

An Annual Assembly meeting of the SEAL PARISH COUNCIL was held on WEDNESDAY 17TH May 2023 in Seal Pavilion on Seal Recreation Ground at 7.30pm.

Present

Mr C Haslam (Chair)

Mr R Bourne

Mr A Michaelides

Mrs L Talbot

Mrs Stiasny

Also present, the Clerk, Councillor Thornton, Councillor Gough, Rev Anne Le Bas, St Peters and St Paul's Church, Rev Serena Willoughby, St Margarets and St Lawrence Church, Mrs L Butler, Head of School, Seal Primary School, Mr R Talbot, UVA and 3 parishioners

Apologies: Mr T Bullied, Mr O Boorman, Mr M Penn and Councillor Hogarth, Mrs M Gilhurst, KYN, Mr J Gilhurst, Mrs H Davies, Beaver Scout Leader, PCSO Tim Darling and PCSO George Darling, Mr D Eaton, Headteacher of St Lawrence School

Chairman's Report – Mr C Haslam

The Chairman thanked all the council members, members of public and organisations in the Parish for attending and their work throughout the year, key areas that were focused on through the year were:

- HIP 14 areas for road improvements identified in our parish, including waiting restriction, reduction of speed limits in both Childsbridge Lane and on the A25 on the western side of Seal.
- Wildflower verges project and provides a nicer habitat for Wildlife.
- A number of new picnic benches in the parish for community use.
- Seal Memorial bench and lectern which shows the history of HMS Submarine Seal.
- Charity contributions, as with many years we have donated and given grants to charities, local groups and causes which benefit the Parish. The last year have included the Jubilee Celebrations in Seal, Stone Street and Underriver. The Parish has contributed to the maintenance of the St Peter and St Paul church clock.

Planning Report presented by Mr Tim Martin

There were 93 applications in the last year which is higher than prior years . 12 of which were new dwellings. We believe we have made a sound contribution to planning decisions in the Parish, and helped to improve projects, such as the housing schemes at Foxbury Farm and Mills Crescent, which also brings welcome affordable dwellings.

The Committee has consistently tried to protect the Green Belt, the AONB and the Conservation Areas in the Parish and to reflect the concerns of local residents, but also to support well considered improvements to dwellings and other development.

The outline application by Tarmac for development of the Sevenoaks Quarry site, is still to be determined and the Parish Council has pressed for planning conditions and agreements to make the proposal acceptable. These include protection from future development for the open part of the site near Seal village, and adequate highway, cycle and pedestrian access.

We also responded to the first consultation on the renewed Local Plan process by Sevenoaks District, and to the Government consultation on changes to national planning policy. Our main messages were to allow local Councils to judge the scale of housing that can be accommodated without harm to the Green Belt and AONB landscape, and to close loopholes in policy that are increasingly exploited in the Parish.

The Chairman thanked Mr Tim Martin and presented him with a gift as he has been with the Council for over 7 years and chaired the Planning Committee and wish him well in his retirement.

Mrs Rebecca Stiasny has been elected as Planning Chairman and we wish her well in her new role.

Finance Report –Mr Michaelides (Finance Chairman) - The unaudited Statement of Income and Expenditure 2022/23 was circulated at the meeting.

The precept increases slowly each year, except in the covid years, which remained the same. The Seal Parish Council share of a band D property council tax increased by 2% which lies towards the lower end of the range for town and parish councils in Sevenoaks District. Expenditure this year was higher due to fencing off the Japanese knotweed for treatment. On highways we contributed to changing the speed limit to 40mph on Childsbridge Lane. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) we spent on benches around the village. A healthy number of reserves have been built up for future improvements in the parish.

Councillor Thornton Report

Councillor Thornton and Councillor Hogarth were elected for Seal and Weald Ward. She has now gained a position to be Leader of Sevenoaks District Council and has new responsibilities. Councillor Thornton congratulated Mr Haslam as a Sevenoaks District Councillor for Kemsing and congratulated Mr Michaelides on the liberal results for Seal. For Liberal. Cllr Purves will remain as Leader of the Liberal Democrats and Cllr Laura Manston will be Leader for the Green Party. The election results, Conservative won 33 seats, Liberal Democrats 14 seats, Green seats 4, Independent 3 seats. Councillor Peter Fleming had a 10-year budget process. The Council's budget is high due to utility costs, refuse collection mileage which is always an increase in demand and cost of living crisis meeting their needs. We are proud of what we have achieved at Foxbury Farm and people have started to move in there. There is always more need for affordable housing. We also have Mills Crescent for affordable housing, which is within the greenbelt rules. Net Zero is still on the agenda. There are schemes for cost of living for households and seeking employment. There are health walks available on SDC website and community grants for family cooking skills. 29 Affordable housing secured, CIL - £14m for the district, £4.2m on lower-level projects and Wildernesse managed to secure some funding.

Everyone Active has increased membership at the Leisure Centre and is doing well but there is still more work to be done.

Councillor Gough Report

It has been great pleasure to work with the Chairman, Clerk and Councillor Hogarth and Councillor Thornton. We have made significant progress in Seal regarding the speed limit reduction in Childsbridge Lane and we are waiting for the contractors to schedule work. We managed to get approved the speed limit on A25 to 30mph which was approved by Sevenoaks Joint Transportation Board before Christmas. Officers continue to work with the school regarding parking issues at Ash Platt Road. The roads have been badly affected this year with potholes and we have been stepping up repairs. A budget of £200m for highway repairs, £6m for Kent. Buses have been a major concern which has affected Seal along with Kemsing. We have secured the Bus Service Improvement Plan funding award and an agreement in place to deploy just under £19m for the first 2 years over the next year. This year was an intensely difficult financial position for the County Council. Severe pressures on Adult Social Care and Special Educational Needs, there was an overspending in our budget and raising Council tax. The Combined Member's Grant was cut to £4,000. Kent has the largest number of refugees from Ukraine and no part of Kent has taken on more guests than Sevenoaks District. On secondary school offer day, record numbers 19,007 families from Kent, up from 695 previous year. 22,620 in total, up 731 applied for a place for their child. Although the proportion that secured their first preference fell slightly, numbers rose securing second, third or fourth preference. So, the proportion allocation was the lowest since 2018. They had a reallocation process in April and appeals continue.

Kent Police

As of 7th June PCSO numbers are now down to 4 and have been redeployed to other areas in the district with PC's taking over responsibility for the parish and will introduce themselves in due course

Mrs L Butler – Head of School, Seal Primary School

The school has had a good year with a strong intake of students as a result of the recent extension which has allowed a 2-form entry. Their pupils have an enriched curriculum and activities include Art exhibitions at Kaleidoscope Gallery a World War II exhibition, sleep overs at Carrotty Wood, a planned Isle of Wight trip and the Seal community farm, which is open to the public in the summer. There is presently a consultation on joining with some other local schools to form their own The Multi Academy Trust (MAT) and would continue to collaborate to enhance pupil progress whilst maintaining their own distinctiveness.

The school operates walking bus at Ash Platt and Zambra Way, whilst there was a desire to use Seal recreational ground, this was unable to progress due to timing constraint involving drop off times clashing with the pre-school. The school has an updated travel plan and was in support of reducing the speed limit.

Mrs H Davies, 9th Sevenoaks (Seal) Scout Group Report

The Parish Council received Mrs Davies report and this can be viewed on our website.

KYN report

The Parish Council received KYN report and this can be viewed on our website.

St Peters and St Pauls – Rev Anne Le Bas

Numbers have improved following COVID and we connected with people online which has continued. Talking Village Sessions are part of KYN meet on a Monday pm in the café and also meeting on Saturday at the library. Loneliness seems to be a big issue. We are a Eco Church and working on the bronze award, encouraging children on bird boxes. Spirits have been good coming out of covid. Getting volunteers who can commit is always challenging, but one which we continue to work on.

St Margarets Church and St Lawrence Church – Rev Serena Willoughby

St Margaret's Church and St Lawrence Church are healthy and very involved in the community. Natural hesitancy, we are getting people back but have lost younger families. But through online we are being creative and trying different activities. Rev Anne Le Bas and Rev Serena Willoughby do work closely together. This year we looked at wellbeing and had at St Lawrence Church Pilates in pews and we have provided free singing sessions. There has been building work at St Margarets Church in Underriver and we have a strong connection with UVA. St Lawrence community is thriving, during covid was difficult. We have had a nativity in St Lawrence Church, a real donkey, sheep and an actual baby.

We would like to thank the Parish Council for the Jubilee grant.

St Lawrence Primary School report

The Parish Council received St Lawrence report and this can be viewed on our website.

Seal Over 60's

A volunteer attended the meeting and reported that Seal Over 60's is on once a month for an afternoon tea, they have speakers in and play the ukulele extra funding provides activities.

UVA Report

It's been a busy year, the UVA arranged a number of events through the year which is well attended such as The Platinum Jubilee (which made the TV on BBC south east), fireworks night, Village Christmas dinner, Golf day, Quiz night, Cheese and Wine evening and more recently the Coronation, which consisted of Ring for the King, a beautiful display of flowers and a tea Party attended by over

120 villagers. A number of these events raised a significant amount that we were able to donate to food banks and MND.

A number of improvements were made to the village Hall with a new boiler, Kitchen, benches and Flagpole installed. These were financed by a combination of grants and individual donations, and our maintenance fund. Income for the year was up due to hiring out the hall for the filming of the second series of The Larkins!

Any Other Questions from Parishioners

No questions

Parish Presentation – Community Award

This year's Community Award goes to Rev Serena Willoughby for her continued work which she supports in our Parish, she been involved in the Coronation, quiz nights and generally helps and supports the community.

Lastly, the Chairman thanked everyone who attended the Annual Assembly and welcomed them to stay for refreshments.

Meeting closed at 9pm