



Rusthall

Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The Rackliff Centre

Thursday 19th May 2025 - 7.00pm.

Present:

Councillors: Cllr Paul Gripper; Cllr Alex Britcher-Allen; Cllr Mark Coghlan; Cllr Mark O'Callaghan; Cllr Richard Shaw. .

Officers: Clerk -Alison; Deputy Clerk - Linda Neusten; Allotments Manager -Jon Vanns.

Members of the public - 11

Minutes

1. **The Chairman, Cllr Paul Gripper welcomed the public** and opened the meeting.

2. **Apologies** – Cllr Barry Edwards; Cllr Chris Ducklin; Cllr Tom Clowes-Pritchard

3. **The Chairman**, Cllr Paul Gripper delivered an Annual Report- Parish Chairman's Report 2025

Good evening, everyone. My name is Paul Gripper and I was elected chairman of the PC last May. Welcome to our 2025 parish assembly. I thought I had done my last assembly when I retired from teaching 6 years ago! The last year has been a challenging one in many ways, globally politically, financially and certainly as a parish council. Soon after I moved to Rusthall 20 years ago a resident made a comment about there being 3 jewels in Rusthall's crown - I looked rather puzzled and he explained- the High Street, the Common and the Community. We are so lucky in that we have a thriving healthy High Street which bucks the national trend, we have the Common which is such a unique and beautiful spot and we have a fabulous community, which we will hear a lot more about a bit later. The job of the Parish Council is to support all 3 of those unique elements which make Rusthall such a special place. As you probably know a parish councillor is a voluntary role - it is not the most glamorous role -sometimes it is one which is immensely frustrating - but it is one which I believe is so important in serving and supporting our community and trying to facilitate changes which will benefit our businesses and residents.

One of the changes which has occurred over the last 12 months is a reduction in the number of committees. Issues such as planning, highways and finance are now dealt with at full council meetings.

The only stand alone committee remaining is the Environment Committee which covers such a wide range of critical issues and is chaired by Alex Bricher Allan. We here in Kent like everywhere else are going to have far more unpredictable weather patterns – wetter and warmer winters, hotter and drier summers seem to be the trend with greater frequency of extreme weather events and as a community we need to try to achieve sufficient adaptability and resilience to deal with those events.

Whilst national government seems to be dialling back on the timeline for net zero and less dependence on fossil fuels we as a council are very keen to play our part in encouraging residents to alter their mindsets and behaviours in practical and realistic ways which are conducive to reducing their carbon footprint – in their use of energy and how they get from place to place. If enough people sign up to this- small steps, big impact - then there is hope that we can make a positive difference. RPC has continued to push KCC to introduce traffic calming measures which will encourage residents to comply with the 20mph speed zone within the village with Lower Green, Meadow and Southwood roads being particularly prone to speeding vehicles. I am particularly grateful to the members of the Speedwatch team who monitor speeds in various spots around the village on a regular basis and that information is fed into the Kent Police. My hope is that we might get significantly more support and encouragement to implement some of our requests on our Highway Improvement Plan with the new administration at KCC.

RPC have made a concerted effort to forge closer links with Kent police and Mark Coghlan will elaborate on some of the important issues raised by Rusthall's Community Police Officer. Lisa Whitehead.

It is so important that RPC continue to offer financial support to local organisations and events. Sizeable grants have been given to We are Beams which supports disabled children and their families and the West Kent section of Homestart UK which is a local community network of trained volunteers and expert support helping families with young children through challenging times. Both charities support a number of Rusthall families. A large donation was given to the Molyneux Almshouses in the High Street which rely heavily on charitable donations. RPC make a sizeable donation to the production costs of Rusthall Life which is enjoyed by so many residents in the village, the Community café which meets at the URC on the last Saturday of the month, the Summer fete which is a fabulous community event, as are the fireworks at the end of October, the Thursday Lunch club's Christmas lunch and we gave a contribution to St Paul's Church Youth Council Bee Project. The PC also fund the Christmas lights and hanging baskets and is working on increasing the number of defibrillators in the village.

The campaign to get a reduction in the speed limit on the Langton Rd and/or a crossing in the vicinity of St Pauls' Church continues. Now the new All Ability path in Happy Valley which was officially opened last June has made this beautiful part of Rusthall Common more accessible to those with mobility issues it is so important they are able to cross the main road safely and equally important that all of us irrespective of mobility are too. From a recent survey 85% of the 250 people

interviewed on Rusthall Common considered it unsafe or hazardous to cross the A264 and 3 out of every 10 people interviewed had had a near miss when crossing the road. Some quite horrific accounts and reason in itself to continue the campaign which has the parish council's full support.

I would like to finish with some important thank yous. Firstly the people who have stood down from the council in the last 12 months.

Liz Ellicot Doug Smith Angela & Dave Funnell stepped down as parish councillors

I would like to thank my team of fellow councillors who give up their time freely and willingly and have been a great support with their advice and expertise which are so crucial in facilitating some of projects we want to initiate.

Barry Edwards, Mark O' Callaghan, Chris Ducklin, Alex Bricher Allan. & Mark Cogan

Most recently we have welcomed Richard Shaw and Tom Clowes Prichard to the PC. Both have lived in Rusthall for a number of years and are keen to contribute to the life of the village.

We are also particularly grateful to our borough councillors. Jayne Sharratt along with Alex Bricher Allan are incredibly proactive in promoting and serving Rusthalls' interests at all levels. Matthew Sankey makes up the trio of borough councillors who represent our ward which includes Langton and Speldhurst and he regularly attends our meetings. Thank you to Jayne, Alex and Matthew,

I would also like to congratulate John Moreland on his appointment as the representative for Tunbridge Wells West at Kent County Council. We look forward to working with you and hopefully we can get some positive movement on our HIP. Lastly I would like thank our 3 officers who are responsible for the day to day running of the council and ensuring that anything we propose is by the book, legal and affordable.

Claire Reed joined us as Clerk only last May. She has done a great job in ensuring things run smoothly. Sadly for us Claire will be leaving us at the end of this month having been offered the job of full time project manager for the National Association of Local Councils. Our loss is their gain and we wish her well in her new venture.

Linda Neusten is our Deputy Clerk. She has been the constant in my 4 years as councillor and she has always been very supportive, positive and is a font of information and common sense.

Finally we welcomed Jon Vanns to our team last autumn as our allotment manager. He has absolutely hit the ground running and his experience in managing large groups of people and getting things done efficiently and effectively have certainly been very evident on our 3 allotment sites.

Let's now focus on community and what has been going on in the village. I always find these assemblies heart warming because it gives you a taste of how much is going on in the village and what a vibrant and strong community ours is.

4. **Reports from Clubs and Associations:**

a. **Mark Coghlan for PC Lisa Whitehead**

b. **Rusthall Larder: Cllr Alex Britcher Allen**

All volunteers express their real sense of achievement at being able to deliver and help such a worthwhile scheme and making a big difference to local people lives.

c. **Speedwatch: Helen Foster Rusthall** SW group was re-established in April 2019. Initially with 6 volunteers. We have had as many as 12 but are now back down to a core group of 6. In the 5 years of operation we have carried out over 200 sessions. 2793 Vehicles have exceeded the Police set Speedwatch threshold of 10% +2 to 35 in a 30 limit. We record an offender at 25mph in a 20mph limit - this is more lenient than the Police who operate at 10%. Almost 800 letters have been sent by Kent police to offenders (2 or more offences)

24 Letters have been hand delivered by Kent Police.

4 persistent offenders (not just observed in Rusthall) are under active enforcement by Kent Police

Fastest offence recorded in a 30mph was 49mph

Fastest offence recorded in a 20mph was 43mph

Our Unipar friends who maintain and test speed cameras have recorded a 60mph vehicle up Ashley Gardens/Meadow Road.

Problem Roads are the well-known 'Rat Runs' Lower Green Road and Meadow Road/Ashley Gardens. Also observed that Cranwell Road is a problem but unable to operate SW sessions there due to visibility issues. We do keep potential sites under review with Kent Police.

Great to support the recent Kent Police initiative with Schools. Rusthall Junior School opting to cover speeding within the village. We supported a session where the children could observe and have use of SW gear and Police speed guns - great to see the involvement and enthusiasm of local children.

More volunteers would be most welcome. On average it's an hour each week but whatever people can spare is very much appreciated

d. **Commons Conservators:** It has been a very busy 12 months on the Commons, here are some of our highlights:

Adoption of our new Ecological Management Plans for the Commons, produced by an external independent ecologist they are our complete guide for the preservation and protection of the Commons for the next 5 years. We are committed to making the Commons as beautiful as possible for us all as well as all of the wonderful wildlife that we share them with.

Exposing our incredible rock formations at Denny Bottom to show them in their full glory throughout the year.

Working hard on the community project to expose the prehistoric rock formations at the archaeological dig site and to create a beautiful wildlife glade.

Continued work to manage the safety of trees affected by ash dieback and then taking advantage of the opportunities to enhance the habitats in the cleared areas.

Work with volunteers and external consultants to collate invaluable wildlife survey data.

The Commons are for the community, and we take great pride in ensuring they are loved by all. If you have any questions or suggestions or indeed would like to join us on any of our volunteering sessions, please do contact Gemma and or Ranger Dan (contact cards available)

5. **The Rusthall Bonfire and Fete group – Lisa Coghlan;** started in 1977 for the Silver Jubilee, our organisation is made up entirely of volunteers and we are always keen to sign up new members and will consider new ideas for new and existing events.

Our Aims:

- a. To organise and facilitate the community Fete and Bonfire event.
- b. To bring together our community in places which are accessible for non-profit other than fundraising for our main aim.
- c. Offer spaces for organisations to collaborate in the village and surrounding area.

Offer friendship through volunteering experiences and social events

6. **Open Forum –**

- a. A request for an update regarding crossing on A264 – Cllr Ellicott explained this was an ongoing (& disappointing) project as KCC are reluctant to support a new crossing. Greg Clark the local MP has been canvassed for support to at least reduce the speed limit to 30mph for the whole stretch of road from Rusthall to Langton Green.
- b. A request from local youth group to be put in touch with police so they can arrange a speaker at a future event.
- c. Could contact details of local PC be shared ? – no but the link to the PCSO team is available on both Parish Council website and will be published in the next edition of Rusthall Life.

The Assembly closed at 8.25pm

Linda Neusten.

Deputy Clerk.