

Minutes of Ruscombe Parish Council's Annual Parish Meeting on Wednesday 11th May 2022 at 8pm in Twyford Room, Loddon Hall

Parish Councillors In attendance: Mr Mike Evans (Chair), Mr Paul Cassidy, Mr Justin May, Mrs Jane Holmes, and Mr Paul Evans

Guest Speaker: Laura Buck Wokingham Borough Council The Tree Project

Public: 7 members of the public

Clerk: Mrs Ruth Reid

Mike Evans opened the meeting at 8pm and gave introductions and Ruth Reid gave fire precautions for Loddon Hall.

- 1) Laura Buck – Wokingham Borough Council Tree Project.** This project is going to plant 250,000 new trees in Wokingham over the next 4 years. The project came about after WBC declared a climate emergency in 2019 and will achieve 3.1 kilo tons of carbon sequestration 2 years after the end of the tree-planting project. WBC has received £30,000 grant from the Woodland Trust to help with the costs of the project, this will include the purchase of native saplings or whips, protection guards for the trees and the costs of planting. There are also many other costs, land surveys for example, and these will be met by Matched funding. The surveys will include how much land they have offered, who is interested in hosting trees and is the land suitable for planting. WBC has already begun planting, so far they have planted 15,400 trees on smaller sites and interested residents have had trees planted in their gardens. WBC has 17 schools interested in planting and public open spaces (Dinton Pastures, Charvil Meadows, Barkham Playing fields and others). These 250,000 trees are extra to the trees that will be planted with new housing developments. WBC are committed to having the right tree in the right place, this is assessed by soil type, space, no competition (weeds or other trees or plants could compete for water) and having mulch in place to help the sapling grow. During years 3 to 5 of the project is when WBC will be planting up the larger sites (sites more than 5 hectares). WBC will use the WBC Engage website for future consultations for the project and this will include other opportunities for residents to host trees. WBC will be using native saplings from the UK or Ireland to prevent new pests from entering the UK. WBC had 840 applications from residents to host a tree for the Garden Forest scheme and 802 of them were successful. WBC is intending to plant trees with a space of 3 meters between, although typically trees are planted 1.5 to 2.5 meters apart, WBC has gone wider to allow more sunlight down to the ground to support more life at ground level. Hedgerows will be planted much closer, usually 0.5m but they are obviously very different and support different wildlife. WBC will be applying for Tree City of the World, but one of the requirements is to have a policy in place, which WBC is preparing and will have ready in early 2023.

Question: Will these trees be part of the Queens Jubilee trees? No, the Queen's Jubilee trees are being managed by a separate team but The Tree Project is happy to support any Tree Proposals that people want to put forward for the Queens Jubilee trees.

Question: How will the change to WBC leadership affect this project? They hope it will not have an impact, but we have to wait and see how WBC will be led.

Question: How much land is required to plant 250,000 trees? WBC is expecting approximately 250 hectares but this will depend on what areas are able to be planted.

Question: Why is it 250,000 trees that the project wants to plant? This was calculated before Laura was with WBC but she believes that calculation is related to the number of residents and the carbon output.

Mike Evans thanked Laura for a very interesting presentation.

2) Approval of the minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting 27th May 2021: Proposed by Paul Cassidy, seconded by Justin May and approved unanimously.

3) Chair report: Justin May (outgoing chair) gave thanks to all councillors and volunteers and reported that he has been RPC chair for 4 years but has now stepped down although will remain as RPC councillor. Justin explained that during his time as chair, RPC has broadly seen off the threat of Greenbelt development, although RPC will now have to wait and see how the change in leadership for WBC affects the Local Plan, Justin is confident the development will not be in the Greenbelt. RPC has added new benches, bridge painting, community orchard and flower planters, as well as producing and submitting the Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan.

Mike Evans (New chair) gave thanks to

- Justin May for his leadership through difficult times, including a lot of successful initiatives as Justin has just spoken about.
- Clerk, Ruth, outstanding job with serious responsibilities including admin, finances, communication...
- Councillors: Paul Cassidy (Vice-Chair), Gary Merrick (Planning Chair), Paul Evans (Planning Vice-Chair), Carol Bulman,
- Jane Holmes, Justin May - remaining. All have made significant contributions to the council's business.
- Volunteers, Residents, Local Organisation's inc. Econet, CROW, Twyford & Ruscombe Hist Sov, Sundew Ecology, O'Neill Homer (NP consultants)
- Mike welcomed new councillors Graham Howe, our WBC Ward Councillor, just re-elected and Paul Evans.

RPC has had a busy year

- Maintenance and improvements for the environment,
- RPC has worked on Boundary signs: London Road improvement with TPC collaboration is due to be installed very soon, and we hope to get one Ruscombe Lane so residents know they live in Ruscombe!
- RPC with the help of Twyford and Ruscombe History Society has installed a History board on the green by St James church.

- RPC with the help of Sundew Ecology has produced Walking maps - see website
- Trees: RPC has planted new & replacement cherries on N. Avenue. RPC has applied for new TPOs: some obtained, some in progress,
- Planning - continues to be a major activity: Paul E (Planning Vice-Chair) will elaborate.
- Neighbourhood Plan will cover separately. Volunteers & consultants & residents are much involved,
- As we probably all know Berkeley Homes ran a press campaign re. building 2500 homes on green belt land. As if an official consultation. It quoted attractions such as a new station - Ruscombe Parkway. This development was strongly opposed by RPC - leaflets to all RG10 encouraging support for WBC Local Plan choice of development locations via their (official) consultation.
- RPC is in a good financial position: sound, sufficient funds. CIL provides opportunities for improvements to infrastructure. Ruth will cover this in more detail.
- RPC has reduced the Precept - the part of the council tax that is paid to the parish council by -1%.

Looking ahead, RPC would like to

- Continue work to encourage Environment friendliness inc Trees
- Continue to protect the Green Belt
- Pay close attention to planning matters
- Listening to our community

RPC will look out for WBC Local Plan progress of great interest

- NP Referendum, RPC will notify the residents of when this will take place and will ask that the residents come and vote to support RPC Neighbourhood Plan
- Planning system changes (including proposal to have residents voting on applications for extensions), as announced in the Queen's speech this week.

4) Planning report: Presented by Paul Evans, RPC Planning Vice-Chair reported that in the year April 2021 to April 2022 has seen the RPC was invited to comment on 27 planning applications. This number was made up of 21 domestic properties and 6 commercial premises. This was an increase of 4 more than the previous year. It was believed that we would receive a number of applications for the conversion of commercial buildings both retail and offices to become residential, but this has not happened in our parish. This is encouraging as it shows the businesses continue to be successful.

5) Neighbourhood Plan Update: Mike Evans reported The Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan will establish a set of planning policies for the future, based on input from the community. The Draft Plan Pre-submission (Regulation 14) Consultation took place between 22nd February and 19th April 2021. The Draft Plan was made available online or in printed form if requested, and a summary paper, inviting comments, was distributed to all households in Ruscombe. The Draft Plan was also made available to statutory consultees (e.g. neighbouring councils, utility companies, Network Rail). Responses to the consultation resulted in some minor changes. Following the consultation Interchanges between RPC / O'Neill Homer / WBC. RPC Neighbourhood

plan was submitted and accepted by WBC Sept 2021. Reg 16 exam completed Feb - March 2022. Neighbourhood Plan is currently held up by WBC because of appointing an examiner that RPC agrees to. RPC has taken advice from ONeill Homer who has worked directly with all three potential examiners and RPC would like to go with ONeill Homer's recommendation. Independent Examiner now appointed. Findings awaited. Will be a referendum following the independent examination.

- 6) Financial report:** Ruth Reid Clerk to RPC reported that RPC began the year with £138,841. They have received a total of £47,583 and spent £64,377 and finish the year with £122,047. This total includes £47,207 of Community Infrastructure Levy, this is money that can only be spent on infrastructure and if anyone has any suggestions of how to use the money, please do suggest them to RPC, they are always happy to consider suggestions.

RPC's Income is made up of Precept, insurance claim, VAT refund and CIL.

RPC's spending this year includes 3 new street lamps, energy for the street lamps, grants, Pennfield's community Orchard, the environment, pond maintenance, and walking maps, to name a few.

7) Questions:

When is RPC Neighbourhood Plan referendum likely to be? RPC does not know yet, but they will notify all residents.

Could CIL be used for CCTV? CIL could be used for CCTV in public spaces but not applied to any individual's property. RPC will look at security and review Street lighting.

Is there any update on what is happening with the Glebeland? Unfortunately, RPC does not have an update but RPC will ask the diocese for one.

A member of the public thanked RPC for the new trees and wildflower seeds.

Mike Evans closed the meeting at 8:58pm

Chair Signed _____

Date _____