

BODIAM PARISH ASSEMBLY 2025

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The Minutes of the Parish Assembly held at Bodiam Primary School, on Wednesday, 14th May 2025 at 6.30 p.m.

Present:

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

For RDC: Cllr Tony Ganley, Cllr Tony Biggs

For ESCC: Cllr Paul Redstone

In attendance: Clerk Lynsey Willard. Guest speakers and approx. 6 members of the public

Guest Speakers:

Parker & Ashcombe – Pippa Deeley

St Giles Church – Rachel Piper

Bodiam Pre School – Mel Porter

Bodiam C of E Primary School - Heloise Prus, Head of School

Bodiam C of E Primary School & Bodiam PTA - Katie Hodgson-Martin – Chair

Kent and East Sussex Railway & Rother Valley Railway – David Nibloe &

Gardner Crawley

National Trust – Karen Stafford

Apologies: Cllr Graham Peters

Councillor Stevens took the Chair and opened the meeting by introducing the Councillors and Clerk and welcomes the members of the public and guest speakers.

The minutes of last year's parish assembly were confirmed correct and signed as a true account.

ESCC Cllr Paul Redstone covered two topics as part of his report before giving a talk on Devolution, County budget and Potholes. East Sussex County Council have a budget of £538 million this year and the expenditure is dominated by Adult Social care and Child Services. The previous year used £24 million of the reserves, and it is expected that they will use at least £11 million of the reserves this coming year.

Highways & Potholes: The annual budget for highways is £23million for potholes, resurfacing, drainage and pavements. It would take £350 million to

bring all the roads up to green status. All highways are scanned each year and classified but there has been a gradual decline everywhere. Cllr Redstone continues to lobby hard for local roads, including two of the worst, The Stage (from the Curlew to Hurst Green) and Junction Road.

Cllr Redstone provided an informative update on Devolution. Sussex has been one of the first accepted by the Government for the Devolution Priority Program, one of only 6 areas in the country. Details can be found in his report on Bodiam Parish Council website.

Rother District Council Cllr Tony Biggs accompanied by Cllr Tony Ganley talked about the constraints and delays of enforcement cases. The Cllrs have been involved with local businesses to promote tourism in Bodiam. Once the new rail link is completed there are expected to be an extra 20,000 extra visitors coming in by train.

Pippa Deeley – Parker & Ashcombe Trust gave an interesting and enjoyable overview of the history of Parker & Ashcombe. They own and let out 4 Alms houses flats, Rectory Cottage, the Village Parish rooms and an icehouse! All apart from the icehouse are currently let out. The Trust is currently looking for a new secretary so if you are interested in working with this small charity please contact Cllr Graham Peters, John Barnett or Ellie Pottinger. Their full report can be found on Bodiam Parish Council's website.

Rachel Piper – St Giles Church – Church Warden gave a resume of the last year; they have been without their own fulltime priest since Canon Chrstopher retired in October 2023. They have continued to advertise but there have been no applicants. A core of clergies has taken services since with some well attended services at Christmas and Easter and the Primary School continue to use the Church for their celebrations. Please let Rachel or Cllr Graham Peters know if you would like to receive email notifications of services.

Mel Porter – Bodiam Pre School – (Mel Mel to our younger residents) The pre-school provides sessions for 15 children at a time with three members of staff. The environment helps the young children grow in confidence and independent learning. For the latest Ofsted just before Christmas they did really well securing a strong "Good". They are working towards a HALO Award – Healthy Active Little Ones and have various visitors into the pre school from a lollipop lady to discuss road safety and a dentist this coming week to talk about looking after their teeth. They have had a huge expense of replacing the outside decking area this term. They are always looking for donations and have a wish list if you are interested in helping them out. Just a reminder that they do have an easy fund-raising page. It is so easy to use when you shop online. Signing up only takes a few minutes, to get started go to <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/> and enter Bodiam Preschool in the cause search bar. Companies like Amazon donate to the Pre School without costing you any extra.

Heloise Prus, Head of School – Bodiam Primary School – talked us through a excellent slide pack showcasing the primary school, talking about what they have achieved over the last year and their ethos. They had 57 on role in September but are now up to 70 and are expecting a full cohort of 15 for the reception class in September with only 11 due to move up to senior school. They had an excellent report back from the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) inspection in November 2024.

Katie Hodgson-Martin – Bodiam Primary School PTA - reported that they currently have 14 members on their committee and are a registered charity separate from the school. They have held several inhouse fundraisers this year and their big money raiser, the Funday and Dog show is on the 5 July on the recreation ground so please come along and support this event if you can. This year the PTA has paid for the coaches for all the school trips and for all the children to go to the Panto before Christmas. They are currently having a hexagonal reading hub built in the playground. Their next AGM is in September 2025, and they are hoping to bring new parents on board.

David Nibloe – Director Kent & East Sussex Railway (K&ESR) / Gardner Crawley – Rother Valley Railway Heritage Trust (RVR)– gave a joint update for both organisations. K&ESR is an educational charity and living museum powered by 500 volunteers and 20 employees. It brings in £5million of benefit to the local area between Tenterden, Northiam and Bodiam. Ticket sales go towards preserving the railway and local services are used as much as possible. They had their 50th anniversary this year and the original line was operational for 53 years, so the restored line has been open nearly as long. Bodiam celebrated 25 years since it reopened its station in 2020 and several Bodiam School pupils attended and were pleased to see themselves on the local news that evening.

Gardner joined the talk to update us on the extending of the line through to Robertsbridge. Surveys have been done for the new line and the new booking hall is going up in Robertsbridge. A 40-mile limit will be brought into play on Junction Road for the level crossing which will hopefully begin next year. It is thought that once the line connects with Robertsbridge that this will encourage up to an extra 20,000 visitors to visit by National Rail.

Karen Stafford – Manager for Batemans and Bodiam Castle – National Trust – received 155,000 visitors last year. They still haven't recovered numbers since the pandemic. The National Trust continues to safeguard the Castle for future generations. Conservation repairs are being done on the West wall. Abseilers have weeded the castle walls, and the moat banks have been cleared. The moat is becoming a reservoir again and the overflow carpark has been dry since Easter. Dokes field has been divided in two this year. It was formally depicted on an estate map of 1730 as two fields and a quick fact, the W field was called 'The Farther Dokes' and the E field 'The Dokes Next South Hill'.

Several events are planned for this year including another archaeological dig – they are still searching for the Roman village. Cressida Cowell's How to train your Dragon will be at the castle from 24 May until 7 September so come along and join Hiccup, his trusty dragon Toothless and lots of other familiar friends on a brand-new trail. Cressida Cowell is expected for book signing at some point over the summer.

The Castle has received a National Lottery Heritage award for improving and telling the story. They plan to re-open the Northeast Tower this year. Next year the Castle will have been with the National Trust for 100 years. Junior membership is only £12 per annum and resident passes are available for the grounds for Ewhurst and Bodiam residents on presentation of identification at the Ticket Office. They currently host the Bodiam Meet Up group on the 2nd Thursday of the month. Karen finished by giving thanks to all the volunteers that make everything possible.

Close of Meeting - There being no further business the Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.