

BODIAM PARISH ASSEMBLY 2023

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The Minutes of the Parish Assembly held in the Wharf Tea Room, Bodiam Castle, on Thursday, 18th May 2023 at 6.30 p.m.

Present:

For Bodiam Parish Council: Councillors: - (Chairman) Linda Stevens, (Vice chair) Tim Porter, Graham Peters, Darren Page and Nick Gilbert

For RDC: Cllr T Ganley, Cllr T Biggs

For ESCC: Cllr P Redstone

In attendance: Clerk Christine Burgess. Guest speakers and approx. 30 members of the public

Apologies: Bodiam C of E Primary School and PTA, reports for both can be found on the Bodiam Parish Website

Councillor Stevens took the Chair and opened the meeting by introducing the Councillors and Clerk. The Councillors and Clerk were introduced and members of the public and guests welcomed. The public were invited to help themselves to refreshments.

ESCC Cllr Paul Redstone

Cllr Redstone has been a County Councillor for 2 years and as part of his remit deals with Highways and pot holes.

The new contractor for dealing with the pot holes is Balfour Beatty who took over on 1st May. The early signs are good and a much better service is expected, particularly in the quality of the repairs. There are some real challenges with the roads partly due to the weather and unfortunately, there is just not enough money to fix the roads. Roads in the County are divided into red amber and green and are surveyed each year. If we take the red and the amber designated roads and try to get them to the green standard it would cost between 350 and 400 million pounds, which works out at something like £750 per man woman and child, so, there is a lot of discussion around this on how to fund the repairs.

Locally there is a concern regarding the road from the curlew down to the A21. Cllr Redstone has had a conversation with the highways steward regarding this and work is expected to start soon. Station Road in Robertsbridge has now been fixed.

Rother District Council Cllr Tony Ganly and Tony Biggs

Report was read by Cllr Tony Biggs who joined Rother District Council just 2 weeks ago. There have been no meetings over the last couple of months because of the Elections Full report can be read on the Bodiam Parish Council Website.

Bexhill Town Hall Renovation was opposed by Conservative Group and because of the cost, £15 million which has risen to £25 million has now been put on hold. £740,000 has already been spent on consultants and fees, preparing the application.

Financial Reserves are low and have been allowed to fall to the recommended level of £5 million. Savings are going to be made hopefully by devolving Bexhill toilets to Bexhill Town Council, but this has not yet been agreed.

In 2022/2023 there have been 238 new homes, and so far between April and December a further 222 have been built.

The Rother Community Lottery launched April 2022, has been very successful, with 60p of every £1 going towards local good causes. (Full details on website)

Chair, Cllr Linda Stevens

Thanked Rother District Cllrs Ganly and Biggs and ESCC Cllr Redstone and who were now due at another meeting, this evening.

The new markings on the road next to the Primary school are thanks to Cllr Redstone, and hopefully the lights will be added shortly, to slow down the traffic.

Claremont School: Ed Dickie and Severine Collins

Severine Collins is the new Principle at Claremont and joined the School in January this year, and there are now 330 pupils at the senior site.

Several projects have been completed this year: Coaches are now able to use the back gate to the school (using the front gate had caused residents a fair amount of grief); a number of trees were identified as needing cutting back or cutting down; and shortly the school will be able to offer Swimming facilities to the community; a number of Lifeguards are being trained up.

The school is now 12 years old and continues to be successful.

A member of the public enquired when the damage to the kerb down Levetts Lane would be dealt with.

Cllr Peters mentioned level of lighting and Cllr Stevens asked if anyone was interested in training as a lifeguard could they join the life guard scheme, (the next course is at the end of June) please enquire at the school.

Any problems with the coach drivers, please inform the school, as they could be dangerous to locals and to the pupils they are transporting.

Bodiam Church of England School, Patrick Stevens, Governor:

The school year began under the leadership of an Interim Executive Headteacher, Mr. Jon Goulding, whilst they awaited the arrival of the new Executive Headteacher, Mrs. Cherane Marshall who started in January this year

11 new pupils were welcomed into the school; and the children from Years 1 to 6 all engaged with their new Learning Journey, 'In the Beginning', as they explored key knowledge from pre-history (Dinosaurs) through to the Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age.

Full report can be viewed on the Bodiam Parish Council website

Bodiam PTA

Rebecca McCormack was unable to attend but has sent in a report which can be read in full again on the Bodiam Parish Council Website

There is already a new committee chairperson in place, who has started her role and is making great progress in fundraising for the school.

The Funday this year which is on Saturday June 17th from 12-4pm, with craft stalls, a dog show, activities for the children, a band, bar, and BBQ.

All funds go to the school and enable children to go on school trips as well as purchasing equipment to enrich the curriculum.

Bodiam Pre-School, Mel Porter:

Since the last Parish Assembly there have been some big changes. The Pre-school is run by a committee and long-standing chairperson, Rebecca McCormick has now stood down, Linda Stevens has now officially taken over the role.

The group is thriving and have had many new families joining. The main ambition is to grow lots of confident happy children giving them the opportunity to learn through play.

Mel thanked the Bodiam Pre-school team and they are looking for another team member to join them. After a brief discussion with Claremont School, potentially a few older pupils from Claremont may join the pre-school to gain experience if this is their chosen profession.

St Giles Church: Church Warden, Rachael Piper

There are now 47 people on the recently updated St Giles' church electoral roll, and currently hold two Sunday services each month, Parish Communion on the third Sunday and the much less formal Family Service, on the first Sunday. Both services start at 11.15am. At the end of the Family Service, there is the opportunity for fellowship and a chat over refreshments. There is also a weekly service of Evening Prayer held in St Giles' by Canon Christopher on Thursday evenings at 5.30pm.

Attendance at the major festivals is good and is gradually returning to pre-Covid level.

Bodiam CE Primary School held their Harvest Festival and Christmas services in the church and Canon Christopher holds monthly assemblies in the school.

Over the course of the last year there has been a Flower Festival, a Harvest Supper at The Hub, a Pub Quiz at the Castle Inn, a Carols by Candlelight service and not least, this year's Palm Sunday service starring not one but two donkeys, who were walked over from Sandhurst for the occasion. Apparently, they have an aversion to travel by horsebox!

Canon Christopher is always please to receive enquiries about christenings, weddings, and funerals.

The churchyard continues to be a place of special importance to both current and previous parishioners and Cllr Peters thanked Joan and Stuart Foster, for looking after the Churchyard so well.

National Trust: Karen Stafford.

Cllr Stevens introduced Karen and thanked her for hosting the Parish Assembly.

Every second Thursday there is a village meet up group in the second-hand bookshop. And recently there has been a village defibrillator training course at the Castle.

Over the last twelve months they have continued with the care of the castle and grounds, and were pleased to welcome just over 150,000 visitors.

The National Trust recently agreed a pass for Bodiam and Ewhurst residents, available from visitor reception, during opening hours with ID, it covers access to the surrounding grounds for up to 2 adults and 3 children. A Resident pointed out that some families have more than 3 children which the pass doesn't cover, but a yearly national trust pass for a child can be purchased for only £10 per year and covers them up to the age of 17, this covers them for all National Trust properties

Over the summer, the popular medieval fair will return, and Quantum theatre's A Midsummer Night's dream will be in the Castle for two nights in mid-August. There will be a chance for

Cllr Gilbert enquired if there many residents taking up the resident passes, but Karen did not know the figures at this time, as the scheme was only started last week.

2 Wharf cottages was mentioned as the garden needs urgent care.

Cllr Stevens enquired why the trees had been cut down around the moat, the answer was that the trees historically were not originally there and had probably only grown over the last 20 years or so. All the veteran oak trees have been kept.

Karen has kindly written a report which can be read on the website

Parker and Ashcombe Trust: Cllr Peters

The Trust was founded in 1888, to provide housing for single ladies from Bodiam and the surrounding area. The Trust owns 2 properties in the village, the Alms flats, which comprise of four, one bed flats to provide the means for independent living, and the Rectory Cottage, the rental of which contributes to the running costs of the overall estate. The trust also owns and maintains a small garden, the Parish Room where the Bodiam Pre School and the Parish Council meet, an Ice House, in the grounds of Rectory cottage. Rectory Cottage has recently been renovated and rented out; the Trust were very fortunate to receive a bequest from Dora Churcher to help with the restoration of the Ice House. Archaeology is now under way!

This year the charity commission allowed the trust to admit men. Originally it was set up for "single women or widows of good character, who were resident in the Parish at the time of application." So, an application was made to admit men and a gentleman is now in residence.

The trustees are John Barnett Pippa Deeley, Canon Christopher Irvine and Ellie Pottinger.

Parish Council Report: Councillor Linda Stevens, Chairman

The Chairman reported that monthly meetings are held on the third Monday of the month in the Parish Room. Members of the Public are very welcome.

The Council comment on planning applications, but the decision is made by Rother District Council Planning Dept. The Council also report difficulties on the footpaths in the Village to ESCC or to the Landowners if appropriate.

The Council has responsibility for the Recreation Ground and the Pavilion, which is one of the main costs. The Pavilion is not in constant use and has spent most of the winter underwater. The council would be interested in any ideas that residents may have for the future.

Thanks were given to Barbara Napper who has been on the Council for many years for all her hard work and contribution. Also, thanks to Terry Barrett for providing independent audit on the accounts.

The question of car parking at the recreation ground was raised by a resident, this will be discussed as part of the future of the Pavilion and the recreation ground.

A grit bin has been paid for and ordered for the top of Levetts Lane.

Attendees were invited to remain for refreshments, whilst the projector was set up for the next speakers.

Rother Valley Railway and Kent and East Sussex railway: Gardner Crawley and David Nibloe

Gardner Crawley gave the Assembly a brief history of Rother Valley Railway followed by David Nibloe for Kent and East Sussex Railway,

They shared the good news regarding the reconnection of the Kent and East Sussex Railway to the Network Rail main line at Robertsbridge which will bring great economic benefit to the local area.

Following the Public Inquiry in 2021, the Secretary of State for Transport has announced that he has decided to make the Order to enable completion of the railway.

The next stage is to carry out the land and ecological surveys. Substantive physical works are unlikely to start before next year. Once the reconnection is complete, visitors from all over the country will be able to come to Robertsbridge by mainline railway before boarding a Kent and East Sussex Railway heritage train to visit Bodiam Castle, Tenterden Town and other local attractions.

In the past few years 3/4 mile of track has been reconstructed in stages at the eastern end of the RVR route, connecting KESR track to Junction Road. At the western end, five bridges have been reconstructed with track laid from outside the station area to Northbridge Street.

It is believed that this will allow a minimum of 20,000 more visitors per year.

Residents asked how many trains there would be, and if there could be a special night out in London by train, (slightly tongue in cheek). The answer was, 5 return journeys per day are expected, and as for the night out in London, probably not!

The full history can be read on the RVR and the KESR websites.

Close of Meeting

There being no further business the Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.