



Rusthall

Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The Rackliff Centre

Thursday 18th April 2024 - 7.00pm.

Present:

Councillors: Cllr Liz Ellicott; Cllr Alex Britcher-Allen; Cllr Paul Gripper; Cllr Angela Funnell; Cllr Dave Funnell.

Officers: Clerk -Alison Stevens; Deputy Clerk - Linda Neusten; Allotments Manager -Kevin Watson.

Members of the public - 12

Minutes

1. **The Chairman, Cllr Liz Ellicott welcomed the public** and opened the meeting.
2. **Apologies** – none received
3. **The Chairman**, Cllr Liz Ellicott delivered an Annual Report- Parish Chairman's Report 2024

Good evening everyone, welcome to our Annual Parish Assembly.

This is your opportunity to hear what the Parish Council has been doing for the past year and to get to know your councillors and officers. I hope you will also take the opportunity (if you haven't done so already) to chat to the representatives from the groups here this evening, and perhaps consider volunteering for one of them.

My name is Liz Ellicott and I was re-elected Chair of the Parish Council in May 2023.

The other councillors on our team are Mark O'Callaghan, Vice-Chair and Lead on Finance; Alex Britcher-Allen, who you might also know as one of our Borough Councillors, who Chairs the Environment Committee;

Chris Ducklin;

Barry Edwards, who has been Chair of our Planning Committee this year;

Dave Funnell;

Paul Gripper, who takes the lead on Highways and Transport;

Doug Smith, Chair of the Allotment Committee;

and our newest councillor, Angela Funnell.

As well as Councillors sitting on Committees we also have representatives from the village on our Environment and Allotment Committees. Jenny Blackburn, Jayne Sharratt and Phil Wheeler have been valued members of our Environment Committee, while Suzanne French, David Clover and Alan Farmer are representatives from our 3 allotment sites on the Allotment Committee.

The other important people on our Parish Council team are our 3 Officers. Without them we simply couldn't function. They are responsible for supporting, advising and dealing with all the administration entailed in ensuring that the Parish Council runs, not only efficiently, but also within the law. They make sure that the Rackliff Centre is maintained, they deal with contractors, the KCC and Borough offices, they assist hall-users, prepare documents for our meetings and a hundred other things.

Linda Neusten is our Deputy Clerk, working in the office on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays;

Kevin Watson returned to work in May as our Allotment Manager; and last, but by no means least is our Clerk Alison Stevens who has been keeping us in order since December 2021.

It is with very mixed feelings that I have to tell you that Alison is leaving us at the end of this month. She is moving onwards and upwards to take the position of Deputy Chief Executive of the Kent Association of Local Councils, and while we are extremely sorry to say goodbye to her, we know that this is a brilliant opportunity for her, and a fitting acknowledgement of her exceptional skills. In May we will be welcoming Claire Read as Alison's replacement who is leaving her position as Clerk to Goudhurst Parish Council to join us here at Rusthall.

So now you have been introduced to our team, the question is –what do we do? We like to think of ourselves as guardians of the parish environment and a place people can come to for advice about anything to do with Rusthall. If we don't know the answer we know who to ask!

Some of the things we pay for, such as Christmas decorations and the hanging flower baskets, are easy to spot, but a lot of what we do isn't as evident. For example, we have worked closely with our Borough Councillors on issues important to the village such as the changes to the Post Office service and also with the Commons Conservators and the St Paul's Church Youth Council searching for a solution to the problem some people have crossing the A264, Langton Road in order to access the church and Happy Valley.

The 3 allotment sites remain one of our largest responsibilities and we have continued to invest in them this year.

One of the things I am most proud of is the building of our All Ability Allotment Garden at our Southwood Road site.

We had become increasingly aware of a section of our community who have little or no opportunity to enjoy an allotment either because of a disability or advancing age and frailty. It was decided to develop an uncultivated and neglected area at Southwood Road by installing paths wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs, raised beds that can be cultivated both by those who are unable to kneel or bend and those in wheelchairs, and a shed- cum -pavilion -cum -shelter that can be used as a social rest area. As well as investment from our own funds we were able to get a grant from the UKSPF Community Grant Programme (the levelling up fund), which paid for the groundwork, and we are in the process of applying to the Gatwick Airport Community Trust to go ahead with Phase 2 that will include more paths and raised beds. We are hoping that the project will welcome its first users this summer.

There has also been some long –needed investment in our allotment site at Wickham Gardens. The community area has been expanded and a pavilion, a gift from Crossways Community, has been installed. An overgrown and difficult area is in the process of being turned into a wildflower meadow, a project that has benefited from advice from Ranger Dan.

As well as the maintenance and repairs necessary for allotment upkeep we aim to foster a good community spirit, so every year we run a competition for best allotment, best newcomer and best scarecrow. The prizes and certificates will be given out at the summer BBQ held at our Southwood Road site this year, but in future years we hope we will be able to use Wickham Gardens as well.

Our other main spend is on grants to our wonderful local community groups – bear with me while I read out the long list of recipients since last May.

The Alms Houses - £1323.65 to help with maintenance

Friends of Rusthall School - £2000 to be spent on books

Langton Green and Rusthall Coronation Treasure Hunt - £150

Rusthall Bonfire and Fete Committee – a total of £2450 for various activities and expenditure such as new gazebos, the Christmas Tree, monthly coffee mornings, and entertainment at the fete and bonfire.

Rusthall Lunch Club - £600 for Christmas lunch and summer outing

Rusthall Scout Group - £2500 for new tents.

As well as these local groups we also contribute to charities that benefit our residents

The Royal British Legion - £150 towards Remembrance Day costs

The Counselling Centre - £300 towards running costs

and Home Start - £1000 to help with local families

We have continued to donate to Rusthall Life, £750 per issue, ensuring that they can meet the escalating printing costs and making sure that every resident receives a free copy of the bi-monthly magazine. Delivery of the magazine takes a lot of work, so thanks go to Paul Gripper who organises distribution in the village; we are very grateful to the whole team of volunteers for their efficiency and hard work.

It's worth mentioning at this point that all our financial records are available for members of the public to access through our website, as well as minutes of all council and committee meetings. You will also find up to date news items pertaining to the village such as roadworks.

As well as giving financial support managing council funds, a lot of our Councillors are very involved in the day-to-day running of these groups. You will often see Paul, Doug, Alex and myself at the

Community Larder; Barry and Dave are trustees of the Alms Houses; Barry is on the Rusthall Events Committee and is also involved with the Boxing Club; Dave and I both go out with the Speedwatch Group and help with the Lunch Club. Several of our Councillors, including myself, also help deliver Rusthall Life., and on Bonfire Night see how many councillors you can spot wearing Stewards' hi-viz vests.

I hope this has given you an insight into what we do and an appreciation of the time given and the work that all our councillors do, voluntarily, to help keep Rusthall the special place it is.

4. **The Rusthall Bonfire and Fete group – Lisa Coghlan;** started in 1977 for the Silver Jubilee, our organisation is made up entirely of volunteers and we are always keen to sign up new members and will consider new ideas for new and existing events.

Our Aims:

- a. To organise and facilitate the community Fete and Bonfire event.
- b. To bring together our community in places which are accessible for non-profit other than fundraising for our main aim.
- c. Offer spaces for organisations to collaborate in the village and surrounding area.
- d. Offer friendship through volunteering experiences and social events.
- e. Sporting and celebrating local businesses through our events.

5. **Village Archaeologist – Nigel Stapple** - Independent archaeological researcher, Nigel has been working with local volunteers uncovering a long history of human activity at Rusthall. West Kent Community Diggers (**WKCD**) have been excavating a series of rock cut features at the eastern edge of Rusthall Common since 2017. Evidence has shown the presence of people in the area for thousands of years and 100's of artefacts has given us clues to the day to day activities of our ancient ancestors. A brief overview gives an update to current research on Rusthall Common, in particular highlighting the sites former use as a prehistoric quarry used in the extraction and processing of orthoquartzite for the manufacturing of primitive of stone tools unique to our part of Kent. A few examples of his finds were available at the meeting and more can be seen at Rusthall Library.

6. **Reports from Clubs and Associations:**

- a. **Rusthall Larder: Cherie Sharazade & Cllr Alex Britcher Allen**

Finances: Started 8th January 2021. Run every Friday since, inc. Xmas eve pop-ups. The larder received donations of £13,754.62 each year. These comprise of £1150 in vouchers from Sainsbury's; £411 Morrisons; £7729.62 from client's contributions on the door; £2500 from TWBC community grant plus another £400 and £1060 from 4 individual donors.

The larder also took receipt of 10 heated throws and 10 oil heaters when Lookahead closed down. These were re distributed around the village. The costs to keep The Larder running are £7000 to FareShare towards their costs and Supplementary costs of £6706. Totalling £13,706. This left a balance of £only £48.

Has an average weekly attendance of 63. Huge thanks to the team of collectors and volunteers who put in a vast number of hours each week. (72hrs in total) which equates to 12,240 volunteers' hours donated since it started which if paid at minimum wage rates would equate to £111,587.52p!! Organisations who donate include :- M&S ; Sainsbury's; KFC; Tesco; Waitrose; Gail's; Asda; Lidl

Operations:

Cherie collects surplus food from Thursday until midday on Friday travelling around all contributing supermarkets and outlets. Cherie has made strong contacts with staff at all these outlets which have led to the additional generosity of gifts at Christmas and Easter eggs at Easter. All volunteers express their real sense of achievement at being able to deliver and help such a worthwhile scheme and making a big difference to local people lives.

- b. **Charlies Angels:** A very successful year. Charlie has now taken over a former restaurant on Camden road where she has a team who are using surplus and waste food to provide breakfasts, lunches and refreshments. Clients are invited to pay if they can but to simply donate. If they can't or maybe don ate some time to help out. No one is turned away. She no longer is present on Wednesdays here in the village however she has young Duke of Edinburgh Award students who run this for her.
- c. **Speedwatch: Helen Foster Rusthall** SW group was re-established in April 2019. Initially with 6 volunteers. We have had as many as 12 but are now back down to a core group of 6. In the 5 years of operation we have carried out over 200 sessions. 2793 Vehicles have exceeded the Police set Speedwatch threshold of 10% +2 to 35 in a 30 limit. We record an offender at 25mph

in a 20mph limit - this is more lenient than the Police who operate at 10%. Almost 800 letters have been sent by Kent police to offenders (2 or more offences)

24 Letters have been hand delivered by Kent Police.

4 persistent offenders (not just observed in Rusthall) are under active enforcement by Kent Police

Fastest offence recorded in a 30mph was 49mph

Fastest offence recorded in a 20mph was 43mph

Our Unipar friends who maintain and test speed cameras have recorded a 60mph vehicle up Ashley Gardens/Meadow Road.

Problem Roads are the well-known 'Rat Runs' Lower Green Road and Meadow Road/Ashley Gardens. Also observed that Cranwell Road is a problem but unable to operate SW sessions there due to visibility issues. We do keep potential sites under review with Kent Police.

Great to support the recent Kent Police initiative with Schools. Rusthall Junior School opting to cover speeding within the village. We supported a session where the children could observe and have use of SW gear and Police speed guns - great to see the involvement and enthusiasm of local children.

More volunteers would be most welcome. On average it's an hour each week but whatever people can spare is very much appreciated

d. Commons Conservators: It has been a very busy 12 months on the Commons, here are some of our highlights:

Adoption of our new Ecological Management Plans for the Commons, produced by an external independent ecologist they are our complete guide for the preservation and protection of the Commons for the next 5 years. We are committed to making the Commons as beautiful as possible for us all as well as all of the wonderful wildlife that we share them with.

Exposing our incredible rock formations at Denny Bottom to show them in their full glory throughout the year.

Working hard on the community project to expose the prehistoric rock formations at the archaeological dig site and to create a beautiful wildlife glade.

Continued work to manage the safety of trees affected by ash dieback and then taking advantage of the opportunities to enhance the habitats in the cleared areas.

Work with volunteers and external consultants to collate invaluable wildlife survey data.

The Commons are for the community, and we take great pride in ensuring they are loved by all. If you have any questions or suggestions or indeed would like to join us on any of our volunteering sessions, please do contact Gemma and or Ranger Dan (contact cards available)

7. Open Forum –

- a. A request for an update regarding crossing on A264 – Cllr Ellicott explained this was an ongoing (& disappointing) project as KCC are reluctant to support a new crossing. Greg Clark the local MP has been canvassed for support to at least reduce the speed limit to 30mph for the whole stretch of road from Rusthall to Langton Green.
- b. A request from local youth group to be put in touch with police so they can arrange a speaker at a future event.
- c. Could contact details of local PC be shared ? – no but the link to the PCSO team is available on both Parish Council website and will be published in the next edition of Rusthall Life.

The Assembly closed at 8.25pm

Linda Neusten.

Deputy Clerk.