

# **Rother Association of Local Councils (RALC)**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022 at 2.30 pm**

**(Virtual meeting held on Zoom)**

**Present:** David Pankhurst (Peasmarsh) (**RALC Chairman**), Peter Turner (Icklesham) (**RALC Vice Chairman**), Keith Robertson (Catsfield), David Young (Ewhurst), Bob Franklin (Burwash), Jonathan Vine-Hall (Sedlescombe), Malcolm Johnson (Rother District Council), John Barnes (Etchingham), Paulette Barton (Etchingham), Graham Furness (Guestling), Sue Prochak (Rother District Council), Ros Day (Crowhurst), Issy Horsley (Fairlight), Les Nottage (Brede), Judy Petty (Brightling), Dale Wheeler (Battle), Viv Taylor-Gee (Bexhill), Inspector Olivia Carroll (Sussex Police), Tina Longmead (Beckley), Pete Munro (Guestling), Amy Head (Peasmarsh), David Penfold (Pett), Jacqui Harding (Northiam), Janet Richardson-Simmonds (Bexhill), Steve Stewart (Fairlight).

## **1. Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## **2. Apologies for absence**

Nick Warren (Icklesham), Lisa Cooper (Rother District Council), Gillian Branford (Salehurst), Tracy Dixon (Brede), Mark Wey (Brede), Isla Dacey (East Sussex Highways), Pauline Glew (Sedlescombe), Christine Hampton (Hurst Green).

## **3. Accuracy of Minutes of the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021**

Item 6, page 2 – David Young was down as a representative from Burwash when in fact he is a representative of Ewhurst.

## **4. Matters arising from previous meeting (items on Agenda only)**

No discussion.

## **5. Caravan Sites – Council Tax, Peter Turner**

Peter Turner explained that he had brought forward this issue to the meeting as it is becoming of concern to his parish. Caravan sites started as holiday lets. What we are seeing now is a large number are operating 50 weeks of the year which means they are in effect residential sites. One of the reasons for that change is that when the sites began the caravans on them were owned by the site owners but nowadays most caravans are individually owned and rent is paid to the site owner. What has not changed is that in their origins they were treated as a business and rated for tax purposes at business rates which the parishes do not see. We now have all these individuals living in caravans up to 50 weeks of the year using the services parishes provide and we receive nothing from them. The reason for bringing it up is because unless it is dealt with on a national basis nothing will be done.

Graham Furness noted that it is not just the contribution with council tax it is also provision for schools, hospitals and other public bodies as census forms are not being completed by the caravan owners.

John Barnes noted a further problem with caravans/mobile homes being placed in private gardens. There are a number of issues that need to be taken up with the MP.

Trevor Leggo advised that RALC bring an item to ESALC meeting on 7 February. ESALC will send a recommendation to NALC's policy committee to be discussed and supported.

Peter Turner is to put a report together. Other parishes are invited to send their thoughts to Peter.

## **6. Highways**

Apologies received from Isla. Isla sent a written report to the secretary prior to the meeting. David read aloud Isla's report.

Written report will be sent to clerks.

### *Comments:*

Robert Franklin (Burwash) said he was disappointed Clare Dowling is not at the meeting. At RALC's last meeting it was agreed someone from East Sussex would come. Trevor was to arrange this. Clare has not turned up nor any representative. County is not taking these meetings seriously and bearing in mind as a group we represent probably about a third of the county's electors it seems to be really poor that they cannot have a customer service representative and an elected member at the meeting.

Trevor confirmed that after the last RALC meeting he spoke with Clare twice and Rupert Clubb who was anxious that Carl Taylor and his team got a grip of it. Carl contacted Trevor and said he was disappointed that parishes came to Trevor with their complaints and not him. Trevor thought that might be a comment on the confidence that the parishes had with the County Council. Trevor met with Carl and his management team at Ringmer Depot and certain actions were agreed and one was that a representative would attend the RALC meetings. It left the door open for us to go back with other issues should they arise. Trevor was hoping that today at them meeting parishes would have confirmed that their Highway Steward has made contact with them. It was agreed that a Highways Steward would at least once a month ring the parish clerk and make contact. If that is not happening Trevor will go back to Carl and say that it is not happening.

*Q: Trevor asked if Highways Stewards have made contact with individual parishes?*

David confirmed that the reason Isla was not at the meeting is because RALC did not get the invite sent to her and it clashed with a prior appointment of hers. David apologised.

David commented that Peasmarsh have been contacted and SLR set up for end of month.

No other parishes heard from Highways.

Trevor confirmed that after the last RALC meeting 16 of the 31 Rother parishes contacted him with Highways issues. Trevor asked parishes to let him know if they have or have not been contacted by a Highways Steward by end of the month so it can be reviewed at the beginning of February.

David confirmed RALC would ask members and relay responses to Trevor.

Karen Ripley confirmed that she has SLR meetings and what has improved with the County Councillor and Trevor's assistance is the use of website and the reports that her parish now get back when they report something. When they report via the website or email a customer service manager they are reporting back better. Karen pointed out to members to check with their clerks because you can sign up to an account with Highways on their website and if you do that you can see your reports and information.

Peter Turner confirmed that his parish are fortunate that their County Councillor happens to be the leader of the council so they tend to get a better service. For the general interest across the parishes, at this week's meeting we were told that he had identified one road in his parish and one shared with Pett parish where the construction is not standard so the pothole criteria will never come into force because there is not enough depth of tarmac covering the road surface. You get potholes in that the surface is stripping off but they never go deep enough to meet the criteria that County are currently using. They are looking in to it. Peter said that they find that problems with old roads that were laid during the war and immediately post war that the concrete strips with tarmac expansion joints have been surfaced but the surface is not deep enough to become a pothole within the current definition.

David confirmed similar problems within Peasmarsch.

John Barnes said that he thinks we need an update on the new contract because the definition of potholes was something the scrutiny committee at County had identified as a problem. John confirmed his recent experience with the Highways Steward was that they were pretty good at keeping contact but not proactive and they had to be chased.

Robert Franklin commented that we are not being taken seriously by County as an Association. At the last meeting we were expecting Clare to be here and to ask her why County was so reluctant to put a sign up at the end of a lane to say you can expect to meet horses, pedestrians and cyclists along the lane and said there as very little sense in discussing the matter if no one from County was at the meeting.

## **7. Quiet Lanes – Robert Franklin**

Robert confirmed he had been in correspondence with Highways, particularly about Willingford Lane, as they felt it is ideal for quiet lanes having four footpaths and two bridleways coming into it and it is continually used by horse riders, cyclists and pedestrians. At the last meeting there was support for discussing the issue with County. As a parish they are pursuing County. In relation to contracts, they wrote to Clare before Christmas and they still have not had a response. County seem reluctant to enter into a serious discussion.

County turned it down because of a study done over 12 years ago. Robert said that he thinks those of us that have rural parishes with quiet lanes that cars are being driven on far too fast and not considerate of pedestrians needs to get behind the quiet lanes initiative.

Robert explained that the initiative is that signs are put up at the beginning of a lane which notifies drivers that they should expect to meet horses, pedestrians and cyclists. Robert asked that as an Association all the parishes get behind the quiet lanes initiative and lean on County to do something. There is a story that it is too expensive. Robert would like to ask County why, as far as he understands it a Traffic Regulation Order is not required so it just needs County to adopt it as a policy.

Robert invited parishes to ask if they would like a definition of the quiet lanes policy then he would circulate it.

Jonathan Vine-Hall confirmed that he was very much behind the quiet lanes initiative but thinks that all County Council members need to support it as ultimately, they will vote on it. Perhaps that is an avenue we need to adopt.

Judy Petty confirmed Brightling share Willingford Lane with Burwash and they have been backing Burwash on the quiet lanes initiative.

*Q: At the last meeting John suggested we got RALC to lobby for 40 mph speed limits on rural lanes. Has there been any progress?*

John Barnes said that although he was supportive of quiet lanes, one of the problems that County has is that they did not think the policy was effective in bringing speeds down or making drivers aware. John would like to see it taken up nationally through EASLC and RALC as to whether unclassified roads should have a 40 mph, they currently have a 60mph speed limit. If a road is unclassified, it automatically should have a lower speed limit. That would be a start to get drivers to respect quiet lanes.

Trevor confirmed that West Sussex County Council is currently reviewing speed limits on rural roads where there are 60 mph speed limits with a view to reducing them to 40 mph. Trevor said that at the last ESALC board meeting Vanessa Rowlands, vice chairman of South Downs National Park, she is very keen to see quiet lanes which falls within the National Park. If they came to pass or pressure was put on County then it might have the effect of creating the precedent needed to enable it to be put in place elsewhere.

*David Pankhurst Q: – Is our MP Huw Merriman Chair of the Transport Committee?*

Trevor said yes Head of Transport Select Committee who could be approached through NALC.

RALC to put on Agenda for April meeting.

*David Pankhurst Q: - Can we organise someone from county to be at next meeting?*

Trevor will ask Carl Taylor for his attendance.

## **8. Trevor Leggo – ESALC**

Parishes should have received the details of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee weekend on 2-5 June 2022 sent on 4 January.

The Queen's Green Canopy is being fronted by Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex in each county. It is an encouragement for parishes to plant trees in recognition of the Queen's 70 years on the throne.

At the NALC meeting there were the following items to note:-

1. Pay award for clerks: The local government pay award is from 1 April – 31 March but it has not been settled yet. The employers made a final offer in October of 1.75% but this was considered unacceptable to the trade unions who are balloting for strike action. It was suggested that an interim payment be made. There are no details yet.
2. Remote meeting – government has rejected the resurrection of virtual meetings for councils of all tiers. Lord Green made a statement in the House of Lords to that effect, saying that government is still considering the call for evidence, which happened in June, where all local authorities were asked to say the impact on meetings during Covid and make a case for remote meetings. That has been rejected by government who are looking at The Local Government Act 1972 to see if it needs to be updated to allow for virtual meetings.
3. The four priorities of NALC are (1) Look to reform the Standards Regime. (2) Health and health care. (3) Remote meetings (4) Stability and respect.

In relation to the police, a number of parishes will have been involved in the recent round of focus groups where the local inspector attends and someone from the Police and Crime Commissioner's office. A report has been prepared for the Police and Crime Commissioner's office and chief constable.

On 25 February the chief constable is doing a presentation to say they are now using big data and that data is helping to identify where they need to target resources. You will see every month a report from Inspector Ollie Fisher from rural policing team which is detailed and informative.

## **9. Rother Matters**

Sue Prochak confirmed her support for the quiet lanes initiative.

On 17 February at 2 pm RDC are launching a lottery. Part of the ticket money goes to good causes. More information will be circulated.

In relation to the Jubilee, grants of up to £500 can be applied for from RDC for community events. They are usually match funded and the applications have to come from organisations. The grants are awarded on a first come first served basis.

There has been a meeting with the climate emergency working group. RDC have ringfenced a portion of seal money for environment projects (approx. £700,000). If anyone wants to put a bid in for some money.

RDC are launching an enforcement strategy. It has not updated since 2016. RDC have not sent it out to formal consultant but during discussions RDC want to include parishes and town councils. An event will be organised to include parishes on enforcement strategy.

From the cabinet meeting RDC intend to set up a group to protect discretionary services, such as toilets, car parks and other Rother services that they are seeking to find the best way forward to retain them.

Biffa have launched an investigation into decarbonising their waste vehicles. A report will be published in March.

In relation to electric vehicle charging points in car parks, there is a report coming up. If any parishes would like to be included in this work could you let Sue or Deborah Kenneally know (officer working on report).

The Environment Act is now legal. It states that we have to provide free garden waste collections and food waste collections. They do need extra legislation to come into force.

There are some new business grants. Parishes were advised to look at the RDC website for details.

There is a new deputy chief executive starting, Lorna Ford.

Jonathan Vine-Hall spoke about the seal. Going back a few months parishes was asked to contribute what they felt were infrastructure needs in their parishes. They have had responses and recommends parishes to go back and look at it. It is really important particularly with housing developments.

The seal strategy prior 2019 was to gather all the money from rural areas and spend on Bexhill. Very little money has been spent on infrastructure on rural areas. The new strategy ensures there is capacity to spend the seal money where development occurs throughout the district. 20% of the whole fund is being put to climate emergency.

RDC have restructured the planning department in September. There is an Interim development manager with lots of experience. They have managed to clear approximately 200 - 300 of the backlog of applications.

Enforcement have dealt with many applications that needed decisions. A new enforcement strategy will clearly define time scales for enforcement. This was reviewed by the planning committee. It will be clear what you can expect in what time frame for what enforcement.

Applicaiton advice has been reintroduced from January and the charges have been increased. The commitment is that the that advise will come through within the time frame and the intention is that if you get pre application advice and take it your application should go through without concern.

There has been an introduction of a planning agreement for larger applications, such as developers, that they will buy into where they will get a more dedicated service. Those applications will be given more dedication without detracting from smaller applications.

Malcolm Johnson confirmed that government has provided approximately £175,000 for a covid additional relief fund which is designed for businesses that did not receive help from previous covid funds. A report is going to cabinet in February and more details will be published.

*David Penfold – Q: Does the grant for the Jubilee fund also apply for permanent reminders, such as a bench?*

Sue confirmed the grant only does not apply to fireworks.

Trevor confirmed that regarding electric vehicle charging in West Sussex. There is a countywide scheme where 6 of 7 districts bought into same arrangement. Is RDC being done in isolation or being done with other counties such as Wealden or Lewes?

Sue confirmed it is being done in isolation. East Sussex have not yet produced a strategy and it is expected they are to focus on street charging points and Hasting Borough Council have already started to put charging points in their car parks.

Trevor said that West Sussex is looking at all public buildings, owned by charities and those owned or managed by the council. They are working in parentship with Connected Kerb who will install the equipment and provide the infrastructure so no cost falls upon land owner who will grant a licence for installation of cabling and supply.

*David Penfold Q:– At the beginning of December the ESALC office sent out a copy letter that was sent by several Wealden parishes to regarding the punitive algorithm for housing needs and asking them to revise it. Would RALC wish to associate itself with the initiate?*

Trevor confirmed that he is to attend a Wealden meeting tonight and will come back to RALC once he has a better understanding of it.

Bob Franklin confirmed the Burwash clerk and several others are getting together to start the ball rolling on a similar letter addressed to RDC.

## **10. Project Updates**

Speeding Keith – introduced Inspector Olivia Carroll.

Originally the objectives of the RALC meetings were to get more enforcement on speeding to try and change the law around penalties. Data has been collected for the last year and half in regards to speeding above the speed limit and trying to get more enforcement. It has happened on a local basis. Catsfield has proved Black Cat data can be used and the data has been provided to the police. The police have responded and in Catsfield, have enforced through education.

You need to use data to be allocated the resources and there is a new police speed management system that is not yet approved that should collect data from all different sources. That is what is going to drive resource allocation.

Catsfield has proved that data is the way forward. Everything you do requires data. Catsfield has been sharing data with Safer Sussex Roads Partnership and the new speed management programme and East Sussex. Catsfield and Peasmarsh are now on the database.

We are represented via Safer Sussex Roads but there may be consensus that we have not received great service. Rural parishes have not had a say on getting support.

Catsfield is to keep collecting data which allows us to prove what is correct.

Jonathan Vine-Hall discussed Black Cat data training. It was decided that we need one single laptop to deal with data. Training sessions are to be arranged. 9 parishes have signed up. This is an on-site training session. Part of the training will be how to get licences for each site.

*Keith Q: – can we continue until bigger system is available to get support locally through neighbourhood policing teams?*

Inspector Carroll had difficulties connecting to the meeting via zoom.

Inspector Carroll will provide a written update.

## **11. General Discussion on the future of RALC & RALC Subscriptions**

David confirmed RALC has sufficient funds at the moment but, depending on where members want to take RALC in the future, we need to consider raising the subscriptions. David asked members for their input as to what they wanted to see from RALC going forward. David further asked how members wished to meet, either virtually or physically.

*Q: - Issy Horsley asked could we have written reports. A lot of time is listening to lot of information. Written reports given prior to RALC meetings.*

Bob Franklin said that RALC was badly served by County officers. We require attendance from County.

The general consensus for members was alternate face to face and virtual meetings. Afternoons were the preference.



David confirmed the RALC Exec will meet to discuss subscriptions and would add an item to the April meeting's agenda.

## **12. Dates of Next Meetings**

6 April 2022 (Battle)