

Rogate Parish Council – Chairman's letter

In November 2021 the Parish Council became aware that Rogate and Terwick Housing Association (RTHA), the housing association that owns and looks after Hugo Platt and East Lodge, were in negotiations with PHA Homes Ltd (PHA) to make a 'Transfer of Engagements'. In simple terms this means RTHA hand over their assets, liabilities and the freeholds of the properties to PHA. In return, PHA will assume all responsibility for the maintenance and management of these properties.

In some ways this makes sense. RTHA have been paying PHA a hefty fee for managing the property over many years. As the legislation around sheltered and affordable housing becomes increasingly onerous so does the management and maintenance of the property. This requires expertise, resources and ready access to tradesmen.

The Parish Council, as a corporate shareholder in RTHA, wanted to ensure that all the options had been considered and the community had been taken into consideration in accordance with the articles of association of RTHA with regards the community being a central part of all actions taken by RTHA. In addition, the Parish Council were contacted by a number of shareholders who were concerned about the loss of these community assets and that the correct due diligence had been carried out before the ownership of the properties were transferred to PHA.

Since November, achieving what appears to be a simple goal has at times, felt like walking across a field of treacle. Tiring and sticky. At an early meeting in the church we were assured all tenancies were safe. Several pieces have since been written to suggest that START could not take over RTHA. This has never been the intention but START nonetheless, worked with us to consider the alternatives. This proved impossible as they had not been provided with or given access to any information. A 'housing need survey' was not carried out and we were refused time to complete this. This survey is essential in order to provide a clear idea of the housing needs in the village. Our most recent housing need survey (in 2017 the Neighbourhood Plan) strongly indicated the type of houses required were one and two bedroom homes, exactly the sort being given away.

The agreement is between PHA and RTHA. In conjunction with START, we arranged a meeting with PHA. RTHA declined to attend this initial meeting but did attend the subsequent meeting with PHA. At these meetings details emerged that PHA were looking at East Lodge as a site to develop in the future. This would seem to make sense. It is an old building that probably falls below current standards. The flats are difficult to let as they stand as more people opt for care at home. We have no timetable for this but we will do our best to ensure the East Lodge tenants will be treated with upmost consideration. I cannot stress this last point too strongly.

Our original goal was to ensure that all options for the transfer were looked into. Sadly for 18 plus months this does not appear to have happened. If time had been set aside to discuss this with START properly we may well have found a way to keep the freeholds in the village. Now that this vital time has been lost it is not possible to go back and the merger/takeover by PHA looks the most viable option. However, we are now a long way from where we started in November.

As part of the discussions and correspondence with PHA we have been offered a place on the PHA Board, consultation with the village when the redevelopment is considered and that

Rogate residents and people with Rogate connections will have priority on the housing list for all these properties. These options are still being negotiated.

It has been a sad event. All along, the Parish Council has sought answers to simple questions. Regrettably, it has been more like a 'them and us fight' whereas we would have preferred working together. We are now at the final stage and have a few issues to close down. We hope these can be completed together. If anyone has expertise in the areas where we still have the concession to negotiate we would be interested to hear from them.

Rogate Milestone. You may recall a month or two back that mention was made of a milestone. The stone was moved in 1940 to confuse potential German invaders and since then has been stored in a barn at Petworth House. We now have the necessary permissions for its return and with luck it should be in its resting place before the jubilee. That said, we need suggestions of where to site the stone, even better if someone can remember where it was originally.

If the magazine isn't circulated too late, please remember the Annual litter pick on 30th April - bags and tongs available – meet at Rogate Village Hall car park between 9.00-12.00 noon.

Another village gateway has now been installed on the entrance to Rake by Oliver's Piece. The speed indicator devices are able to monitor traffic speed in both directions and the indications are that the speed has reduced since the introduction of the road calming measures in Rake.

The northern gate at the Hugo Platt playground has finally given up and dropped off. The wood was badly rotted. Rather than replace this gate we have agreed to extend the fence. This work will be carried out in the next few weeks.

A reminder – the Annual Parish Meeting will be held on Thursday 26 May at 7.00pm in Rogate Village Hall.

Finally, a plug for the Jubilee celebrations. Rake Village Hall are holding a Pop-Up Picnic and Rogate have events over the weekend. Enjoy.

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