

CUCKFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Report of a Visioning Evening Held on Thursday 13 July 2023

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**Report of a Visioning Evening
Held on
Thursday 13 July 2019**

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Section 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Cuckfield Parish Council commissioned the author to facilitate a 'Visioning Evening' with the aim of creating a platform from which to develop a new Business Plan for the four-year term of the new Council and beyond. The Visioning Evening took place on Thursday 13 July 2023 and was attended by most councillors, the Parish Clerk and the Administration and Communications Officer.
- 1.2 The programme for the evening included the following key elements:
- (i) Issues and opportunities currently facing local councils in the wider context of a reducing public sector.
 - (ii) A review of the performance of the Parish Council over the previous term of office.
 - (iii) Consideration of the future core services to be delivered or facilitated by the parish council, opportunities for working in partnership with the principal councils and other agencies and the delivery of major projects.
 - (iv) Key issues facing Cuckfield Parish Council either now or in the future, namely:
 - Village Hall Rebuild
 - Traffic Calming
 - Carbon Footprint/Sustainability
 - Angela Fox Nature Garden
 - Neighbourhood Plan Review.
 - (v) Consideration of the priorities for the Council arising from the foregoing on a short, medium and longer term basis.
- 1.3 Those in attendance were as follows:
- Andrew Burton, Chairman
Martin Sheldon (Vice-Chair)
Marie Dormer
Andrea King
Steve Oversby-Powell
Adrian Podmore
Andrew Symonds
Jill White
Sam Heynes, Parish Clerk

Noemi Ripert-Forrest, Communications and Administration Officer

Apologies were received from:

Paul Ceccherini

Richard Gill

The councillors and staff were divided into two groups for some of the topics which generated different, but often complimentary, views and proposals.

Section 2 Summary of the Visioning Evening

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the findings and arising from the evening and the key aims, objectives, issues and priorities emanating from the discussion. The process was positive and all those present actively participated. The next stage is for the Parish Council now to consider the outcomes of the evening as a platform on which to develop a new Business Plan, Timeline and Financial Strategy for the duration of the current Council. This will need to be undertaken ahead of the budget setting process through the autumn.
- 2.2 The councillors and Parish Clerk had a clear vision for both the future of Cuckfield and Cuckfield Parish Council. During the visioning process there was clear enthusiasm for the future development of both and it was agreed that the proposed Business Plan must be deliverable and be properly resourced.
- 2.3 Once the Council has agreed the key objectives and priorities there is a need to assess these against both the financial and staff resources of the Council. The budget setting process through the coming autumn will form the basis of the strategic financial considerations in order to deliver the Business Plan.
- 2.4 When finalising the Business Plan the Council also needs to consider 'risk'. Clearly the Council has a fiduciary duty to ensure that public money and resources cannot be put to unnecessary risk. However, particularly in the current public sector environment there will be a need, at times, to consider 'managed risk,' particularly when treading new ground. When doing so it is essential that all known and anticipated issues are considered at the time and clearly documented.
- 2.5 For the purpose of developing an initial timeline for the process the findings to date have been divided into short, medium and longer term objectives. At this stage, the short term objectives include a range of decisions, feasibility issues and project planning in order to assess the viability of some of the projects/initiatives. The initial objectives are a guide from the opinions expressed at the Visioning Evening which, due to time constraints, detailed assessment of issues was not possible.
- 2.6 It is important that the proposed Business Plan is flexible, regularly reviewed and can respond quickly to changes in circumstances or opportunities that may arise. Councillors were clear that they wanted to achieve some 'quick wins' in order to demonstrate their commitment to the community via an improved communication strategy. Wherever appropriate these have been clearly identified in the short-term objectives and actions.

Section 3 The Good, The Bad and the Ugly

3.1 To commence the visioning process the facilitator took the councillors through a warm-up exercise to reflect on the achievements of the Parish Council through the previous term (2019 to 2023) in order to set the scene for the evening.

He outlined a simplified approach to visioning as follows:

- Where have we been?
- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to get to?
- How are we going to get there?

He also stressed the importance of reflecting and learning from previous experiences in order to inform the way forward. On that basis the following questions were asked: 'What has Cuckfield Parish Council done well over the past four years and what not so well?'

Delegates were divided into two groups in order to obtain a wider variety of views. In addition, a supplementary question was asked, namely: 'what do you consider to be the new opportunities and challenges you are facing?' The lists below represent a summary of the responses of both groups.

What has the Cuckfield Parish Council done well over the past four years?

Larger litter bins
Lease for Angela Fox Nature Garden
Angela Fox Nature Garden initial phase
Village Hall Strategy
Widen pavements in London Lane
Parking outside Village Hall
Toilets, including disabled access
New paths in Cemetery
Silver Sundays
Christmas hampers
Tea and Company
War Memorial clean up
Speedwatch
Various benches
Coronation picnic
Christmas lights and Street Festival
Skate Jams
Twitten maintenance
Cemetery maintenance
New websites built
Cuck-Stye
Staff Team positives
 Sam's development
 Welfare
 Consistency

- Cemetery Management
- Playgroup subsidy
- Cemetery pathways
- Landscaping of Horsfield Green
- Lychgate roof
- Curtains in Hall
- 106 for Penland Farm – bus information system
- Village Orderly

What has Cuckfield Parish Council done not so well over the past four years?

(Note – some of these items are outside the control of the Parish Council)

- Angela Fox Nature Garden - progress on build
- Youth and Elderly engagement
- Relationship with retail sector
- Parking discs
- Communication with community
- Promoting new websites
- Maintenance of twittens
- Full Section 106 allocation not used – Arts funding
- Recreation Ground pavilion improvements
- Glebe Road allotments
- Strategy for Traffic Calming
- Burial Ground
- Ardingly Crossing - Puffin

What do you consider to be the new opportunities and challenges you are facing?

- Investigate fund raising opportunities
- Review Council charges
- Improve perception of the Parish Council (USP)
- Parking – Recreation Ground and Parking Discs
- Further develop staff team
- Future finances
- Traffic from Northern Arc
- Traffic Calming
- Improve communication with the community

- 3.2 It can be seen from the foregoing that, in the main, there is a positive report on the role and services provided by Cuckfield Parish Council over the past four years. Interestingly, the response was consistent between councillors who had served on the previous Council and those who have recently joined.
- 3.3 It can clearly be seen that there are some frustrations with issues outside the control of Cuckfield Parish Council as some of the challenges ahead are the responsibility of other agencies. Although it does raise the issues of the Parish Council's role in influencing such matters where it can. A number of the above list are operational and the Council may wish to take these into account with

the day to day running of the Council by the Clerk. Others can be considered as part of the 'new vision.'

- 3.4 Overall the report for the period 2019 to 2023 is positive, with areas that can be built on and others improved. This exercise set the scene well for the rest of the evening.

Section 4 The Role of the Parish Council and Projects

4.1 For this element of the Visioning exercise two questions were set for the councillors to consider. The councillors were again separated into two groups in order to obtain a range of views. The results put forward, in no particular priority order, were as follows:

Question 1 - What are essential services and events for the Parish Council to deliver in the future, and why?

- Cemetery extension
- Toilets
- Community Events
 - Silver Sunday
 - Skate Jam
 - Treasure Hunts
 - Tea & Company
 - Annual Picnic
 - Additional summer and winter events
- Community engagement
- Sharing delivery of services with Neighbouring Councils
- Post Office
- Arts Festival
- Repair Shop
- Wildflowers on verges
- BMX Track
- Skate Park
- Angela Fox Nature Garden – complete and open
- Traffic Calming
- Youth Activities
- Improve relationship with Schools
- Partnership with retail sector
- Future of the Village Hall
- Traffic Management Strategy (initial consultation)
- Queens Hall ongoing improvements and usage (Meetings rooms for local users – more people working from home)
- Community Hub
- Play meadow
- Flagpole in car park
- Offer PAT testing as an income stream
- Welcome to Cuckfield initiative with local Estate Agents

Question 2 - What other services could the Parish Council take over from partner organisations as both a delivery body and facilitator?

- Car Park (central)
- Grass cutting
- Glebe Road Allotments
- Extend parking in recreation ground

4.2 In addition to the foregoing one of the councillors unable to attend the Visioning Evening had submitted the following items to the Clerk for consideration as part of this element of the process:

1: Repair Hub and more based on the Lindfield event structure but Bi-monthly

2: Wildflower meadow on the space next to the Rose & Crown pub

In addition, the Chairman of the Council suggested a change of name for the Parish Council to Cuckfield Council, thus eliminating confusion with the Parochial Church Council. Although this is part of a vision for the Council it is suggested that it should be considered formally at a future Council meeting. Some councillors will recall that a similar suggestion was made at the Visioning Evening in 2019 but changing to Cuckfield Community Council.

4.3 Due to time constraints on the evening it was not possible to analyse all of the foregoing issues to any level of detail. It is clear that there are some strong views on some of the subjects and that warrants further discussion before drafting the Business Plan and associated Timeline. Others will require feasibility studies, project plans, funding assessments etc. Therefore, it is suggested that when the Council considers this report it will be worth revisiting the lists above to consider the role of the Parish Council (provider, facilitator or influencer) and allocate priorities and resources accordingly. This will also inform a financial strategy which should run parallel with the Business Plan

Section 5 The Big Subjects

- 5.1 As one group the councillors then addressed five key issues outlined below facing the Parish Council over the term of the new Council. A detailed discussion ensued over these items, often merging issues as the implications were common to the village or the suggested way forward.

Village Hall Rebuild

A range of views were expressed about the future of the Village Hall ranging from selling off for housing to retention for the Play Group and community activities. No overall conclusion was reached but it has been included in a short-term review of community facilities in Section 6.

Traffic Calming

It was agreed that an overall strategy for traffic management in the village was required, not least because of the impact of the Northern Arc currently under construction west of Burgess Hill. It was also agreed that the services of a traffic consultant will be required.

Carbon Footprint/Sustainability

It was agreed that good progress had been made and the Council should now move on to the next stages.

Angela Fox Nature Garden

All those present agreed that this was a priority and should be completed, publicised and opened as soon as possible.

Neighbourhood Plan Review

This is now a matter of undertaking the 5 year review and developing the the plan accordingly over the medium term.

- 5.2 In addition, councillors clearly saw that the Parish Council had a role in supporting and developing the local economy together with some additional projects that have been added to the provisional lists in Section 6.

Section 6 Initial Priorities, Objectives and Action Plan

6.1 Arising from the process outlined in the previous chapters it is possible to identify the Council's initial desires, objectives and priorities. As previously stated, time did not permit detailed consideration of any of the items in Section 3 (The Good, The Bad and the Ugly) or Section 4 (The Role of the Parish Council and Projects). Therefore, it is recommended that the Council revisits these two sections when considering its priorities, actions required, project feasibility and preparation and the timeline for the new Business Plan. The initial findings have been divided into short, medium and longer term objectives. There was a clear enthusiasm for the process and desire for some 'quick wins'. One example is the completion of the Angela Fox Nature Garden. However, it should be noted that the process tends to be refined as it progresses through the more detailed consideration stages, particularly financial and staff resources. It is vital that a future Business Plan is flexible in order to reflect and respond to changes throughout the duration of the Council's term of office. In addition, it needs to be regularly monitored.

The following timescale is suggested:

Short term **between now and 31 March 2024**

Medium term **1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025**

Long term **1 April 2025 and beyond.**

6.2 Many of the items considered through the Visioning Exercise will require further investigation, survey work or feasibility studies due to the nature of the projects. Although this will limit the 'quick wins', both in terms of resources and finance, good progress can still be made in the short-term. In order to assist this process, it is suggested that a workload planning process is undertaken using a technique such as a simple Gantt Chart. This will ensure that the workload can be properly planned and managed and to avoid peaks and swamping the staff team with a wide range of initial tasks.

6.3 Short Term Objectives

a) Completion of the Angela Fox Nature Garden

This was seen by all present as a short term 'quick win' to complete and formally open the garden. It will provide a good opportunity to promote the work of the Parish Council but not all of the phases will be completed in the short term. Therefore a partial opening should be considered provided public safety issues are met.

b) Retail Sector and Village Economy

To open a dialog with the Retail Sector in the village with a view to developing a partnership to promote visitors and trade in Cuckfield. The proposed 'Welcome to Cuckfield' initiative in conjunction with local estate agents could form the basis of the first meeting. Some local councils have used the services of their MP to launch such an initiative. For example, an invitation to a meeting on House of Commons headed notepaper can have a positive impact.

c) Communications Strategy

To get this initiative underway it was suggested that the positive achievements of the Council over the past four years should be promoted to increase the profile of the Parish Council in the village. A Communication Strategy for the Parish Council should be developed which could also include the promotion of Cuckfield and events. Such a strategy should also be linked to the Business Plan. The initial aim is to improve communications from the Parish Council but also to co-ordinate or link other sites promoting the village diary of events etc. with the Parish Council website.

d) Village Hall

To formally undertake a feasibility study to review the future of the Village Hall. This should include a position statement of other community facilities available in the village.

e) Post Office

To keep a watching brief on the contractual situation regarding the Post Office, considering a range of options going forward. Contact could be made with both Withyham Parish Council and Hailsham Town Council, both of which have taken over Post Offices to learn from their experience.

f) Cemetery Extension

Proceed with the work already undertaken regarding a cemetery extension and produce a costed feasibility study, including a timeline.

g) Traffic Calming

Develop a brief for the employment of a Traffic Consultant to review the situation in the village both currently and considering the phased impact of the Northern Arc development. Contact should also be made with the County Council to ascertain what traffic studies have already been undertaken in order not to duplicate work. Such studies will assist the proposed consultant in recommending mitigation measures for the increased traffic in the village as part of an overall Traffic management Strategy.

h) Repair Cafe

Investigate the feasibility and developing a Repair Café in the village. The starting point should be with the successful project in Lindfield to discuss their experience and investigate the possibility of a partnership project.

i) Staff Development

To continue the positive approach to staff development and training. One option could be to develop Personal Development Plans for each member of the team.

j) Community Events

To undertake a review of the events calendar in the village to ascertain gaps in provision. Mention was made of the need for events in July and August together with the possibility of an Arts Festival. Such a review should include the role of the Council as provider, facilitator or influencer and due regard needs to be taken of the financial and staff implications. The possibility of utilising Section 106 Arts funding was also mentioned.

k) Youth Initiatives

The need to both better engage with young people and provide leisure facilities was discussed, albeit briefly. Among the initiatives mentioned were improved communications, the possibility of creating a Youth Council, improving the relationship with local schools, the provision of a BMX track and a Skate Park. It was also recognised that the Skate Fest events had been successful. Due to the range and scope of the issues involved in youth facilities and initiatives it is suggested that a Working Group is established to consider the subjects in more detail and to embark in communications with young people.

l) Mid Sussex District Council – Possible Partnerships

The possibility of leasing the car park from the District Council, the need for more burial space, Glebe Road Allotments and the possibility of extending the car park at Cuckfield Recreation Ground were all discussed. It was suggested that an initial meeting with the new Leader of the District Council may be a way of developing a positive working relationship going forward on these and other issues.

m) Partnership Working

To ascertain the feasibility of developing a range of partnership working initiatives with neighbouring councils, an initial meeting needs to be organised. The agenda should include a wide range of issues of mutual interest from local 'housekeeping' initiatives such as weeds and twittens to sharing the cost of a traffic consultant as the Northern Arc development will impact on many of the neighbouring parishes.

n) Review Income Opportunities

The start of a new Council term and the associated Business Plan provides a good opportunity to review new income streams to help fund the plan. These should form part of a strategic financial plan that should run parallel with the Business Plan. Among the initiatives mentioned was the Parish Council providing PAT Tests by using its inhouse expertise and better using the Queens Hall meeting rooms for local businesses and individuals who now work from home, post pandemic.

o) Carbon Footprint/Sustainability

Continue on to the next stages of this initiative as substantial progress has already been made.

p) Neighbourhood Plan Review

Establish the process and systems required in order to undertake the 5 year review.

6.4 Medium Term Objectives

At this stage there are a limited number of clearly identified projects in the medium and longer term sections. As previously stated there was insufficient time on the evening to allocate detailed priorities to the wide range of projects identified. Once the Council has considered the options outlined in 6.3 above the medium term items can then be identified and the Business Plan developed accordingly. The key major projects are listed below but this will undoubtedly change as the short-term investigations and feasibilities are completed and projects are developed further with timescale and funding options. In addition, a further analysis of Sections 3 and 4 may also produce additional items.

a) Communications Strategy

Implement the strategy in parallel with the Business Plan

b) Cemetery Extension

Embark on the next phase of the proposed cemetery extension.

c) Neighbourhood Plan

Complete 5 year review.

d) Promotion of the Village Economy

Implementation of the proposed Action Plan.

Dependent on progress with the Council's deliberations of the short-term items this section is likely to be populated with initiatives and projects on the economy, Village Hall, Post Office, Youth initiatives, traffic related projects, and hopefully new partnerships with neighbouring councils as well as the District Council.

6.5 Long Term Objectives

a) Cemetery Extension

Complete the Cemetery Extension project.

6.6 As previously stated the foregoing objectives need to be supplemented with items identified from a more detailed consideration of the Short-term issues and Sections 3 and 4.

Section 7 Next Steps

- 7.1 Although the Parish Council has yet to consider this report and decide on priorities and phasing of the issues that were agreed, in principle, at the Visioning Evening it is clear there is a strong appetite for both improving Cuckfield and developing the role of Cuckfield Parish Council. A Business Plan needs to be agreed and a timeline given to both implementation and review. It is only at that stage can the level of resources required be assessed.
- 7.2 The Council is already clearly ambitious and has made a good start. It is a busy and proactive council and the day to day workloads are already high. The staff team is small but committed and are keen to see the role of the Parish Council develop.
- 7.3 Once a draft Business Plan is agreed it is recommended that a resource review is undertaken at that time to ascertain how and by whom the plan can be implemented. As part of this Visioning process the Council has reaffirmed its core services and identified a range of feasibility and survey work that is required in the short-term. Once completed there is likely to be some complex levels of project management that may need to be resourced with specialist contractors.
- 7.5 The Parish Council has a good record for training and development of its staff and this will need to continue and be refined to meet the challenges ahead. The council has a duty of care for its staff and accordingly risks must be managed along the journey into the future.
- 7.6 In many cases business planning can be over complicated and confusing, therefore it is recommended the Parish Council uses a straightforward process to develop, monitor and amend its Business Plan.
- 7.7 The Visioning Evening was a positive process with many good ideas and options coming forward. It is important that Cuckfield Parish Council now builds on this good start. It has an enthusiastic new Council, a good staff team in place and a firm foundation on which to move forward. The future looks good.