

PARISH OF COCKING

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF ELECTORS

27 MARCH 2023, 7PM

AT THE VILLAGE HALL, BELL LANE, COCKING

PRESENT

Parish Councillors Miss F Russell. (Chairman in the Chair), A Cornwell, D Imlach, Jane Elliott-Renney, Mrs J Jackson, D Summerfield and approximately 22 residents.

IN ATTENDANCE

G Burt, Clerk to the Council
P Craig, Chairman, Village Hall Committee
Cty Cllr T Richardson

The Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Miss Frances Russell welcomed everyone.

1. PCC The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Sussex, Katy Bourne (KB) , OBE

KB gave a resume of the history of the role of PCC; initiated in 2012 it is an elected position and she has held the role since its inception. Her job is to write the Policing and Crime Plan, which the Chief Constable (CC) then implements. Sussex covers 1.6 million people. There was no blueprint when she started on how to do the role. She holds the CC to account. The Balcombe fracking public order issue provided a really good experience on how to engage the public, which was often equally divided on issues and how the police should respond. Sussex now had its first female CC. KB decides on the level of Council Tax for the police, following consultation. 70% had supported paying more for the forthcoming year to retain and increase the number of frontline police officers. KB recognised that people expected to see something for their Council Tax. She wasn't allowed to raise Council tax by more than £15 p.a. In answer to those who say PCCs have politicised the police, she said the previous police committees were also made up of politicians, but being appointed by councils they were not directly answerable to residents. Her current three priorities were: Strengthen local policing, tackle crime and prevent harm; Relentless disruption of serious and organised crime; Support victims and safeguard the vulnerable. She had just witnessed the swearing in of 108 new police officers, which included a good mix of sexes, ages, ethnicity and backgrounds. PCCs were now also responsible for victims of crime for which she receives and extra £2million p.a. She was particularly proud of the volunteer teams who visit custody centres to visit detainees. We police by consent in the UK, and that means that although not convicted, we allow our freedoms to be removed by the police pending a court appearance. Sussex was a very safe county and had the 7th lowest council tax. Many services are shared with Surrey to reduce costs, e.g. dog unit. Youngsters were more likely to be victims of crime than other age groups.

KB then took questions:

In the light of the report into the Metropolitan Police by Baroness Casey, what was Sussex Police doing to reassure residents? Recruitment processes of Sussex Police are being reviewed. She is confident that the CC will deliver on removing officers who should not be in post. KB had power to move 60% of the pension of an officer convicted of a crime which on duty but felt this should also be extended to crimes committed off duty, as a policeman is never really off duty. Being a reflective force she was confident that Sussex would learn from its own and others' experiences.

Where are the Police as we rarely see any in Midhurst? There are 5k police and civilian staff of which 3k were officers. There were approximately 5 turns or shifts throughout the day to cover every hour, holidays and sickness, so they did appear thin on the ground at times. Her budget in 2012 had been £300 million; austerity had cut PCSOs by 1/3; this had been regrettable and had a detrimental impact. At full strength there were 300 PCSOs. Capacity had returned to pre-austerity levels – but still 40 short of PCSOs largely because they keep applying to become police officers!

Who funds Gatwick Airport policing? This is funded by Gatwick under contract. The COVID impact on air travel had reduced police income from the airport.

As a woman, I feel nervous about contacting the police unless I absolutely have to. See answer to first question. KB added that she planned to extend vetting to include all her own staff even though they were not policemen and women.

Why was there no longer a pie chart in your council tax leaflet? Agreed!

On ASB she said that young people were far more likely to be the victims of crime than other age groups. The early intervention program, called REBOOT was quite effective; this involved a staged process to stop youngsters entering the criminal justice system: letter then visit to the home then mentor and then Youth Offending Teams. Originally it was planned to deal with 100 youngsters via this method but ended up working with 1,000. Even then, only 1 ended up getting to stage 4.

KB was thanked by the Chairman for her most excellent presentation and for answering questions in such an engaging way. The audience agreed!

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 14 April 2022, previously circulated were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Report from the Parish Council

The Chairman Cllr Miss F Russell presented the following report:

As you will see from our printed report we have had another busy year and as ever one of our main topics has been the speed of traffic travelling through the village. We are planning to restart our speed awareness group and with the support of the police we hope to be active soon. We have also been asked to comment on an increased number of planning applications this year. As a Parish Council we are a statutory consultee in the planning process which is led by our Local Planning Authority the South Downs National Park. Our response should only be based on those matters that affect planning matters, for example things like the risk of flooding, loss of privacy, ease of access and impact on traffic, parking and environmental issues. In reaching a decision the local planning authority may decide that the parish council's comments have insufficient weight to enable the application to be determined in line with the wishes of the parish. You may have noticed that we have had to increase the Parish Precept for 2023. The precept is the money required from Council Tax to cover spending within the Parish. Our precept has only increased by £2 over the last 10 years and unfortunately when we looked at our budget for 2023/4, we realised we would have to increase it this year. Significant factors influencing our decision included the need to provide a budget for the local council elections in May, the need to build a fund for improvements in speed indicator signs on the A286, making a contribution to the maintenance of the churchyard as well as a number of smaller increases in other budget areas for example in ground rent for the village hall and sports field etc.

A reminder that our Parish Council is up for election in May and if anyone is interested in becoming a councillor, please speak to Greg our Clerk. Also to remind you that you will require photo ID in order to vote on the 4th May.

I would like to finish by thanking all our Parish Councillors and our Clerk for their help and support over the year. Also, thanks to our CDC councillor Gordon Macara, who isn't standing for re-election, and our WSCC councillor Tom Richardson for their support.

4. Parish Council Accounts

The Clerk, G Burt, advised that the last set of accounts had been circulated and he had returned to the previous practice of sharing the by-budget version which was more informative. He was happy to take questions now or at any time throughout the year.

5. Village Hall Report

Cllr P Craig, Chairman & Treasurer of the Village Hall Management Committee (CVHMC) reported

The more observant of you will have noticed that the Village Hall clock is stuck at twenty past three. This does not mean that it is perpetually tea time in this rural idyll of Cocking or that time stands still here. The clock is simply misbehaving. I just need a volunteer to climb up the roof and remove the motor; any takers? I am conscious of playing the role of tail-end Charlie here and you are probably by now looking forward to a glass of wine, so I will keep it short.

2022 bookings overall were healthy. The booking pattern was mostly a repeat of last year. Cocking talks continued as did U3A art appreciation, english willow making and the various dog training classes. We had true adventure with the Duke of Edinburgh award youngsters camping in the field and an increasing number of yoga classes. And of course there were the private parties for children, wedding anniversaries and a limited number of professional meetings. The big event of the year was the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, an all-day affair with a hog roast, games, face painting, a bar, of course, and ending with some excellent live music on the sports field. Other events included our annual fireworks and bonfire – this year in conjunction with a Halloween party at the vicarage, the rah rah theatre pantomime cinderrahrahella and our usual children's Christmas party run by Santa and his little elves. We also hosted a new event, skittles in the hall as part of the Easter egg challenge around the village.

Financially, after the grant inflated income of 2021 we spent down the surplus mainly on improvements to the hall which I will touch on in a minute. We ended the year with a balance of just under £7000, which is the target amount I like to keep in case of emergencies.

We completed phase II of the car park at a cost of just under £6,000 and installed a hearing loop at a cost of just under £1,500, which the parish council shared with us. Other expenditure included painting the hall at a cost of £1,200. Overall costs have increased, especially in the supply of utilities. Fortunately, we were able to secure a new 3 year contract with bg lite before the invasion of Ukraine which sent prices through the roof. We shall press on with the improvements. The order has been placed with BT for installing WIFI in the hall and we hope this will attract some more of the corporate type business, some of which failed to mature because we did not have it. On the 6th of May we will celebrate the King's coronation with an evening of live music on the sports field together with the odd glass of ribena or some such. Later in the year we shall have our usual panto, fireworks and children's Christmas party.

Last but not least I would like to add a word of thanks to the village hall committee for their support over the year and would single out our bookings secretary, Kate Pudlo, without whose massive contribution this hall simply could not function. For some of us it is getting close to the time to retire from running the hall. Fresh faces and new ideas are usually a good idea. We don't

*want to give the image of the committee as being geriatrics at play. Volunteers, however, are hard to come by these days. Everyone seems to be so very busy. We shall mount a recruitment campaign later in the year and if that fails, I shall send out the press gang. Watch out for a Cocking shilling at the bottom of your beer mug.
Thank you very much.*

6. Questions from Electors

A resident thought that some of the hedgerows to the north of the village had been poorly cut leaving not only an unsightly mess but all the arisings posed a danger to walkers and cyclists; those to the south were much neater. A brief discussion ensued, but the Chairman remarked that this was perpetual discussion item for Cllrs but it was also something that it was difficult to reach agreement on. Some also felt that if hedges were cut too short etc it made for a wider road and faster traffic. There seemed to be a consensus that the issue here was not that it was cut, but the way it was cut.

The meeting finished at 8.45pm