

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD IN THE VESTRY HALL, CRANBROOK
ON WEDNESDAY 24TH APRIL 2019

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

Apologies: Cllrs. Clifford, Fermor & Hall. Borough and County Cllr. Holden.

Approximately 45 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.

PRESENTATION of KALC COMMUNITY AWARD:

Cllr. Veitch presented Mr. Denis Hemsted with the KALC Community Award and explained that the Council had chosen to nominate him for many years of service to community groups and being a dedicated and active member of the Sissinghurst Fete, Sissinghurst Flower Society, the Parish Council and Cranbrook Union Mill. There were other organisations that had benefited from his commitment however we were limited to the amount that could be listed on the award. His service to all of them, was greatly appreciated.

THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:

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

TUNBRIDGE WELLS & DISTRICT CITIZEN'S ADVICE - Chris Bates:

Mr Bates gave a very interesting report on the service provided. The Tunbridge Wells & District Citizens Advice is one of 300 bureaux in England and Wales and one of the oldest. In September they are celebrating their 80th birthday. The bureau in Cranbrook is central to the rural area. A range of advice is on offer for clients which is free, impartial and confidential and is quality assured. There are several different ways clients can access the service including outreach facilities and house visits for housebound residents. Every bureau has a research and campaign team which highlight certain trends, this is what helped identify the issues that arose from the roll out of Universal Credit. Tunbridge Wells & District Citizen's Advice see approximately 5,500 clients a year of which around 800 are seen in Cranbrook. Around a third of issues relate to benefit claims. The advisors can help claimants complete the forms. About 20% are debt related where the advisors can assist clients to negotiate with creditors. There is a common misconception that funding comes from central government. This is untrue they are an independent charity responsible for their own fundraising. It costs approximately twenty three thousand pounds a year to provide the service in Cranbrook. The regular support from Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council is appreciated.

Questions were invited.

Question: Has central government changing the criteria for applying for legal aid put any extra pressure on the service.

Response: It has helped that some volunteers are legally trained, the service also has access to solicitors.

Question: Do all parish councils support the service

Response: Unfortunately, no.

Question: Are those applying for help with debt issues in debt with their council tax

Response: Yes, amongst other debts.

Question: How much of the cost of running the service in Cranbrook is down to the cost of the premises.

Response: Approximately five thousand.

Cllr. Veitch thanked Mr Bates for attending, she felt that the facts he had provided were very interesting.

KENT POLICE – Inspector Christian Mayers

Inspector Mayers introduced himself as the Community Safety Inspector for the Tunbridge Wells District. He had recently had a meeting with a Sissinghurst resident and Cllr. Veitch and was aware of the concerns around policing in the Parish. He expressed his passion for the area having worked here since 2002 and now also living here. It was hoped that communication would improve with the introduction of a community contacts database to help in disseminating alerts to residents in the Parish and highlight the work of the police.

He went on to advise that he had the pleasure of being involved in setting up the current police model which in 2005 saw Cranbrook amalgamated into West Kent Division. It saw a 24/7 response unit based at Cranbrook which continues to this day. PCSOs also work out of Cranbrook, part of their role is to let him know what is going on in the area. He referred to the existence of ‘county lines’ being run by organised crime groups, specifically the Albanian network which is a huge threat and one that must be tackled. He reassured the meeting that in the overall crime picture, Tunbridge Wells Borough is the safest part of the County. There are ongoing joint operations with neighbouring forces such as Sussex Police to help tackle rural crime, but it is not just about tactical work, the partnership working with other organisations such as KCC wardens is highly valued.

Questions were invited.

Question: What do the police need from residents?

Response: Report all crime and suspicious activity, either by using 999 if there is a crime in progress or 101. He advised that Lee Jules, the PCSO, was happy to take reports of suspicious activity. Anonymous reports and information can also be made to Crimestoppers.

Question: In this area, if traffic is not gridlocked then it is speeding, what can be done to secure the mobile speed camera van here?

Response: The van is deployed at locations where there have historically been either fatal or serious injury accidents. Insp Mayers said he would look if it was possible but could not make any commitment.

Question: Does the existence of CCTV prevent crime.

Response: It does help to identify offenders, but there is no evidence to support it works as a deterrent.

Question: What is being done about drug dealing, it is regularly reported but there is no evidence that the information is being acted upon.

Response: Advised to pass the vehicle indexes to Lee Jules.

CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

Cllr. Bridget Veitch

It has, yet again, been a very busy year for the Parish Council, her full report is available to read in this year’s Annual Report along with an attendance record for committee and parish council meetings for your interest. She highlighted several aspects of her report including the tremendous success of the Parish Cake magazine, congratulating Cllr. Clifford and his team.

Our Clerk and Deputy Clerk continue to work hard and, usually, keep smiling whilst providing us with a great service and good advice.

Firms of solicitors representing ourselves, Guy Johnson, TWBC and the Co-op Group have been working on the legal documents for the transfer of land and the rights of access for the Community Centre. The final drafts are now being circulated, and we are very hopeful that these will all be agreed and signed very soon. Then the project for the Community Centre can be relaunched, with a series of consultations to establish what facilities the community want and need in the Community Centre, and the appointment of a project manager. The building will have to be redesigned to suit a modest capital cost. She reiterated that this Parish Council never had any intention of selling the Vestry Hall complex.

She was very grateful for all the hard work and commitment from the councillors and the clerks, without which nothing could be achieved. She particularly wanted to thank the chairmen of the various committees, and her stalwart Vice-Chairman, Cllr Fletcher. The work of the NDP Steering Group should also be highlighted, and thanks given for all the many hours that have been put into this endeavour.

This is the last Annual Parish Meeting of this Parish Council's four year term. She took the opportunity to thank those councillors who are not restanding for their many years of service. These are Cllr. Holmes, after 18 years, Cllr. Cook after 12 years, Cllr. Kemp after 4 years and finally Cllr. Swann after 24 years. She welcomed those new councillors that are taking their place. Questions were invited, none were raised.

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Cllr. Brian Swann

Cllr. Swann opened his report by stating that he had recently visited the Parish Office to find Lori and Lynn working hard on a sunny day, in their overcoats, door open with scaffolding being carried past their desks. This is the dedication of this team which keeps the Parish Council operation so efficient and to whom we should all be grateful. Thank you.

He said he would miss this on his retirement after 24 years on the council but would still be calling in to see if he can help and to have a good laugh.

He gave a precise of what the Policy and Resources Committee had been doing over the past year. He knows that the mundane admin items that are so essential to the running of our Quality Parish Council, can be a little boring so was not going to report on those. A lot of what is discussed is covered in more detail by other committees so I would not report on those either.

He did however mention the giving of a new lease to the Bowls Club and our involvement in the commemorations of the 100 years since the end of the 1st World War. This commemoration was jointly headed up by the Parish Council, The Royal British Legion and St. Dunstan's Church with a beacon being lit on top of the church tower.

We have put money in the budget to provide public toilets, if possible, until they can be incorporated in the new Community Centre.

So much is going on in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst that we need a central hub to co-ordinate everything in Cranbrook, at the new Community Centre in the middle of Cranbrook to bring all communities together. The Parish Council have had the site at Wilkes Field given to us for community use. This will be a financial asset for all the people of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst worth up to £1 million.

The Parish Council have been more than pleased to agree to give a small piece of land to St. Georges Institute Trust to enable a new Village Hall to be built in Sissinghurst and we fully support this.

He had been waiting 24 years and more for an organisation like “Well Being in the Weald” to get going to bring the community together. This is a group of like-minded individuals whose aim is to promote activities that enhance “well being” and build a stronger community. They rightly believe that the best way to help everyone’s “well being” is to get people involved in what is going on in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst to provide other activities if these are not yet available.

They will find out what is going on out in the community and promote this for the good of everyone, so that people are not lonely or feeling left out. To this end the Parish Council have already given the use of the Vestry Hall free of charge for the inaugural “Well Being Fair”, which was a great success. We have recently agreed that “Well Being in the Weald” can use space in the Weald Information Office as a drop in centre for anyone wanting information about community activities and putting them in touch with the right people for help. The first thing that “Well Being in the Weald” organised was a Community Choir in St. Dunstan’s Church, which has proved a great success attracting over 100 participants every week.

For all this to really succeed we need a Community Centre in the middle of Cranbrook to bring all communities together. The Neighbourhood Development Plan has suggested having a Town Square meeting area and this can be incorporated next to the new Community Centre right in the heart of Cranbrook.

The Parish Council has so far failed to provide a central point where information is available for the community, as to what is going on in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst or what is to come. We need an up to date central directory about clubs, societies and associations. This is certainly not provided by an up to date Parish Council Website and is something I had hoped we would achieve with the Parish Council Magazine “Parish Cake”, but we have not. To this end please ensure that any changes to your clubs/societies details are notified to the Parish Office so that we can keep information up to date.

The other thing he was very keen on is the Parish Council “Mail Chimp Be In The Know” used to circulate up to date information about what is going on. However, to receive this you must be signed up to get regular updates, the address at which you can sign up is on the back page of the Annual Report. There is also a list of Grants we have made to local voluntary organisations.

Also included in the Annual Report was an informal picture of what the Parish Council has done over the period of the financial year 2018/19 and how the precept money has been spent. He invited questions.

Question: A concern was raised about the amount of reserves held and how much was being put aside for the Community Centre and the Car Parks.

Response: Cllr. Swann referred to the current repainting of the exterior of the Vestry Hall, this was only possible because funds have been put aside over several years. The Clerk advised the reserves held are within the recommended guidelines of the Governance and Accountability regulations.

Question: If the car parks are so expensive to maintain then perhaps the council should consider not being responsible for them.

Response: That would be a question that would have to be revisited by the new council when it takes office, the only option would be to return to TWBC and they would most certainly implement charges. This would result in parishioners paying considerably more in car parking charges than they do through the precept.

BURIAL GROUNDS AND PROPERTIES COMMITTEE

Cllr. Graham Holmes

In the absence Cllr. Clifford, Cllr. Holmes read the follow report:

Firstly, looking back on the year I would like to express my sincere thanks to Cllr. David Cook who is standing down as a Parish Councillor. David has been not only responsible for keeping an eye on St. Dunstan's Churchyard but has always, at committee meetings, offered very wise council during discussions. Likewise another member of our committee Cllr. Graham Holmes has decided not to stand for re-election as a Parish Councillor. As a member of the Burials and Properties Committee, Graham provided invaluable reports and advice on insurance matters on the fabric of the Vestry Cottage as well as frequently advising the Parish Council Policy and Resources Committee, based on his extensive knowledge of the insurance industry. Both Graham and David have been stalwarts of our committee's responsibilities.

During the last year, as a committee, we have needed to make some substantial spending proposals to the Full Council for acceptance. In the Vestry Hall complex, including Vestry Cottage, a fire alarm system has needed to be installed to meet our requirements. Repairs to Vestry Cottage have also been necessary and the exterior of Vestry Hall has required re-painting, all significant expenditure but necessary as we maintain the condition of the building as a part of our responsibilities.

At Sissinghurst Cemetery based on a commissioned tree survey some felling has needed to take place, and we now are taking advice about the re-planting. Some areas of the cemetery have flooded during the last two or three months, and this is simply because of a lack of land drains and ditches surrounding the cemetery and not, as has been suggested caused by the building of new homes in Church Mews. I must say that Sissinghurst Cemetery is a most peaceful place to pass away the time.

At Cranbrook Cemetery, our contractors continue to do a good job, and some Cranbrook residents most generously provided some trees to be planted. And, if you do drive past the Cemetery on the Golford Road you will see that our Parish Warden, Ivor Hatcher, has now installed some much requested signage.

Burials and Properties Committee members all have individual responsibilities so that at our committee meetings reports can be received and minuted.

And finally, those who visit St. Dunstan's Church will have noticed a hand rail from the steps to the South Entrance of the church, this was very kindly partially funded from the bequest of a Cranbrook resident and has been much appreciated, as has the work by Robert Longley who made and installed the rail.

Cllr. Clifford – Chairman Burials and Properties

Cllr. Holmes 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.

Two litter picks have taken place in both Cranbrook and Sissinghurst with a great deal of support from parishioners. It was generally thought that during the recent spring pick that litter was generally down. However fly tipping, large item waste, e.g. car parts and road signage was greatly increased.

Further tree work has been completed in Sissinghurst cemetery and a plan for replanting more suitable shrubs is planned.

We have continued to be blighted by vandalism particularly to street lights and the Crane Valley area. Spending has been incurred to replace vandal proof lighting and litter bin inserts.

Drainage upgrades have been authorised in the skate park.

A continuing plan for tree management in the Tanyard Car Park is underway and contracts have been awarded.

We have again had a very successful allotment competition

Very recently a major programme of repairs has been completed in the Regal Car Park. This included, pot holes, uneven surface, relining of spaces, pedestrian crossings and signage. The recycling bins in the car park will be removed later this year when door step collections begin from TWBC. This will enable further parking spaces to be created.

Improvements and upkeep of the Crane Valley continue with special thanks to the Kent High Weald Project.

He thanked committee members and in particular Cllr. Fletcher for his continued work towards providing electric car charging points in the town. During the year grants totalling over £15,000 have been secured, the work has started in Jockey Lane Car Park and is due for completion very shortly.

He also thanked the Clerk and Deputy Clerk for their continued help and support during the year. He invited questions.

Question: Is it possible to provide some sort of games court for teenagers?

Response: It can certainly be something we can ask for when the Planning Authority are negotiating S106 agreements.

Question: Referring to the Parish Council Winter Strategy, why is snow clearance not undertaken?

Response: Hand propelled small gritters are available to use, one in Sissinghurst and one in Cranbrook. The Committee decided that following advice from the insurance brokers that we would not be responsible for gritting any areas in the Parish.

PLANNING & PRESERVATION MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE Cllr. Alison Bunyan

Cllr. Bunyan reported that as usual we have had a busy year but not a lot of forward movement except as far the Neighbourhood Development Plan is concerned – but Nancy Warne would update you on that.

The Brick Kiln Development at the top of the High Street is still being tweaked but the detailed planning application is expected any day now.

The market housing extension to Cobnut Close has not yet been decided in spite of the fact that October 2018 was the due date for the decision and also that there is already an approved application for the site.

The Countryside development of 60 homes, also off Common Road in Sissinghurst is forging forward and some – 12 the last time she had heard – having been sold or moved into.

The self-build site on the Frittenden Road/Common Road crossroads came back in with a redesign and has hit a sticking point with the Borough who appear to want considerably more homes to be built on the site and they would be unlikely to be self-build. She thought that could be somewhere between 30 and 50 homes. This self-build site for 9 homes was extremely well supported by the local community and is an unusual concept within this Borough. Borough Councils are required to keep a list of those who are looking for sites on which to build their own homes and are supposed to actively seek out sites to offer those on the list. Our Borough has such a list but as far as she was aware, no sites have been identified. We recommended approval for the previous application and again for this application although on the latest occasion it was only a majority decision. Sissinghurst would be furious if the village had to have another large development on the edge of the village.

On that subject, there is another proposed development for the parkland on the Cranbrook side of Mill Lane for 44 homes. We have recommended refusal for this site. The NDP and CCAAC are also against this site being built upon.

Although in Cranbrook this evening she asked everyone to spare a thought for poor little Sissinghurst who are being taken advantage of because the north of the village is outside the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

We are still sending our Eco Design Guide to all those making applications for new builds and there is one new house in the parish that has already achieved Passivhaus Standard although it is not yet finished.

She thanked the Clerks and also to the members of the Planning Committee who turn out twice a month. She also wished to particularly thank retiring Cllr. David Cook for his help as Vice Chairman and his wise advice when things sometimes got a little difficult – we would miss him. Cllr. Bunyan invited questions.

Question: Who is responsible for providing infrastructure improvements for all the new houses being built? If it is left to developers, it will not be provided.

Response: Cllr. Warne advised that the cost of all additional infrastructure that is required has to be met by the developer.

A member of the public disagreed with to the statement that Sissinghurst is taken advantage of because it is outside the AONB, she felt that being within it does not necessarily protect the area from development as was the case with Brick Kiln Farm development. Cllr. Warne advised that the problem was that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council does not have a five year land supply and developers will continue to win on appeal because of this, at least until we have a NDP or Tunbridge Wells have a Local Plan in place.

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN COMMITTEE Cllr. Nancy Warne

Cllr. Warne gave a summary of what the Committee had achieved during the last year, her full report was recorded in the Annual Report.

It started optimistically with a two-day workshop in May with the TWBC Planning Policy team in an attempt to work collaboratively on site allocations for the parish. The idea being that we could bring to bear our detailed local knowledge when discussing sites and their team could help with technical planning support and information gathered from other agencies such as KCC Highways and Education departments.

The workshops went well, with broad agreement on many of the sites under discussion, but with a few notable exceptions which we are still in disagreement about.

The emerging Neighbourhood Plan was trying to develop a spatial strategy for growth in the parish based on the evidence we had gathered to date. Some of these ideas were tested during a 3-day exhibition held in June in both Sissinghurst and Cranbrook. Parishioners were asked to comment on a number of high-level scenarios, which included concentrated growth based around the settlement centres of Cranbrook & Sissinghurst, dispersed development based around the historic settlement pattern of farmsteads, and the idea of a new settlement based around Colliers Green to support the school. In hindsight, we perhaps should have included more scenarios, but those we presented certainly elicited a response, especially from the residents of Colliers Green and she thanked our consultant Richard Eastman who came up in December to help us reach out to the residents of Colliers Green and calm the concerns that had arisen there. A similar engagement followed in Hartley. Also in December the Parish Council ratified the decision that the Steering Group would undertake the site assessments themselves. We hit the ground running in January as there were over 50 sites to assess. She thanked June Bell, Annie Hopper, Garry Pethurst and Jeremy Boxall for their commitment to this task. Extra volunteers were pulled in to help moderate the sites in March. More government funding has been secured to help with the extra technical support necessary.

We have had several conversations with developers to discuss their plans and with Cranbrook School to hear about their master plan for the future. We now need to press on because until this plan is in place we are vulnerable to speculative development. She invited questions.

A question was asked regarding S106 agreements.

Response: The government is asking councils to move towards a system of CIL's (Community Infrastructure Levy) if you have a NDP in place you can get more money and direct it to your community, you can get 25% of all infrastructure monies raised and spend it how and on what you want but at the moment TWBC are dragging their heels in adopting that system.

Question: when is that money due? A member of the public gave the following response: It depends on the individual agreement.

Cllr. Veitch thanked all those Members of the community that help and support the Parish Council. She thanked everyone for attending.