

**MINUTES OF WHATLINGTON ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY HELD ON THURSDAY  
16<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2 IN THE VILLAGE HALL AT 7.00pm**

**PRESENT:-** Councillor Fisher in the Chair  
Vice Chairman Underhill  
Councillors, Ratcliff and White  
District Councillor Cook  
County Councillor Field

There were 2 local electors attending

1. Apologies – None
2. The Chairman began the meeting by thanking those attending and explained there is no Speaker this year. Packs of all reports were available for those attending and are on the council's web site. He then gave a little time for everyone to read these. District Councillor Cook asked reading from the Chairmans report who was our Footpath Warden. The Chairman explained Bev Marks who is really helpful with looking after the area and also commenting on any relative Planning application sand usually attends our meetings but had to give his apologies for this evening.

**Chairman Report 2023**

- 1.This is the final report of, what I believe to be, the 31<sup>st</sup> Council of the Parish of Whatlington. With the exception of 1914, 1918 and no election in 1942 because of world conflicts, I think this Councils experience of dealing with a pandemic event will (hopefully at least) be the last for many years to come.
2. That we have been able to continue to provide the services of a Parish Council is due to the flexibility, support and commitment of my fellow Councillors and our Parish Clerk, to all of whom we are indebted during this extended time of difficulty.
3. I highlight this now because of the upcoming elections for a new Council in May. There are some 170 parishioners who are qualified and potential Councillors and trust there will be a sufficient number of them prepared to put their names forward.
4. There are 9,000 Parish Councils with some 80,000 voluntary Councillors, so why not consider joining them? If you wish to make some impact on the world outside your front door this represents a small, but important, contribution to a civil society. We may be the 2<sup>nd</sup> smallest Parish within the District, but I trust our spirit of community and the benefits this brings will be amply demonstrated in a May election.
5. Turning to this, our last year, it would be true to say that it has not been a hectic one, with no significant new issues arising and a smaller number of planning applications being submitted for Councils' consideration
6. Continuing issues, as ever, were mainly highway difficulties. My report last year commented on the development of the A21 Safety Package project. But only as this year came to an end were we finally engaged with Highways in a public consultation meeting and which was happily, well attended. We await the outcome of this exercise later this year...hopefully!
7. Continuing on road issues we maintained pressure for repairs, not only to carriageways but also drainage. We met with some minor success with the latter not least with an improvement by the Village hall.

8. On finance we continued to retain the existing precept even though it will mean a reduction in our reserve. However, it represents a small but hopefully welcome piece of stability in difficult times

9. In conclusion, further thanks to our District and County Councillors for their continuing constructive support and positive input to our proceedings also, not forgetting, to our very active (ex officio) Footpath Warden

### **COUNTY COUNCILLOR FIELD 2023 REPORT**

As usual I shall start with the money. It has been another tough year for the County Council. This is especially true in Children's Services where much of the budget is demand led; for example, if a child needs looking after that is what happens and they often have complex needs. The same is true for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children – the number changes but is often around 70. The County Council is part of a national transfer scheme and these young people can be planned for but the number arriving via Newhaven etc are an unknown quantity. Children's Services is just an example as all the County's services are stretched. Council Tax will be going up to the maximum allowed by government before the need for a referendum ie 4.99%. This is 2.99% of "normal" taxation plus 2% allowed for Adult Social Care.

From the next financial year, the highways contractor will change to Balfour Beatty and hopefully they will adopt a more pragmatic approach to potholes and fill those around the one which actually meets the criteria. Thanks to the weather we are suffering from a great many more than usual but 6,000 have been mended since the beginning of January. At the time of writing there are 1,7800 in the system awaiting attention with 23 gangs busy repairing. When the weather makes this work impossible the gangs are redeployed gritting pavements, if required.

The County Council has been awarded £41m (half of the amount of the bid) to improve us services. I hope that this will be used to improve connectivity in the rural areas and not used where there are already adequate bus services or rail connections.

The County Council is working hard towards its target of being carbon neutral by 2050 and is planning to install Electric Vehicle Charging Points on street. Some Local Authorities use lamp columns for this but this is only possible where they are at the edge of the pavement, otherwise the County Council is expecting to place them outside houses which do not have drives. As neither the road nor any charging point will be specific to the house it is outside, I can foresee problems!

Kathryn Field

### **ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLOR COOK**

Rother District council has adopted a pattern of hybrid meetings enabling councillors to choose whether to attend in person in the chamber at the Town Hall in Bexhill, or virtually sign in via teams. Committee members are invited to keep their cameras on and are welcome to speak but cannot vote. Non committee members and members of the public can watch the meeting (except confidential items) on you tube Hybrid working for officers and council staff is also popular although many have returned to the Town Hall to work. This enables us all to do our bit to save the Council travel expenses and to significantly reduce our carbon footprint by reducing emissions.

The delivery of a New Local Plan, which is about planning policies and enables us to enforce sustainable practices, is a key priority for Rother District Council as it will set out our policy response to the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis as well as plan for sustainable development up to 2039. After the elections in May 223 the council will undertake public consultation in June and July 2023.

RDC consulted with members of the public on next year's budget plans. Councillor Jeeawon said "We face a possible shortfall of £2.2 million and need to make some difficult decisions about where to spend and where to save over the coming financial year." And we welcomed your input.

In September 2019 Rother District Council declared a climate emergency and began to formulate a strategy that is hoped to help the District Council to become Carbon neutral by 2030.

Regular meetings are held to consider progress and celebrate successes and hear about new initiatives. RDC have completed a feasibility study to install Electrical Vehicle (EV) charging points in RDC car parks

## ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLOR COOKS REPORT CONTINUED

(including) Market Road and Mount Street). A project to reduce carbon emissions of village halls across the district was initiated and 40 village halls should benefit from a green grant to reduce heat loss, improve insulation and install EV charging points. A tree planting programme has also been undertaken in Bexhill. In November RDC was the first local authority in the UK to commit to the Couch to carbon sprint, a 10-day event which ran from 7<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> November 2022. Participants received an e-mail each day with easy to action information and a short video on different topics to engage, empower and encourage climate action. Many councillors (and their husbands / wives/partners) completed this challenge and several residents were encouraged to join in.

Since 2021 it has been noted that bring sites for recycling across the district have been misused by residents and many have now been removed. As well as a health hazard from vermin, the irresponsible fly tipping has led to cross contamination of recycling, resulting in increased use of landfill sites at considerable cost to the council and fines for residents that can be identified.

Cllr Vikki Cook, Cllr Kathryn Field

## REPORTS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATION

### Whatlington Parish Church

#### Overview

It is now sixteen months since Revd. Kevin Mepham retired, we are thus into our second year of 'Interregnum', the period without a Priest-in-Charge. The advertising contract with the Church Times allows for the advert to be repeated without additional charge, but the initial cost was in excess of £1,000.

It is acknowledged that a clergy post of 'House for Duty' will appeal to a limited number of applicants and unfortunately, we have thus far had no success in finding applicants. The Benefice was suspended on the departure of the last full time Rector, this suspension having now expired the Bishop has decided the post will revert to that of Incumbent. This change, whilst leaving the post as 'House for Duty' and part time does have the advantage of giving greater security of tenure. It is hoped that this change may make the position more attractive.

We have been very fortunate in having retired local clergy coming to take our church services, with their expenses paid by the diocese. Revd. John Hawkins has led the majority of services, but with Revd. Stephanie Prosser also taking some services. We are most grateful for the help and support given by both John and Stephanie. On the few occasions where a Priest has not been available the two churchwardens have led worship.

The church has continued to offer the usual full range of services, including those for Easter, Patronal, Harvest and Christmas, along with some special ones such as Songs of Praise. The church has also been able to hold weddings and funerals with Kevin having returned on occasion for the latter.

John Crouch has now succeeded Jeffrey Bridges as Vice Chairman of the PCC, this church council continues to meet regularly maintaining the day to day running of church.

Whatlington church continues to be open on Wednesdays and Sundays, usually between 10am to 4pm, this has proved successful with a number of visitors looking in. This opening allows much greater access to the building and we do encourage local people to make use of this. We would like to extend the opening times, but it is a matter of people being available to open and lock up, our insurance is specific that the building must be locked at night.

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. As I write this, the statistics show 7180 visits this year, with 624 in the last month and 188 over the last week. This interest aligns with our commitment to growing church attendance and welcoming not only practicing 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

The Wardens, PCC and congregation review regularly our engagement with the community and are always open to new ideas and suggestions. In these challenging times we also look at ways to improve our income streams in order to meet ever increasing overheads. A new acquisition towards the end of last year has been a contactless 'Collecting More' giving device, this has a small annual charge to enable its Sim card. The device was acquired following an application made to the diocese in response to a number of such devices being made available without cost, excepting an annual charge for the Sim card to enable wireless connection. This device gives four optional amounts and quickly proved its worth. The church relies heavily on weekly collections, for which we encourage the use of standing orders. We also benefit from and encourage Legacies. In addition, donations can be made using the QR code posted in the porch, or through the link on our webpage.

A new fundraising initiative is a Table sale, to be held in the Village Hall on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> April.

**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 people's 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. We are pending having a tree felled due to its poor condition, work is also pending to repair damaged areas of the perimeter fencing. Both of these have required consent from the Diocese.

**Fabric:**

In the past year we suffered the expense of having one of the original beams treated for an infestation of Death Watch Beetle. Whilst the treatment appears to have been successful there is ongoing work pending to deflect water from the roof so that it falls well clear of the beam ends. It is also planned to have further detailed investigation work carried out to determine the condition of the concealed ends of the beam. Ideally, we would like to see the beam, which looks rather fragile replaced, but we are bound by consultations with various heritage bodies, the diocese and our architect. The heritage bodies, SPAB and Historic England have a default position to retain historic fabric, unless it is no longer structurally sound. Work in getting thus far has entailed considerable time spent filling in forms, writing letters, emails and making phone calls.

Other recent work on the building has included the application of specialist 'Earthborn' paint to walls in the kitchen and WC to overcome damp problems. As always with an ancient building there is always something in need of attention.

**VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE REPORT FROM MRS ANNETTE MCBRIDE CHAIRMAN**

After nearly three years of no business, we are very slowly building business up again and of course our bank balance was hit very hard as bills still have to be paid and on top of that we had to have a new boiler but life goes on.

Unfortunately, the Booking Clerk resigned, not the easier job to fill we divided it up but fortunately I didn't have to worry as the new resident of Old Rectory the house next to the Village Hall rang me offered her services Jane Hendley is her name and so organised, she was a head in Hong Kong so I am hopeful that the Village Hall has started back on its fortune again.

Our first function this year is the Coronation Serenade on the 7th May at 6pm, when we can start our picnics. Gazebos will be erected in the morning if you have come and put it up. The music will be supplied by the wonderful Bodiam Band who have played for our three previous Serenade evenings. We then hope to have a Wine Tasting Evening in the Village Hall later in the year. There will be of course the Annual Fete which this year will be August the 26th 2023 August bank holiday Saturday.

That for the moment is my report but am hopeful that the Village Hall will build up the business again as it was pre pandemic

#### SPEED WATCH

##### **Whatlington Speed watch Group Anne Smith/Steve Turner**

For various reasons the Whatlington Speed watch Group made fewer roadside sessions than planned. In the past 12 months 55 drivers were reported to the police for travelling on the A21 at 47mph or more.

They each received an official Sussex Police letter warning them of their driving behaviour and outlining subsequent, more stringent measures, should they be caught again.

Last month (February) 13 motorists were reported – nine for speeding and three for aggressive language or gestures and one for driving with a number plate not registered to an owner. One driver, who said he was 'local', stopped his car to shout abuse at the team.

The team has now been issued with a bodycam to record any approaches or aggressive behaviours.

The police are currently considering additional checkpoints both on the A21 and Whatlington Road. Generally, twice as many motorists heading south are reported as those heading north so the aim is to find new sites to measure southwards traffic.

An average of 520+ vehicles pass through the checkpoints in each hourly session and data from the group is being passed to the Highways Authority to inform its A21 safety proposals.

The radar gun currently used by the group is not sufficiently accurate and an approach has been made to Sussex Police for a more up-to-date version. The initial response is that bearing in mind the accident rate on the A21 in and around the village the Whatlington group is likely to be a prime candidate to receive the new equipment.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.25pm