

Rother Association of Local Councils (RALC)
Minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2021 at 7.30pm
(Virtual Meeting held on Zoom)

Present: David Pankhurst (Peasmarsh) (**RALC Chairman**), Peter Turner (Icklesham) (**RALC Vice Chairman**), Philip Allard (Iden), John Barnes (Etchingham), John Bradford (Camber), Gillian Branford (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Gill Colquhoun (RALC Secretary), Ros Day (Crowhurst), Judith Dean (Pett), Tracy Dixon (Brede), , Bob Franklin (Burwash), Jill Gyngell (Battle), Jacqui Harding (Northiam), Tracy Hoad (Crowhurst), Issy Horsley (Fairlight), Malcolm Johnston (Rother District Council) , James Newmarch (ESCC) Les Nottage (Brede), Hilary Pankhurst (Peasmarsh), David Penfold (Pett), Cllr Sue Prochak (Rother District Council), Keith Robertson (Catsfield), David Smedley (Icklesham), Kristina Sodomkova (RDC Environmental Manager), Steve Stewart (Fairlight), Inspector Chris Varrall (Rother Police), Lesley Voice (Playden), Dale Wheeler (Battle)

1 Welcome.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. He informed those present that the meeting was being recorded on Zoom to aid minute taking.

2 Apologies for absence

Paulette Barton (Etchingham), Lisa Cooper (RDC) Isla Dacey (East Sussex Highways), Pauline Glew (Sedlescombe), Doug Lambert (Etchingham), Judy Petty (Brightling), Karen Ripley (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Jonathan Vine Hall (Sedlescombe). The Secretary apologised to those Parishes for whom the meeting clashed with their Parish meetings.

3 Accuracy of Minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2020, were agreed.

4 Matters arising from previous meeting (items on agenda only) – no discussion.

5 Finance

- **To receive update as at 30 November 2019 ***

The Secretary had circulated the update. There were no questions

- **To agree subscriptions for 2020-21**

The Secretary proposed no change to membership fees (**agreed** with the budget)

- **To approve budget for 2021/22 ***

Members **voted to approve** the circulated budget for 2021/22. The budget assumed that the new Bexhill Town Council would wish to join RALC if formed after elections currently scheduled for May. (Peter Turner proposed; Keith Robertson seconded)

- **To discuss renewal of Online Mapping**

The Secretary proposed an increase of £5 on the Parish Online Mapping annual subscription from £45 to £50 pa for the 2021/22 year, to reflect the estimated group invoice supplied by Geosphere. Invoices would be sent out with the annual membership fees in August. (**approved** with the budget). The Chairman asked the Secretary to check that no funding contribution was available from East Sussex County Council.

6 To elect 2 RALC representatives for ESALC board

RALC has 3 representatives; John Barnes already elected and 2 vacancies arising from the resignation of David Pankhurst and Hilary Pankhurst. No nominations had been received before the meeting. The Chairman stated that the initial appointment was only for 4-5 months, until representatives were re elected to the board at the AGM in July, and John Barnes informed members that the board was exploring the possibility of continuing with Zoom for future meetings beyond the pandemic. Peter Turner volunteered and members **approved** his appointment. Philip Allard will consider becoming the third RALC representative.

7 Sussex Police Inspector Chris Varrell

Email Christopher.varrall@sussex.pnn.police.uk

Inspector Varrall introduced himself as the new Rother Inspector, replacing Inspector Hartley. (Inspector Varrall is in position whilst Inspector Olivia Carroll, who has been appointed to the post is on maternity leave). Inspector Varrall has a broad background in policing including neighbourhood policing, and reported that crime has reduced in most areas of Rother over the last year (crime have reduced in most areas during pandemic, for example thefts have reduced in last 3 months compared to last year by 31% in last year, but there has been a concentration of rural breaks around Icklesham and Ticehurst). Rother Police want to improve engagement with local communities. Most resources are concentrating on Covid, with an emphasis on education, with occasional fines and arrests. Police staffing has been affected by staff Covid infections.

Questions:

Cllr Sue Prochak (RDC) asked if the recent PCSO police report of catalytic converter thefts is new to Rural Rother Inspector Varrall confirmed that it was a new issue in the rural area; PCSOs had emailed Parishes to make the public aware. [Inspector Varrall left the meeting].

Item 11 – Speeding Proposal Update – was discussed at this point (see Item 11 below).

8 Report from Isla Dacey (ESCC)

isla.dacey1@eastsussexhighways.com

A report had been circulated, including a response from Highways to questions Keith Robertson had raised regarding rollout of the Black Cat speeding equipment. There were no comments.

The Chairman reported that, further to his concerns voiced at the last meeting about Highways repairs, he had raised the matter and Highways are reviewing the current repair contract; a report has been prepared for ESCC Cabinet on 20 January.

9 Rother Matters.

Rother Update

Cllr Prochak cldr.susanprochak@rother.gov.uk provided an update. Partnership working was seen as the way forward. She recorded her thanks to the Chairman and Secretary for assistance with Rother Rural Conference in October and the follow up meeting on managing biodiversity held in December. Parishes will be invited to attend Rother member training from the county ecologist on 11 February. RDC budget will go out to consultation; it has been a hard year for district funds with Government grants not covering Covid losses (RDC is around £1 Million short). Even before Covid Rother had calculated savings of up to half a million pounds were needed to avoid going into reserves. The Corporate Plan will also go out to consultation; comments are welcomed. In the current lockdown no waste collections had been cancelled. However local recycling 'bring' sites are experiencing problems of contamination so a decision has been made to close 30 of these sites, 9 of these are in the rural areas. Parishes will be informed where this affects them. Renewal of the Rother Local Plan is ongoing. Elections are still scheduled to take place in May, a result of which would be the formation of Bexhill Town Council. An RVA meeting earlier on 13 January had shown widespread disquiet regarding rural rollout of the Covid vaccine. Questions had been asked as to why GPs could not deliver vaccinations, rather than creation of a vaccination centre at Etchingham which was at a long distance from residents in areas such as Rye, and why staff at schools and preschools were not priority. Rother residents registered with Kent doctors will be expected to travel to Headcorn. It had been confirmed that the very vulnerable will receive their vaccinations in their homes. New hubs, use of GPS and pharmacies are all possibilities. Parishes were asked to tell Rother what is happening locally.

Malcolm Johnston (RDC) endorsed Sue's comments. He felt that the current situation regarding vaccines was dictated by central government policies and what was needed was more emphasis on local response, and fast alternatives were needed. He praised partnership working as

illustrated by the joint Parish/District response to recent flooding in Robertsbridge. He reiterated the request for Parishes to comment on Rother's Corporate Plan.

Cllr John Barnes (Etchingham and ESCC County Councillor) felt strong representation to local MPs and authorities was needed for a streamlined vaccination response, and a new centre in Eastern Rother. He proposed that Rother write as a body to voice concern, seconded by Cllr Issy Horsley (Fairlight) Cllr Horsely also suggested all Parishes write to their MPs as soon as possible. It was **agreed** RALC and RDC would write together asking for an urgent meeting with local MPs which expressed the concerns of all the Parishes. Sue Prochak to lead. David Pankhurst, Cllr Horsely, Sue Prochak and John Barnes to meet at the end of the meeting to progress.

10 SSALC/ESALC- to discuss what members value about membership of SSALC /ESALC.

The Secretary presented results of a recent, ongoing survey of Rother Clerks: 'RALC Members Survey on SSALC / ESALC Services to Rother Parishes'. So far 9 out of 31 Parishes had responded, showing the value assigned to training provision, information and legal advice. All Parishes were reminded to complete the survey (via the Clerk).

11 Project Updates

Speeding Proposal update

Cllr Keith Robertson keith.a.robertson@aol.com summarised RALC's work to date on speed reduction across Rother in a presentation 'RALC Project Speeding Reduction (see Appendix). In summary the objective is to reduce traffic speeds and improve road infrastructure using evidence obtained from investing in traffic volume and speed recording equipment.

Phase 1: to test Black Cat radar equipment (in Catsfield). This was agreed at July RALC meeting. If it works to move on to next phases. Results showed £2600 is required per unit for equipment; licence and brackets. Parishes need to find a safe place of more than 1.2m from kerb where possible. Installation is technical – cannot give to Clerk to do, need to find someone else who is able to install and connect to laptop and analyse results. There is a need for training, regular inspection of equipment, and review of the format of data output.

Phase 2 – get commitment. Parishes need to decide if this is the data wanted, and whether they can purchase or share funding with other parishes and whether they have a responsible person at Parish level who can take responsibility for the Black Cat. Police response had been positive but RALC needs to establish what has been done with the data collected, and will senior police officers and the commissioner support use of the equipment. ESCC have so far been very supportive, and confirmed that the licence can be used multisite (see report by Isla Dacey). It will be necessary to think through the approach to using and getting access to the data. There are opportunities for a partnership approach – will our MPs support this project?

Phase 3 - roll out. To be decided.

Questions were asked as follows:

*Cllr Dave Wheeler (Battle) asked what a bin was (shown on data)
A A range of speeds, you can vary criteria.*

*Q Cllr Bob Franklin (Burwash) should the Police Crime Commissioner be copied in?
A Cllr Robertson confirmed she was included in the list of contacts for next stages of project*

*Q Cllr Peter Turner (Icklesham) Would there be any merit in putting this data on Parish Online?
A Possible, but would need to have like for like data across Parishes*

*Q Cllr Dale Wheeler (Battle) Is the equipment discrete, could it be removed by public?
A Cllr Robertson showed everyone the device). It is discrete with secure fixings which mean it could not be removed.*

Q Cllr David Penfold (Pett) suggested that it might be necessary to modify Parish Online to enable parishes to see data in neighbouring Parishes.

Chris Varrell Police response

He congratulated Cllr Robertson on the work he had undertaken on the project and stated that he will support RALC every way he can, but needs to make a proportionate approach. The next step is for Cllr Robertson and himself to meet with Chris Cannon (Surrey and Sussex Police), Steve McConnell (SpeedWatch) and ESCC. Speeding is a problem and this issue is led by County Councils. Police enforcement does not work on its own. It will be necessary to take a staged approach following national guidelines: to include 1. Education (SpeedWatch) 2. Engineering 3. Enforcement (last resort). It will be necessary moving forward to work alongside the SpeedWatch in education phase.

Cllr Robertson and Inspector Varrell were in agreement that the plan needs to work across the board, in partnership. Cllr Peter Turner (Icklesham) highlighted that some roads in Rother are the responsibility of Highways England so he suggested that they need to be included in discussions. [Inspector Varrell left the meeting at 8.24pm]

Wildflower Verges

To discuss results of Rother Survey on Wildflower Verges

Kristina Sodomkova, Rother Environment and Policy Manager

kristina.sodomkova@rother.gov.uk outlined results of RDC's recent survey on wildflower verges in a presentation: 'Managing road verges for biodiversity' (see Appendix). The survey took place in December 2020, targeted at Parish Councils. It also included comments from the public. The survey had been conducted in partnership with RALC, East Sussex Highways, High Weald and Great Dixter. The response was good. A map was shown which identified designated wildflower verges. Results showed most respondents did not know if their Parish had designated parishes (only 22% said yes). So there is scope to inform our communities which areas are designated. The majority of respondents did not know reasons why Parishes had applied for wildlife verge designation, and very few respondents knew what fauna and flora have been identified in designated wildlife verges or who had initiated the designation – individual, community group or parish councils. The frontrunners appeared to be Parishes where community groups are working together with Parish Council – Burwash, Battle, Crowhurst and Mountfield were highlighted. Applications led to designation, and less mowing. There were a lot of ideas for improvement, with comments on visibility; pedestrian safety; cars parking on wildlife verges and residents destroying verge habitats. 3 parishes were considering apply to have verges designated in next 3 months, 6 more parishes in next 12 months. Kristina thanked those who had participated. She proposed to meet with James Newmarch (ESCC) and other partners to see how support can be provided to parishes who might be interested but do not have the expertise to take this forward. Cllr Prochak thanked Kristina for her work.

Questions and answers on Proposed ESCC Verges 2 cut trial – James Newmarch ESCC

James Newmarch Senior Asset Engineer (Soft Estate) East Sussex County Council

james.newmarch@eastsussex.gov.uk stated that he was happy to meet and progress with Kristina. He reported that a trial in 2021 with 2 cuts had been offered to a dozen Parishes, who had previously expressed interest, spread geographically across East Sussex to reduce the urban cut. Instead of 2 rural cuts per year ESCC would carry out one main cut in the autumn, and a second reduced cut in May/June would be cutting for sightlines and access only. One of the main sources of complaints last year was that the verges were at their most diverse when they were cut at in May/June. The final list of Parishes participating in the trial is not yet confirmed; one or two more Parishes may be offered to take part to ensure a reasonable spread across East Sussex. James confirmed that there is one application process for both types of verge designation – designated wildlife verges (from 1980s) and meadow verges – with an application form on the East Sussex Highways website <https://www.eastsussexhighways.com/our-services/vegetation/wildlife-verges?topic=what-do-we-do-in-east-sussex>

12 RALC Website - launch of new website

The Secretary reported that work on the website for members is almost complete. A draft site has been produced in collaboration with Rother District Council. She recorded her thanks to James Waite at RDC. She demonstrated the website and asked Parishes to inform her if there were particular things they want included on the site and to also check whether permission had been given to the Secretary to include contact details of the Clerk and both RALC representatives from each Parish (a form was included with annual invoices in September). The Chairman thanked the Secretary for driving this project forward.

13 Ideas for Future Meetings

The Chairman asked members to feed any ideas for future meetings to the Secretary.

14 Dates of next meetings

The dates and timings have been previously agreed as 7 April 7.30pm; 7 July 7.30pm, 6 October 2.30pm. The RALC Executive had received a suggestion that the April meeting is held in the morning. Members were asked to feedback if 10.30am was better than 7.30pm [Please can members email the Clerk by 10 February]. The Secretary was asked to check and confirm if the April meeting could be held on 14 April, to avoid holding a meeting in Easter week.

The meeting ended at 9.13pm

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