

RINGMER PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2008 – 2009

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The Council has had another busy year of involvement in all spheres of local activity and has addressed matters of safety, security and welfare as well as the main issues of housing, employment, transport and the environment. This year has also seen our successful attempt at achieving Quality Council status, an award which recognises that this Council is well organised and provides a good service to its community, a sentiment with which I hope you fully agree! Possessing this status may bring the potential to take on new powers and to collaborate with other authorities, enabling greater local input over the delivery of some of your services.

THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL

The Council works at a number of levels. These include: seeking to influence the services provided by the district and county councils and other organisations; facilitating the work of voluntary organisations via grants and other support; and providing services itself. Above all it sees its main role as being the main champion for the local community and in this it endeavours to be open and accessible to everyone. The following gives a summary of the range of activities and issues which we have been involved in over the last year:

Recreational improvements

Last year much money was spent in refurbishing the play area at Broyle Close and installing additional equipment at the Fingerpost Field and Village Green play areas. It is gratifying to see that these facilities are being very well used, but we need to keep a watchful eye to ensure that the equipment remains in good condition and the surrounding areas are clean, safe and tidy – while we pay for weekly inspections please contact the office if anything seems amiss. In addition, the path across the Green was replaced, which improved accessibility to the adjacent play area and between the Church and Bishops Lane. These facilities were entirely paid for by developers' contributions associated with larger housing developments.

Further money remains available for eligible recreational purposes up to 2011 and the Council will consider how best to use them over the remaining period. So far it has been decided to refence the play area at the north end of Broyle Lane and provide a practice goalpost, but there are several other potential commitments and opportunities and these will be further considered in the summer when the position may have become clearer – we want to ensure that the money is spent where it is most needed and will provide maximum benefit; with the current financial downturn it is uncertain when further such contributions will be made available.

Affordable Housing

You will doubtless have heard of the desperate national and local shortage of genuine affordable housing and this parish will hopefully be adding to the stock required with

the development of 2 pairs of small semi-detached dwellings in Potato Lane. Following wide publicity, a consultation exhibition was conducted in February which drew favourable remarks about the buildings' design, and it is anticipated that the planning application will have been lodged by Hastoe Housing Association during March. The houses are intended to be for rent and to be for locals and other people with Ringmer connections.

Traffic calming and parking

A good working relationship continues to be achieved with the County Council and they have done much to improve the widths and condition of roadside footpaths within the centre of the village. The 40 mph speed limit is to be extended further into The Broyle, and to improve highway safety and residents' and shoppers' convenience limited period parking and yellow lining are currently being introduced in several locations following a village-wide consultation undertaken by ESCC, particularly in Broyle Lane and at the Shopping area. This has been a long time coming but will hopefully encourage more considerate parking that particularly respects the needs of disabled and elderly people and of those vehicles that must unload in restricted spaces.

In addition, the vehicle-activated 30mph signs have been introduced at Council's expense to persuade traffic to slow on the approaches to our schools and improvements have been made to the Forges roundabout to increase its effectiveness. Council supports the work of RADAR which has this year conducted a detailed local survey in collaboration with Brake, a road safety charity. This identified residents' main concerns as being speeding, heavy vehicles, the need for crossings at the Community College and Harrison's Lane junction, pedestrian safety and the need for better parking facilities. These findings will help to inform Council in its decision-making and may well be instrumental in persuading ESCC to introduce further measures that will slow traffic and improve road safety.

We were very concerned to learn of the fatal traffic accident late last year on The Broyle and this was discussed in Committee – it is intended that following the gathering of a petition and other representations, the issue will be taken up with ESCC with a view to achieving improvements to this treacherous stretch of road.

Access to the countryside

A lot of resources have again been devoted to improving the parish's footpaths. More kissing gates have been introduced particularly where stiles have become beyond repair and surfaces have been made more readily useable by a wider section of the community; and continuation of the programme is intended this year. We are most grateful for the co-operation that has been shown by the landowners concerned. With a good relationship with the South Downs Joint Committee we have also seen the installation of further kissing gates on the path to Mill Post, widening of a hazardous stretch, and the installation of further steps.

A new permissive path is also hopefully about to be introduced, possibly this spring, subject to the completion of legal formalities. Many thanks are due to Mr Christie the landowner and Mr Loughborough the initiator. This would run from New Road near Gote Lane up to Saxon Cross and then join an existing public footpath. It would be

necessary to close the new path for several days every year (warning signs to be displayed on such days) to allow shooting on the Estate.

Maintaining grounds and other facilities

The Council is responsible for maintaining all the open spaces in the village including the Green, Anchor Field and Fingerpost Field. Grass cutting; maintaining trees; and providing seats, bins and litter clearance are all within its remit. Action has been taken this year to improve the drainage of the pond above the Green as its overflowing had been seen as leading to periodic flooding of the cricket pitch. In the recent heavy rains there have been some further drainage problems in this area however as this may have been an exceptional situation the matter will be kept under review for the present.

The allotments have been fully let and there is currently a waiting list. We are however in the process of restoring some overgrown areas and dividing them into smaller plots in order to increase the number of residents who can avail themselves of this opportunity.

The old churchyard and the war memorial

It is Council's responsibility to maintain the old churchyard, a task in which it receives great help from the church wardens. In addition to grass cutting and managing the trees, this year renovation work was satisfactorily completed on the grave of the Reverend Edward Palmer. Dated 1748 this is of particular historical significance. Repairs are also scheduled for the churchyard wall and investigations are being undertaken into sympathetic improvements to the brick path. Unfortunately, the lights to the war memorial failed to work in November – several possible causes are being investigated with the intention of this being put right in good time for this year's Remembrance.

Law and order

This is the second year that the Council has contributed substantially towards the cost of a second Police Community Support Officer, and it is understood that the presence of the PCSO's in the village is a very welcome addition. They have doubtless been instrumental in reducing the incidence of problems in the area although there have still been examples of vandalism, crime and antisocial behaviour. A local Neighbourhood Panel has been established by the Police on which the Parish Council is represented and this has decided that currently the 3 main priorities for action should be antisocial behaviour, litter and inconsiderate parking. With the introduction of limited parking and no waiting in some areas this latter issue can be more firmly controlled.

Some help in providing residents with greater security is given by several neighbourhood watch schemes but concern has been felt at the number of unsolicited visits paid by salesmen, genuine and otherwise. Therefore in conjunction with East Sussex Trading Standards a consultation letter has been circulated with the March Parish Newsletter to all households, seeking views on support for the setting up of a No Cold Calling Zone. This will help in deciding whether to proceed and on what basis. Last year we advised that there were also proposals to introduce a No Public Drinking zone in the central part of the village and consideration of this is still being

progressed – any views expressed over this will be sent on to those thinking of organising it.

Planning Matters

A significant part of the Council's time is taken up with planning matters. Each month the Planning Committee considers local planning applications and passes comments back to Lewes District Council, which is the statutory planning authority for the area. Over 60 applications were considered in 2008 ranging from small extensions to more significant applications for new developments. Early 2008 saw a public inquiry into the Glyndebourne proposal for a wind turbine on Mill Plain. Following a ministerial decision, a temporary mast has been erected and we must await the outcome of wind – flow tests. This year, the Planning Committee has had to consider early consultations about a possible reservoir at Clayhill, put forward by South East Water as part of a range of solutions to its water storage needs, and has been in discussions with ESCC about the route and details of the proposed Ringmer- Lewes cycleway. You will have seen the new surgery arising on Anchor Field. You will also have noted that the mobile home on Broyle Lane is still there - despite permission being refused and an appeal dismissed almost a year ago, further action is proving necessary; and that neither the full landscape screening nor the play area promised on the Forges development is as yet in place.

Planning is also a strategic activity with long-term implications for the community, and much effort has gone into considering the future needs of the village. Building on the Village Action Plan, the Council published its own Employment Plan in May 2006 and is embarking on the process of consulting over its draft Strategy for Residential Development 2006 – 2026. The aim is to have both documents recognised within the Local Development Framework being developed by the District Council and thus have some influence on key developments and policies affecting our community. As things stand housing allocations for the Lewes District arising from the South East Plan are at the lower end of expectations and the Council will strongly resist further 'greenfield' market housing development on the fringes or green wedges within the village. It will in principle, however, support smaller infill developments within the current village planning boundaries if appropriate and is recommending challenging targets for developing affordable housing. Plans to move Ringmer F.C. to a new site near the Community College and to develop other leisure facilities there (generally as provided for under Local Plan policy RG3) have made little progress – Council does not view a developer's suggestion that this should be financed by building hundreds of new houses on adjoining fields as either realistic or acceptable.

The proposals for the South Downs National Park have yet to be agreed in final detail but the Council has welcomed proposals (with just a few minor caveats) to extend the boundary down from the escarpment to include Gote Farm and parts of Ashton Green and a significant area to the west of the village between Ham Lane, the A26 and the B2192. Additional protection of the landscape bordering a large part of the village can only be welcomed.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Raising money

The Council's financial year runs from 1 April to 31 March and the bulk of its annual income comes from the precept; a sum raised via the Council Tax.

For 2008/09 Council set a gross expenditure budget of £88,620, partly reduced by income and other items to a net budget of £85,299. This was financed by a Council Tax Precept of £77,794 and supplemented by £7,505 from reserves. The latter covered 75% of the cost of an additional PCSO, as discussed and agreed at the 2008 Annual Parish Meeting. This was a "one-off" subsidy and the cost of this additional resource for the village must be covered by precept in future years.

The table below gives an overview of the main areas of the Council's budgeted expenditure for 2008-09. Before taking into account the benefit of income and funds set aside for specific purposes, the approved expenditure budget for 2008/09 is £88,620, of which the following represents the significant items:

Main expenditure Items

	£
Staff, including employer overheads	36,481
Office & General Administration	5,694
Audit and Insurance Fees	4,640
Grants to organisations	3,500
Maintenance of grounds (the Green, the Pond, Anchor Field, Fingerpost Field and others) including grass cutting, tree maintenance etc.	9,520
Play area maintenance, inspections etc.	3,800
Contribution to Police Community Support Officer costs	10,250
Maintenance of Old Churchyard & War Memorial	2,655
Emptying of dog bins	2,060
Allotments-grass cutting, water charge, lease	725
Footpaths-maintenance and installation of kissing gates	1,310
Rent for Anchor Field and Broyle Close play areas	500
Rent for office and meeting accommodation	2,750
Other sundry expenditures	4,735
Total	88,620

The Council is required to have both an internal and external auditor to oversee its accounts. The final accounts are signed off by the external auditor in August/September and are available for inspection. A notice is placed on the notice board stating the period when the accounts can be inspected.

Looking to 2009/10, Council has set a gross expenditure budget of £89,258, which will be reduced by the benefit of income and other items to £86,724. The precept has been set at £83,630, an increase of 7.5% and it is planned to supplement this with £3,094 from reserves. While this increase is higher than the inflation rate, this is largely to reset the budget baseline to include the PCSO costs referred to above, and the precept

still only represents 2.7% of overall Council Tax. The Council has set a target of the budget being met entirely from precept by 2010/11, thereby eliminating the need to rely on reserves for operational purposes.

PARISH COUNCILLORS & COMMITTEES

Tel: 01273

Cllr. A. R. Peters, **Chairman**
Plashett Park Farm, Ringmer BN8 5SJ 812389

Cllr. J. E. Kay, **Vice-Chairman and Planning Committee Chairman**
Fair Meadow, Rushey Green, Ringmer BN8 5JB 813388

Planning Committee - comprises all Councillors

General Purposes Committee

Cllr. P. Longhurst, **Chairman** 813574
Dart Cottage, The Elms, Ringmer BN8 5EZ
Cllr. Mrs J Fordham, 53 Broyleside Cottages, Broyle Lane, Ringmer BN8 5NS 813471
Cllr. Mrs E L Pitts, Chanctonbury, Broyle Lane, Ringmer BN8 5PG 813366
Cllr. K. White, Celandines, Bishops Lane, Ringmer BN8 5LD 813121
Cllr. Mrs J. Woollons, 36 Christie Avenue, Ringmer BN8 5JT 812639

Greens Committee

Cllr. R Wilcox, **Chairman**
5 Gote Lane, Ringmer BN8 5HP 812810
Cllr. A. J. Grindley, 25 Springett Avenue, Ringmer BN8 5HD 812933
Cllr. Mrs. V. Humphrey, 26 Oakmede Way, Ringmer BN8 5JL 814472
Cllr. Ms. P. Lewis, 3 East View Cottages, Harrison's Lane, Ringmer BN8 5LP 814637
Cllr. R. B. Truman, 1 Cheyney Cottages, Lewes Road, Ringmer BN8 5QA 812862
Cllr. I P Wilson, Dorian, Rushey Green, Ringmer BN8 5JB 812143

Chairman & Vice-Chairman are Ex Officio on both the above Committees

Office & Finance Committee: Cllrs: A. R. Peters; R Wilcox
Mrs J Fordham; P Longhurst; J. E. Kay

Internal Control Committee: Cllrs. Mrs.V. Humphrey; Mrs Pitts,
R. Truman;

OFFICERS

Clerk: Mr. C. Elphick

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