from the general reserves had been allocated to the new Cranbrook Community Centre and he asked whether it could be assumed that comparable funds would be set aside for the St. George’s refurbishment. He also noted that the Borough site in Cranbrook had been sold and he asked if there is any indication of how much funding is available for Cranbrook and for the refurbishment in Sissinghurst. Cllr. Veitch confirmed that there have been discussions with the Borough but so far we have nothing in writing. She stated that however, the amount suggested was nothing like what the site was sold for.

Mr. Clifford then stated that whilst he supported the fundraising for the £2m needed for the Cranbrook centre he was concerned and bothered that Cranbrook and Sissinghurst would be fighting against each other for funding. Cllr. Veitch suggested that there should be a meeting between the two bodies – she thought there would be a time lapse and that there would be no conflict but a discussion needed to be held.

**BURIAL GROUNDS AND PROPERTIES COMMITTEE                      Cllr. Denis Hemsted - Chairman**

Cllr. Hemsted stated that that this Committee is responsible for the two cemeteries, the St. Dunstan’s Churchyard, the notice boards, bus shelters, the Penny Farthing, benches and two War Memorials. Also the Properties which include The Vestry Hall, Angley Cottage, Vestry Hall Cottage, Golford Chapel and the Information Centre. Quite a long list.

The contract for grass cutting and maintenance of the Cemeteries and Churchyard came up for renewal recently and we are pleased that we were able to award it to the same contractors. They have done a good job in the past and work well with the Parish Council.

He was pleased to report that at long last a job that has been put off for many months has now been completed and we have a photographic and written description of all the pictures and items adorning the walls in the Council Chambers and various areas in the Vestry Hall.

The Clerk had reported that following a meeting with Dan Docker, the Tree Officer with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, a fifteen year permission has been granted to reduce the lime trees in St. Dunstan's Churchyard by 30%. This means that we can look after the trees as and when necessary without constantly contacting TWBC.

A review of fees both in relation to burials and the Vestry Hall was carried out towards the end of last year. After a full debate it was decided that no increase in fees was necessary.

As people may be aware the Sissinghurst Village Hall (St. George's Institute) is currently seeking planning permission to refurbish and extend the existing hall. This extension is out into Jubilee Field, which is Parish Council land. Although this, in principle has been agreed between the Management Committee and the Parish Council it still has to be recorded legally and at present is in the hands of the solicitors. The right of way across the field to the Tennis Club and others has also had to be moved over and again has to be legalised.

Finally, he thanked the hard working Committee and the Clerks.

He invited questions. No questions were raised.

## **ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

**Cllr. Graham Holmes - Chairman**

Cllr. Holmes stated that his report covers the work undertaken by this Committee for the twelve month period commencing April 2013.

An initial overview of economic activity and community events within the Parish during this period suggest that businesses are still finding conditions extremely challenging with the retail sector continuing to feel the pressure of online shopping. That said, the occupancy levels of retail premises within the Town centre continue to be high in comparison with similar sized towns. There is also a continuing high demand for good quality office accommodation. Hopefully, the completion of the Cranbrook Engineering site redevelopment may help alleviate this shortage.

Since his last report twelve months ago, we have seen both the village shop and pub in Sissinghurst reopen, again bucking the trend in many rural settlements across the country.

He stated that if this were a school report, he would probably be saying, "a solid terms work, but must not become complacent".

Within the community, the Parish Council has continued to offer its support for the Family Fun Day, Apple and History Fayre, Music Festival, Windmill Association, Cranbrook Museum, St. Dunstons Church, Sissinghurst Flower Show and Village fete and, of course, the highly successful Cranbrook in Bloom. All these organisations deserve the highest praise for helping to engender a wonderful community spirit as well as enhancing the visitor experience to the Parish. Add to this the beautiful countryside and the walking and rambling opportunities and you begin to appreciate what this area has to offer.

The Committee has successfully delivered a number of projects during this past year. We updated and redistributed the Welcome Packs to estate agents in the area so that new residents can access information on a wide range of local services and organisations. We also took delivery of a second defibrillator and handed this over to the new tenants of The Milkhouse.

We have received and processed a number of applications for Section 137 grants. The Parish Council has the power to make these grants under Section 137 of the Local Government Act. Our Policy has been to offer financial support to those organisations whose work is of benefit to the community and not those large organisations that have to support a national structure.

The beneficiaries this year were:

Cranbrook Windmill Association/ Sissinghurst Flower Show Society/ Cranbrook Primary School PTA/ Cranbrook in Bloom/ Cranbrook Ladies Group/ Cranbrook Royal British Legion/ Cranbrook Voluntary Service/ St. Dunstons Church/ The Friends of St. Dunstons/ Cranbrook Apple & History Fayre/ Cranbrook Citizens Advice Bureau and Cranbrook Museum

We have continued to support and develop our working partnerships with the Cranbrook Business Association, The Cranbrook & Weald Tourism and Economic Forum and the Transport Accessibility Group. Our partnership with this latter group provides us with direct access to local bus operators as well as Kent County Council representatives responsible for bus service planning.

Looking now to the future, 2014 sees the commemorations associated with the outbreak of the First World War and the Council will be supporting the Cranbrook Branch of the Royal British Legion with its plans to mark this special occasion. We are also in the process of taking direct control of the reprinting of the Cranbrook In and Around/ Heritage and Shopping leaflets as well as the highly successful "Walk Through Time", maps and guides. Both projects will help enhance the visitor experience to this area. Because visitors help support the local economy, we are continuing with our dialogue with the National Trust at Sissinghurst Castle to explore any potential opportunities that may help increase tourist footfall in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst.

He thanked all members of this Committee for their help and support during the past twelve months and also the valuable guidance and advice from Coral. He also thanked Lori for her excellent help and administrative help, especially her accurate production of the minutes of the meetings.

Cllr. Holmes invited questions. No questions were raised.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**Cllr. Bridget Veitch - Chairman**

Cllr. Veitch stated that the Environmental Management Committee has had a productive year.

The highlight has been the successful handover of the Jockey Lane, Regal and Tanyard car parks. On 1st August the Mayor of Tunbridge Wells formally handed over the car parks to the Parish Council. We have already started a programme of improvements to the car parks, and the benefits are becoming visible. These improvements include works to the general landscaping and environment and several favourable comments have been received as the view towards the Crane Valley is opened up, and the clearance of the brambles assists us in keeping the areas clear of litter.

Cranbrook in Bloom and the High Weald Partnership are working with us to suggest further improvements which will be part of the programme for 2014-15, including the replacement of the concrete litter bins. We have also done overdue maintenance to the light standards, the patching of the road surfaces and repainting of the white and yellow lines. The gullies have been emptied and the benefit of this was that the car parks all drained well during the prolonged wet winter season.

The winter programme of salting and gritting of the car parks was continued. Although there was no snow this year, there was the risk that freezing temperatures at night would create ice in the car parks.

The schools litter poster competition attracted some exciting and interesting entries, and prizes were awarded to the winners from Sissinghurst Primary School. Many congratulations to both the winners and all the entrants. Several of the entries, including the winners were displayed at the Fun Day in Cranbrook and the Sissinghurst Fete. Entries have been included in the quarterly parish magazines so that the campaign continues.

The allotments continue to provide exercise, pleasure and food. The allotment holders spend many hours in this pleasant area in the centre of Cranbrook. Occasionally a plot becomes vacant, so if anyone is interested, the Parish Clerk maintains a waiting list of interested parties.

The wet weather over the winter created several problems. Extra drainage needed to be put in the Crane Valley around both the children's slide and the skate board area. The rain also caused damage to the wooden children's play equipment, particularly in Sissinghurst. A programme of repair and replacement will need to be put in place in 2014-5 and onwards. Unfortunately the play equipment is expensive, and replacement will take time. Some ideas for the play equipment in the Jubilee Field in Sissinghurst were described at a public meeting in January.

A survey of the fire hydrants and their signs was undertaken in the early summer, and the results sent to the Kent Fire Service. This will enable them to plan their programme of maintenance.

The improvements to the Wilsley Green junction are still at an early stage of discussion. We hope for more information and progress soon.

The road surfaces are another casualty of our wet winter. The KCC website is the best method of reporting potholes in the public roads, and the website is very easy to use.

Let us hope for a lovely summer to compensate for the wet winter.

She wished to express her thanks to all her committee members and fellow councillors for their contributions to the work of the Environmental Management Committee, and also to thank our hard-working Parish Clerks, who are invaluable.

## **PLANNING & PRESERVATION MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**Cllr. Alison Bunyan  
Chairman**

Cllr. Bunyan stated that reading through her report for last year's AGM is quite depressing. So many things seem to have got no further: the Providence Chapel; the Site Allocations Document which should have been published in November; and is still awaited and until yesterday the Old School site – but she had now been told that the unilateral undertaking has been signed and the decision will be issued shortly. So at last something will be happening to what is now a very sad-looking area. A unilateral undertaking is an agreement by the developer to pay to TWBC a sum of money to be used for things like extra school places, playground equipment, adult education etc, etc.

Another area that she was delighted has progressed is the affordable housing being built for Golding Homes at Cobnut Close just between the new school and Cleavers. The foundations are due to be completed this week and the whole project should be finished between December and February 2015. There will be a public exhibition here on September 11<sup>th</sup> at 6.30p.m. immediately before our September Full Council meeting. The houses should be built by then although they won't be finished. We hope a lot of people will come and look at the progress and talk about the possibility of becoming one of the tenants. Golding Homes and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will also be there to give information and advice.



The planning applications side of this Committee's work has been steady and we have generally had 2 meetings per month. She thanked the Committee for putting in the time – we meet about 6 times more often than any other committee. This also means 6 times as many minutes – so as always a huge thank you to Coral and Lori – they are the professionals and keep us amateurs on the straight and narrow.

Cllr. Bunyan invited questions. Mrs. Linda Clifford asked who had made the decision on the naming of Cobnut Close. In the past ideas for naming were put before parishioners. She felt that it had no resonance with the Village. Cllr. Rook confirmed that the decision was made by the Parish Council following consultation with Cranbrook Conservation Area Advisory Committee and Peter Mellor had put forward suggestions. A shortlist had been drawn up and the vote had been in favour of Cobnut Close.

#### ITEMS FOR INFORMATION:

Cllr. Bunyan reiterated the views that we would need more people to come forward next year to become parish councillors.

Cllr. Cook referred to the possibility of a wild flower meadow in St. Dunstan's Churchyard and asked people to give it some thought.

Cllr. Rook stated that if anyone would like to see pictures of the news community centre it is on display in the Weald Information Centre.

Joy Taylor congratulated the Council on the handling of the takeover of the car parks and the way they had kept in touch with local people with the ballot. She felt this should be repeated with the community centre. She volunteered to help with any PR. Cllr. Veitch confirmed that all that we had chosen was the architect – we have not yet chosen a design. Joy Taylor referred to the February Minutes and to an article which appeared in the Courier. She had also had a conversation with Cllr. Marley regarding the housing for Mr. Johnson. Cllr. Rook explained that it was part of an enabling project; the land is outside the limits to build. In the Borough's emerging policy it is shown to be allocated for housing and a community centre but we have to work with what policy is in effect at the moment. There has to be a very good reason to permit housing outside of the limits to build and in this case it is the community centre. Mr. Johnson could say that if he gives the land for a community centre it will enable him to build the homes or we could say that the community centre would permit him to build the houses. The development will be linked – one cannot be built without the other. There is a lot of work going on at the moment on budgets, business plans and determining the size of the centre; this in turn will determine how many houses will go on the remainder of the site. Joy Taylor did not think the Courier article helpful. We need help to build the trust. Cllr. Rook agreed stating that he had asked to see the press report before commenting but this was always declined.

A parishioner recorded her thanks for the public toilets – both in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst.

Mr. Fairweather referred to another unfortunate fatality on the A229. He suggested that the Parish Council should write to Frittenden Parish Council to show support for a realistic 50 mph speed limit through from Wilsley Pound to the Knoxbridge Café.

Cllr. Hemsted referred to the many events being held in May for the Windmill celebrations. Helen Grant MP will be unveiling a plaque on the Vestry Hall – John Russell saved the Windmill for the Town – we owe him a lot. Joy Taylor stated that he also gave valuable land.

Borough Councillor John Smith thanked the parish councillors for all their efforts during this past year. He raised the issue of the telephone box near the toilets. He suggested it should be changed for a red phone box especially being within the conservation area. The Clerk agreed to contact BT but would first need the actual telephone number, which is the first thing that BT would require.

The meeting was then closed and the Guest Speaker – Peter Rolington – Chairman, West Kent Neighbourhood Watch gave a very interesting talk on various issues regarding neighbourhood watch, cold calling zones, crime figures, e watch and Cranbrook Police Station opening times.