

Crowborough News

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Yet again another busy year for Crowborough Town Council. A full Town Council meeting is held every two months. Our council operates through 5 committees which meet on a regular basis. All committees have delegated powers, so the 49 meetings allow councillors to have every opportunity to be involved in the town's affairs. Separate committee reports are provided.

Equally important to the town is the work carried out by volunteers and the good thing about being Mayor is that you get to meet many of them. Young people are well catered for by our football, hockey and netball clubs, whilst our Scout and Girl Guide organisations are very active. I am delighted that we have established a dialogue with skaters who have helped us design an improved facility at Goldsmiths. All clubs and societies report ever increased membership. New this year is the Pine Grove Picture club whose membership has rapidly climbed to 300. Music and the arts also seem to be active with concerts and exhibitions throughout the year and activities at our community centre cater for all ages.

All the Town events were well supported this year, perhaps the good weather during the summer had something to do with it? Our Sussex Day, Summer Fair, Firework Display, Christmas Cracker and Carol Service events had record crowds. It was good to see so many people at the Remembrance Day events; the sunshine of the Parade on the Sunday being contrasted with the heavy rain for the children

on the Monday. During the year, with the help of the Lions and other volunteers, we were able to collect some £2,500 for charity. This year I chose the Meningitis Research Trust and the Sussex High Weald Dementia Social Group.

Active Council Committees result in stacks of work for our staff. Their experience and organising ability enabled our committees' resolutions to be carried out efficiently and their contribution to the well running of our Council should not go unmentioned. In particular this year our leases and land holdings have been examined so that in future there is no doubt about the assets we own and their lawful uses.

As Mayor of Crowborough I have attended many meetings and social functions inside and outside Crowborough.

Most of the Councillors I met from other towns knew little of Crowborough. Clearly Crowborough is a long way from Hailsham and even further from Lewes. I have held meetings with the Mayors of Sevenoaks and Uckfield; towns of a similar size but totally different assets, finances and problems. In addition I have held meetings with our surrounding parishes of Buxted, Maresfield, Rotherfield and Withyham. They regard the development of Crowborough (and our War Memorial Hospital) as important to them as we are, de facto, their natural shopping and administrative centre.

Wealden District Council's embargo on development is beginning to have an effect. In the past sufficient infrastructure has not been provided when development took place. The Town Council has sought to influence the location of new development. The consequences of the 300 house allocation for

The Town Mayor's Report continued

Crowborough will have to be scrutinised to ensure that suitable infrastructure is provided this time.

Another problem facing Crowborough is the operation of our War Memorial Hospital. The unannounced closures of the Birthing Unit and Minor Injuries Unit have had a devastating and very unsatisfactory effect on the use of our hospital proving inconvenient and worrying for would be patients. I have spoken with the CEO of our Clinical Commissioning Group on several occasions and attended the last three meetings of East Sussex County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The current consultation on the future of Paediatric and Maternity Services (Better Beginnings) prevents discussions with the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust on a possible transfer of the running of our hospital to Pembury. This is an issue likely to come to the

fore shortly.

Fortunately for Crowborough the First Responder scheme is operating effectively and I am sure there are many in town that are grateful to these volunteers for their vocation and time they dedicate to saving lives.

I would like to thank the staff once again and my fellow councillors for the work that they do and the time they selflessly devote to Crowborough. In committee councillors often have different opinions, but we do not vote along political party lines nor have I detected any animosity during debate. Finally a big thank you to my wife Marion for her support and tolerance throughout the year, without which it would not have been possible to have the honour of being Mayor of Crowborough.

Cllr Peter Cowie, Town Mayor

Finance & General Purposes Report

This committee is responsible for the corporate management and the administrative services of the council. It is a fact of life that all local authorities are under financial pressures as the Central Government austerity programme gathers pace and this will impact on us all over the coming years. Parishes and Towns have so far been excluded directly from this but not now. This generates threats to the services provided but may also be opportunities for the Town Council to undertake tasks relinquished by both WDC and ESCC.

BUDGETS

A major role of the F&GP is to agree and consolidate the annual budgets of the Council from the different committees for full council approval, which then becomes the basis for the precept.

The overall objective is to maintain a balanced budget i.e. income from the precept (that element of the council tax that pertains to Crowborough) and its other income from rentals from various sporting activities, the Caravan site at Goldsmiths and the Cemetery,

matches its expenditure.

Any surplus or deficit is met from or to reserves. These can be General (policy is to cover 6 months expenditure, which we have) and Earmarked reserves which are specific for a purpose. Our annual income from you is over a million so it is quite a responsibility for all councillors and staff. This is from residential dwellings – no elements of business rates comes to the town council at all which can be quite frustrating when we are asked to improve the town centre and its infrastructure.

PRECEPT (COUNCIL TAX)

The local Crowborough element of your Council Tax is £128.37 out of an average band D of £1,680, namely 7.6% of your total council tax. The increase this last year was 2.1% which represented an increase of £2.50 over the previous year (5p per week). Why it increased at all reflects the fact the town receives no help from central government at all. Wages of staff increased in 13/14 by 1%, having been frozen for the previous 3 years. Members also voted to freeze councillor allowances

Finance & General Purposes Report continued...

for a 3rd consecutive year, but other costs have increased e.g. utilities and we are also continuing to subsidise the Crowborough Community Centre (CCC).

I am really pleased to be able to tell you that for 2014/15 there is to be no increase in the Town's element of the Council Tax. Part of this is down to good financial management and partly because the subsidy to support the direct running costs of the CCC is coming to an end although the loan taken out to cover the construction costs still has some 18 years to run. The other main reason is to recognise that we are all hurting financially.

This is however likely to be a one-off as Wealden District Council is annually reducing the rate support grant to us and we may have to offset this shortfall by increasing council tax although we have absorbed this reduction for this coming year.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The F&GP set the policy for banking to maximise the best return for the minimum of risk. As you will know interest rates are extremely poor but we only deposit with triple

A rated banking institutions, however by careful cash forecasting we have been able to increase our income.

As at 31/03/14 our total General and Earmarked cash reserves were over £1m.

GRANTS TO LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Another role is the annual grants process where applicants present to us and we evaluate the benefit of their contribution to the town and the community and agree the amount of support we should give.

Many local institutions have benefited ranging from the girl guides, Crowborough 1st Responders, the Crowborough anglers, the new netball start-up as well as Wealden CAB and Clued Up. The grand total is £50,000 a year.

Thanks to my fellow committee members who address quite technical issues with expertise and mostly with good humour. Thanks also to the Clerk and her Council staff who are simply first class.

Chairman Cllr Quentin Burch

Environment Committee Report

The Environment Committee is responsible for the appearance of the town and this includes the floral displays, street furniture, notice boards and signs, dog waste bins and wooden fingerposts. The Committee also liaises with East Sussex County Council on issues affecting the highway, transport and environment. Other functions of the Committee include footway street lighting and the management of the Council's amenity land at the Ghyll, the Country Park and the meadow at Palesgate Lane.

I thank all the members of the Environment Committee for the commitment and time they have volunteered this year. I would also like to recognise the commitment and hard work that the Town Council staff have put in to keep up with the diverse range of responsibilities.

PLANTING

Another great year for the planting around

the town. We did not have to plant for the Jubilee or for the Olympic torch passing through but it was abundantly clear to see, that the same high standard of planting was achieved. This was confirmed by the amount of correspondence received from the public.

The anniversary bed was planted up to celebrate the birth of Prince George.

HIGHWAYS ISSUES - Strengthening Local Relationships

We hold 6 monthly meetings with ESCC to highlight issues that the public bring before us. A new crossing outside of Beacon Academy



Environment Committee Report continued...

has reached consultation stage and the traffic lights at Crowborough Cross are going to be retimed with a new layout.

Due to a drastic cut in budget ESCC are not carrying out village maintenance and are asking Towns and Parishes to fund or part fund projects in future. As a result of this the Town Council is seeking part funding towards improving the lighting at the crossing in Jarvis Brook.

The Environment Committee has also agreed to install a bus shelter in Croft Road

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

John Coleman has continued to be the Town Council's representative for rail transport. We appreciate his diligence in keeping the committee up to date with changes in Community Transport particularly rail travel. (See minutes on Town Council's website).

WEALDLINK BUS SERVICE

The Town Council is a major contributor to the funding of the Wealdlink Bus Service and was pleased to hear that it has been awarded the contract to run the 226 service. A new Forest Explorer service has also been introduced the aim of which is to cut down car journeys to the forest. Details can be found on the Wealdlink website.

CLEANER ENVIRONMENT

Julie our Environment Warden and the ground staff continue to keep our Town as litter free as possible. The collection of litter peaked the week beginning August 19th when 183 black bags of rubbish (including from litter bins) were collected. It is a cost to the taxpayer when litter is not taken home.

POLICE

We liaise regularly with the Police and Sgt Keeler recently reported on the work of the neighbourhood police team in Crowborough and Operation Crackdown.

The ongoing issue for many residents is speeding and although mobile speed cameras are used it is difficult to police every road. Public participation has been discussed and antisocial behaviour can be reported on the Sussex Police website.

POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICER

The Town Council funds one full time Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) Chris Harrison. He with the other PCSOs regularly hold street meetings where residents can talk through any issues. The local Councillors attend these very useful meetings and are then able to highlight the issues to the appropriate authorities.

STREET LIGHTING

Crowborough Town Council is responsible for 378 lighting columns around the town. 116 of these columns are over 20 years old and structural testing is being undertaken and a programme of replacement being considered.

COUNTRY PARK, GHYLL, BLUEBELL WOOD and PALESGATE LANE MEADOW

A new 5 year plan for maintenance has been produced for the Country Park. Work continues on all the sites in accordance with management plans.

We yet again thank Barry Kemp who has continued to help with conservation projects and has recently introduced the Council to the Exmoor Pony Grazing Scheme.

Three ponies will graze on the Palesgate Lane meadow site. A grant has been obtained from the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee for fencing the area.

TREE INSPECTION

Tree inspections continue to be carried out, this year Ash trees were at risk of disease but our inspection showed that none of our trees showed sign of die- back.

TOWN MAP

The maps are now in place at the Town Hall, Montargis Terrace, outside Chappels Chemist, the Railway Station and the Fernbank Centre. Many thanks to Dave Brooker for his services as cartographer.

The Environment Committee continues to review Crowborough with the aim to achieve a clean, safe and attractive Town in which to live.

(More information can be found in the minutes on Crowborough Town Council website)

Chairman Cllr Sandra Timms

Planning and Development Report

Due to our location adjacent to the Ashdown Forest, planning policies provided by the Core Strategy Local Plan restrict development within the town. Planning applications that might increase vehicle traffic and, hence, nitrogen deposition on the forest are routinely refused planning permission. This means that the range of application types is very limited – most applications are now for household extensions and minor changes of use, which don't affect nitrogen deposition.

Despite the limited number and type of application, this is still a busy Committee. We meet every three weeks and consider a number of applications at every meeting.

We also try to pick up on relevant consultations both from national and local government. Wealden District Council has been preparing a Strategic Sites Local Plan, which seeks to allocate land for housing to meet the Core Strategy requirements. This means that they are seeking sites to provide 300 homes within Crowborough.

The Town Council has commented on this

throughout the process, particularly seeking to influence the location of development in south east Crowborough, which councillors do not consider is the best location for development of this scale within the town. We will continue to seek to influence the location of houses through the examination into the Strategic Sites Local Plan during 2014.

The Town Council is currently in the early stages of preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan, which would guide development within the town. Initially, this will look at reviewing the Vision document adopted in 2010 but will provide policies against which planning applications will be assessed if adopted. The Planning and Development Committee is closely involved with this.

Finally, thank you to all the members of this Committee. It is a time consuming process going through all the applications and other documentation every three weeks, taking up a lot of councillor's weekends prior to our Monday evening meetings.

Chairman Cllr Andrew Steen

Sports, Recreation and Cemetery Report

The committee members have had another busy year with a number of projects being planned or undertaken to enhance the facilities available to Crowborough residents.

The members of the committee have attended the regular scheduled meetings at the Town Hall and a number of meetings outside the town to search for new ideas on sports and recreational pursuits.

These outside visits included a visit to Hailsham to look at the new skate park and to an exhibition of play equipment. Both these visits provided an insight to the latest ideas and this has been used in planning some of the projects.

The committee has also been searching for grants to fund some of the projects and they have been successful in this.

NEW CEMETERY

The committee was successful in attaining planning approval for the new cemetery in London Road and is now proceeding with fulfilling the requirements which have to be met as part of the approval.

These requirements include:-

- An archaeological survey of the site.
- Reduction of the speed limit outside the cemetery.
- Construction of a new entrance from London Road.

GOLDSMITHS RECREATION GROUND

A grant has been made available to provide a new youth shelter at the recreation ground.

This has allowed the existing unsightly container to be removed.

Plans are being drawn up to replace part of

Sports, Recreation and Cemetery Report continued...

the skate park which is now outdated and to provide a multi- use facility. Meetings have been held with the users of the skate park for their ideas and a further meeting will be held with them when the plans are complete.

It is planned to finance this capital project with funds from housing developments.

With the growth of netball in the Town the existing court has been refurbished.

Proposals are being looked at for the refurbishment of the exiting shower block in the next financial year. A submission has been made for a grant towards the cost of this work and a decision is awaited. A small section of land has been purchased to allow the Locomotive Society to extend its track to double the existing length.

WOLFE RECREATION GROUND

An extension to the existing children's play area is being planned and various new items of play equipment are being proposed. This would be paid for by funds from developer contributions designated for recreational facilities at Wolfe.

The cricket score board has been moved to a more suitable location.

New agreements have been signed with the Cricket and Hockey clubs for use of the facilities at Wolfe.

JARVIS BROOK RECREATION GROUND

Work to provide new play facilities was completed but the new shelter has been vandalised and has had to be repaired.

The committee will consider the future of the shelter if it is vandalised again.

PALES GATE LANE

Since the Council purchased the land at Palesgate Lane the committee has been looking at the ways the various areas could be used.

Part of the top of the land was used for football and Jarvis Brook Sports Club expressed a wish to continue using it. A certificate for lawful use of this area has been obtained. Plans for the rest of the land are being considered.

THE WHITEHILL CENTRE

The hot water system at the centre has been upgraded and is now more efficient.

The centre has been completely redecorated and refurbishment has been carried out to the timber floor.

OWLSBURY ALLOTMENTS

A new path has been created to provide better access to the allotments and the access gate made secure. A proposal has been made to create a wild flower meadow outside of the growing compound and work will start on this soon.

HERNE ROAD ALLOTMENTS

During heavy rain the allotments suffer from flooding and to help rectify this problem a drainage system has been installed.

The above is a brief synopsis of the work handled by the committee over the last year and its commitment to improving facilities in the Town.

As can be seen a large amount of work is still in the planning stage so next year looks just as busy.

Chairman Cllr Ron Reed

Communications & Events Report

One of the aims of the Communications and Events Committee is to hold events that encompass all ages of our community.

The Town is well known for the Summer Fair and the Firework Display but there are many other events that the Council organises to encourage Crowborough residents to get together whether as participants or just to

enjoy the free entertainment on offer.

The Town's events calendar starts with the Boundary Walk which is always held on Rogation Sunday and is a 21st century version of 'Beating the Bounds'. Walkers and their dogs enjoy a leisurely walk around the parish which enables them to enjoy beautiful views of the countryside surrounding Crowborough

Communications & Events Report continued...

without – as was the custom – being turned upside down and violently bumped on the boundary stones!

Whilst the Town's celebration of Sussex Day is not held on the large ground at Goldsmiths Recreation Ground, the event held on June 16th on Chapel Green is always a very popular event. Crowborough's young singers, dancers and actors have an opportunity to show off their talents and also enjoy the professional entertainment on offer whilst Mums and Dads can enjoy a visit to the cream tea and beer tents.

The Town is well known for its Summer Fair held in July and the Firework display held in November. Both events in 2013 were huge successes. After two washouts in 2011 and 2012, the summer fair was blessed with outstanding weather and thousands flocked to Goldsmiths to enjoy the afternoon.

The rides and activities were free and the arena entertainment was excellent. We hope that we will be similarly lucky with the weather for our summer fair this year which is to be held on the 12th July.

Our annual firework display cemented Crowborough's reputation for holding the best firework display in the area. The audience were enthralled by the spectacular fireworks and the space theme music really added to the atmosphere.

The firework display this year will be held Wednesday 5th November.

Record numbers attended the Christmas light event in the Town centre with over 30 stalls in situ, street entertainment and the ever popular land train transporting children and their families to the Santa's grotto in the Town Hall.



As well as our superb youth choirs we were treated to an exuberant and professional performance by the Crowborough Youth Jazz Orchestra.

As well as organising the above events the committee hosts a reception to welcome visitors from our twinned town of Montargis. On this occasion the Town Hall is packed with Crowborough host families and their friends from France. The Towns have had 48 years of twinning and will be celebrating a bond of 50 years in 2016.

Our final event of the year is the Town's civic carol service held in the beautiful church of All Saints. The lessons are read by young people from Crowborough Scouts, Guides and RAF cadets who are a credit to their organisations. School children from Herne and St Johns primary schools also take part in what is a wonderful way to end the year's events and to welcome in the Christmas period.

In 2013 the committee took the decision to be more interactive in terms of new media and have added a link to facebook and twitter on our website. We now have 62 'likes' on our facebook page and 134 links to twitter. Please visit our website www.Crowboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk for information about our events and how to get involved.

Finally, the committee would like to thank the Crowborough Lions, St Johns W.I, members of the Crowborough Bonfire and Carnival Society and those unsung members of the town of Crowborough who give their time freely and enthusiastically to help make the events in our town such a success.

Chairman Cllr Matthew Street



**The Boundary Walk
(Beating the Bounds)
25th May 2014
STARTING 9.30am**

**Meet at Goldsmiths Recreation
Ground
REGISTRATION at 9.15am
Length of walk 10 miles approx**

Crowborough Town Councillors *(in alphabetical order)*

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