

Pett Parish Council

Chair's Report – Parish Meeting – March 2018

We started the year in a difficult position. As the council had become inquorate, the District and County councillors were co-opted. They served for several months. Their contributions, particularly those of Councillors Saint and Bird, were much appreciated, as were those of Councillor Robin Patten, who agreed to be co-opted. Thus the council at that time comprised:

- David Penfold (chair)
- Alan Crouch
- Robin Patten
- Steve Taylor

+ the District and County Councillors

The month of May brought two principal changes:

- As a result of boundary changes, Cllr Keith Glazier again became our county councillor (thanks to Cllr Carl Maynard, who had served as our county councillor for 12 years)
- The clerk, Sarah Willoughby resigned for reasons that she explained at the next Council meeting.

We were lucky to be able to obtain the services of Anna Evett, Clerk at Icklesham, who acted as acting clerk. Unfortunately, for family reasons, she was unable to take on the job on a permanent basis, but I would like to thank her for her support. However, we were again lucky in obtaining the services of Mary Philo as our new clerk. Mary was already clerk at Iden and Appledore and her experience is already proving of great benefit to the council. I would also like to thank Mary Saint for taking the minutes at one meeting.

In the mean time, we were able co-opt back onto the council, Judith Dean, Mike Wilkins and Stuart Ware, which allowed the District and County Councillors to stand down. Councillor Patten also decided to stand down as he felt, in his own words, that he had “fulfilled his purpose”. We are grateful to him for his advice and wisdom during a difficult period. The

current make-up of the council is currently as listed in Pett Parish News (and on the website – <https://www.pettnet.org.uk/parish-council/councillors-responsibilities>); we still have one vacancy.

So, what has happened? Most of this has been covered in the Parish News (but probably not everything):

- The residents of Canal Bank decided that they were happy with their address and postcode as it is;
- There have been a number of problems at the children's playground and, although it is quite safe, the surrounds for both the climbing tower and the slide will shortly be improved, subject to the weather. The fencing will shortly be repaired, as will the gate and fencing at the entrance to the Recreation Field.
- The surface water drainage at the Recreation Ground has now been connected up to a new system at Gatehurst Farm, which will mean that there should be no more risk of flooding at the farm. An easement to cover future maintenance and access is being prepared. We are grateful to Mr and Mrs Barker for their help and cooperation in making this possible.
- The foul water at the Recreation Ground is still being removed by tanker from the cesspit. This has necessitated hiring portable toilets for the Flower Show once again, but future options are still being explored.
- During the past year, all matters to do with the Pavilion have been settled and, once again, I would like to thank Stuart Ware for all his pro bono work in managing this project.
- The Pett Level "gateway" has had some repair work done to it and it has been repainted.
- There have been some issues with the Marsham Petty Sewer, which Councillor Saint has been involved with. This takes waste water from Fairlight, but then runs through Pett Level to the Royal Military Canal. There has been concern about the volume of water and also, at times, raw sewage, flowing through the Sewer (which is not a sewer in the commonly understood sense). Some of the banks have also collapsed. Discussions with the relevant authorities are continuing.

- There has been some concern over the route of the Saxon Shore Way, where it crosses the Royal Military Canal (into the Smuggler car park, which is potentially a brown-field site). However, as this is a designated footpath, even if there were development on the car park, which is not even a possibility at present, the route of the footpath would be protected.
- Pett Road and Chick Hill have been resurfaced from the junction with Elms Lane to the bottom of Chick Hill. The rest of Pett Road will be covered by patching, probably in 2018.
- Information panels have been discussed, thanks to Fran Rogers, and the 'petrified forest' notice has been replaced (although the case needs some work), while negotiations with the Environment Agency continue over the replacement or repair of the board about the Royal Military Canal by the toilets in Pett Level. It has been suggested that more information signs could be put up around the village, but this is still at a discussion stage.
- "Clean up after your dog" signs have been put up on the footpath opposite the church.
- Cllr Saint has distributed notices discouraging speeding. Guestling Council is trying to bring Speedwatch back to life, but this requires volunteers.
- It has been agreed to put up a new Parish sign at the top of Rosemary Lane, but this has to be approved by East Sussex Highways.
- There have been one or two caravan-related incidents on Chick Hill. The Council has approached Highways over improved signage.
- Planning: there has been a regular flow of planning applications, on which the council has commented. Most have caused no problem, but there was a great deal of discussion and many comments from parishioners about the proposal to set up a camp site in Pannel Lane, involving the construction of passing places. Planning permission was eventually refused by Rother District Council. It is understood that the Parish Council's comments were taken into account. A current planning application that is causing some controversy relates to vehicle access along the narrow lane off the top of Chick Hill. This has yet to be resolved.

- Policies: we are gradually putting in place a series of policies, health and safety, discipline etc. These are on the web site and a few others will follow.
- As almost everyone will know, we have a new web site for the village. While this is partly the Parish Council site, run by the clerk, it is also intended to provide a site for all village activities. I am very pleased that Tim Rothwell has agreed to act as webmaster and I would like to thank him, both for being willing to take this on and also for what he has achieved so far. One aspect of the site is to act as an archive and Tim would very much like to receive any old photographs and other documents so that they can be scanned for the site. You will, of course, get them back! In this connection, I would also like to thank Mike Wilkins for all his work in setting up the site.
- In connection with the web site, you will also see that the councillors and the clerk all now have new email addresses. These are given in the Parish News.
- It has been pointed out that not everyone has Internet access and therefore will not necessarily have access to documents referred to at council meetings (and in my reports in the Parish News). Any such documents, including correspondence, will be available at council meetings, but it may occasionally be possible to supply hard copy in response to a request to the clerk or myself.
- We have a new highways steward, Isla Dacey. However, any highways problems should be reported at www.eastsussexhighways.com or on 0345 6080193. Incidentally, the Highways web site also gives details of all planned roadworks.
- The council has decided to provide a framework for Project Remember, the project to restore the War Memorial, about which you will be hearing later. It will also administer the associated appeal fund and a special bank account has been set up for this. Nevertheless, the actual details of what is to be done have to be finalised and agreed. This may well also involve the Parochial Church Council.
- The Council has made a number of grants in the last year. These include to POPP, to Pett and Guestling Community Friends, to the Methodist Church for heating and lighting for the Post Office and to the PCC for upkeep of the churchyard. It also agreed to pay for rabbit-proof fencing for the allotments. The Council is, however, reviewing the procedure for applying for, and approval of, grants. This does not

mean that they will be reduced, only that there will be a more formal procedure and thus more control of this use of public money.

- We heard in January about the England Coastal path. For more information see the link in my February report in the Parish News.

Recently:

- The Parish now owns the telephone box opposite the Royal Oak, having paid £1.00 for it, and the council is looking into the options for installing a defibrillator
- Mr Barker of Gatehurst Farm has confirmed that Andrew Norcott, the farm manager, will maintain the camino. Indeed, he has now worked on the South end and installed steps, so that it is possible to walk all the way through. In case anyone is in any doubt, although I thought I made myself clear in the last issue of the Parish News, this work is being carried out *pro bono* and we should be grateful to both Mr Barker and Mr Norcott for this contribution to the village amenities.
- A new contractor, Id Verde (which mows the recreation ground) has taken over the village maintenance contract.
- And, of course, I must mention the Village Hall. For the sake of the record, I note that, as a result of a claim for injury to a person playing badminton, the insurance company has decided that they will not cover people playing action sports in the Hall (unless a special mat is put down) and thus the Village Hall Management Committee (VHMC) has decided that badminton can no longer be played. This has led to various recriminations, following which the members of VHMC have all decided not to stand again at the AGM in May. I am not concerned with the past; it is very easy to be wise after the event and, apart from regretting the spate of personal criticism and comment that has poured forth in the last few weeks and which helps no one, all I wish to say about this is to thank all the members of the VHMC for their service to the village – and, indeed, to thank all those in the village who are involved in the organisation and management of activities. However, the Village Hall can only function if there are eight trustees (who form the VHMC). I am hoping that a few members of the current VHMC will decide that they will stand again and I also have

the names of a number of villagers who are willing to stand. Nevertheless, we are looking for a few more volunteers to take responsibility for this important village asset. It has been suggested that we hold a village meeting in April to consider this and this may well happen. I would also add that, contrary to popular belief, the Parish Council does not take over responsibility of the Village Hall if there are not eight trustees elected. The matter then has to be referred to the Charity Commission, which may decide to close the Hall. In order that we do not reach this stage, please think whether you (or your neighbour) would be willing to put your name forward for this important role. If you want to know more, please contact the chair of the VHMC, Phil Button, or myself.

There have sadly been a number of deaths during the year, both of those in the parish and nearby. We remember Ginny Jackson, Janet Crook, Marion Woodward, Kay Jury, Jill Chinnery, David Darnell, Nick Ramus and Prof. Brian Bellhouse. If I have missed anyone, I apologise.

The Council is also looking at the ramifications of GDPR, the General Data Protection Regulations, which come into force in May. Councillor Dean, the clerk and I have attended a briefing on this and we are working out how to take such actions as are needed.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow councillors and the clerk for their work and support throughout the past year, so that I think we can say that the council is in a much better position than it was this time last year.