

**MINUTES OF WHATLINGTON ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY HELD ON THURSDAY 21st.
MARCH 2019 IN THE VILLAGE HALL AT 7.00pm**

PRESENT:- Councillor Fisher in the Chair
Councillors, Underhill and White
County Councillor Field
District Councillor Kirby-Green

There were 11 local electors attending

1. Apologies – Councillor Apthorp, Councillor Scott and Vikky Cook Guide Leader
2. The Chairman began the meeting by thanking those attending and explaining due to problems with attending dates there is no Speaker this year. Packs of all reports have been given out and he will now give a little time for everyone to read these. The Chairman then read his.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT.

Parish Assembly Report 2019

1. This is the final report of the current Council, but instead of commencing with a review of the years activities I would like, firstly, to take the opportunity to look forward to May and the election of a new council.
2. Parish Councils were established in 1894 and since then there have been 31 Whatlington Councils representing the community, delivering services to meet local needs and seeking to improve the quality of life and well being of the community. Over the years this has meant a considerable number of parishioners have put themselves forward for election, thereby continuing to deliver these objectives over the last 125 years.
3. This year we see, at this time, some existing councillors not seeking re-election. Therefore, we need to fill not only these vacancies but also to have sufficient local interest and candidates to have an actual election.
4. Unfortunately there is a trend, not only in this but also other parishes, of a lack of candidates. For example, a significant number of Councillors in nearby Councils have been co-opted. I do not believe that co-option is the ideal way for a Council to have to operate in a democratic environment. Indeed, there are also difficulties in identifying potential co-optees given an apparent lack of concern or interest in Parish/Town Councils' activities and their contribution to their local communities.
5. I believe, if we are unable to find sufficient candidates for election or co-optants, then Rother District Council could invoke the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 (with regard to parishes with an electorate of under 150) or the Local Government Rating Act 1997 and undertake a Community Governance Review. One trigger for this is a "justified, clear and sustained local support" which I would also interpret as a negative lack of support. In its turn this Review could recommend a dissolution of the Parish and a merger into a neighbouring Parish.
6. If this was to occur Parishioners would, I believe, notice the impact. Firstly, the precept would reflect the "importing" Parish's rate. A quick inspection of those around us would indicate up to a 300% increase in our existing precept. In addition, the "voice and views" of the village would be but a minor part of this bigger parish. One sees examples of this in regard to the District Councils alleged dominating interest of Bexhill residents (who's Councillors represent a significant voting bloc) in the policies and service delivery to the wider Rother community. The answer to this lies entirely in parishioners' hands. With sufficient candidates we could have an election or perhaps some element of co-option. If not.....

CHAIRMANS REPORT CONTINUED

7.Next, a brief overview of the work of the Council over its full term. Firstly, and as referenced above, the average number of electors attending the 20+ meetings, whilst averaging 5 over the 4 year course of the Council, has dropped significantly in the last year and would reflect adversely in any Governance Review regarding support of and for the Councils' activities. In contrast, Councillor attendance over the term has been consistently high at 75%.

8.Over the term there have been a number of recurring issues, many of which will continue into the next Council. Prime amongst these, inevitably, are improvements to the A21, including installation of average speed cameras and paving throughout the Village. Also improvements to the local electricity supply and, hopefully, an effective waste recycling service from Rother, can be anticipated early in the new Council. Planning will also feature again; the Council having provided their input to the planning process with comments on over 40 applications.

The Chairman then asked if there were any questions on the reports

COUNTY COUNCILLOR FIELD

Report from East Sussex County Council 2019

It will not surprise anyone to know that the the County Council's portion of this year's Council Tax has risen by 2.99%. The County Council is still having to make serious cuts to services. This is in spite of lobbying Central Government which resulted in some extra cash. However it is "one off" and has been used on continuing expenditure so the effect will be to move the problem to next year. The County Council has developed a "core offer" which is a mixture of statutory services and services which are not statutory but are deemed essential. Most services are now targeted at those who need them currently which means that those who do not quite qualify are left exposed and potentially vulnerable. I am particularly concerned that the subsidy of £4.10 per meal for those who qualify for meals on wheels has been withdrawn. Not only did this service provide balanced nutrition for service users but it ensured regular human contact for people who are often isolated.

The County's Capital Programme has also been reduced because less revenue has been allocated to it to allow for more spending on front line services. Maintenance items have also been moved to the Capital budget. This means that there will be less money to spend on infrastructure improvements.

On a brighter note Ofsted has awarded the Council "outstanding" for Children's Social Care, only five Local Authorities have gained this grade. It is to be hoped that budget cuts to preventative services will not threaten this service because it is not the grade itself which is important but what it says about the service provided to a vulnerable section of the community.

Despite what has happened in some parts of the County, the Council is still committed to its small schools. The Government's National Funding Formula is likely to prove difficult for smaller schools so a small group of Councillors and Officers looked in depth at the issue and how the worst effects might be mitigated. The conclusion which has been agreed by the whole Council is that small schools should consider formal arrangements to combine and share management functions etc while maintaining the school itself in its community. This will mean that this vital part of community life can continue. Following an accident in the summer to a small child the skate ramp in Battle has been closed. It is on County Council land but is not owned by the County Council which is the cause of the problem because no organisation has a budget for the repairs necessary to make it safe so it can be reopened. The cost is in the region of £4,500 + VAT. The County Council has agreed to contribute the cost it would have had to pay to dismantle it and Battle Town Council is looking at ways to make it usable again. This is not just a resource for young people in Battle.

Kathryn Field.

RDC Update for Whatlington Parish Council

Council Budget News



From 2019/20 Rother District Council will no longer receive a revenue support grant from the government and will be reliant solely on income from business rates, council tax, charges for services and income generation. We've recently been informed the government accepted the East Sussex Business Rate Pool to pilot 75% rates retention in 2019/20. We do not know the financial impact yet. The advantage will be that RDC could keep more of any growth in business rates (currently we get 50%). However, the Government's fair funding review and business rates reset in 2020 may divert funding and growth in business rate income from district councils to meet pressures in other areas.

More detailed information on the Council's finances can be read in our draft medium term financial strategy. Our Sustainability and Efficiency Plan sets out how we will decide which services to prioritise and how lower priority services might be delivered over the next three years. You can find both documents on the Council's website at <http://www.rother.gov.uk/article/1059/Budgets-and-accounts>.

Neighbourhood Plans

The Localism Act (2011) introduced several new rights and powers to allow local communities to shape new development, including the provision to prepare a 'Neighbourhood Plan' for their area.

Like Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans are statutory plans and once adopted, will form part of the statutory Development Plan used for determining planning applications within the respective designated Neighbourhood Areas. So far in Rother, there are two adopted Neighbourhood Plans (Salehurst & Robertsbridge and Sedlescombe). Battle, Burwash and Etchingam are three amongst the further nine in preparation.

A new waste contractor (Biffa) has been procured in partnership with Hastings Borough Council and Wealden District Council. The new contract will start from late June 2019 and include alternate weekly collections of co-mingled dry waste and residual waste, and a fortnightly chargeable garden waste collection service.

Housing

In response to concerns about the cost of housing, lack of affordable housing, and increases in homelessness and rough sleeping we undertook a scrutiny review to understand the issues and develop recommendations regarding how we might tackle these issues. We consulted on these recommendations during the latter part of last year and have since developed a Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy which is currently being considered by Council for adoption from 2019/20.

ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLOR KIRBY-GREEN REPOPRT CONTINUED**Response to Anti-Social Behaviour**

Last year we reported that in response to residents' concerns we had created a new part-time role of a community warden to work with the police to enforce low level anti-social behaviour. From March 2019 the Council will be employing two Community Wardens to take on this role and they can be contacted at pollution@rother.gov.uk.

Civil Parking Enforcement

During 2018 we undertook a scrutiny review on the implications of moving to civil parking enforcement throughout Rother. The County Council have recently completed a consultation exercise and we are awaiting their final proposals. Taking into account the statutory consultation process if CPE does come in to force it will not be until summer 2020.

Supporting Community Projects and Events

Last summer we awarded a total of £66,601 in community grants to support twelve separate projects or events. These included:

- Improvements to Battle's football pitch and the addition of a covered shelter at their recreation ground
- Development of a community garden at Burghwood House, Etchingham
- Playground equipment in Northiam
- A lifeboat launch vehicle in Pett
- A community space project in Sidley
- Outdoor cricket nets and children's play facilities in Westfield
- Equipment for the angling club, a grant towards the cost of the Remembrance Day parade (to celebrate 100th anniversary of WW1), and a grant towards the cost of a children's music festival in Bexhill

A further £72,561 in grant applications is up for consideration during February 2019.

Communications

Over 16,400 residents receive a My Alerts email. This has reduced from over 29,000 at this time last year. This is primarily as a result of GDPR as subscribers were asked to confirm their subscription. We anticipate that numbers receiving the monthly email will increase in the future and encourage anyone who no longer receives the emails to re-register.

3 REPORTS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Whatlington Parish Church

Perhaps the most important event for Whatlington Church over the past 12 months has been the formation of the new unified Ecclesiastical Parish of Sedlescombe with Whatlington. This came into effect, following a period of consultation from the first of January 2019 and means that Sedlescombe and Whatlington are a single Parish with two Parish Churches. The main effect is that the two separate Parochial Church Councils merge to become one under the chairmanship of our Priest-in-Charge Revd. Kevin Mepham, Whatlington churchwarden Jeffrey Bridges becomes Vice Chairman.

The change has been made at the request of the two church councils and is intended to strengthen the position of both churches, which have been combined as a United Benefice since 1924. The two churches have been working more closely together for some time now and this move will consolidate our position and should help to make the future of both churches more secure. Prior to the merger the Whatlington P.C.C. had been strengthened with new members to six, plus Jeffrey Bridges (ex officio) as churchwarden, there remains a vacancy for the second warden. The Sedlescombe P.C.C. was six members, plus the two churchwardens and so representation from the two churches are fairly evenly split.

In terms of finances, whilst there will be a single church Treasurer in Mrs. Jane Wallis, the accounts will be so arranged that funds specific to each church are treated separately with monies specific to each church clearly identified as such.

Another significant development in the past year has seen our church become home to the recently formed Whatlington Singers, a newly formed choir who both use the church for their weekly rehearsals and as a venue for concerts.

In other respects the now established pattern of church services have continued, but with some minor changes, such as an evening service for All Souls on the 4th Sunday of October. The names of departed loved ones were read out with an opportunity for members of the congregation to come forward and light a candle in their memory. The success of this service and of the 6pm evening services in general means that they will now start in March and run to October on the 4th Sunday of each month.

All service times are shown on our page of the national website: <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/search/> just enter the name of the village in the search box to find us, or use the postcode, which is TN33 OND. Details can also be found on the church notice boards and on the church's Facebook page. We also encourage people to join our email list underhilly@msm.com so that they receive regular updates about services, events and other news.

We do occasionally change or add services an example being an additional 10.30am Family Service on 31st March for Mothering Sunday and a change on Easter Day to 10.30am to make it more accessible given the significance of the day in the Christian calendar. Our Priest-in-Charge takes the majority of services, whilst local retired Priest Revd. John Hawkins helps with a number of the Family services.

Christmas services were again well attended with a good congregation for the Christmas Eve service, which has become an established one. On Thursday 14th February, The Right Revd. Dr. Martin Warner, Diocesan Bishop of Chichester attended a special service of Morning Prayer at the church as part of his visitation to the Bexhill and Battle Deanery, this was almost 5 years to the day that the Bishop led the service to re-open our church following the post fire restoration. Then on Thursday 21st February the church played host to a Health and Safety seminar led by Ecclesiastical Insurance with 53 people attending from other churches in the surrounding area. This is the first time that we have hosted such an event and it was a great success with all those attending being full of praise for the church building.

WHATLINGTON PAROCHIALO CHURCH COUNCIL REPORT CONTINUED

As I write there is nothing new to report on the ongoing proposals which, should they be successful would lead to the church having its own car park.

The Council's grant continues to help ensure that the churchyard is kept in a tidy state, with the grass cut as required by a contractor, assisted by help from volunteers. We are very fortunate to have volunteers who carry out tasks, both in the churchyard and inside the building with periodic cleaning parties to ensure that everything is well cared for.

We continue look to the future, seeking to grow our regular congregations by attracting new people to join the church and try to ensure that the range of services will offer something for everyone. Whatlington church has been the villages centre for Christian worship since 1275 in the present building and most probably since before the Conquest on the same site, as a church we want to be seen as relevant in today's world, seeking to be flexible and open to new ideas and ways to be 'church', indeed we are one of the few churches in the Bexhill & Battle Deanery who welcome women priests.

We hope that as 2019 unfolds we will see continued development for our church.

Jeffrey Bridges
Churchwarden.

For and on behalf of the Parochial Church Council for Sedlescombe with Whatlington

VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE REPORT FROM MRS ANNETTE MCBRIDE CHAIRMAN

This year has been a busy one yet again with about 9 hirers each week on a regular basis and then a few more fitted in occasionally. Therefore, I feel I can say that our bank account is quite healthy. We are proposing to carry out all the alterations and the swimming of the wail between kitchen and loo area in the very near future. The functions have gone very well the Festive Supper was a sell out and the next function is the Twilight serenade in the field behind the hall and hopefully we will have even. Ore people this year and make it our main fund-raising event of the year. We will of then have the Annual Summer Fete my son has very kindly offered to run the bar which will be an immense help to me personally.

I am a little concerned as I keep receiving a letter from Rother asking how the grant for solar panels is going on but as I wrote to the about three weeks after they advised of the grant that we were not going ahead with the plans I would have thought they had received the message. I will of corse be writing to them yet again. There will of course be no request for funds from the Parish Council this year for Whatlington Village Hall and perps they could be awarded elsewhere.

This is my report as Chairman of Whatlington Village Hall for 2019.

Chairman Annette McBride