

Fairlight Parish Council

Parish Assembly 26 May 2015

Chairman's Report– (11 Pages)

1. Councillors and the Council

Following the Election on 7th May, all Parish Councillors have been re-elected unopposed except Charles Mendelson who retired. I am pleased to welcome Derek Greenup onto the Parish Council. Following the retirement of District Councillor Robin Patten, Chris Saint has been elected in his place. Roger Bird has been re-elected to Rother District Council and Carl Maynard as our County Councillor. Congratulations to all of you. There remains one vacancy on the Parish Council.

Amber Rudd has been re-elected as our MP and is now SoS for Energy & Climate Change

At the 2015 Annual Meeting last week, I was re-elected Chairman, and Cllr Revd Val Gibbs Vice-Chair. A list of current Councillors and their responsibilities is available on the noticeboards and Village Website.

It would be impossible to mention every task which the Councillors have undertaken this year although some will be mentioned during this report but my thanks goes to all our Councillors for all their hard work and dedication throughout the year.

2. Matter Arising from last year's Minutes – There appears to be none

3. Budget, Expenses and Finance

The accounts for 2013 to 2014 were passed by both the District Auditor and External Auditor without qualification. The internal audit of the accounts for 2014 to 2015 take place on 27 May, and I do not yet have a report of that.

The precept – the amount of money the Parish Council levies on parishioners and which is collected with the Council Tax – was set at £32,000 for 2014/2015.

For 2015/16 We realised that there would be heavy future demands on the Parish, such as Neighbourhood Planning, a substantial contribution to the third phase cliff works and £30,000 towards the Community Purchase of the Village Shop and Post Office. We would also like to acquire the Warren Estate (which includes Knowle Wood) on behalf of the community. Additionally we were concerned that we need to be in a position vigorously to defend the interests of parishioners should any unexpected matter arise in the year. There was a consultation with Parishioners via the FRA email scheme and the Local Paper. From an admittedly small response there was overwhelming support for an increase. The Parish Council therefore voted to increase the precept to £44,800 which, for a Band D household equates to about £1 per week, putting Fairlight in range typical of other Rother Parishes. However, if we are to meet all the expected calls on our resources in 2015 to 2016 and beyond we shall have to borrow, and this is uncharted territory for us. Happily we can borrow from the government over a very long term at low rates of interest. To do that requires consultation with the electorate and this Assembly is one of the opportunities for that.

In addition to the precept the Council has other income.

4. Grants

The Parish Council awarded grants for 2014 to 2015 totalling £5350.

The principal ones were -
Activate Youth Club £300
Village Hall £1000
MOPPS £1000
St Andrews Church (graveyard) £1800
Fairfest £250
Fairlight Playgroup £250
Pett Level Rescue Boat £250
John Lutman Award £150

Smaller grants (£100 or less) went to the CAB, Rural Rother Sussex, Sussex Air Ambulance, The Sussex Regiment.

Broadly similar amounts have been agreed for 2015 to 2016, with an additional £300 to Activate for pottery equipment.

5. Projects carried out during the Year

Children's' Play Area on Wood Field

The Playground had its Annual Inspection and some work was necessary for Health and Safety reasons. We also removed the *Leylandii* trees, which had become unmanageable. *Weigelia* has been planted in its place and some shade trees are planned for the autumn. We would like to replace the bark chippings round one of the attractions with a lower maintenance surface.

Channel Way

Thanks to the organisation skills of John Pulfer, the lower end of Channel Way has had road-stone laid by the residents and the future upkeep will be maintained by the residents. I am grateful to Nick Booker for the stone donation. There has also been some progress by Paul Draper of the FRA towards sorting out the ownership of the road.

The FPT has made progress with Hastings BC and Natural England towards measures to direct surface water away from the Channel Way roadway.

Emergency Plan

This has been updated and distributed this year. A shortened version of it appears on the Fairlight Website (www.fairlight.org.uk). Street wardens have been put in place for each street and letters distributed to every household advising details of their individual warden.

Speedwatch

A speed indicator device has been purchased by Guestling, Pett and Fairlight Parish Councils. The co-ordinator is Guestling PC's Chairman and it has and will be regularly seen in Fairlight.

Brighter Fairlight

The gardening club are pursuing this initiative with a plan being set out for the Circle and plant pots at areas within the Village such as bus stops. In fact you will already have seen the new pots at the bus stops and I thank The Gardening Club for what they are doing. The Parish Council has made a donation of £50 towards the scheme.

Other large regular exercises include the collection of waste from the dog bins, grass cutting, CCTV and Insurance.

6. Assets

The Parish Council owns the following assets –
Wood Field Recreation Ground

Knowle Wood (part of)
Land between Channel Way and the cliff edge (SSSI)
8 Dog Waste Bins
Salt Bins (5 – Supplied by ESCC, but paid for by PC.)
Bollards on Circle
Bus Shelters (Coastguards Lane, Knowle Road, Just Property)
Benches (Various)
Office equipment used and housed by The Clerk – but this has a minimal value.
The Circle Roundabout and verge opposite the Post Office is owned by ESCC as part of the highway, but the Parish maintains and cuts the grass under licence.

7. Parish Website

An excellent website can be found at www.fairlight.org.uk . Bill O'Reilly is doing an excellent job of developing and maintaining the site. The PC continues to support the project and has paid for the domain name. Various clubs and societies contribute entries and advertise on the site. It is only as good as the information which is provided so it is important to keep relevant information about your organisation up to date.
This report will go on the site.

8. Fast Broadband

At long last faster Broadband has reached Fairlight and many, although not all, are benefitting from this. The area needing it most – the Lower Waites Lane / Rockmead Road area - was due to be connected by the end of this month (May 2015), but I've heard this has been put back to the end of June. The green box has been installed on the verge at the bend in The Broadway, sadly on the wildflower verge we were cultivating – but it's a necessary job.

9. Highways – General

Cllr Revd Val Gibbs as Highways Officer has continued to act as our contact with ESCC Highways, succeeding in calling them in to fill potholes, unblock gullies and generally being a nuisance to get things done. I am also grateful to Michael Hall (resident) who has badgered East Sussex Highways into dealing with the gully problem at the top of Battery Hill.

10. Buses

ESCC carried out a major review of subsidised bus routes last autumn, which included our route 344. There was some danger that the hourly weekday service would be reduced to two-hourly, and the Sunday service lost altogether. We conducted research and made extensive representations on behalf of Fairlight during the consultation period, and I am grateful to residents, especially Ruth Kosmin, who contributed so much to the exercise. In the event ESCC negotiated with Stagecoach for the company to run the weekday service on a commercial basis and the Sunday service with a subsidy from Hastings on-street parking surplus (which by law must be spent on transport projects). Fares have risen by some 30% as anticipated. The new double decker No. 101 buses are now becoming a familiar sight, and I hope the timekeeping and reliability will soon settle down.

11. The John Lutman Award for Community Service

This is given by the PC each year in honour of the late John Lutman. At the time of my report last year, the recipient for 2014 was unknown. It went to Mrs Val King for all her hard work with Mopps and other organisations around the Village. This year, who knows, the award has been deferred until this meeting so again, it will be interesting to see who has won.

12. Community Post Office and Shop

Residents will be aware of this initiative which began towards the end of last year and gained a terrific amount of momentum. Apart from one hiccup, now resolved, the project has progressed

well. The Parish Council voted to support the project with a grant of £30,000. That was after considerable soul-searching – you will recall that our total precept for last year was only £32,000. With the exception of the long-standing commitment to support cliff preservation work this was by far the biggest donation we have ever considered. We shall have a presentation about progress later tonight. I wish the Committee luck in trying to achieve their goal.

13. 1 Planning – General

The Parish Council is routinely notified of planning applications within the Parish, but is not the Planning authority and does not make planning decisions.

Cllr Leadbetter chairs the Fairlight PC Planning Committee which was set up in 2013. This committee sits in Public at the Village Hall on a fortnightly basis (if any Planning Applications have been received). The views of the Committee are then forwarded to the Planning department at Rother for each Application. The general public and applicants are encouraged to attend. The Parish's comments can be viewed with the minutes of Parish Council meetings, and on individual applications on Rother's website.

The Planning Committee and the Parish Council are also very concerned with developments or planning applications which occur within 100 metres of the Cliffs due to the erosion problems in that area and I make no apology for repeating this.

The most recent issue of concern is the proposed Visitor Centre on Hastings Country Park. Fairlight PC has never opposed this in principle, but the proposal as put forward was not acceptable. Despite numerous objections Hastings BC Planning Committee granted conditional planning permission. A meeting between representatives of Fairlight on the one hand and Hastings BC on the other took place on 18th May 2015 with a view to resolving differences.

There was a Planning Application put forward this year for the development of The Market Garden Site – behind Fairlight Gardens in the very heart of the village. The proposal as made was not acceptable to the Parish, nor indeed the County Highways Department or numerous local residents. The application was subsequently withdrawn by the developer, but we should expect another in due course as the land is earmarked in Rother's Local Plan for at least 15 dwellings, 40% to be affordable.

13.3 Neighbourhood Planning

The Parish Council has decided to pursue this initiative with the help of Action in Rural Sussex. By putting a plan in place the Village will have much more say and control over the type and location of new development, though Rother's housing requirements will have to be met. A Neighbourhood Plan can only be prepared with the participation of the whole village and with the very active support of a working group of local people. We are lucky to have several volunteers, but can accommodate more.

14. Fairlight Cliffs

Parishioners will be well aware of the disastrous consequences which could befall many households if the third stage of the cliff preservation work is not completed. Those of you who have been on a tour from Laurie Beetham (Fairlight Preservation Trust) will have seen first-hand what work has already been carried out and what is still required to maintain the protection for the Cliffs.

The Southern Area of the Environment Agency have given their go ahead for the necessary survey to be carried out but it needs agreement from Defra before it will be undertaken. **[Update]**

I have been pleased to see the level of commitment within the Village towards this project and I have been impressed by the efforts to raise funds by different organisations to help achieve this monumental financial task. At least £150,000 will have to be raised from within the village. The PC will make a substantial donation, but please pledge money to the scheme via the Fairlight Preservation Trust. We also need to show that everyone is involved and be seen to raise money

through local events etc. Already Fairfest has organised a very successful dance to raise funds – thanks to The Kytes for playing for free. The Fairlight Residents' Association put on an excellent Variety night which was equally successful. The Fairlight Players and the Art Club have given raffle proceeds to the fund and I'm sure there will be many more events organised – please support them or think of fund-raising ideas of your own.

15. Knowle Wood Footpath

In last year's report I mentioned that the path from Woodland Way to Warren Road had long been used as a public right of way and that an Inspector was undertaking a Public Inquiry. This took place in September and unfortunately the Inspector decided the path was not a public right of way. The landowner has now fenced off his land.

Therefore, walkers may only venture into the part of the Wood which is owned by the Parish Council.

It is also a shame that the Twitten between Knowle Road and Knowle Wood has been closed by its landowner.

I have already mentioned that the Parish Council would like to purchase the Warren Estate, which owns the greater part of Knowle Wood and other land.

I am extremely grateful to Councillor David Thatcher and his helpers for the sterling work they have undertaken to clear brambles and other undergrowth to make the Parish's part of the wood so attractive.

16. Water issues

Many residents will be acutely aware of the water issues in Fairlight both from a supply and discharge point of view. Talks continue with Southern Water over the Main supply pipe in Battery Hill which has burst several times in recent years. Southern Water has indicated that the main will be replaced towards the end of the summer. Beware all time estimates based on the seasons of the year.

The sewer/surface water issues in and around Lower Waites Lane remain although it is expected that senior Southern Water staff will visit and test the capacity in the next few weeks. The Lower Waites Lane combined (ie surface and foul water) sewer has been a particular bone of contention with Southern Water, which has vacillated in saying whether the sewer is adequate to serve the proposed development of the Market Garden Site. A layman's view would be that the sewer is not adequate to deal with existing demand. Parish Councillors, The FPT and our District Councillor held a meeting in March 2015 with representatives of Southern Water, Rother planners and the Environment Agency. The FPT and PC are continuing to follow up from the meeting.

17. Local Successes

I am sure there are many which go unnoticed and I would love to celebrate them so please let me or any Councillor know when any notable success has been achieved.

Cllr Andrew Mier
Chairman Fairlight Parish Council