

Chair's Report, Pett Parish Meeting 2019

Last four years

Not always easy. Resignations meant that the council was no longer quorate, requiring the county and district councillors to be co-opted onto the council. I am grateful to them for their contributions at a difficult time. Fortunately, we were able to co-opt new councillors, which meant that the county and district councillors were able to step down. In addition, the clerk resigned, but we were again fortunate in being able to obtain the services of Anna Evett on a temporary basis and then our present clerk, Mary Philo, on a more permanent basis. She has been working very hard to get us back on an even keel and I am very grateful to her and to Anna for their work. I would also like to thank all the councillors who have served in the last four years as well as our district and county councillors. I should note that, following boundary changes, Keith Glazier again became our county councillor, following Carl Maynard, who had served us well over the preceding 12 years.

Probably the major development in the last four years has been the reconstruction of the pavilion. I would again like to thank Stuart Ware for all his work on that project. The other major project has been 'Project Remember, but I will come to that later.

The last year

Now we come to the year now ended. As I have just said, the biggest activity has been the restoration of the War Memorial in time for the centenary of the Armistice at the end of World War I. I would like to thank, not only the committee who put a lot of time and effort into the project, but also all those who contributed to the project, either by making a cash donation or by donating their labour or materials. In parallel, of course, the WI organised the making of the hundreds, if not thousands, of poppies, which so effectively decorated the church over the armistice weekend. Thanks go to all who organised, knitted or crocheted. I should also add that a book 'The Fallen of Pett' has been produced to commemorate the project. The first print run has almost sold out, but more copies are on the way.

What else has happened in the last twelve months? At the Recreation Field, the gates have been renewed, some dead trees have been removed and the playground has had a partial

make-over; the final piece, the renewal of the beams on the climbing tower, has happened in the last few weeks. Emptying of the cesspit has, I am please to say, not been as frequent as had been anticipated, so alternative plans are on hold. It had been thought that a persistent leak in the water supply somewhere under the field would mean that some major works would be necessary, but ongoing discussions with the Bowls Club to provide an alternative water supply look as though the work will not be necessary, at least not at present.

Elsewhere, the purchase of the telephone box opposite the Royal Oak was completed and a defibrillator installed, with the much appreciated support of Rother Responders. The council has also arranged for various signposts to be repaired, as well as adding signs to the toilets at Pett Level to try and discourage people from walking along the main road. A decision on whether the Royal Military Canal information sign will be reinstated near the toilets in Pett Level has been delayed until the future of the toilets and car park is clear. There have been no developments on this in the last 12 months.

And, while on the subject of road safety, I am pleased to say that SpeedWatch has been brought back to life again. This is a joint project between Pett, Fairlight and Guestling, but I am sad to say that there are hardly any volunteers from Pett, in spite of the complaints about speeding in the village. A session was planned by the church in recent weeks, but had to be cancelled on account of the weather. Please think about volunteering.

And, on the topic of signs, the village sign at the top of Rosemary Lane is due to be replaced, but negotiations with Highways have taken longer than expected. The resurfacing of the road through the village was, of course, also a Highways activity. While I am sure that we are all pleased to see a new road surface, the timing and communications about the work left something to be desired and a complaint was forwarded to the Highways Department, who apologised. Cllr Glazier was helpful in this. There has also been discussion with Highways about wildflower banks and with several departments of East Sussex County Council about footpaths.

We are grateful to the owners of Gatehurst Farm for maintaining the 'camino', which means that people do not have to walk along the narrow part of Pett Road towards Chick Hill. Rother DC have agreed to subsidise the cutting of the roadside grass verges for another year. This may be the last year this happens, so the cost of this may have to be taken into account when setting the precept for 2020-21.

The council has paid for rabbit-proof fencing at the allotments, which the Allotments Association installed. The allotments lease ends next year and negotiations have begun with the landowner about renewing it.

In terms of administrative matters, there have been various changes:

- Councillor Steve Taylor resigned because he did not feel that he was giving enough time to the council. Our thanks to him for his contributions at a difficult time.
- The Council has decided to meet bimonthly rather than monthly.
- The Council has formally confirmed that it is responsible for the Pett Parish News and a statement to this effect is included in each issue. (This follows some unfortunate letters.) Can I also thank all those who work on PPN and all those who deliver it.
- The chairs, vice-chairs and clerks of Pett, Guestling and Fairlight have now met twice to consider matters of joint interest (for example, Speedwatch and planning issues such as the application for 150 houses at Wakeham's Farm); at present meetings are planned on a quarterly basis.
- The council has adopted a series of policies, all of which are posted on the website.
- Following Village Hall insurance problems last year, the council is being much stricter about insurance at the Recreation Field. A claim for a broken windscreen was rejected by the insurance company.
- Through Rother District Council, the parish council now has a subscription to the mapping website www.parish-online, which can show many aspects of the parish (AONBs, SSSIs, house names and much more). It is also possible to add information. More about this will be made public in due course.

The new parish website goes from strength to strength and we are grateful to Tim Rothwell for all his work on this. He has also taken on the chairmanship of the Village Hall Committee and our thanks go to him and all members of that committee for all their hard work.

Following the problems of last year, the insurance policy has been renewed, badminton is now again being played and the hall seems to be flourishing. A possible development at the hall is the setting up of an Archive Resource Centre, but this is still at an early stage. We are also grateful to Tim and Anne Jury and their helpers for taking on the monthly coffee morning and the community library, following the demise of the mobile library. And, of course, we should thank Ray Barden for his 40 years of service and congratulate him again on the award of the British Empire Medal.

The Council has made a number of grants in the last year. These include to:

- the Kent Air Ambulance
- the Methodist Church for heating and lighting for the Post Office
- the PCC for upkeep of the churchyard
- Pett Piranhas (young people's cricket club) towards an all-weather playing mat

The Council will shortly agree a policy for grants and donations.

Almost finally, there is planning! There have been a number of quite controversial issues this year and I don't want to rehearse them all. Perhaps the two that have caused most discussion are the Pannel Lane campsite and the plans for developing The Smuggler at Pett Level. The appeal by the campsite owners against the Rother decision not to approve the application was successful, but there are a lot of conditions attached to it, so we shall have to see how this develops. The original Smuggler planning application was withdrawn after considerable public opposition. To date no further application has been submitted.

There have, of course, been other things happening in the village for which the council takes no credit. For example, Open Gardens in aid of the Hospice was very successful and is being repeated this year.

There have sadly been a number of deaths during the year, both of those in the parish and nearby. We remember Pauline Brown, Mary Carr, Amanda Crisford, Joan Slack, Brian Butler, Nick Jones, Robert Lee and Revd Frank Rowson. If I have missed anyone, I apologise.

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 that, after a difficult year or so, we have established a firm base on which the new council can build.