

Rogate Annual Parish Meeting report – 20 April 2023

Councillors: in the last year we have lost Steve Williamson and are sorry that both Mairi Rennie and Gerard McCloskey are standing down at the end of this term. We thank them all for the work.

It has been an eventful year. We were in the last part of COVID with lock downs a very recent memory and our meeting were conducted with social distancing in mind. We were to some extent lamenting moving from video calls to holding physical meetings.

The developments at East Lodge were still in the forefront of our minds. In April 2022 we believed we were in the final phase of the transfer to PHA Homes Ltd. Considerable pressure was being applied to hold the vote for agreement to the transfer. The vote was held, the transfer approved only to find out that the vote did not meet requirements. A second round of voting was held and the transfer occurred in December. Whilst the Parish Council still believe there should have been more due diligence that stage has now past. We succeeded in obtaining a number of assurances from PHA. Prof John Craven stepped forward and agreed to represent Rogate on the PHA board. Thank you John. He is supported by a group of 4 people from the village, Richard Hack and Cindy Beresford, both residents of East Lodge, Cilla LaPla and Simon Ward. Many thanks to the 4 for this support. PHA are moving forward with plans to redevelop the East Lodge site and have recently submitted a pre-planning application. Thanks to the support from the group within the village the residents are being kept advised. The Parish Council remain mindful of the situation and will organise a village meeting when plans for the redevelopment become clearer.

In the early part of the year there was also concern about the felling of a copse of trees south of the A272 and west of Garbett's Lane, near Fyning House. The farmer had obtained the necessary permissions but the Forestry Commission had potentially not followed normal procedure. Following concerns in Rogate we held a meeting with Forestry England and have since posted a paper on our website on what to do if you notice trees being felled and you suspect correct permissions may not been obtained. We have also put in place a process to comment on local requests for felling licences. Thanks to Philip Lymbery for his work and involvement on this project.

A salute to the residents of Hillbrow who funded a speed indicator device on the Rogate Road near the National Trust car park, they also funded a set of gateways to reinforce the fact that drivers are entering a 40mph limit. These gateways work well with the speed indicator devices to calm the traffic.

A long wait due to COVID but the bus shelter for children using the Bohunt coach was installed on the London Road, Rake on the corner of Bewells Lane. This shelter was built by the Sussex Volunteers for the value of the material and a small donation. Thanks to WSCC Volunteers and to Adrian for seeing the project through.

I would also like to recognise the excellent work of the planning committee. We have received over 60 planning applications. A high number for a small parish in a National Park. The committee work to guidelines set out in our neighbourhood plan and can often involve a site visit. We have also had to adapt to the new process for pre-applications as we are not statutory consultees and don't have access to the documents unless we make a freedom of information request.

Flooding on North Street and obtaining an Operation Watershed grant from West Sussex County Council has taken a great deal of time. We have received support from North Street residents, held a number of meetings with residents and the contractor. A plan has been submitted to WSCC which requires a grant of £70,000 plus. We remain hopeful that work can start in the summer and are aware there will be disruption in the village for a number of weeks.

We have been working with Rogate Village Hall committee to provide an emergency site in the event of a sustained power cut. The plans are in place with the generous offer of a shared generator; we await the final quotes before work start to make changes to the hall electrical supply to be able to use a generator.

We remain committed to helping the residents, with this in mind information leaflets were produced and 2 'Supporting You' events were held in Rogate Village Hall. Chichester District Council arranged for benefits specialists to visit and they were able to advise residents on benefits they could claim. Whilst we don't plan to hold any further events we are happy to try to connect residents to the specialist team or suggest they use the new centre recently opened in Midhurst.

In 2022 we increased the precept by just under 20% (approx. £7.85 per band D property), this was after 7 years of no increases and in simple terms inflation just caught up with us. We incurred additional costs repairing 2 aging playgrounds, bus shelters, council owned land, increased wages meant we were liable for pension costs and the projects were costing more. It is our intention to maintain around 1 year's reserve equal to the precept.

We are looking forward to 2023 closing some of the existing projects (not least the potholes and the TRO in Fyning Lane) and working on the new projects as they arise.

Max Harwood
Chairman, Rogate Parish Council