



The Queen's Hall
High Street
Cuckfield
West Sussex
RH17 5EL

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

Notes of the Meeting held on 26th March 2026

- Present:** Mr A Burton (Chairman), Mr P Ceccherini, Mrs M Dormer, Mrs A King, Mrs A Kyle, Mr S Oversby-Powell, Mr A Podmore, Mr M Sheldon, Mrs Jill White and members of the public
- In attendance:** Noemi Ripert (Clerk) and Kate West (Communications & Admin Officer)
- Guest Speakers:** James Skilicorn
Paul Umney, PCSO
Malcolm Avery, MSDC
Symon Stokes, Cuckstye update
Paddy Boyle, New England Wood Trust
Katy Bourne, PCC

1) **Opening and welcome by the Chairman of Cuckfield Parish Council**

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

Cllr Burton welcomed the 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.

2) **Earthworm Talk- Presented by James Skilicorn**

Mr Skilicorn explained that he started his wormery six years ago in his small garden at home. Since then, he added 440 kg of raw food waste, producing an extraordinary amount of compost. The wormery was a simple system made up of a stack of trays placed on top of one another, each filled in turn. As each tray was completed, the worms naturally worked their way upwards to continue processing the waste.

The worms moved up and down the trays and were sensitive to changes in air pressure; for example, on rainy days, they tend to move downwards.

Worms were a fascinating subject, and Mr Skilicorn had the opportunity to speak to over 600 pupils, as well as numerous organisations. He was already fully booked for talks until the end of 2027.

Worms had a long history and had been recorded since ancient times, included by the Ancient Egyptians and Aristotle. During the Middle Ages, they were often associated with darker symbolism. In the 18th century, Carl Linnaeus contributed to their classification. Charles Darwin spent 40 years studying earthworms and wrote a book titled *The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms*.

There were around 30 different species of earthworms, commonly described as surface dwellers, topsoil dwellers, and deep-burrowing (vertical) dwellers. Earthworms did not have eyes but instead possessed light-sensitive receptors, and breathed through their skin.

3) Paul Umney, PCSO

PCSO Umney, who had worked with MSDC for nine years, provided an overview of the role of a Police Community Support Officer. The role focused on four key areas: community engagement (including speaking with residents, conducting foot patrols, and visiting schools), maintaining a visible presence (such as patrolling in a high-visibility police vehicle), gathering intelligence, and supporting safeguarding work. PCSOs were not warranted officers and therefore had limited powers, including no power of arrest; however, they played an important role within the wider policing team, working closely with neighbouring policing team and response colleagues to support community safety.

4) MSDC update – Presented by Cllr Malcolm Avery

Cllr Avery, a resident of Cuckfield for 20 years, explained that he was motivated to stand as District Councillor for Bolney, Cuckfield and Ansty in order to give something back to the community. He outlined that the role covered both local “micro” issues—such as assisting with bin collection problems—and wider “macro” matters, including supporting planning matters, addressing the increasing number of potholes, and contributing to projects such as the successful development of the Rugby Club. He emphasised that the District Councillor acted as a key link between residents, the Parish Council and Mid Sussex District Council.

Cllr Avery also provided an update on devolution, noting that significant work had taken place, with proposals initially suggesting two separate authorities for West Sussex and East Sussex. However, plans involving Arun, Adur and Worthing aligning with West Sussex were not supported by Government, leaving the process currently uncertain. A six-week consultation was expected, after which further clarity should emerge.

Cllr Avery encouraged the community to get in touch if they required any support or assistance.

5) Cuckstye Update – Presented by Cllr Simon Stokes

Cllr Stokes presented an update on “Cuckstye” and outlined the long-running opposition to Fairfax’s proposed development between Ansty and Cuckfield, explaining that although the planning application was rejected by Mid Sussex District Council last October after years of delay, the developer was now appealing, with a hearing starting on 9th June. While the Council was robustly defending its decision, the community campaign believed it was vital to take part as a “Rule 6 Party,” as this allowed residents to add further evidence and had been shown to greatly increase the chances of success. Cllr Stokes emphasised that visible, sustained community commitment could influence outcomes, thanked supporters for their efforts and fundraising, and called on the community for one final push to help fund expert witnesses and legal support to protect the countryside and defend the villages.

Giles King, chairman of Cuckfield Society, spoke briefly to encourage the community to help fund the “Cuckstye” campaign and to join the 500 club with further information available on their website: <https://www.cuckfieldsociety.uk/say-no-to-cuck-stye>

6) New Egland Wood Trust Update – Presented by Paddy Boyle

Mr Paddy Boyle, chairman of the New England Wood Trust (NEWT), introduced the Trust and explained its work and recent expansion. The Trust was founded in 1980 and bought New England Wood (27 acres) both as a community amenity and a nature reserve that they have since managed. Volunteers maintained over 1¾ miles of paths (including steps and bridges), supported community use (e.g., scouts and nature groups), and managed habitats through coppicing and scrub control.

A major current challenge was ash dieback, which had killed most ash trees—formerly nearly a quarter of the woodland—leading to ongoing felling for public safety. The Trust was also using this as an opportunity to create more long-term open space to benefit wildlife,

particularly butterflies.

The Trust recently purchased an additional 12 acres adjoining the wood (behind Cuckfield High Street), funded by donations from over 250 households and organisations plus grants from both local parish councils and charitable/environmental bodies. Over the next 1–2 years, NEWT planned to prioritise surveying and monitoring the new land before producing a long-term management plan. Immediate actions included improving key footpaths, addressing hazardous ash near paths, and clearing scrub to protect and slightly expand the southern meadow.

Mr Boyle closed with a call for volunteers and a reminder that the woodland was for community benefit and shared the contact details for anyone wanting to get involved or propose appropriate activities. cuckfieldwoodlanders@gmail.com

7) **Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Sussex - Presented by Katy Bourne**

Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Katy Bourne, a former resident of Ansty and former parish councillor for Ansty & Staplefield Parish Council, was pleased to attend the evening. She outlined the role of the PCC, which was an elected position serving a four-year term, responsible for holding the police to account and setting the overarching policing strategy. Under this framework, the police developed their own operational plans.

Mrs Bourne explained that the PCC oversees a substantial annual budget of approximately half a billion pounds and conducted regular accountability through monthly online performance meetings. The role also included the authority to appoint—and, if necessary, dismiss—the Chief Constable. A significant proportion of funding was directed towards vital support services, including those addressing domestic abuse, as well as specialised services for children and victims of sexual offences, helping them to report and recover from trauma.

She also noted that, by 2028, the PCC role was expected to be absorbed into the mayoral office under the new unitary authority. Mrs Bourne concluded by highlighting that her annual report was available online and distributed copies to attendees.

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

Cllr Burton shared the Parish Council successes and outcomes over the last year:

The new council for 2023-2027 was elected in May 2023, this was our last year.

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 and available online on the Parish Council's website.

Cuckfield Parish Council (CPC) continued to work through the business plan and Cllr Burton highlighted some of the activities out of the 60 that the Parish Council wanted to achieve. Planning was a major theme for the village with the ongoing Cuckstye proposed development that remained a major concern for the village. The Hanlye Lane new development had been completed. And another application had been put through by Fairfax at the end of Hanlye Lane, opposite the new Penlands Farm development near Borde Hill Lane, that was also causing some concern.

The Parish Council continued to push for the transfer and ownership of Buttinghill, another year had passed and still nothing had happened.

Cllr Burton gave a brief update on devolution and hoped that some of the assets managed by MSDC would be transferred to the parish council during the process.

The Parish Council's community events continued to be successful and well attended this year, including the Cuckfield Christmas Street Festival, Advent Windows, two 'skate jams' at the skate bowl, weekly Tea and Company and Silver Sunday cheese and wine events for

senior residents. CPC was looking forward to the Big Summer Picnic in July organised in partnership with HH Rugby Club at Whitemans Green and hoped for better weather!

Cllr Burton mentioned Holy Trinity Primary School who had taken over the running of the Cuckfield Pre-School Playgroup at the Village Hall. The Queen's Hall continued to be a great asset and venue for the village with the Angela Fox Nature Garden, located at the back of the hall, nearing completion and opened to the public. Solar panels had been installed on the roof of the Queen's Hall as part of the Parish Council's project to becoming more energy efficient.

Both allotments sites were full, and a waiting list was in place. The Parish Council continued to push for the ownership of the Glebe Road allotments owned and managed by MSDC.

Cllr White continued to run the Speedwatch programme with volunteers alongside our SID also in use in the village aimed to reduce speeding. The implementation of the 20mph zones remained a hot topic as well as potholes causing problems on the roads. CPC was still encouraging residents to report these issues directly to WSCC.

Cllr Burton thanked the team in the Parish Office for all their hard work in organising this event and opened the floor to the Q&A session.

9) Closing Comments

Cllr Burton thanked the speakers for their enriching presentations and thanked everyone for their time and for coming out this evening!

The meeting closed at 9pm

Signed: _____