



The Queen's Hall
High Street
Cuckfield
West Sussex
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Annual Parish Meeting held at the Queen's Hall, High Street, Cuckfield

Notes of the Meeting held on 11th April 2024

- Present:** Mr Andy Burton (Chairman), Mr Paul Ceccherini, Mrs M Dormer, Mr R Gill, Mrs A King, Mr Adrian Podmore, Mr Andrew Symonds and Mrs Jill White and members of the public
- In attendance:** Sam Heynes (Clerk) and Noemi Ripert-Forrest (Communications & Admin Assistant)
- Guest Speakers:** Simon Stokes
Michael Brown
Paddy Boyle

1) **Presentation by the Chairman of Cuckfield Parish Council**

Cllr Andy Burton opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. For the third year, the meeting took the format of a roadshow with many local organisations in attendance.

Cllr Burton welcomed our guest speakers for the evening, and thanked all the local organisations for coming along to share news of their work and how others can become involved.

Cllr Burton shared the Parish Council successes and outcomes over the last year: The new council for 2023-2027 was elected in May 2023, welcoming two new councillors, forming a great team of 10 councillors with mixed knowledge and experiences. The last council was successful in achieving most of the activities laid out in the business plan, with highlights shared in the annual chairman's report published in Cuckfield Life.

Opposition to the proposed "Cuck-stye" development still remained a major issue and substantial evidence had been produced and presented at MSDC examination of the District Plan regulation 18, in partnership with Ansty & Staplefield Parish Council.

A new planning application for the Hanlye Lane development was proposed after the Parish Council submitted strong objections in autumn with the help of a planning consultant. Cuckfield Parish Council remain committed to maintaining the distinctiveness and character of the village.

Progress had been made with Taylor Wimpey to commence the transfer of the Buttinghill site to the Parish Council. This site would be renamed Ivy's View after consultation with residents.

The Coronation picnic in the park last summer had been a tremendous success, and Cuckfield Parish Council was looking to turn this into an annual event in partnership with the Rugby club.

Other events organised by Cuckfield Parish Council were due to continue this year such as the Christmas Street Festival, the Silver Sundays, and the Skate Jam, in the hope that these events offered provided entertainment across all generations. The Parish Council aimed to increase the number community events where possible.

The Angela Fox Nature Garden continued its journey of development as a long-term project and was making further progress in its design.

The refurbishment or replacement of the Village Hall was an ongoing topic of discussion and the Parish Council would be glad to welcome any feedback from residents to hear their views about what to do with this old building.

The increased traffic through the village continued to be an important issue with more cars and residents driving faster. Cuckfield Parish Council recently held a consultation to introduce a 20mph zone in the London Lane/Broad Street/High and South Street triangle with the hope that Google maps would eventually divert traffic away from Cuckfield. Cllr Burton urged residents to add their thoughts to the consultation presented in the lobby area.

Cllr Burton thanked the team in the Parish Office for all their hard work in organising the event and offered to answer any questions before introducing to the floor the guest speakers of the evening, Simon Stoke, Michael Brown, and Paddy Boyle.

2) Presentation by Simon Stokes

The Chairman of SCAG (Stop Cuck-stye Action Group), Simon Stokes, introduced who they were and gave some detailed background to explain the formation of this group.

Since Fairfax proposed their development plans of 1600+ houses in January 2022 on the Ansty farms site, SCAG had engaged a strong opposition with the help of its members and the public. After an initial and successful meeting including the surrounding parishes of Ansty & Staplefield and Cuckfield in March 2022 to understand the public's greatest concerns, SCAG had since built up a list of volunteers and increased their membership with people of a variety of professional backgrounds who provided a great resource, energy and determination.

The first task was to focus on the planning system and tackle the housing target set by Central Government and the share allocated to Mid Sussex. Fortunately, with the support of Cuckfield and Ansty & Staplefield Parish Councils, the funding needed to build the SCAG website was raised, which also paid for external reports in Planning, Landscape alongside further fundraising events.

By May 2022, SCAG were ready for their first big question time event with the presence of Brad Williams, politicians and other speakers to address the public and answer questions. This turned out to be a brilliant and successful evening and created a marvellous piece of drama to stir the public. As a result of this, the site was withdrawn from the District Plan.

Fairfax threw a spanner in the works by submitting a new application that had to be opposed according to the new District Plan and SCAG encouraged all residents to respond and oppose the new development plan.

SCAG will continue to fight and oppose these plans and hoped to collect all the evidence produced so far to create a legacy and a list of instructions for their successors. SCAG was still looking to raise funds to continue the hard work and would be grateful for any donations.

3) Presentation by Michael Brown

Michael Brown introduced himself, a volunteer working for the Sussex branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), a charity that has been campaigning for the last 98 years to protect our countryside. CPRE was also involved in planning matters and was currently working with SCAG, Ansty & Staplefield Parish Council and Cuckfield Parish Council to oppose the Fairfax plans. CPRE also contributed to the public examination of MSDC for the update of the District Plan.

Michael Brown talked about how nature should take more of a prominent place in the planning process. Our environment should be used as a utility and nature as monetary value. The government's main rulebook for planning is the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework), ensuring plans are sustainable and beneficial to future generations. The NPPF also confirmed that sustainable planning works if it balances economic, environment and social benefits.

How do we fairly balance the environmental component with the social and economic needs? We needed to think differently. How to turn our natural habitat into an asset? It is only by adding value to nature that changes could be made to the way planning decisions were made.

The Office of National Statistics published an annual report (England's Natural Capital Accounts) which valued our natural environment at over £12.3 billion annually through the attraction of tourism and recreation revenues. The more people who realise the value of our countryside, as a measurable asset with economic value, the greater the chance of it being protected and enhanced. Whilst the world was getting richer, nature was getting much poorer.

Michael Brown reminded us of the hard work CPRE was doing to protect our countryside and rural communities and that they were the only charity that campaigned on these issues locally and nationally.

Michael Brown thanked everyone for listening to him and encouraged the audience to support CPRE and become a member.

4) Presentation by Paddy Boyle

The Chairman of the New England Wood Trust, Paddy Boyle, introduced himself and described New England Wood as a tremendous asset for the village with its 25 acres of ancient woodland. This nature reserve had been purchased by Cuckfield residents in 1980 who had formed the New England Wood Trust, working hard to preserve the wood and to manage it for the benefit of Cuckfield.

Since the trust was formed, dedicated volunteers have been improving access to the woods and maintaining its ecology. The woodlands have 4 essential functions: recreation, biodiversity, climate mitigation and financial return.

A variety of people and activity groups enjoyed the woods and open spaces daily welcoming dog walkers, scouts and school groups, bird watching, meditation and yoga classes and other various groups.

The trust and volunteers maintained the paths, bridges, open spaces (glades) and over 200 steps across the woods. No vehicles were allowed as the access could be quite difficult,

therefore volunteers used the crops produced in the woods to carry out these maintenance tasks.

More species were planted at each opportunity for biodiversity benefits. Some trees needed to be taken down to help maintaining the paths and keeping them dry in the winter. The woods continued to face challenges with Ash dieback affecting 95% of the Ash trees that will die as the result of this fungus.

The trust had become more efficient in tidying up the woodlands and almost 90% of the wood felled had been collected.

Paddy Boyle concluded with a huge thank you to all the volunteers and trustees for their time and efforts and for all the donations received that kept the charity going. The New England Wood was our wood.

5) Closing Comments

Cllr Burton thanked the three speakers for their thought provoking and enriching presentations and thanked everyone for their time and for coming out, and offered to speak to anyone who had any questions about the items discussed this evening.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm

Signed: _____