



Rusthall

Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The Rackliff Centre

Thursday 23rd April 2026 - 7.00pm.

Present:

Parish Councillors: Cllr Paul Gripper; Cllr Mark Coghlan; Cllr Barry Edwards; Cllr Del Walker

Borough Councillors : Cllr Jayne Sharrett; Cllr Matthew Sankey.

County Councillor: Cllr John Mooreland

Officers: Clerk -Alison; Deputy Clerk - Linda Neusten; Allotments Manager -Jon Vanns.

Members of the public - 15

Minutes

1. **The Chairman, Cllr Paul Gripper welcomed the public** and opened the meeting.
2. **Apologies** – Cllr Alex Britcher-Allan
3. **The Chairman**, Cllr Paul Gripper delivered an Annual Report- Parish Chairman's Report 2026 *Recently I was accosted by a local resident who asked in rather accusatory manner. 'What has the parish council actually done? The tone of the question indicated a high degree of scepticism accompanied by a dispiritingly low expectation of a convincing reply. This reminded me and no doubt others of a certain age of the great Monty Python line from the Life of Brian of the memorable question - 'What have the Romans ever done for us? To which of course there was a fairly lengthy reply containing a comprehensive list of achievements. I am not for one minute going to liken the achievements of RPC to those of the Romans but this evening is a great opportunity to hear about many of the good things that have happened in Rusthall over the last 12 months and I hope the parish council has played its part. The High Street, the Commons and the community - those are the 3 special features which make Rusthall such a special place in which to live.*

Rusthall High St continues to buck the national trend. Literally every shop unit in the High St is now filled with the opening of The Venture's pet shop on the corner of Meadow Rd imminent. A major reason for such a thriving retail environment is not only the fabulous support shops and cafes get from local residents but also support from those who travel from neighbouring villages and indeed Tunbridge Wells. In what are very challenging times for everyone it is so important that this level of support continues. The icing on the cake was when the much needed and long awaited resurfacing of the High Street occurred and that was in no small measure as a result of the cajoling and persistence from our borough and County councillors with a special mention for Jayne Sharratt.

Another project in the pipeline which will enhance the High Street is The Safer Walking, Wheeling and Cycling link between TW and LG .The project looks to deliver a series of measures that would make the links between Langton Green, Rusthall, the Commons and Royal Tunbridge Wells safer for walking, wheeling (e.g. wheelchairs, mobility scooters, or children's buggies) and cycling. There was a very well attended public engagement event here at the Rackliff at the end of November which generated a lot of interest and in recent discussions with the Borough Council, Rusthall has been earmarked for the first phase of the link. The plans are now being costed by KCC and we hope for progress with the project in the very near future.

Our Commons have been very much in public spotlight over the last 3 months. The Friends of the Commons under the dynamic leadership of Roger Barton and John Barber launched a magnificent campaign to raise sufficient funds for a successful bid to bring this much loved and unique green space into public ownership. A number of public meetings were held, in Rusthall and TW and there was widespread coverage of the campaign in the national press and TV as well as 2 very well attended marches through the Common and town centre to highlight the issue. Over 3000 pledges were offered by the public but in the first instance the bid has not been successful although due diligence on the winning bid may keep the FOC bid in play. Despite not getting the desired outcome yet it was a superb community effort which demonstrated the depth of feeling which local people have for our Commons and is a clear indication to the new owners on how important responsible stewardship will be in the future. Our grateful thanks go to the FOC committee who worked so tirelessly and passionately on this campaign since last autumn.

And finally the third of the jewels in Rusthall's crown and many would say the most important – The Community.

A number of initiatives have come to fruition in the last 12 months.

In January there was the launching of the Rusthall youth hub here at the Rackliff . Meeting every Friday between 6 &8, funded by TWBC and run by professional youth workers at Play Place it is has got off to an encouraging start. Numbers are steadily growing and there has been some very positive feedback from the youngsters who are attending.

RPC are very close to taking over responsibility for the Mary Caley playground in Ashley Gardens with just the final legal formalities to complete.

It has been a very productive and busy year on our 3 community allotment sites with virtually every plot occupied. Our allotments manager, Jon Vanns, has done a brilliant job. As well as routine maintenance, replacing fence panels, painting summer houses, clearing scrub and weeds in communal areas, the number of plots in the all ability garden at Southwood Rd has been extended which has been a very popular addition. Jon has also forged a very beneficial (and cost saving) link with Community Payback who send groups of individuals to do several hours of 'community work' every Monday. All allotments have hosted a number of very enjoyable social events which have been much appreciated by many of the plot holders.

Safety of motorists and pedestrians must always remain a priority. Speeding is an on going problem in the village and we are incredibly grateful to Helen Foster and her Speedwatch team who collect data on a weekly basis which is then passed on to Kent police who act on it.

Rusthall Speedwatch has been complemented several times by Kent police for the frequency and quality of the data collected and it has become a template for good practice in Kent.

We are awaiting the final plans for traffic calming measures on Lower Green Rd which will in part be funded by a £25 000 grant from fines collected by TWBC for traffic infringements in the town centre. As soon as we receive the amended plans we will put them out for consultation to the residents in Lower Green Rd.

The campaign for a reduction in the speed limit and a pedestrian crossing on the main Langton Rd around the area of St Paul's Church has been going on for well over a decade. Although we haven't succeeded in achieving those goals we got the news earlier in the year that KCC has approved the funding for a pedestrian refuge which will undoubtedly make crossing what is a very busy and dangerous road, significantly safer.

One of the key functions of parish councils is to support local organisations and events. A sizeable grant has been given to Baby Umbrella which gives access skilled and compassionate support to families in West Kent during their parenting journey. Large donations have been given to Molyneux Alms Houses in the High Street, the production costs of Rusthall Life which is enjoyed by so many residents, the Community café which takes place on the last Saturday of the month at the URC and the summer fete and fireworks committee which are both incredibly popular and well attended annual community events and the Thursday Lunch club's Christmas lunch. The parish Council also fund the Christmas lights and the hanging baskets and an extra 2 defibrillators have been purchased which now make a total of 6 spread across the village.

THANK YOU'S

- Barry - presentation of gift
- Alex- 5 years as a Borough Council
- The team

4. **Speakers:**

- **Community Learning Skills – Denise McGiven-Nolan county Education Manager & Wendy Weston Community Education Manager.**

Work to offer a variety of free courses across Kent for people over 19 years who are unemployed or in low paid jobs.

Courses aim to provide skills and basic qualifications through further learning, employment and wellbeing volunteering. Pathways to employments are also offered. Response partners include:- Community & Healthy Living centres; Housing and volunteering Organisations; Local Community Groups, Local Parish Councils, and charities.

For more detailed information please contact response01@kent.gov.uk

- **Sea Cadets – Cadet Alyssa Russell & Junior Cadet Zac Vanns.**

Gave a comprehensive report as to how the Sea Cadets are structured and the various benefits gained from being a Sea Cadet. Eg. New challenges which enhance confidence; leadership and responsibility. Most off fun and plenty of outdoor activities down at Bewel Water during the summer months.

- **Youth Club – Cllr Mark Coghlan**

The Youth Club was set up in January of this year and runs every Friday evening at The Rackliff Centre. So far an average of 16 young members regularly attend each week.

The Youth club provides an excellent space for a variety of activities inc. A quiet 'girls room' plenty of games, gaming and offers refreshments during the evening. Given the success, it has now been decided that an additional youth worker is required.

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

- a. **Mark Coghlan for PC Lisa Whitehead**

Speed checks –

15/04/26 – Speed checks conducted on Lower Green road

Visits –

13/03/26 – Visit to Rusthall Youth Club, lovely to see a good amount kids involved

23/04/26 – Visit to Rusthall Squirrels positive engagement the children loved the Police Car Patrol –

I continue to patrol Happy Valley and woodland we had one report of indecent exposure, of which I attended along with a dog unit. Image obtained of a male – this was different from previous incidents, and the dog was unable to detect semen at the scene, therefore believed the male was urinating. Positive news as he seems to have not returned.

Several foot patrol shifts in the nice weather around the area.

Anti social behaviour – x2 calls regarding ASB/nuisance bikes – I will continue to find out who is driving the bikes and issue Section 59 warnings.

Reports of small fires within Happy valley, advised inft to call 999 for fire brigade I will continue to monitor.

I have been working with Dan and Gemma in relation to males cutting trees down and helping themselves to logs – report has been created for criminal damage and male will be interviewed.

Commons Conservators: Gemma Stapley – General Manager of Commons gave a reassuring report about future ownership of the Commons and that from the public's point of view there will be no changes. No building developments. Ranger Dan continues to work on conserving the woodlands and recently planted some disease free Ash trees. The Commons Conservators have a large number of volunteers who regularly assist with a large variety of clearing, planting, litter picking and similar activities.

Speedwatch: Micky Heasmen SW group was re-established in April 2019. Initially with 6 volunteers. In the last few months 248 vehicles have been recorded exceeding the speed limits around the village. All vehicles recorded are reported to the Police who maintain records and in cases of repeat offenders write to the drivers.

We are pleased, that due to the of the high number of cars recorded in excess of 30mph in recent months on Lower Green Road, that Kent Police Speed watch have supported us with a physical presence and subsequent enforcement notices.

If you have time, and would like to offer some voluntary hours (2-3 hours a month) we would be delighted your welcome you. Please contact deputyclerk@rusthall-pc.gov.uk

Rusthall Lunch Club – Helen Foster Run every Thursday by volunteers for older members of the village in St Pauls' Parish Hall at a cost of £6 per person. Currently there are 35 regular members. We make a point of celebrating 'special' birthdays, an Christmas meal and Easter eggs. Once a year members are taken on an outing. Funds for the outing are through an annual raffle Helen made a specific plea for volunteers. Help is needed for a variety of roles including driving members who cant get to the lunches on their own. Once a year the committee host a special evening for all volunteers to say thank you.

Helen Foster and Richard Brook have recently taken over joint Chair responsibilities. For further information please contact myhondacz@gmail.com

The Rusthall Bonfire and Fete group – Lisa Coghlan; Last years 'new' firework event was a huge success and, is going to be followed up with an even bigger, better version this year. The main fund raiser, The Summer fete, to be held on 27th June. This years Christmas Tree event is to be held on the 1st Saturday of December. Once again Lisa called for volunteers to assist with a variety of roles.

Please contact Lisa Coghlan at lisatoes@yahoo.co.uk

Open Forum – Networking

We had a very pleasant social networking session following the main Assembly meeting to which most attendees stayed and participated.

The Assembly closed at 8.55pm

Linda Neusten.

Deputy Clerk.

