

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD IN THE VESTRY HALL, CRANBROOK
ON WEDNESDAY 22ND APRIL 2015

Present: Cllr. Francis Rook (Chair), Cllrs. Bancroft, Bunyan, Cook, Fermor, Goodchild, Hemsted, Holmes, Summers and Veitch

Apologies: Cllrs. Fletcher, Hazlewood, Marley, macLachlan and Swann. Borough Cllrs. Dawling, Hall, Holden and Smith.

Approximately 30 members of the public

Members who had a personal or prejudicial interest, whether direct or indirect within the meaning of Section 51 of the Local Government Act 2000, or a personal or prejudicial interest defined by the Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council's Code of Conduct, in any of the matters appearing on the agenda were invited to declare that interest at this stage. Alternatively, personal interests can be declared at the time when the specific item is being discussed, if a member wishes to speak on an item in which they have a personal interest.

The Chairman read out the above statement, no interests were registered.

THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING: The Chairman proposed that the Minutes be adopted as a true record. This was seconded by Cllr. Cook and agreed.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

Cllr. Francis Rook

The Chairman, Cllr. Francis Rook welcomed everyone to the meeting.

He stated that this had been a challenging year for him as a businessman in Cranbrook and as Chairman of this most excellent Parish Council. We had some triumphs as well as disappointments.

The outstanding achievement had been the completion of Cobnut Close in Sissinghurst and the first tenants being able to move in. This was a special exception site in Sissinghurst and he wished all those lucky applicants who secured a home there all the best for the future and especially to those who managed to get a home for the first time.

The application for about 65 homes in Common Road had filled us with trepidation and worry as whilst we will always need more housing as the population increases, it has to be done with care and sensitivity to the area and its indigenous population and we were relieved when TWBC rejected the application. We are still waiting to see whether the developer intends to appeal.

There is of course the other major application in the wings and that is for 250 homes to be built on the Parish Council's preferred site, on the field behind the Co op with its exit joining the Angley Road near the junction of the High Street.

He stated that he personally believed this will be a shot in the arm for the area as long as the mix of houses is correct with accommodation for key workers as well as for those who can afford a bit more, with the incoming residents bringing much needed enterprise and skills to the parish.

The car parks have proved a great success and without their undoubted advantage of being free to the end user, the town's economy, he believed, would have suffered a great deal more than they did during difficult trading times brought on by the continuing trend away from shopping in the High Street and from the replacement gas mains work that dragged on and continues to drag on.

There is a small section of the gas mains in the High Street that is very problematical and SGB want to crack on with that as soon as possible with a new contractor called I&G. After that is completed, New Road will probably be next which would take us to Angley Road for the school summer holidays. This work will then go to the top of the High Street by the War Memorial and back down to join into where they finished in the High Street. Whilst the disruption is incredibly annoying, he believed the work needs to be done. He had seen some of the old pipes that have been removed and it is not before time they are replaced.

As the theme for this year's Annual Meeting is education he was delighted to welcome Carrie Beech and John Weeds - Head teachers of High Weald Academy and Cranbrook School respectively. Here he declared an interest.

The Chairman stated that his son went to Cranbrook School and from there achieved a place at Christ Church, Oxford University to read physics. He stated that he was incredibly jealous. His wife is now Vice Chair of Governors at the High Weald Academy, bringing her 15 years' experience as deputy head of Sittingbourne Community College to the governors at HWA. So his loyalties are equally balanced as they should be. There are great changes afoot at both schools and when they happen and are bedded in, he was convinced the parish and parents will benefit.

With regard to the Community Centre, Councillor Veitch and her committee has worked incredibly hard on this project and for the first time we have managed to get to planning application stage and with the obstacles that have strewn our path she has shown remarkable resilience in facing them and overcoming them with the consummate skill that is required of the project manager. He apologised to her that his ill health meant that far more work rested on her shoulders than he had intended. We have now put most of our ducks in a row so that we will be able to start building as soon as the necessary permissions are granted and work on the Cranbrook Engineering site has reached a suitable point in its development. You might ask what happens if it all fails on this site and the expected work does not go ahead. Well we do have a plan B and C and probably D but he did not want to even contemplate the alternatives until we had to and that is a long way down the line.

He was incredibly disappointed that the Cranbrook Ward of the Parish Council did not warrant a poll as the number of candidates matched exactly the number of seats so he warmly welcomed those who did put their names forward and hoped they enjoy the next four years.

Being a parish councillor can be a lot of hard work, far more onerous than a borough councillor as you actually have to do something. Whilst he used to complain on the planning committee that a ten hour session at the Town Hall was draining, Councillor Bunyan knocks that into a cocked hat with the work that she does on the applications that come into this Council. He thanked all those councillors who have laboured long and hard for this Council each bringing their own area of expertise. Councillor Veitch, who he had already mentioned, has incredible resilience and managerial skills, Councillor Swann who has looked after our accounts being an ex-bank manager, Councillor Hemsted, coming back to this Council bringing his in depth knowledge of Sissinghurst to bear on his stewardship of the cemeteries and properties, Cllr. Bunyan whose diligence and hard work meant that when her committee made a decision TWBC usually took notice, Cllrs. Rev. Cook and Rev. Goodchild never let us forget our moral duties to the population whilst Cllrs. Bancroft, Marley and macLachlan kept us on our toes with an alternative view, Cllr. Summers with his knowledge of the law and age concern has proved invaluable on the Community Centre Committee and he hoped he would continue in that post, Cllr. Fletcher who has kept an eye on what has been going on in the rest of Kent and without his hard work on the Community Centre we wouldn't have got this far, Cllr. David Hazelwood deserves a special mention for the continuing success of the armistice Sunday parade and Cllr. Holmes for all the work he does behind the scenes on tourism and business development and especially his in depth knowledge on insurance. Cllr. Fermor who has been a great support to all the committees she has sat upon and her skills as a wordsmith.

He thanked David and Janet, our caretakers, who have cleaned and polished our Vestry Hall over and over again making sure it is open on time and closed at the end of every session and Ivor Hatcher, our contractor who looks after the day to day functioning of the cemeteries and playgrounds etc.

The Chairman thanked the Clerks, Coral and Lori. Lori has not been with us long in the grand scheme of things but with Coral's tutelage and mountain of reference books she is rapidly learning the job. Coral's in depth knowledge of planning and the population of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst are second to none. This Parish would be a worse place without her.

COMMUNITY CENTRE COMMITTEE:

Cllr. Bridget Veitch – Chairman

Cllr. Veitch stated that the Committee was formed in 2014 and first met in May 2014. Its members are drawn from both the Parish Council and the residents of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst.

We succeeded in the submission of a full and detailed planning application in January 2015, slightly later than our target date of autumn 2014, but an achievement never the less. In order to do this we did the following:

- agreed the minimum requirements for the Community Centre
- produced a short list of potential architects, and chose a firm after reviewing presentations
- held public consultation and public presentation on the architects design, revising the design after receipt of comments
- created a business plan, including the documentation of the basic need for the centre.

Over 70 sets of written comments were received on the design, the vast majority of which were in favour. Over 100 people attended the Public Presentation, and many more have inspected the designs displayed in the Weald Information Centre.

The planning application was submitted as a joint application with the enabling houses project (12 dwellings) on Wilkes Field. This made sense as many of the supporting reports were common across both aspects of the development.

From the press coverage, many people would be aware of some of the difficulties that we encountered in the past year. The important one of the access permission needed from the Co-operative Society to reach Wilkes Field from the Tunbridge Wells owned car park is now well on the way to being resolved. The other, the question of the impact on the whole project from the halt in development of the Cranbrook Engineering site, has yet to be resolved.

She recorded her grateful thanks to everyone expressing their support for the project, and to all those councillors, our Member of Parliament, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council officers, and others who have been very active on our behalf to speed up these discussions and decisions.

The outcome of the planning submission, and the decision of the Secretary of State on the listing of buildings on the Cranbrook Engineering site are unlikely to be known before May.

The Parish Council granted the Community Centre Committee £40,000 out of general reserves in order to get to the stage of submission of the planning application. Only £28,605 of this money was used. It was spent as follows:

- £15,128 architects fees
- £2,682 lawyers' fees
- £1,300 quantity surveyors fees
- £3,000 business plan creation
- £3,850 planning application fees (TWBC)
- £2,000 planning consultants fees
- £645 sundries (accountants fees, Land Registry fees, printing costs, training costs)

The architects were very generous to the Parish Council in the amount of professional time used that was not charged. Our grateful thanks to them, and also to all the other professionals who were generous with their time and advice.

If it proves impossible to use Wilkes Field for the Community Centre we are determined that we will find another site instead, as the need for the Centre remains.

Our major task for 2015-16 is to plan in detail the raising of the capital necessary to build the Centre, and we will actively start fund raising once planning permission has been received. If a loan looks necessary to speed up the start of construction, rate payers will be consulted first.

Cllr. Veitch thanked her fellow councillors, and in particular the committee members, for their hard work and support, and the hardworking clerks for everything they do.

Finance Report for the Year 2014/2015

This report looks at what your Parish Council has done from the perspective of its finances for the year to 31st March 2015.

The accounts show the precept and expenditure for each committee as follows:

	<u>Precept</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>
	£	£
Policy and Resources	148,700	188,394
Burials and Properties	14,250	41,504
Economic and Community Development	9,500	9,211
Environmental Management	73,050	57,548
Planning/Preservation/Housing	Nil	Nil
General, including Contingency Fund	3,000	3,400
	248,500	300,027
Earmarked Funds not spent from 2014/15 Budget (put aside for future projects) including Car Parks (£15,000):		£37,600

We have taken £28,606 from general reserves which has been spent on initial planning and Architects fees etc. for a new Community Centre, this is included under Policy & Resources expenditure.

Total earmarked funds for future repairs etc. to the car parks now stands at £71,000.

Our staff – the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, Vestry Hall Caretakers and Parish Warden (self-employed) – are our most essential resource and we could not run the Council without them. Our staffing costs, including National Insurance and pensions amounted to £85,267.

Other significant items of expenditure were as follows:

	£
Insurances	9,752
General Administration	15,925
Street Lighting	10,514
Vestry Hall - Rates & Utilities	8,443
- Repairs, Maintenance & Cleaning	7,373
Bus Shelters, Benches & Noticeboards	2,905
New Computer system	1,905
New Entrance Doors to Information Centre	5,815
Burial Grounds – Business Rates	1,960
General Maintenance of Cemeteries & Churchyard	4,234
Contracts for maintenance of Grounds, Cemeteries, & War Memorial	36,125
Playground equipment, repairs & maintenance	2,417

Recreation Grounds – Repairs & Maintenance	3,090
Crane Valley – Upkeep of Nature Reserve	3,500
Car Parks	45,162
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	8,641

These and all our other payments were funded by the precept of £248,500, various grants, monies earmarked in previous years and the following income:

	£
Bank Interest	845
Rents Received	3,905
Hire of Vestry Hall and Council Chamber	21,591
Burial Fees	11,615
Tomlin Murton Playing Field Trust	6,000

At the end of the year there was £222,300 held as a reserve earmarked for future specified expenditure, and £109,798 held as a general reserve.

The accounts are examined by our Auditor from Kent County Council and then sent as part of our Annual Return to the Accountants appointed by the Audit Commission for approval. Once approval has been received the accounts are available for inspection at the Parish Council Office.

An explanation of the precept set for the year 2015/2016 can be found in the March edition of the Parish Council Newsletter.

If you would like any further detail or information please contact me via the Parish Clerks.

Cllr. Brian Swann
Chairman – Policy and Resources Committee

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE:

Cllr. Brian Swann - Chairman

Cllr. Holmes in the absence of Cllr. Swann, stated that the purpose of the Policy and Resources Committee is to oversee the workings of the Parish Council, including its finances, staffing, general administration and the setting up and granting of contracts issued by the Council. We also set the overall policies of the Council.

The membership of this Committee is the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Parish Council together with the Chair of each committee. We may invite others to attend. He thanked all the committee chairpersons for their hard work both within and outside the committee room. A lot goes on in their own time.

The real value of this Committee is that it is a discussion point, a plain talking shop, where ideas are tossed about. We discuss what has been happening in the Parish and what we can do about any problems and what we would like to see happening in the future. These ideas are then taken to our various committees.

We work closely under the wise guidance of our amazing Parish Clerks, Coral Kirkaldie and Lori Ham, without whom we would not be able to function. A big thank you is due to them.

The Parish Council aims to improve the “Quality of Life” for its parishioners and the economic viability of the Town and of Sissinghurst Village. You will hear more specifically what has been going on from the reports of the other committees.

The Parish Council has an excellent website www.cranbrookandsissinghurstpc.co.uk which is kept up to date with all the news of what is happening, giving much information about Cranbrook and Sissinghurst. There is a Parish Diary onto which we would like you to enter all the events that you organise, this will hopefully increase the attendance and will help you choose a date that does not clash with other events. You can also be kept informed about things happening in the Parish by signing up to our “Be in The Know” email circulation.

Please keep coming into Cranbrook to shop and join in the many things going on in the Town and in Sissinghurst, and enjoy the free parking which we hope we have secured for many years to come.

BURIAL GROUNDS AND PROPERTIES COMMITTEE:

Cllr. Denis Hemsted – Chairman

Cllr. Hemsted stated that he was one of the four councillors representing Sissinghurst.

Looking back over this past year there did not seem to be many items to report on. There was the review of fees and hiring charges that took place in October when it was agreed to leave the Vestry Hall hiring fees as they were but we did need to increase slightly our burial fees in line with increased costs.

New glazing had to be put in the entrance doors to the Weald Information Centre and the Parish Office as the old ones had become unsafe.

He had looked deeper into what we had been doing and it was interesting to note that there is a continuous stream of little things; the branch that is overhanging a footpath which needs to be removed, the brambles that need cutting back and the yew trees that need a little attention and then there is the noticeboard that requires a bit of tender loving care, the bus shelter that needs to be placed and arrangements made for installation, and so it goes on and all this makes the difference between living in a pleasant environment or where everything is just below par.

All these things have to be reported by either members of the public or by fellow councillors usually to the clerks and then decisions are made and arrangements made to get something done about whatever it is. It is appropriate here to thank a couple of people who have done things for us free of charge.

1. The Sissinghurst and Cranbrook War Memorials were cleaned by Dave Howell and look better for it.
2. The Penny Farthing in Sissinghurst was repaired by Robert Longley, who built it in the first place to commemorate the Tour de France coming through the village
3. The Cadets painted the Howitzer at Cranbrook War Memorial.
4. The local undertakers for supplying a new noticeboard at Golford Cemetery.

Another important task undertaken annually is the budget. Once a year we sit down with the Treasurer and decide what major expenditures we are likely to incur in the next few years and put monies aside for these. In this way we were able to put in a new floor and kitchen in the Vestry Hall and new gates at Golford Cemetery, just two examples.

There is also the smooth running of the Golford and Sissinghurst cemeteries, working with the undertakers. A lot of this is done by our Clerks and helped by our Parish Warden.

On a personal note he stated that after eight years he was not standing for re-election but would like to take this opportunity to thank his fellow councillors for their support and encouragement during these years, particularly the members of his committee.

And finally a word to new incoming councillors, do look to join the Burials and Properties Committee – you will find it very interesting and diverse in its coverage.

He thanked everyone for their help and particularly our brilliant Clerks.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE:

Cllr. Bridget Veitch – Chairman

Cllr. Veitch reported that the car parks have now been under the control of the Parish Council for a full financial year and they are looking much improved. The concrete litter bins have been replaced with better looking heritage designed bins, and some have been relocated to reflect current usage of the areas.

The hedging between the Regal car park and the Crane Valley play area and Nature Reserve has been thinned and layered by the High Weald Partnership. This has successfully opened up the view from the car park, and has been favourably commented upon by residents. We also removed the hedging around the back of the recycling bins as this was proving to attract litter which was difficult to collect. A programme of trimming and pruning of all the hedges and trees has been done. Councillors have reviewed the car parks on a frequent basis, collecting litter at the same time.

Large planters, a gift from Cllr. Holden, have been placed in the Regal car park, and have been planted and cared for by Cranbrook in Bloom. They also planted some crocuses and two other areas with flowers which are a colourful welcome addition to the car park.

We are to experiment with different types of lights in the Crane Valley as some have been a target for vandalism, probably by catapult.

Concern has been expressed in the past that coaches might be unable to use the coach park area in the Regal car park, due to the variation in surface heights on the exit to the car park. This has hampered the marketing of Cranbrook as a tourist destination.

The concern was indeed evidenced when a double decker bus on a test run got stuck last summer, causing several hours of traffic chaos. It has proved difficult to get estimates from engineering firms for a reworking of the exit surface, due to the uncertainties of what is underneath the surface and the potential impacts on the nearby houses. Hopefully this whole problem will go away, as the most modern coaches have the ability to adjust their chassis heights, and can cope with the exit.

The Committee decided that the Winter Strategy for the car parks for 2014-15 would be to supply salt and grit in the yellow bins, and to encourage residents to use this supply for the icy patches when necessary. This decision was taken on the basis of the experience of the previous winters, when scheduled salting and gritting to KCC guidelines proved to be expensive, even when there was a mild winter. Each occasion that the three car parks were gritted by contractor was costing the Parish Council £200, and even the mild winter of 2013-14 cost approximately £3,000.

Icy patches did appear on the footpaths in the Crane Valley, and residents needed to take care, but these paths have never been scheduled for salting and gritting. Unfortunately it is not possible to include shovels or spades in the bins, as they tend to disappear.

It has been noted that the car parks are now much used, and spaces are not always available in the smaller two car parks. A survey of the usage will be needed in 2015-16 so that we can consider ways of ensuring efficient use of the space.

The allotments continue to be a much used and appreciated resource. There is an annual competition, with prizes awarded to the best kept allotments, and to the best novice held one.

There are three areas with equipment for children and youngsters to use, all of which have an annual RoSPA inspection. There is the area in the Crane Valley, with slide, swings and the skate board area. We are investigating further means of improving the drainage in this site. The children's playground in the Ball Field (Cranbrook) is much used. The one in the Jubilee Field (Sissinghurst) is less used, and in need of updating. We have discussed requirements, with the help of Sissinghurst residents, and had visits and estimates provided by three manufacturers. Although there are some funds set aside, it is not enough to buy the desired equipment. As a result some fund raising will be necessary, and the new equipment will have to be phased in. It should be noted that the Ball Field equipment was also purchased as the result of fund raising.

The proposed changes to the layout of the junction of Waterloo Road and Angley Road have been the subject of much discussion. The plans have been modified as a result of the comments from residents, and the work is scheduled to be done in August, taking three weeks. We hope that this will prove to be a safer and more satisfactory layout than the current one.

She stated that she was disappointed at the amount of litter that appears on our roadside verges. A litter picking session has been scheduled for Saturday 25th April, with volunteers meeting at 10.00am both by the Recycling bins in the Regal car park and by the entrance to the Jubilee Field in Sissinghurst.

Overall this has been a busy year for the Environmental Management Committee, and she thanked everyone who has been involved, particular the committee members and our hard working parish clerks.

PLANNING & PRESERVATION MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE:

Cllr. Alison Bunyan – Chairman

Cllr. Bunyan thanked her Committee for putting in so much time at meetings and also, of course, our two fabulous clerks for all their help and advice. It's been both a busy and frustrating year. The frustrations came because of the transfer of the back room – validation – operations of the planning department at TWBC to the joint Mid Kent Partnership situated in Maidstone. It was supposed to make a huge saving by amalgamating the work of Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Swale Councils in one place. Unfortunately in practice it caused a huge disruption to the applicants of all three councils with no applications being validated for the whole of June last year and since then there is still a backlog of several weeks. She understood that TWBC are now intending to return this work to Tunbridge Wells – let's hope they can find qualified staff – she imagined that the majority of the previous members of staff will have found other employment.

As far as applications are concerned, the numbers have increased considerably although not yet back up to the numbers of 10 years ago. The Self and Custom Build Bill has now received Royal Assent which will be good news for prospective self-builders although she was not sure that the Borough Council will be that pleased – it will involve extra work for them in keeping a list of those looking for a plot and plots that are available and then offering them to those on the list.

After the election and when the new Parish Council is bedded in, we will be considering the matter of producing a Neighbourhood Plan and we will be looking for a lot of volunteers to help with the process. A Neighbourhood Plan seems to take 2-3 years to produce and then it has to be accepted via a referendum, by the parishioners and pass the inspector's test that it complies with local and national policies. We will be advertising the start of the process and hope you will all want to take part. One of the requirements is that the community should be involved at every stage.

The consultation period for the Land Allocations Document has now finished. This document shows details of where the borough expects the new houses to be built - up until 2026. Tunbridge Wells had a 6000 allocation for new homes between 2006 and 2026 and as soon as the current allocation document is finalised, they will start the process all over again and this time it is suggested that Tunbridge Wells may identify a need for up to 18,000 more! She just hoped that's scare-mongering.

Cllr. Bunyan then went on to mention the project of which she was most proud. The identification of the site, the enthusiasm of the land owner to help us, the negotiations with the housing association, achieving the planning permission and the completion of the 11 new affordable homes in Cobnut Close in Sissinghurst. The new residents, who were mostly already living in unsuitable accommodation in Sissinghurst, are delighted with their cosy new homes. You may recall that we tried to get 30 housing association homes for Cranbrook on Longfield some years ago and failed so she had spent eight years in the process. If the politicians' promise of selling housing association homes to their occupants comes to fruition, we will be looking for lots more plots for replacement housing association homes!

The Sissinghurst ward of the Parish Council will be having an election in May – she wished good luck to the five candidates for the four places. She hoped that she could return for the next four years.

The Chairman then closed the meeting and invited Carrie Beech and John Weeds - Head teachers of High Weald Academy and Cranbrook School to give their presentations.

Carrie Beech gave a power point presentation which outlined all their policies, achievements and ambitions. She explained how High Weald Academy was working with Cranbrook School and the other local primary schools and actively encourages partnership working. The School Farm is an asset to the Academy and she was very keen to promote the activities of the School Farm. They had open days where members of the public could visit. Her presentation was well received by Members and Parishioners.

John Weeds outlined the history of Cranbrook School, the Old Cranbrookians and the link with the armed forces. He, like Carrie Beech, actively encouraged partnership working and working within the community. Cranbrook School has a high profile in the Town and he aims to not only make the School proud to be in Cranbrook but also for Cranbrook to be proud of the School. He would always welcome the opportunity to inform the Council and parishioners of the future plans for the school.

The Chairman then invited parishioners to ask questions. No questions were raised but parishioners thanked both headteachers for a very informative update.