

Minutes of Ruscombe Parish Council's Annual Parish Meeting on Wednesday 24th May 2023 at 8pm in Twyford Room, Loddon Hall

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

Apologies: Mr Paul Evans

Guest Speaker: Stephen Conway, Leader Wokingham Borough Council

Public: 2 members of the public

Clerk: Mr Graham Winder

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

- 1) Stephen Conway – Leader, Wokingham Borough Council.** Mr Conway shared an overview of the impact of forthcoming boundary changes in the borough. He told the meeting that these changes will change the political landscape since both parliamentary and local government boundaries will be affected.

The process is overseen by the Boundaries Commission which attempts to ensure that roughly equal numbers of people are in each ward or constituency. They also try to respect community cohesion by attempting to aggregate and not to divide.

On the parliamentary side, it was concluded that Maidenhead western point should move to Wokingham. The western part of Wokingham moves to a new constituency called Woodley & Earley. This recreates the original makeup where we were part of Wokingham.

The changes will be put to parliament. It is thought that the change favour the current government party. MPs may resist some changes but it is still very likely to happen.

On the local government side the change, all wards are to have three councillors. Many of northern Wokingham Borough are not three councillor wards. Majority and minority options were presented but the Boundary Commission insisted on the three councillor wards. The proposal is to create one new ward e.g. Thameside or Northern.

Ruscombe is back in with Twyford, creating a Twyford, Ruscombe and Hurst, three councillor ward.

Under the different system, Ruscombe would be connected with Twyford and Hurst.

In 2024 there will be all-out elections due to the changes. These will be allocated by thirds, starting with lowest votes received for a councillor.

The total number of councillors is 54 and stays the same. Divided by 3 into 18 wards.

Most changes are in the North and South with very little in the centre.

Mike Evans asked Stephen if the name is going to be Twyford, Ruscombe and Hurst. This was confirmed.

Mike Evans thanked Stephen for a very interesting and informative talk.

8.19pm Mr Conway left the meeting.

2) Approval of the minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting 11th May 2022: Proposed by Gary Merrick, seconded by Mike Evans and approved unanimously.

3) Chair Report: Mike Evans shared with the meeting that Ruth Reid had to leave as Clerk after a tremendous contribution and that he was now pleased to have Graham Winder on board to accept the challenges. He also shared that Carol Bulman left and was replaced with Anne Hasted, bringing the Council back up to the full strength of 8 councillors.

Mike Evans gave thanks to

- Graham Winder (Clerk).
- Councillors: Paul Cassidy (Vice Chair), Gary Merrick (Planning Chair), Paul Evans (Planning Vice Chair).
- Jane Holmes, Justin May and Graham Howe.
- Volunteers, Residents, Local Organisation's inc. Econet, CROW and O'Neill Homer (NP consultants).
- Twyford Parish Council for a good collaborative relationship.

Mike Evans highlighted key Events and Achievements

- Pennfields Orchard is showing encouraging signs.
- Wildlife Verge on London Road.
- Railings installed Castle End Pond.
- Copper Beech tree planted in memory of QE II.
- Northbury Avenue cherry trees replaced and doing well.
- Planters and hanging baskets doing well.
- New London Road boundary sign.
- Street lighting, looking after them and electricity costs.
- Fair time spent on planning applications, reflecting the views of residents.
- Grant requests from local charities

Looking ahead, RPC would like to

- NP moving forward after a delay. Gary will talk about that.
- Local press picked up on RPC concerns with naming the ward.
- The WBC Local Plan – this is a big challenge. RPC is not sure of the content or the timing. RPC will do its best to represent the residents of Ruscombe.

4) Planning report: Presented by Gary Merrick, RPC Planning Chair. Gary reported that in the year April 2021 to March 2023 has seen the RPC was invited to comment on 9 planning applications. This is a significant decrease on the prior year likely due to impact on house values. The prior year included adaptations due to home offices. The demise of conservatories being replaced by extensions as a result of owners re-organising space was notable.

5) Neighbourhood Plan Update: Presented by Gary Merrick, RPC Planning Chair. Reported. Gary provided background that a number of years ago the government decided that there should be parish input on local planning. RPC took stock of characteristics, 80% green belt, pub and church but not doctors or schools.

Houses were different. Four storey office blocks would not fit in. Aim was to create a guide for the WBC planners but cannot preserve a parish, we have to understand that development must take place. We think Northbury Lane is most likely to be developed.

Going forward, there is a document which took the best part of two years to create. It takes into account wildlife, green spaces, house of character etc.

The process should have been straightforward. We consulted with residents then published for public feedback. It went to an external examiner but the first time it went wrong. It was submitted May 2022 but our examiner had personal issues and the report was useless. The NP had to be withdrawn and re-submitted. We should have a finished result by October 2023.

The key benefit – it has a standing in terms of planning. It will influence approval of inappropriate development.

Once the NP is approved, it becomes part of planning law.

CIL Money will come as a consequence of development although this is not directly linked to the NP. However the NP can affect the allocation of CIL Money.

6) Financial report: Graham Winder Clerk to RPC reported that RPC began the year with £122,048. They have received a total of £35,440 and spent £28,874 and finish the year with £131,460. This total includes £63,031 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 key spending this year includes ponds, wildflowers, orchards, trees and energy for streetlighting as well as costs associated with the Neighbourhood Plan submission.

7) Questions:

Has RPC considered planting a Coronation Tree? There may be space in the Pennfields Recreation Site. Mike Evans will look into this.

Any news on the Glebeland. No movement at all. This is out of the hands of the church and is now with the Diocese.

Mike Evans closed the meeting at 8:51pm

Chair Signed _____

Date _____