

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD IN THE PARISH ROOM, SISSINGHURST
ON WEDNESDAY 18TH APRIL 2018

Present: Cllr. Veitch (Chair), Cllrs. Beck, Bunyan, Clifford, Cook, Fairweather, Fletcher, Hall, Holmes, Smith, Swann and Warne.

Apologies: Cllr. Fermor & Kemp.

Approximately 25 members of the public

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting and advised that the meeting was being recorded as a Clerk's aid.

THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:

Cllr. Veitch proposed that the Minutes be adopted as a true record. This was seconded by Cllr. Cook and agreed.

Mayor of Tunbridge Wells, Councillor Julia Soyke speaking on "The role of Mayor and her chosen charity DAVSS"

The Mayor gave a very interesting report on the role, how you become appointed to the position and what engagements she had attended during her year of office. Her business background was in share farming but over recent years, they had diversified into bed and breakfast and camping. She was also very interested in education and music. Her career in local government had begun as a Speldhurst Parish Councillor and she encouraged anyone interested in the community to stand for election. As Mayor the registered charity she had chosen to support was Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Services (DAVSS) – a West Kent based charity supporting men or women experiencing domestic abuse which is run by almost entirely by volunteers. The charity provides free practical and individual support for clients, aiming to break the cycle of abuse, enabling survivors to take control of their life and to improve life opportunities for themselves and their children. In Kent, one quarter of all police emergency calls are domestic abuse related, an average of one every 27 minutes. The Kent Community Safety Partnership is putting domestic abuse at the top of the list of its four main priorities for the coming year.

The Mayor invited questions:

A parishioner asked if the Mayor could refer the lack of decent toilet facilities in Cranbrook to the Leader of the Council at the earliest opportunity.

Borough Cllr. Holden thanked the Mayor for attending, however, he felt that the ceremonial position of Mayor was an unnecessary expense when more essential services were being cut. The Mayor appreciated his comments but pointed out that the mayoral car was sponsored by Audi and any engagements she had attended that were outside the borough were done so at her personal expense.

Cllr. Smith raised concern at the cost of the proposed civic development and the funding of the loan required for a period of 50 years which would incur interest of £3m annually.

Another parishioner commented on the £247,000 severance pay of a public servant after eight years of service. The Mayor was unable to comment on an individual case.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Cllr. Bridget Veitch

In the past we have wanted to give a full picture of all the work the Parish Council has done, resulting in some very long reports. This year as an experiment, we have agreed to limit our reports to three minutes, giving more time for questions. She hoped this approach would be appreciated.

There have been no questions submitted in advance to be answered at this meeting. She advised that we would do our best to answer all questions, but reserved the right to ask for them to be submitted in writing if necessary. In the interests of courtesy to fellow residents, she requested those asking questions to express their questions succinctly.

This year has been full of successes as a result of the hard work of the councillors, and she expressed her appreciation and gratitude to them. At the same time, the Parish Council would not function at all without the dedication, knowledge, patience and excellent team work of the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, she expressed her sincere thanks to them as well.

The new parish magazine, Parish Cake, has been a huge success, due to the expertise of Cllr. Clifford and his team, which includes Cllr. Fermor and her journalist skills. This has been universally welcomed, and perhaps more importantly, read. It also has the advantage of being delivered directly to the household, as well as being available via the Parish Council website.

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has been very busy under the chairmanship of Cllr. Warne. We thank all those volunteer parishioners for their active involvement.

In conjunction with TWBC we have been trying to progress the Community Centre. We are awaiting final resolution of the approval of the Rights of Access, without which nothing can be done. It is recognised that the design of the Community Centre will need to be significantly simplified in order to reduce the project costs and this redesign would provide the opportunity to review the facilities that are needed by the community, and reflect the work of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

She reported that she had attended all of the TWBC Parish Chairman's meetings and the TWBC KALC chairman's meetings. These are very useful forums at which to receive information from TWBC and to have informal and active discussions with the chairmen of the neighbouring parishes.

This year Cllr Peter Goodchild resigned, to move to South Africa. He has worked long and hard for this council for 7 years, and we were sorry to lose him. However in his place, we were pleased to welcome Cllr. Robin Beck, who is now getting to know us all.

She also recorded our sadness in the sudden death of Cllr Peter Davies who was not only our Borough Councillor for 12 years but also a past member of this council.

Questions raised:

A parishioner referred to the Sissinghurst Parish Magazine, highlighting several errors and omissions of details. He was advised that the publication was the responsibility of Sissinghurst PCC and not the Parish Council.

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Cllr. Brian Swann

Cllr. Swann opened his report by stating that the committee meet once a month and comprises of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, the Chair of each committee and himself. Other councillors are often invited to join the meeting if they have an expertise which would help with a particular decision.

Many of our policies such as our Standing Orders and Financial Regulations are subject to Local Government legislation, although with some we are able to tailor them to our circumstances to help improve the quality of life of the parishioners.

Our main resource is our staff, the Clerks without whom we would not have such a good Quality Parish Council. Each month our accounts are reconciled and any payments agreed. We set budgets annually and regularly check that we are keeping to them. We earmark money for future projects so that we do not have any unexpected expenditure; to help with this each committee has a five year plan. From the budgets, we set the precept (a parish council's part of the council tax), there is an article in the current Parish Cake, detailing this year's precept. There was a financial report available which he hoped was useful.

The workload of the Clerks has increased considerably over the past year and is set to increase more when the new General Data Protection Regulations come into force next month. To assist their efficiency the opening hours of the office would be reinforced, Monday to Friday 10am to midday or by prior appointment. Telephone calls will generally go to an answerphone and will be returned as soon as the Clerks get an opportunity.

The decisions made by this committee are ratified each month at a Full Council meeting. During the last year we have discussed topics such as the Council's insurance policies, the responsibilities of the Council as sole trustees of several charities, and several of the larger contracts that have required renewal. We have also installed two new defibrillators, one in Sissinghurst at St. George's Institute and the other by the doors of the Weald Information Centre. Cllr. Swann listed the grants that were awarded this year to the voluntary organisations totalling £8,145.

Finance Report for the year 2017/18

The below report is an informal picture of what the Parish Council has done over the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018 and where the precept has been spent.

The precept for 2017/18 was £325,200 and payments out were £339,861 and £71,480 was transferred to earmarked reserves for future projects (including £14,775 for the carparks).

Our staff – the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, Vestry Hall Caretakers and Parish Warden (who is self – employed) – are our most essential resource and front line to Parishioners. We could not run the Council without them. Our staffing costs including National Insurance & Pensions amounted to £99,728. Other significant items of expenditure were as follows –

Insurances	£9,635
General Administration	£15,606
Neighbourhood Plan	£25,560
Street Lighting	£10,602
Vestry Hall – Rates & Utilities	£8,538
Vestry Hall – Repairs, Maintenance & Cleaning	£7,707
Vestry Hall – Redecoration	£5,250
Vestry Hall – Cottage Repairs & Maintenance	£3,564
General Maintenance of Cemeteries & Churchyard and War Memorials (excluding grass cutting)	£1,445
Contracts for upkeep of Recreation Grounds, Cemeteries & Allotments	£27,852

Burial Grounds Business Rates	£1,854
St Dunstan's Churchyard – tree work	£16,420
Sissinghurst Cemetery – tree work	£6,470
Golford Cemetery – paths relayed	£2,800
Golford Cemetery Chapel – new heating	£1,567
Recreation Grounds – Repairs and Maintenance	£1,736
Play Equipment	£10,751
Crane Valley Nature Reserve	£3,738
Car Parks – general	£35,228
Tanyard Car Park – tree work	£1,615
Amenity Refuse Vehicle	£1,245
Defibrillators	£379
New Telephone System	£1,174
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	£8,145

The above and all our other payments were funded by the precept, various grants and monies earmarked in previous years, plus the following income –

Bank Interest	£1,208
Neighbourhood Plan – Grant	£9,000
Vestry Hall Hire	£21,825
Burial Fees	£13,505
Play Equipment – Grants	£6,933
From Tomlin Murton Playing Field Trust	£5,000
Rents received	£1,792

At the end of the year there was £360,325 held as a reserve earmarked for future specified expenditure (including £113,275 for the car parks). There is also a general cash flow fund of £151,766.

The accounts are examined twice a year by our Auditor from K.C.C 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 in their formal format are available for inspection at the Parish Council Office.

In response to a question from a parishioner, Cllr. Swann reiterated the need to accumulate sufficient reserves for projects such as the resurfacing of the car parks. The parishioner expressed disappointment that more funds could not be released to support tourism. Cllr. Fletcher suggested that the provision of free car parking in the town was a massive contribution to tourism.

BURIAL GROUNDS AND PROPERTIES COMMITTEE

Cllr. Brian Clifford

Cllr. Clifford stated how lucky he was as Chairman of the Burials and Properties Committee to have such enthusiastic members, and he wanted to put on the record his thanks to a former member, Cllr. Peter Goodchild who, with his wife, had moved to South Africa. Peter always gave wise counsel to our necessary decision making or debates.

His committee title would be more informative if the word 'Burials' was changed to 'Cemeteries' as the work associated with burials at our two cemeteries in Sissinghurst and at Golford are organised by the Clerks and Ivor Hatcher the Parish Warden.

Concerning our responsibilities, Cllr. David Cook is the eyes and ears at St. Dunstan's, which is a closed churchyard but we still have the responsibility of maintaining the grounds. Cllr. Andy Fairweather keeps his eye on Sissinghurst Cemetery. At both we have needed to spend a considerable amount of our budget on tree surgery. Golford Cemetery is one that he keeps an eye on and expenditure there relates to a new and necessary heating system in the non-denominational Chapel, which is now being used for regular services on a Sunday afternoon. Cllr. Clifford also looks after the two War Memorials.

Also in our portfolio is Vestry Hall and the attached cottage, the Information Centre and Parish Office. Bus shelters, noticeboards, cycle racks, along with the newly acquired BT red telephone boxes are also ours, Cllr. Linda Hall has been allocated responsibility of those. We are seeking ideas as what to do with the telephone boxes, so any ideas would be most welcome.

The Parish Cake is delivered to every household in the parish, however he advised that if the next edition is not received during the first two weeks in June, please let the Clerks know, so the issue can be raised with Royal Mail.

He invited questions, none were raised.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Cllr. Andy Fairweather

Cllr. Fairweather introduced himself as the Chairman of the Environmental Management Committee. He advised that his Committee was responsible for recreation grounds, The Ball Field, Crane Valley, The Jubilee Field, and all associated play equipment; the allotments, Cranbrook's car parks and the furniture therein.

He gave a report of what the committee had done in the last 12 months. They had visited and inspected all areas of responsibility, once as a whole committee and then each month as per councillor's individual responsibilities.

Litter picks had been completed in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst, a huge success with over 50 parishioners taking part.

Tree work in the Tanyard car park had been completed, along with some replacement signage in the Regal car park. There were also two pot holes and lines on the pedestrian crossing repaired.

Glass in the telephone kiosks and some street lighting had been repaired damaged due to vandalism

Repairs to the skate ramp in The Crane Valley had been completed. A new roundabout had been installed in the play area on The Ball Field. It is suitable for disabled users and is happily used by at least one wheelchair bound child in Cranbrook. The play surface areas in Sissinghurst were power washed, after it was brought to our attention a resident had slipped and been injured. We have installed some safe matting in recreation areas and hope to continue with more if we are successful with a TWBC grant application that we have submitted.

We have had a very successful allotment competition.

The Committee will continue to monitor the car parking situation, he thanked Cllr. Fletcher for his in depth article on the subject in the last edition of Parish Cake. It is known there are issues and that all townsfolk have some very differing views. We would continue to discuss new ideas and seek to solve problems that arise from time to time.

One final item he wanted to mention which fell into ‘watch this space’ is that we are looking to install some electric car charging points in at least one of the car parks in Cranbrook. This is currently quite a small project but hopefully looking to the future, if the batteries improve, will run and run.

In response to a parishioner’s question, Cllr. Smith advised there were at least seventy black sacks of litter collected during the litter pick events.

PLANNING & PRESERVATION MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE Cllr. Alison Bunyan

As always, it has been a busy year. We seem to have had a larger number of proposed new dwellings or demolish and rebuilds than usual. This set us thinking about how we could influence the construction of buildings which far outstrip the building regulations as far as insulation and the on-going running costs are concerned. The result is our Eco Design Guide which the Borough are forwarding to all those in our parish who make a pre-application. It is available on our website and will be reproduced in the next edition of the Parish Cake. We forwarded it to all other parishes in the Borough and received several compliments. She suggested that anyone thinking of building – even an extension, should take a look.

She reported that the Borough has been undertaking a land availability assessment and a large number of sites have been put forward by owners and developers. Many or even most of those sites would not be considered suitable in this plan period to 2033, but after that nobody knows.

The Brick Kiln site, at the top of Cranbrook High Street received Outline Approval for 180 homes last month, now the major task of trying to improve every aspect of the application has to start. TWBC are very keen to work with the Parish.

The Gladman/Countryside site in Common Road is being built, with houses already being advertised, she wasn’t sure if any had already been sold?

The approved extension to Cobnut Close has been the subject of a redesign and the submission of the application was expected shortly.

The self/custom build site on the corner of Frittenden and Common Roads has not yet been determined by TWBC. At first we had recommended refusal for ecological reasons, but have revisited the decision and after much discussion with the applicant over those matters and taking the strong support of parishioners and particularly neighbours into consideration, we have now recommended approval in principle on the proviso that several areas of concern are reconsidered. The Parish Council supports self-build, as does the Government and all Borough Councils have to keep a register of those wishing to build and should help facilitate the provision of sites. As far as she was aware Tunbridge Wells has not yet found any sites for the 100 plus self-builders on their register.

Last year she had reported that the Borough would not be sending letters to neighbours of application sites. This year she had to report that they will be using even fewer trees as they will no longer be sending paper plans to the parishes! She expressed her thanks to the Clerks and to her Committee for turning out twice a month, whatever the weather.

Cllr. Bunyan invited questions, none were raised.

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN COMMITTEE Cllr. Nancy Warne

Cllr. Warne gave a whistle-stop guide to what she said was a very busy year.

From the information residents gave us during the initial Visioning Events last March, we have worked throughout the year to develop a spatial strategy for development in the parish and to write policies to deliver that strategy.

- In **May** we held a 3-Day Design Forum.
- We ran stalls throughout the year at the Cranbrook Fun Day, the Sissinghurst Fete and the Apple Fair.
- **July** saw a Public Exhibition with a feedback questionnaire and further requests to get involved.
- During **August & September** this led to the formation of Task Groups in each of Chapter headings:

Landscape *Heritage* *Community & Culture*
Access & Movement *Housing & Design* *Business & Employment*
Land Use & Social Infrastructure

- **From August to January** – Task Group meetings to begin policy-writing.
- **In September** – our Business & Employment Questionnaire identified some key issues, including the acute shortage of housing which is affordable to those who work in the parish and the need for more space for expanding businesses.
- **In November** we held a Public Exhibition and asked for residents' responses via a postcard form, on the draft policy headings.
- **From January to April** – series of workshops to develop Vision & Objectives and to incorporate public responses in the emerging draft policies.
 - Further evidence was gathered through research on housing need & demand, a Landscape Character Assessment workshop and many meetings with key stakeholders, including schools, doctors, farmers & other landowners, including Sissinghurst Castle.
 - To help with the NDP work we have received a grant of £9,000 from central government plus additional technical support through an independent site assessment of 17 sites in Cranbrook & Sissinghurst, which happened in December.
 - We have also had regular liaison meeting with TWBC Planning Policy department and now have an agreement with them to work collaboratively on site allocations in the coming months.

Cllr. Warne advised that there was a Public Exhibition scheduled for 28th – 30th June when the first full draft of the Neighbourhood Plan would be seen, there would be a public consultation period, before submitting it to TWBC for examination. In the autumn, the plan will be revised, and public consultation held, before being submitted for independent examination. The referendum is planned for the summer.

She expressed huge thanks to all the volunteers in the Steering Group and all the Task Groups for all their hard work and support throughout the year.

More information can be found on the website: <https://cranbrookandsissinghurstndp.co.uk/>

A parishioner requested further details on the Neighbourhood Plan expenditure and was advised the Clerk would be happy to provide it. Another parishioner queried if land identified in the NDP could be earmarked for specific projects. Cllr. Warne assured her that it should be possible to do so.

Further questions raised:

A parishioner referred to the Mayoral chain and enquired as to the weight, he was advised by the Mayor's attendant that it was approximately the same weight as the Mace, about 7lbs.

KCC and Borough Cllr. Holden applauded the commitment and dedication of all the Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Councillors.

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