

MOUNTFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 8 April 2025, 7.30pm

CHAIR'S OVERVIEW 2024-25

Last May, we were delighted to co-opt Susan O'Sullivan back on to the Council.

This does still leave us with a vacancy though. If this is of interest to you please have a chat with me or Irene after we have completed all the formal business this evening.

We continue to let the Local Planning Authority (Rother District Council) know our view on applications for planning permission within the Parish – but also get involved with shaping District planning policy.

We don't have a problem with new housing so long as it is in the right place; the design is in keeping; it is, preferably, *actually* affordable – and, crucially, local infrastructure (such as public transport and healthcare/medical facilities) is improved *at the same time*. Five-bedroom, executive-style housing is of no use when our younger parishioners cannot afford to move out of the family home and remain in the area.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the passing, at Christmas, of our former Chairman, Peter Miles.

I am sure I don't need to tell you everything that Peter selflessly contributed to the Parish: he touched the lives of many of us and the Parish will, in perpetuity, benefit from his efforts to enhance the area and the lives of its inhabitants. He will be remembered for many things – but especially his dedication to protecting the High Weald National Landscape – of which, Mountfield is a part.

Every parish needs a Peter.

The Council is minded to make both a contribution to charity and plant a tree in Peter's memory. This will be done in close liaison with Peter's wife, Val.

We continue to be grateful to Cllr Purdie, Rob, for continuing to keep up the pressure on National Highways regarding traffic speeds on the A21.

Although we – and others - were not successful in persuading National Highways to retain – and even extend – the former 30mph limit at John's Cross, a few positives emerged from its rationalisation of speed limits along the trunk road: namely, a 40mph limit has replaced the 50 outside Vinehall School – and the resurfacing has lowered traffic noise for those living alongside the road.

Although it claims that it constantly monitors traffic speed, the agency has agreed to check traffic speeds after 12 months' has elapsed.

We are always pleased to be asked to support our local community groups and events. This year we awarded two grants to Mountfield Village Hall:

£1,000 to buy equipment to help set up a toddler group.

£1,000 towards the 2024 Bonfire & Fireworks - and the Children's Christmas Party.

This time last year we were alarmed to have discovered, by chance, that the Planning Authority, Rother District Council, had issued a Lawful Development Certificate to Southern Water in respect of its intention to cover a significant proportion of its land at the Reservoir with solar panels – including deer fencing and CCTV cameras mounted high on poles.

Because of the timing and high cost it was not possible to seek a Judicial Review, Instead, we made a formal complaint about the way the application was handled by Rother - and then presented it with the case for the Certificate being revoked. Unsurprisingly – but disappointingly none-the-less - neither was successful.

After having made only limited progress with Southern Water at a public meeting held here, we decided to establish a working group comprising members of both Mountfield and Brightling Parish Councils and local residents who will be impacted the most by the development.

The working group has focussed on mitigation and amelioration – particularly improved screening - and has had some success. One of the

'ask's of Southern Water is the creation of a permissive path around the Reservoir – as conceived by Peter Miles. Southern Water has not said 'no' – but the idea is clearly some way down its list of priorities – and so we can expect progress to be somewhat painful.

Sadly, an attempt to secure a Tree Protection Order on the trees along the boundary of the pumping station and the lane was rebuffed by Rother.

We remain very appreciative of the determined and persistent efforts of the members of the Working Group.

Annoyingly, some highways issues have become a regular feature on our parish council agendas – notably:

- The suspected blocked/partially collapsed culvert on the A2100 between New Cut and John's Cross roundabout. Improvements were undertaken on the eastern side but their effectiveness was short-lived: we continue to see a torrent on the A2100 after periods of heavy rain.
- The fabric of the highway regularly crumbles around the drain and utility covers on the same stretch of road. These are easily spotted - or felt: either when a wheel of your car momentarily drops into one – or, if you are lucky, a traffic cone – or two – appears to alert you to the approaching hazard.
- Additionally, between Soloman's Lane and the roundabout, we have the ongoing issue of vegetation, the verge and trees encroaching on to the pavement – narrowing the safe space available for pedestrians. We are grateful to Mountfield Court for cutting back some of it, north of the junction with New Cut.

We are hoping to arrange a Strengthening Local Relationship meeting with Highways to discuss these issues.

Unfortunately, the re-organisation of local government Eleanor will shortly be telling us about isn't likely to result in more funding for the Highways Authority.

It is all very frustrating.

During the year we appointed Littlewoods in Battle to replace some of the fencing at the playground – which was not fit for purpose – or deemed hazardous. We now have some nice black powder-coated railings and gates- which should last a long while.

Sadly, though it holds fond memories for many in the Parish, the rocking horse meets very few of the current safety standards. We are exploring replacing this – and other play equipment – as well as installing a couple of new ‘wood effect’ brown plastic picnic tables – hopefully dead level! Currently, if you are picnic-ing in there and have Babybels for lunch there is a risk of them rolling off the table in the direction of the football field.

Our Vice Chairman, Neil, is doing sterling work endeavouring to get the Village Hall kitted out to double as a rest centre in the event of a local emergency.

We are seeking to establish what support, if any, Gypsum might be able to provide. Once Neil has gathered sufficient estimates, the Council will consider its role.

It can't have escaped your attention that the 1066 Route Café emerged from a winter hibernation – and has been re-born. The rumours about Morrisons opening on the site turned out to be true – and not an early April 1st – as I initially, incorrectly, suspected.

Consequently, we now have, of sorts, a village shop – albeit one that is ‘proud to be serving the community of Robertsbridge’! Of course, any additional employment opportunities are always welcome. I just hope there is enough parking for the bikes and all those extra cars that will be visiting during these warmer weekends.

I would like to thank the Vice Chairman for cutting the re-birthing ribbon in my absence. I am pleased to say that the Clerk of Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish Council declined Morrison's original request for its Chairman to carry out the deed.

The Parish Council is the managing trustee of the King George V Playing Field – and meets twice a year to consider any issues. In practice, there are rarely any because the Cricket Club does such a superb job looking after the field and facilities there – and we remain grateful to them for everything they do.

Sadly, after some years of teetering on the edge, the Hastings & St Leonards Bowmen – which could trace its founding back to Elizabeth I – and used the Field for a very long time – has disbanded. The Bowmen not only helped to maintain the Field but also helped with the construction of the Pavilion.

There are so many of you who do your bit to make our Parish a great place to live and work, I really do not know where to start when it comes to thanking everyone. You know who you are – and I know who (some of) you are – so please be assured that your contributions are appreciated greatly – and matter.

Lastly, I would like to thank my Council colleagues for their support – especially Neil who ends up being asked to cover for me if I am busy, or unwell – and also Irene - who really doesn't see - or hear - from me as much as she should.

Richard Farhall, MPC Chairman