

MINUTES OF WHATLINGTON ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY HELD ON THURSDAY 21st MARCH 2024 IN THE VILLAGE HALL AT 7.30pm

PRESENT:- Councillor Fisher in the Chair
Councillors, Clarkson, Davis, Sullivan
County and District Councillor Field

There were 11 local electors attending

AGENDA

The Chairman began the meeting by thanking all those attending

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors Smith and Burton

2. SPEAKER CHAIRMAN BATTLE ABBEY SCHOOL.

Also attending was the Head, Assistant Head, Governer, Chairman of the Finance committee

The school has 500 children 38 of these are boarders. They are finding the school building is really too small to accommodate the boarders satisfactory for them and the school.

They have looked around and Leeford Place is ideal a small family property close to the main school with grounds and facilities. The children will be bussed to the school in the morning and back late afternoon so there will be no increase in traffic. The Chairman said the school hold many different excursions and with their saying they would be inviting the public in this would mean more vehicles and would have to be discussed as and when proposed.

The Chairman went on to say the building will stay the same as now. The area is rich in diversity and this will stay. They are also looking for the future for it to be possibly their sixth form.

Concern was expressed about the danger to pedestrian and cyclists. Our Footpath Warden said the Ramblers had objected not to them using the property but to the danger to pedestrians and other users.

the Finance Chairman said they will be keeping the layby the lower car park and would make sure drivers take care.

The Chairman thanked them for attending and explaining what they intended

Packs of all reports were available to all those attending and are also on the council website.

He then gave a little time for everyone to read these.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT.

Parish Assembly Chairmans Report 2024

1) This report is the first for your new Council elected in June 2023. It is worthy to note that not only was there an election, (one of only 10% of Rother Parishes having one) but also that 60% of the Councillors were new. I believe these outcomes are positive indicators of a Parish community that is strong and developing in the second smallest Parish in the district

2) A further indication of this is the inception of Whatlington Connectors during the year, actively promoting community development and engagement within the Parish. This is in addition to The Village Hall Committee, who continue to successfully raise funds for this community asset and the well-read and presented Village news and band of deliverers that keeps us all in touch, plus Community Speed watch volunteers helping keep us safe. My thanks to all these community stalwarts for their commitment to the civic well-being. A strong community is a healthy community.

3) Another unique event in the year was the hosting a meeting with our MP. Unique in the fact that this was the first time that a member of the Government had come to the Parish (Huw Merriman being the Minister for Rail in the Dept of Transport) The meeting was as expected, dominated by issues about the A21,

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4) As ever the A21 also predominated Parish concerns during the year. There is a £26m road safety improvement scheme in place for the A21 and Whatlington's position in the plans, to reflect a fair disposition of funding, has to be actively protected. There was one public meeting with Highways followed by a Councillor only online video call with a further public meeting promised - not yet delivered but hopefully in May. Like most Parish issues with local and central government we always travel hopefully but expect long journeys for delivery.!

5) With regard to other Council business it was a normal year for planning considerations with 15 being submitted for comment. A notable application, still in process, was a change of use of Leeford Hotel becoming a boarding house for Battle Abbey school It is hoped that if this proceeds there will some civic gains for the Parish.

6) On finance, after 5+ years of no increase, the Council decided that it was necessary to raise the Parish Precept by 5%. A decision not taken lightly but essential if we are to maintain our ability to continue to deliver positive outcomes on Parish matters.

7) In conclusion, my thanks to our District and County representatives and our Parish Clerk for their continuing support during the year.

8) But special thanks to our new Councillors and Vice Chair for stepping up to the challenges of being a Parish Councillor. I trust their first years' experience in the role has confirmed them in the belief that serving the community is not only an informative, rewarding and engaging activity but, hopefully, at times, entertaining and fulfilling.

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COUNTY COUNCILLOR FIELD

East Sussex County Council:

- The County Council's portion of Council Tax will rise by 4.99%. This includes a 2% precept for Adult Social Care.
- Government's view was that any shortfall in the budget should be filled from reserves. This was done, £9m, but this is only a short term fix.
- Children's Services has been inspected by Ofsted and been judged Good with Outstanding features; the outstanding feature is services for Looked After Children
- The Director of Children's Services is retiring and her successor will be in post later in Spring.
- Adult Social Care is due to have a CQC inspection later in the year.
- Since the last Assembly a new highway contractor has been appointed: Balfour Beatty.
- Approximately 4,000 potholes had been mended in the first two months of the year with many more gangs than usual being used.

Cllr. Kathryn Field March 2024

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR SUE BURTON

Rother District Council - highlights and key issues – 2023/24



January 2023

The Council started the new year by urging residents and businesses to take part in a budget consultation, as the authority continued to face increasing demands on its finances.

A new requirement for voters to show photo ID when they vote was highlighted. Residents were warned the new rule would apply for the first time in the May 2023 local elections.

January ended with some fantastic news, as the authority was told it had been awarded over £19 million for community, creativity, and skills in Bexhill. The investment, from the Government's Levelling Up Fund would be used to support two major projects at the De La Warr Pavilion and in Sidley.

February

This month the authority highlighted its work to keep the district tidy with the removal of unsightly graffiti at several sites, and by encouraging smokers to dispose of cigarette butts in the right way. The Council also promoted its green credentials with the launch of a new energy improvement project for village and community halls across the district.

Cabinet met at the end of the month to agree items including community grants of more than £40,000 for groups in Battle, Burwash, Icklesham and Staplecross, the extension of a contract for Citizens Advice with £85,000 of additional funding, and progress being made on the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.

March

In March, the Council launched a special £10,000 grant for community groups looking to celebrate the Kings Coronation in May. Further good news was confirmation the district had been chosen as one of 20 new Levelling Up Partnership areas and would benefit from a share of the £400m UK fund.

This month also saw the authority addressing some difficult issues. The Council continued its negotiations on the devolvement of public conveniences to town and parish councils and issued a joint statement with East Sussex County Council on the Government's proposed plan to use the Northeye site as a centre for people seeking asylum.

April

The forthcoming May elections took centre stage with another step in the process ahead of residents going to the polls. The authority published its 'Statement of Persons Nominated for the District & Parish Elections' online allowing people to check those standing in each ward.

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April continued

It was another example of the work of the authority promoting the elections which has included the election timetable, including deadlines for registering to vote and voting by post, plus Photo ID needed in polling stations, and the LGA debate note hate campaign.

The Council also kicked off its annual work to promote safety, protection of the environment, and respect for local communities at Camber and along the rest of the district's coast.

May

The District Council and Parish Council elections took place on Thursday 4 May and results were announced at the election count held at the De La Warr Pavilion on Friday 5 May. On the day of the count, the Council published results as they came in on its website and on social media.

Later on in May, the Council highlighted its work to promote equality and diversity with the raising of the Progressive Pride Flag at the Town Hall in Bexhill. The Flag marks International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia.

June

In June, the issue of public open spaces was on the agenda. The Council launched a consultation on proposed changes to dog controls in public spaces, and highlighted the need for budget savings with proposals to change grounds maintenance.

The issue of Northeye again came up this month, with Council Leader Doug Oliver releasing a statement to confirm that the Government had changed its plans and would not be opening the proposed centre in September 2023 but the plans remain on the table.

The Council's Cabinet met and approved items including continuing with the enforcement of certain environmental offences - such as dog-fouling and littering. Cabinet also confirmed the Council's Net Zero pledge and its membership of UK100 – a network of UK local authorities who have pledged to reach Net Zero by 2030.

July

The Council helped to celebrate the completion of 15 new affordable homes for local people in Icklesham. The Council joined Hastoe Housing Association, the Icklesham Parish Community Land Trust, Icklesham Parish Council, Sussex Community Housing Hub and other partners to mark the project.

Other highlights included promoting democracy to school pupils when a group from All Saints School visited the town hall, praising improved bus timetables that will boost the economy, and highlighting Egerton Park in Bexhill - recognised as one of the country's best parks for the eleventh consecutive year.

August

This month the authority announced it had appointed Lorna Ford as its new Chief Executive and welcomed its first cohort of energy champions – volunteers who will train others to reduce their energy bills and save money. August also saw the Council continuing its work to maintain the electoral register by asking residents across the district to check their details and ensure they do not miss out when it comes to voting in local elections.

September

There was good news for people in the Rye area this month with the announcement that Rye Pool was set to reopen in October. The Council and its partners had worked tirelessly to make the facility available again for local people after soaring energy costs forced its closure in 2022.

Community groups and projects in Battle, Bexhill and Winchelsea were among the beneficiaries of the latest round District Council community grants with close to £20,000 being handed out. And a local eyesore in Bexhill got a welcome makeover as National Highways confirmed it had completed the Ravenside roundabout improvements.

October

In October, due to budget savings, the Council introduced a trial closure of public toilets over the winter months in Battle, Bexhill, Pett Level, Sedlescombe and Rye. The Council took the decision as it faced a £3.8 million shortfall in its budget.

At its Cabinet meeting, the authority discussed various issues including the Council Tax Support Fund, cash payments in car parks, dog controls, and CCTV cameras.

OCTOBER CONTINUED

The month also saw the authority highlight its work to get people of all ages active and healthy. The Council promoted a national rugby play programme called Rugby tots for pre-school and primary school aged children to take part in rugby-themed activities.

And looking ahead to Bonfire Season, the Council reminded Rother bonfire societies of their responsibility of clearing up litter after their official events.

November

The Council launched a wide-ranging consultation on its budget situation. Using all its communication channels, the authority urged residents and businesses to have their say on how the Council manages its finances, as Government budget cuts, soaring costs, extra demand for services create a £3.8m funding gap.

Towards the end of the month, the Council started its annual 'Love Local' campaign, urging people to shop and eat locally in the run up to Christmas. The campaign, which includes input from businesses themselves was boosted with the announcement that once again free parking would be available on set days in council-run car parks during the festive period.

December

The last month of the year saw continued activity on Rother's budget consultation and Love Local campaigns, and at a Cabinet meeting councillors discussed the Council's Climate Strategy and how its aims would be implemented over the coming months and years. At the same meeting, cabinet members were told that the authority had received £76,000 from DEFRA's Coronation Living Heritage Fund, for tree planting, community orchards and biodiversity work across the district.

And so far in 2024 the Council has...

- Announced £300,000 rural business grant
- Held a Rother Housing event attended by 80 industry and partner delegates
- Completed a successful budget consultation resulting in over 700 responses
- Set its budget with £15m to be spent on services and a 2.99% council tax rise
- Agreed to hold consultations on both the Local Plan and on anti-social behaviour on beaches
- Announced the latest round of community grants with £66,000 for projects in Bexhill, Crowhurst, Icklesham and Three Oakes

And finally...

The authority is also looking forward to highlighting its 50th anniversary in 2024!

Here attached is our District Councillors' report. Below are a few items to add that are coming up this year and in the coming years that are significant.

1.The Grounds Maintenance Contract which looks after Rother's green spaces, Bexhill and Rye cemeteries and sports areas ends November 2024. A new, smaller contract is being worked on and hopefully a new contractor will be starting in November.

2.The Waste Collection Contract is also coming to an end and will be either re-procured or re -tendered.

3.The new Local Plan (until 2040) is going out for consultation very soon, starting in mid- April for 12 weeks. We would encourage everybody to respond the questionnaire. It's a big document but you don't have to complete every section. The Council is asking for your opinion regarding building to higher environmental standards.

The. Food Waste collections from the doorstep has to be in place by 2026. Rother officers and Councillors are working on the implementation of this new service Rother District Council will offer.

The Parish of Sedlescombe with Whatlington

St. Mary Magdalene Church, Whatlington

Report for Annual Parish Assembly 2024

Overview

The church maintains an online presence through the Whatlington page on the Church of England website 'a church near you'. This consistently records quite a high number of 'hits' or visits, this interest aligns with our commitment to growing church attendance and welcoming, not only practising Christians, but all who may doubt but seek. The church also has its own Facebook page which, whilst less frequently visited does promote our services and is something we are trying to grow.

The initiative of opening the church on Sundays and Wednesdays has proved a success and we would like to be able to extend this, but it does mean that someone has to be available to open up and close the church.

The contactless giving device which the church has been able to acquire in 2021 from the diocese has proved to be a worthwhile addition and attracts regular giving.

For most of the past year the church remained in what is termed an Interregnum, in lay terms without our own appointed priest. Church service cover was arranged by the Churchwardens and given by Revd. Stephanie Prosser and Revd. John Hawkins respectively.

We maintained all the usual services through the year, with some special Songs of Praise services substituted where clergy cover was not possible. All services were well attended with the congregation staying stable and actually showing some small growth. The 'Hymns and Pimms' service at the end of August offers something different and was again held in the churchyard.

Having gone through the process of advertising in the Church Times three times and with no applications thought worth further consideration, in September the diocese decided to make a change to the terms of the position. The description of Priest-in-Charge, which was being advertised for the Parish of Sedlescombe with Whatlington changed to that of Rector. This change to Rector, reverts to the historical title for the post as used at both Sedlescombe and Whatlington. This change means that the post holds greater security of tenure and importantly that applicants could live in their own home and not in the Rectory, provided that they lived within easy distance of both churches.

It was hoped that in making these changes the vacancy might have a wider appeal and so we were very fortunate that they led Revd. John Hawkins to apply. After going through the usual application/interview process we were happy to appoint John, with the formal licensing by the Bishop of Lewes taking place last December.

With John having taken services stretching back to before Kevin Mephams' retirement, his appointment has given the church some welcome continuity.

Christmas services were, as usual well attended, the Christmas Pageant was based in the church due to the usual venue being unavailable as its owners were away.

In February we held a special service to mark the 10th anniversary of the re-opening of the church after the post fire restoration and everyone commented how quickly those ten years have passed.

Church Fabric

We have previously had the tie beam at the juncture of the Nave and Chancel sprayed to kill death watch beetle. At that time it had been hoped that we could replace what was clearly a 'well eaten' beam. Unfortunately various heritage bodies, including SPAB and Historic England opposed replacement. Fast forward to 2023 and the infestation was manifesting itself again, presumably with the beetles have lain dormant deep inside the timber. The presence of wood dust was the tell tale sign.

Our architect was asked for and gave his opinion and confirmed what we suspected. Quotes were obtained from our builders to treat the infestation using a Boron paste, brushed on and it was agreed that a start date in the new year would be the best option.

The work to treat the wood beetles is an expensive exercise, a full scaffold platform has had to be erected in the main body of the church, the Nave. This was necessary to gain safe and effective access to apply the paste onto every exposed timber. With the scaffold in place it became obvious that the ancient tie beam, spanning the walls at the juncture of the Nave and Chancel was more severely damaged than had been thought. This was so bad that it could be quite easily moved in situ and was cracked through at one end. Whilst replacement was the obvious and necessary course, we had to

gain permission from the church authorities, who manage work on Listed church buildings. This is done through a derogated planning system and just like local authority planning there is a fee attached, £198 in this case. The urgency of the work meant that it was not considered necessary to further consult the heritage bodies.

In order to replace the tie beam further scaffolding was necessary, this to be erected in the Chancel, both for access to replace the beam and to afford access to apply the boron paste to the Chancel timbers, which had not originally been thought to be necessary. The void along the top of the roof has also had to be treated and as can be imagined this whole process has made a huge dent, some £14,000 in the churches reserves. Some serious fund raising is now required to try and replenish this. We have only been able to afford this work thanks to being able to use funds from a generous bequest, but this does serve to show just how expensive it is to maintain a Grade II* Listed medieval church building. On top of this, it seemed sensible to ask the builders to inspect the condition of the bell frame and the timber structure of the spire, this has revealed the fact that the infestation has spread, both into the 16th century bell frame and the 19th century spire frame. The estimate to treat these additional timbers in around £3600, access is, to say the least awkward

With fund raising partly in mind, we have our Spring Fair at the village hall on Saturday 27th April, where we hope to see a good support from local people.

Churchyard:

The churchyard is maintained using a mixture of paid and volunteer labour, there is always plenty to do to keep everything tidy. We draw peoples attention to the Churchyard Regulations posted at the church, these set out various conditions associated with the churchyard. We are grateful to the Parish Council for their grant towards the cost of grass cutting. In the past year part of the perimeter fence has been replaced and we are mindful that the paving slabs in the Garden of Remembrance are becoming uneven and will need to be reset at some point when funds allow. We have had two interments of ashes in early 2024 and draw peoples attention to the fact that there are some clear Church of England regulations concerning memorial tablets and indeed headstones for burials.

Conclusion:

As always there remains an ongoing list of work which needs to be done in order to maintain the building. We pay for an annual clean and check of the gutters, roof tiles and valleys, this costs around £350 but is worthwhile as preventative maintenance.

Although at a national level the Church of England may seem to have plenty of money, unfortunately the powers that be do not let any of this filter down to help maintain the country's heritage of Listed ancient church buildings and the task is left to the Rector, Churchwardens and Parochial Church Council to manage as best we can.

Next year will mark the 750th anniversary of the present church in Whatlington, though some of the fabric may be older still and we strive to ensure that the church remains relevant and well cared for during our period as custodians.

It is hoped we may be able to restart church services on Sunday 17th March and we shall certainly be up and running for our Easter services, where we hope to see good local support, particularly for the 10.30 service on Easter Day.

VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE REPORT FROM JANE HENDLEY

Whatlington Village Hall Usage, February 2023 – February 2024

The past year has been a busy one for hall usage and has seen increased income generation through hiring fees.

In February 2023 there were four regular hirers using the hall over the week. This has now increased to seven. Presently the hall is used from Monday through to Saturday by weekly hirers. Friday evenings also see ad-hoc use by bands for band practice and there have been several weekend children's parties held at the hall during the year. Feedback from those seeking to use the hall for children's parties, is that the venue is rather on the small side. This could be impacting on take up for this type of event, as we are very close to Sedlescombe Village Hall that can accommodate more people for events.

As well as birthday parties the hall has been used for a Funeral Wake, two fundraising events for the Sarah Lee Trust, family gatherings, polling days (held twice in 2023), church and church choir events, Parish Council meetings and as a meeting venue for the NHS and other local societies (Bowls/Gun Dog). The Hall also hosted the local MP Huw Merriman and a group from National Highways to discuss road safety concerns via the Parish Council.

The Village Hall Committee held their annual Summer Fayre and Festive Supper again and there has been a Valentines Quiz evening hosted by the Whatlington Connectors. The Whatlington Connectors have also established a community craft group who meet on Wednesday mornings in the hall.

The majority of the users of the hall reside in the village or are connected to groups within the village. Others are local to Battle and its surrounding villages – e.g. Netherfield, Sedlescombe.

The aim for the Village Hall Committee for the coming year is to increase the number of community events for villagers, whether hosted by the committee themselves or as the venue provider for groups.

SPEED WATCH REPORT FROM CO-ORDINATOR – ANNE SMITH

There have been no Whatlington Community Speed watch sessions since July 2023.

This is in large part because the roads in our village and volume of traffic lend themselves to a more suitable speed gun device than the one we currently possess.

Since the summer there has been a lot of communication with the Community Speedwatch section of Sussex Police, Sussex Safer Roads Partnership and Katy Bourne, Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner, about this problem.

The latest update is that we have been recognised as a group for support. Consequently the Police will join us for some sessions with the latest speed gun device (Scout 2) to confirm the suitability for our village before we decide whether to purchase.

We have also been sent a form to complete for financial assistance. However, this will not cover the whole cost of the device and assistance may be sought from the Parish Council. The current cost of the device is approximately £1600.

The current group has lost two of its members and despite the need for more people, no one has joined to date.

The Chairman then asked if anyone had questions on any of the reports,

No questions

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.00pm