

# **CUCKFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

## **Report of a Visioning Evening Held on Tuesday 11 June 2019**

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June 2019

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## **Section 1 Introduction**

1.1 Cuckfield Parish Council commissioned the author to facilitate a 'Visioning Evening' with the aim of creating a platform from which to develop a Business Plan for the four-year term of the new Council and beyond. The Visioning Evening took place on Tuesday 11 June 2019 and was attended by all councillors and the Parish Clerk.

1.2 The programme for the evening included the following key elements:

- (i) Issues and opportunities currently facing local councils in the wider context of a reducing public sector.
- (ii) A review of the performance of the Parish Council over the previous term of office.
- (iii) Consideration of the future core services to be delivered by the parish council, opportunities for working in partnership with the principal councils and other agencies and the delivery of major projects.
- (iv) Major issues facing Cuckfield Parish Council either now or in the future, namely:
  - Traffic Calming
  - Lych Gates
  - Queen's Hall Roof
  - Cemetery Expansion/Clay Pipe and Pathways
  - Cuckfield Village Hall
- (v) Consideration of the priorities for the Council arising from the foregoing on a short, medium and longer term basis.

1.3 Those in attendance were as follows:

Andrew Burton, Chairman

Jill Butler

John Dickie

Andrea King

Steve Oversby-Powell

Adrian Podmore

Colin Mercer

Hilary Schan-Martyn

Martin Sheldon

Andrew Symonds

Sam Heynes, Parish Clerk

The councillors were divided into two groups for some of the topics which generated different, but often complimentary, views and proposals.

## **Section 2 Summary of the Visioning Evening**

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the findings and arising from the evening and the key aims, objectives, issues and priorities emanating from the discussion. The process was very positive and all those present actively participated. The next stage is for the Council now to consider the outcomes of the evening as a platform on which to develop a new Business Plan and Timeline for the duration of the current Council. This will need to be undertaken ahead of the budget setting process through the autumn.
- 2.2 The councillors and Parish Clerk had a very clear vision for both the future of Cuckfield and Cuckfield Parish Council. During the visioning process there was clear enthusiasm for the future development of both and it was agreed that the proposed Business Plan must be deliverable and be properly resourced.
- 2.3 Once the Council has agreed the key objectives and priorities there is a need to assess these against both the financial and staff resources of the Council. The budget setting process through the coming autumn will form the basis of the strategic financial considerations in order to deliver the Business Plan.
- 2.4 When finalising the Business Plan the Council also needs to consider 'risk'. Clearly the Council has a fiduciary duty to ensure that public money and resources cannot be put to unnecessary risk. However, particularly in the current public sector environment there will be a need, at times, to consider 'managed risk', particularly when treading new ground. When doing so it is essential that all known and anticipated issues are considered at the time and clearly documented.
- 2.5 For the purpose of developing an initial timeline for the process the findings to date have been divided into short, medium and longer term objectives. This is a guide from the opinions expressed at the Visioning Evening but it is important that the proposed Business Plan is flexible, regularly reviewed and

can respond quickly to changes in circumstances or opportunities that may arise.

- 2.6 Councillors were very clear that they wanted to achieve some 'quick wins' in order to demonstrate their commitment to the community. Wherever appropriate these have been clearly identified in the short-term objectives.

### **Section 3 The Good, The Bad and the Ugly**

3.1 To commence the visioning process the facilitator took the councillors through a warm-up exercise to reflect on the achievements of the Parish Council through the previous term (2015 to 2019) in order to set the scene for the day. He outlined a simplified approach to visioning as follows:

- Where have we been?
- Where are we now?
- We do we want to get to?
- How are we going to get there?

He stressed the importance of reflecting and learning from previous experiences in order to inform the way forward. On that basis the following questions was asked:

**‘What has Cuckfield Parish Council done well over the past four years and what not so well?’**

The question was taken in two parts and, for this exercise, the councillors completed individual lists and outcome was as follows:

**What has the Cuckfield Parish Council done well over the past four years?**

Queen’s Hall – management, redecoration, weddings & new floor

Village Hall – purchase of

Toilets

Allotments

Speed Indicator Device

Reintroduction of Village Orderly

A very good Parish Clerk and staff team.

Neighbourhood Plan

Co-op Retention

Planning responses in general, especially Horsefield Green

Feather bench

London Lane

CVH – considerable work  
Grown the role of the Parish Council  
Anticipated and avoided difficult issues  
Twittens  
Highway improvements  
Maintain cemetery to a high standard  
Traffic calming  
Utilising existing facilities  
Good financial position  
Maintained sense of community  
Elected a full Council

**What has Cuckfield Parish Council done not so well over the past four years?**

(Note – some of these items are outside the control of the Parish Council)

Lack of public interest in Council meetings, including Annual Parish Meeting  
Playgroup liaison  
Communications Strategy  
Parking issues  
Community engagement/voluntary sector  
Presenting grant cheques  
Lack of public awareness (quiet competence)  
Identify and utilise Cuckfield's USP (whatever it is !)  
Progress with Taylor Wimpey  
Communication with Newcomers  
Promote activities and events  
Modernising working practices  
Holding developers to account



## Engagement with young people

- 3.2 It can be seen from the foregoing that, in the main, there is a positive report on the role and services provided by Cuckfield Parish Council over the past four years. Interestingly, the response was consistent between councillors who had served on the previous Council and those who had been recently elected.
- 3.3 It can clearly be seen that there is a high level of frustrations with issues outside the control of Cuckfield Parish Council as many of the items in the 'not so well' column are the responsibility of other agencies. Although it does raise the issues of the Parish Council's role in influencing such matters where it can. A number of the above list are operational and the Council may wish to take these into account with the day to day running of the Council by the Clerk. Others can be considered as part of the 'new vision'. Some of which have been identified in the next two exercises.
- 3.4 Overall the report for the period 2015 to 2019 is positive, with areas that can be built on and others improved. This exercise set the scene well for the rest of the evening.

## **Section 4 The Role of the Parish Council and Projects**

4.1 For this element of the Visioning exercise two questions were set for the councillors to consider. The councillors were separated into two groups in order to obtain a range of views. The results put forward, in no particular priority order, were as follows:

### **Question 1 - What are essential services and events for the Parish Council to deliver in the future, and why?**

Maintaining well what we have:

- Queen's Hall
- Village Hall
- Cemetery
- Allotments
- Village Orderly
- Toilets
- Twittens
- Lighting

Extend Cemetery.

### **Question 2 - What other services could the Parish Council take over from partner organisations as both a delivery body and facilitator?**

Increased maintenance of hedges and twittens and take on the tasks previously undertaken by BHTC on behalf of WSCC

Weed spraying (environmentally friendly)

More wildflowers

Additional community events – cinema, theatre, bands (Queen's Hall)

Trimming nettles between Courtmead Road and the cemetery

Install two more SID's

Request double yellow lines by roundabout off London Lane

Take over path between Ansty and Cuckfield

Use Section 106 money for electronic Bus Information Boards

Purchase Cuckfield Recreation Ground from MSDC for more parking

Introduce a parking permit scheme (not 24 hours)

Outdoor Gym

Mountain Bike trail (land to South East of rugby club)

Pump Track

Go Ape

Communications Strategy

BMX Track

Community Orchard/Garden

Investigate additional bus services  
Cleaning road signs  
Fund a PCSO (possibly with neighbouring parishes)  
Revive a Youth Club and engage a Youth Worker  
Provide a local recycling scheme  
Better engagement with the elderly.

4.2 In addition to the foregoing two councillors submitted some additional items for consideration as part of this element of the process. Although those present did not have the opportunity to consider the issues in advance, some comments were made on the evening which are shown in italics below:

i) Change of name to Cuckfield Community Council instead of Parish Council.

*Item for a future Council meeting.*

ii) Extend cemetery land by purchase as this is one of most profitable of our enterprises.

*Already on the list of major projects.*

iii) Consider erecting radio mast to improve signal locally. Is one of biggest sources of frustration!

*Contact utility companies who want to provide smart meters.*

iv) Refurnish Council chamber with large table and proper area for public and press.

*Defer.*

v) Take over bus shelter cleaning and maintenance under powers of competence.

*Proceed with this initiative as part of routine work.*

vi) Consider reinstating bus service under same powers of competence.

*Requires further investigation as some services have been reinstated.*

vii) Reenergise Parish meeting with “market of local organisations”

*Look to increase frequency of existing market.*

viii) Become “military champion” for Cuckfield and research possible beneficiaries.

*Contact WSCC/SSALC regarding Military Covenant.*

ix) Passing a Climate Emergency motion, as recently passed by Lancing Parish Council, recognising that there is a Climate Crisis and committing to do all we can to promote green choices in the Village and committing to making CPC activity carbon neutral by 2030.

*Agree, in principle, but requires further investigation and identification of precise role of CPC.*

x) Look at how we can further promote the scrapping of single use plastics in the village.

*As per ix) above.*

xi) Setting up a Parish Youth Council.

*Agree, add to priority list.*

xii) Looking at how we might introduce youth clubs, particularly for teenagers, possibly volunteer run by young people in the village.

*Worthy of future consideration.*

4.3 Due to time constraints on the evening it was not possible to analyse all of the foregoing issues to any level of detail. It is clear that there are some strong views on some of the subjects and that warrants further discussion before drafting the Business Plan and associated Timeline. Therefore, it is suggested that when the Council considers this report it will be worth revisiting the lists above to consider the role of the Parish Council and allocate priorities accordingly.

Some additional items raised after the meeting are listed below for consideration:

- Safety improvements to the road layout at the Junction of London Lane and London Road and the junction of The Dell and High Street.
- Asses the safety of the Zebra Crossings in Ardingly Road with the possibility of conversion to Puffin Crossings
- Double Yellow lines at the top of London lane to prevent parking too close to the junction.

- More benches throughout the village for people to sit on.
- Consider merging the Annual Parish Meeting with ISOC and CuckSoc to encourage more people to attend.
- Additional crossing at Whitemans Green

## **Section 5 The Big Subjects**

5.1 As one group the councillors then addressed five major issues outlined below facing Cuckfield Parish Council over the term of the new Council. A detailed discussion ensued over these items, often merging issues as the implications were common to the village or the suggested way forward.

### **a) Traffic Calming**

Concern was expressed over a number of issues including HGV's using London Lane, the High Street being used as a 'rat run' and the longer-term implications of the Northern Arc development at Burgess Hill.

### **b) Lych Gates**

This was seen as a priority but the works required needs to be identified in the first instance and a specification drawn up accordingly

### **c) Queen's Hall Roof**

The same approach as the Lych Gates was suggested.

### **d) Cemetery Expansion/Clay Pipe and Pathways**

The life of the existing cemetery to meet the burial needs of the village needs to be calculated in the first instance in order to identify a timescale for the project. Then a similar approach to b) and c) above needs to be undertaken.

### **e) Cuckfield Village Hall**

A range of views were expressed regarding the future of this building from redeveloping the site to improving the existing building. It was suggested that a brief be agreed for a feasibility study to be undertaken.

5.2 In addition, councillors clearly saw that the Parish Council had a role in supporting and developing the local economy.

## **Section 6 Initial Priorities, Objectives and Action Plan**

6.1 Arising from the process outlined in the previous chapters it is possible to identify the Council's initial objectives and priorities. As previously stated, time did not permit detailed consideration of any reflection on the items in Section 3 (The Good, The Bad and the Ugly) or Section 4 (The Role of the Parish Council and Projects). Therefore, it is recommended that the Council revisits these two sections when considering its priorities and timeline for the new Business Plan. The initial findings have been divided into short, medium and longer term objectives. It should be noted at this stage one of the aims agreed is to 'front load' the plan with a number of short-term objectives (quick wins). There was a clear enthusiasm for the process and desire for some 'quick wins'. However, it should be noted that the process tends to be refined as it progresses through the more detailed consideration stages, particularly financial and staff resources. It is vital that a future Business Plan is flexible in order to reflect and respond to changes throughout the duration of the Council's term of office. In addition, it needs to be regularly monitored.

The following timescale is suggested:

**Short term**                      **between now and 31 March 2020**

**Medium term**                **1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022**

**Long term**                    **1 April 2022 and beyond.**

6.2 Many of the items considered through the Visioning Exercise will require further investigation, survey work or feasibility studies due to the nature of the projects. Although this will limit the 'quick wins', both in terms of resources and finance, good progress can still be made in the short-term. In order to assist this process, it is suggested that a workload planning process is undertaken using a technique such as a simple Gantt Chart. This will ensure that the workload can be properly planned and managed and to avoid peaks and swamping the staff team with a wide range of initial tasks.

### 6.3 Short Term Objectives

a) **Repair Cemetery Footpaths**

It was identified that there were some serious problems with the condition of the footpaths in the cemetery causing public safety concerns. This could not be quantified therefore a two-course action plan is suggested. Firstly, undertake essential safety repairs as a priority and, secondly, commission a survey of the footpaths in the cemetery with a view to embarking on a phased programme of replacements/major repairs.

b) **Lych Gates**

To undertake a survey of the Lych Gates to ascertain the scale of work required to bring the structure up to standard. Once completed use the specification to ascertain the cost of the required works and consider as part of the budget process.

c) **Communications Strategy**

Devise a Communication Strategy for the Parish Council which should also include the promotion of Cuckfield and events. The initial aim is to improve communications from the Parish Council but also to co-ordinate or link other sites promoting the village diary of events etc. with the Parish Council website.

d) **Land Rear of Queens Hall**

It was considered by all present that the acquisition of this land is an early priority. Once acquired, produce plans and costings for improvements to the area.

e) **Queen's Hall Roof**

Arrange for a survey of Queen's Hall roof to ascertain the range of repair works required and to produce a specification as the basis of a tendering exercise.



**f) Cemetery Extension**

Ascertain how long the current burial space will last and the land use requirements for a cemetery extension. Arrange for a survey of the current site to assess the constraints of existing structures and services, including the clay pipe. Once completed produce an options report for the provision of burial space to meet the future needs of the village, including the option of land purchase if necessary.

**g) Cuckfield Village Hall**

Undertake a feasibility study to assess the options for the Village Hall and the site. Options should include replacing the existing building, assessment of alternative uses for the site and the needs of current users.

**h) Traffic Calming**

Contact the Northern Arc Development Board (MSDC/WSCC) to ascertain what traffic studies have already been undertaken by the developer's and principal council's consultants that may assist on mitigation measures for increased traffic in the village. In addition, make contact with neighbouring parish councils to ascertain areas of mutual concern and investigate the feasibility of joint working, including commissioning a consultant to undertake a new traffic study. This could include parishes south of Burgess Hill as well.

**i) Cycle Parking Facilities**

Investigate the location and cost of cycle parking facilities. If this exercise is successful the aim is to install the facilities as a short-term priority, if not it will become an early medium-term objective.

**j) Horsefield Green**

Complete the Landscape Plan for Horsfield Green.

**k) Promotion of the Village Economy**

Working with various sections of the community and local organisations consider ways of developing and promoting the village economy with a view to producing an Action Plan. Early ideas included promoting a range of new and existing events, a dinosaur trail and positive aspects of visiting Cuckfield.

**l) Youth Council**

Consider establishing a Youth Council and its Modus Operandi.

**m) Proscenium Arch – Queen’s Hall**

Investigate the possibility of replacing the curtains.

**n) Partnership Working**

To ascertain the feasibility of developing a range of partnership working initiatives with Haywards Heath Town Council and neighbouring parish councils.

**o) Review Strategic Finances**

Review the finances required to achieve the foregoing list of projects and develop a strategic Financial Model as part of the proposed Business Plan. This should include consideration of ‘sinking funds’ for key buildings.

**6.4 Medium Term Objectives**

At this stage there are limited number of projects in the medium and longer term sections. This will undoubtedly change some of the short-term investigations are completed and projects are developed further with timescale and funding options. In addition, a further analysis of Sections 3 and 4 may also produce additional items.

**a) Replace Cemetery Footpaths**

Embark on the first phase of replacement or major repairs of cemetery footpaths.

**b) Lych Gates**

To arrange for the work to be undertaken to repair the Lych Gates, subject to prior approval.

**c) Land Rear of Queen's Hall**

Implement the improvement plans for the area.

**d) Promotion of the Village Economy**

Implementation of the proposed Action Plan.

**b) Cycle Parking Facilities**

Installation of cycle parking facilities, only if this is not achieved in the short-term.

**6.5 Long Term Objectives**

**a) Replace Cemetery Footpaths**

Complete the repair and replacement of cemetery footpaths.

**b) Cemetery Extension**

Complete the Cemetery Extension project.

6.6 As previously stated the foregoing objectives need to be supplemented with items identified from a more detailed consideration of Sections 3 and 4.

## **Section 7 Next Steps**

- 7.1 Although the Parish Council has yet to consider this report and decide on priorities and phasing of the issues that were agreed, in principle, at the Visioning Evening it is clear there is a strong appetite for both improving Cuckfield and developing the role of Cuckfield Parish Council. A Business Plan needs to be agreed and a timeline given to both implementation and review. It is only at that stage can the level of resources required be assessed.
- 7.2 The Council is already clearly ambitious and has made a good start. It is a very busy and proactive council and the day to day workloads are already high. The staff team is very small but committed and are keen to see the role of the parish council develop.
- 7.3 Once a draft Business Plan is agreed it is recommended that a resource review is undertaken at that time to ascertain how and by whom the plan can be implemented. As part of this Visioning process the Council has reaffirmed its core services and identified a range of feasibility and survey work that is required in the short-term. Once completed there is likely to be some more complex level of project management that may need to be resourced with specialist contractors.
- 7.5 The Parish Council has a good track record for training and development of its staff and this will need to continue and be refined to meet the challenges ahead. The council has a duty of care for its staff and accordingly risks must be managed along the journey into the future.
- 7.6 In many cases business planning can be over complicated and confusing, therefore it is recommended the Parish Council uses a very simple process to develop, monitor and amend its Business Plan.
- 7.7 The Visioning Evening was a very positive process with many good ideas and options coming forward. It is important that Cuckfield Parish Council now builds on this good start. It has an enthusiastic new Council, a good staff team in place and a firm foundation on which to move forward. The future looks good.