

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

We had a busy November meeting which covered a wide range of issues. On the financial front there was a review of our expenditure seven months into the year. We responded to a number of funding requests which we will be met from our reserves. As in previous years we support the Rogate and Terwick PCC's with the maintenance of the cemeteries and agreed to pay for a range of marketing materials for Rogate Primary School to help boost pupil numbers. Also on the subject of primary schools we are concerned that WSCC is undertaking yet another review and consultation on the viability of rural and small schools. Locally Stedham and Compton and Up Marden schools have been identified as 'at risk'. Rogate and Rake schools are not directly identified but maybe impacted either positively or negatively by any resultant decision. The Parish Council considers that a primary school is one of the essential pre-requisites of a sustainable village community and will oppose any moves that jeopardise the Rogate and Rake schools' viabilities. In addition, for the same reasons, it fully supports the continued sustainability of Stedham and Compton and Up Marden schools.

In another cost-cutting exercise, WSCC has put one of our bus service links with Chichester at risk of closure. From Petersfield, the first 54 service of the day leaves at 0707 arriving in Rogate at 0720 before travelling to Harting. From there, at 0734, it leaves for Chichester arriving at 0816. It is used by students attending Chichester College and others. WSCC will be cutting the Saturday service as it is not used at all, but wants the affected parishes (Rogate, Harting, Compton, Stoughton Walderton and Funtingdon) to pay for the retention of the Monday to Friday service. The remaining four 54 services during the rest of the day will not be affected. Provision of bus services is the responsibility of WSCC and not the parish council. To pay for this subsidy we would have to significantly increase our portion of the council tax. There are different opinions as to whether it is lawful for a parish council to provide parish precept money to support a function that is not its responsibility, especially when that responsibility resides with another precept-generating local authority. Also, there is the issue of whether it is right for parish council-taxpayers to pay again for something that they are already paying WSCC. Before we make a decision on whether to agree to the WSCC request at our December meeting, we will sort out the legal position and liaise with neighbouring parishes. If you have any views on the matter, please let me or the Clerk know or talk to any of our councillors.

May I repeat notice of an issue I raised last month? WSCC and SDNPA are about to relaunch a public consultation exercise about plans to create a second major sand extraction quarry at West Heath Common which is just south of A272 off the lane from Durford Mill to West Harting. The new site at Down Park is just outside Rogate parish but all the resultant HGV traffic will come into the parish and join the A272 adding to the already significant HGV problem on the road and through Rogate. If you are at all concerned, as we are, about this proposal, please look out for further information on how and where to comment.

Finally, may I wish everyone a very happy Christmas and best wishes for the New Year.

Steve Williamson

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