

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

A major part of our January council meeting considered a report and presentation from Chris Paterson from the SDNPA regarding the procedural minefield that our Neighbourhood Plan (NP) has encountered. As our Neighbourhood Plan proposes development sites which are within 5kms of internationally protected nature conservation sites it is necessary that the NP is subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), the first stage of which is Screening. The HRA Screening was undertaken over a year ago when it was also determined that a Strategic Environmental Assessment would not be necessary. However, that HRA also included the second stage where necessary mitigation measures were identified. Last year a High Court ruling required that any mitigation must be determined in a separate second stage HRA and cannot be considered as part of the HRA Screening. Therefore, we are now required to carry out this separate second stage of the HRA, which means also that a Strategic Environmental Assessment will now be required. These requirements mean extra work and include the need for additional statutory consultation periods which will push back the submission date to the early summer. This is a significant blow to those who have worked on our NP for many years and wish to see it proceed to the final stages as soon as possible. However, we are advised that if these procedures are not followed now, the NP will fail when it is scrutinised by an independent examiner.

We agreed to hold the Annual Parish Meeting in Rogate Village Hall at 7pm on 11 April. This is not a parish council meeting but a meeting of all the clubs and organisations in the parish including: Rake Church of England Primary School; Rogate Church of England Primary School; Rogate Village Hall Committee; Rake Village Hall Committee; Rogate and Rake Neighbourhood Plan; Rogate Parish Churches; Rogate Youth Club; Rogate Society; The Heritage Centre; Rogate and Terwick News; Rogate and Terwick Housing Association Limited; Fyning, Terwick & Borden Wood Residents Association; and George Street Trust. Please put this in your diary and come along to hear about what is happening in your parish. Last year, disappointingly, we had very few people who weren't already involved through one of the organisations presenting. This is an excellent opportunity to hear about what is happening in your community, for both newcomers and long-standing residents.

Another date is that Thursday 2 May 2019 will be election day. All current parish councillors wishing to continue will be up for re-election and anyone else can put themselves forward for election as well. It may be that we will have some vacancies so please consider whether you or someone you know would be interested in becoming a parish councillor. Nomination documents will be available from Rogate Village Shop.

Also for your diary, there will be a Southdowns' Dark Skies Festival between 15 February and 3 March 2019 - <http://southdowns.gov.uk/dark-skies-festival> – which will include a star count. Maintaining our dark night skies is an important issue for our rural area and this will be an excellent way to celebrate them.

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