

The Parish Matters

Volume 2 Issue 2

SPRING2006

MARESFIELD REGENERATION... William King

..... was the title of a display and discussion in the Village Hall on 8 April. It was put on by landowners of land south of the village, with ideas for a substantial housing development there. 32 people attended.

It is right to say that the architect, engineers and road design specialists engaged on the proposed development are absolutely topnotch. The architect, Ian Logan, specialises in creating "schemes", ie outline concepts for a development and then layouts and parameters for the intended housing and public spaces and buildings. He has won Civic Trust awards for his work, and one of his recent schemes, at Coventry City Centre, is widely thought to be a great success. His sort of work has been an interest of mine for many years and I found his talk and the illustrations he showed us extremely interesting and impressive. I say all this because I think it would be wrong to think about the possibility in entirely negative terms so far as the design is concerned.

One factor mentioned by the promoters of this idea was that the village can either be reactive to developer led proposals, or can be proactive and take part in steering a development in ways which the village wants. Some people present recognised the obvious self-interest of the landowners in this, and questioned if it is true that if we don't go along with this

idea then we will finish up with some ghastly housing estate built with only one objective, ie the developer's profit. Being proactive makes sense if you want a larger village, or if the price paid is outweighed by the advantages of new

... or can be proactive and take part in steering a development in ways which the village wants..

facilities. It also makes sense if you think that there is an inevitability about a housing development south of the village eventually, so better to take part in its planning than have a developer led scheme where we have to fight for every possible advantage. But being proactive can create an inevitability of housing development where, perhaps, no such inevitability actually exists - so some people will say "best to steer clear of this; we don't want more houses in the village and we don't want a large-scale development south of the village at all."

I think it would be wrong to think entirely negatively so far as the consequences are concerned. More housing would benefit the school, and would likely lead to some new public space and perhaps public facilities, eg a new shop, an enlarged or new pavilion or village hall. On the other hand, the negative consequences are pretty obvious. More people

would lead to a much larger village, threatening its identity as a village, and a large new area of housing to the south could easily become a satellite village, not really part of the existing village. And the fields, the walks and the open views from the Rec and elsewhere would go. For many people, the enlargement of Maresfield by about 25% over the last 12 years is enough for quite some while, and the proposed 80 new houses at Park Farm is too much on top of that - so for many people the answer to this idea is "no thank you" whatever supposed advantages the scheme may offer.

Another role of the Parish Council is to advise. So far as the inevitability of housing south of the village is concerned, our view is that eventually it is likely that the land will be developed for housing; as the demand for housing land will continue,

... no need for the Village to be pushed into this ...

eventually that area of fields will become a least worst option. And if we look elsewhere round the country, we see that land between towns and villages and their bypasses becomes developed. However, the recently published South East Plan has a relatively light load of new housing for Wealden, and Wealden's current thinking is that most of it should be built in the south of the District. So we say that there is no need for the village to be pushed into this idea yet because of a fear of the inevitability of a developer soon

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SOME USEFUL

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building several hundred houses in an unattractive estate. What do you think? Do you want to know more about this idea? So far as the Parish Council is concerned, our job is to find out what the village wants and try to represent those views. So we ask you to let us know what you want us to do - an e-mail or telephone call from you to the office.

Budget versus Precept

Roger Street

As I reported in the last issue the Parish Council intends to spend £83,645 for this coming financial year. This is an increase over last year of £3,811 or 4.8%. This compares favourably with most other local government spending increases and is necessary just to keep pace with last year.

A few people have, quite rightly, raised the question of why this means that the precept (i.e. the amount that householders pay) has gone up by some £11,000 to £76,443 this year. This represents an increase of nearly 17%.

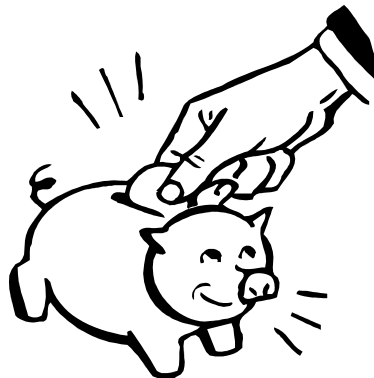
The following chart of how this year's figures were calculated may help to understand my attempt to explain how this has happened:

Balance Y/E 04/05 + Precept 05/06 – Spend 05/06 = Balance Y/E 5/06
Budget 06/07 – (Balance Y/E 05/06 – Emergency Reserve) = Precept 06/07

So, why is there such a difference between the increase in proposed spending (budget) and the money set aside from Council Tax (precept)? The answer to the conundrum, at least partly, is that the Parish Council is becoming more efficient. Having said that I can almost hear some of the cynical laughter from

here!

Let me try to explain. In recent years the council has not achieved its goals over the annual cycle. At the beginning of each year it stated what it intended to do and budgeted accordingly. At the end of each year it failed



to achieve its targets and therefore did not have to spend all of the money it had set aside. Consequently that year end balance was then set against the following year's budget and, thereby, reduced the amount necessary to be raised by council tax for that year's precept.

In 2003 this amounted to £23,000

(31.8% of the budget), 2004 - £19,800 (26%), 2005 - £14,400 (18.1%), and this year £7,200 (8.6%). So you see the shortfall is inexorably coming down. The Parish Council is performing better.

But there is also another factor this year that has reduced the amount of reserves available to offset the size of the precept. The rules have recently changed in respect of the amount we are advised to hold as a reserve for use in emergencies. In the past this figure has been £15,000. Our auditors have now told us that this amount should be somewhere nearer to £30,000. So our budgeting this year needed to take this into account. Indeed, if we had not had to do it, the increase in precept, in percentage terms, would have been very similar to that of the budget.

What this all means is that next year, so long as there are no major emergencies that require significant unplanned expenditure, and that the Parish Council continues to improve the effectiveness of its performance, the budget/precept anomaly should be significantly resolved.

INTO THE FUTURE?

Ken Ogden

The Wealden Villages' greatest assets are their roads. By keeping our roads small and slow, it holds our villages in a time warp and helps to maintain village life.

At a recent Housing Conference with Wealden Planners, it was outlined that the Government is pushing for greater numbers of houses in the South East; perhaps this is the time when we should say "NO WATER; NO MORTAR".

It is plain that we do need more houses for the young, and at a recent meeting of Councillors from the surrounding Parishes, it was agreed that 10 houses in each of the 44 Parishes in Wealden, providing a total of 440 new homes, sounds like a sensible and realistic proposal. However, to ensure that current demand is satisfied, this annual building plan would need to be maintained for a period of five years, and this still doesn't take into account future demand.

Of the 80 houses proposed for Maresfield in the District Council's Local Plan,

30 would be low cost and the other 50 would potentially be bought by individuals and families migrating from outside of Wealden. This influx will inevitably put even more strain on our already stretched resources.

So why don't we just build what we need? Even if we manage to get plans agreed this year, the debate will continue for many years to come before we can match supply to demand.

The Parish Council is looking very thoroughly at the possibility of self-build affordable housing on a small scale i.e. approximately six houses which would go a short way towards helping a few in our villages. There would of course be a clause relating to the retention of these houses for such purposes, to prevent inhabitants from selling up and moving on.

Obviously, public consultation is particularly crucial in the early stages of this process but also throughout it. Let us know what you think.



RED OR DEAD!

Many of you will have noticed the recent resurfacing and repainting of Budlett's Roundabout in Maresfield. There is a new red coloured band around the centre and many people have enquired as to the reasoning behind this.

Discussions with East Sussex Highways Department suggest that aim of the band of red is to make the roundabout appear larger, and by creating two defined lanes for the traffic it has subsequently slowed vehicles down.

ASSET REGISTER

The Parish Council is updating its Asset Register. This is an important document as it relates to our insurance policy and Risk Assessment. We need to list all 'assets' that the Parish Council has responsibility for.

You can't beat local knowledge, so if you are aware of any items that you think the Parish Council should be caring for, then please let us know. On the face of it this seems obvious, but there are numerous items dotted around the Parish where ownership is not certain.

Local government is the poor relation in politics; dull, small beer, and with a gentle whiff of Dad's Army. It delivers the Onyx waste site to Maresfield; the East Grinstead relief road to Nutley (not yet decided, but it's planned for); it runs up the £100m pa deficit in our local health services; it spends £117m on adult social care in East Sussex, £34m on fire services in East Sussex and £227m on policing in East and West Sussex. Dull? Small beer? This matters and it matters in our every day lives.

It would be a struggle to find a parishioner who doesn't care about the waste site in Maresfield, the hospital cuts, the roads getting busier or the daftness of building many more houses without a plan to provide sufficient water. If you are that parishioner who doesn't care, stop reading now. Otherwise

In four years as a councillor, I have seen amazing incompetence, malpractice, disregard of due process, bloody mindedness and thoughtless waste in our local government. Each of these could be itemised, but it would take too much space. At one point, very experienced members of our Planning Committee were expressing concern about the District Council's performance; I can hear now Guy Hardy saying "in all my years, it has never been this bad". I was asked to see the Leader of WDC to express our concerns and when we looked at them, we realised that there were 10 things which we wanted to complain about. On that front, I believe there has been improvement, but it should never have been allowed to sink to that level.

The Onyx (now Veolia) waste site business has moved the bar to new depths. Approx 22 years ago, ESCC produced a planning brief outlining the site as a potential business park. Since then, it has been so identified in the County Structure Plan and the WDC Local Plan; each of these Plans involved the full process of draft plan, public consultation, revised plan, further public consultation, a final draft, examination of the final draft in a Public Inquiry before a Planning Inspector and the Inspector's report (the Inspector's findings have to be incorporated into the Plan) and an adopted Plan. This is a process with every bell and whistle of democracy and open government, and produces at huge cost a final Plan which has been very carefully considered. The same process applied to ESCC's Waste Plan.

The County Structure Plan, the District Local Plan and the County Waste Plan all involved careful consideration of the Maresfield Camp site. The first two decided that it should be a business park. The Waste Plan decided that there should be a civic amenity site for Uckfield in

Uckfield; and that a late plea to consider Maresfield Camp as a suitable site for waste activity should be rejected because it had not been fully assessed, and because, in any event, an Uckfield site was chosen for the civic amenity purpose. The Inspector specifically said that as the Maresfield Camp site had not been through the full process, no consideration of it would be permissible until it had been thorough that process, in particular until after public consultation.

When Veolia applied for planning permission at Maresfield Camp for a waste transfer station (dustcarts to bulk transport) and a civic amenity site, you will see what very heavy cards were stacked against them – well you would be wrong. ESCC have a Transport & Planning

Committee which decided it knew better and was able to ignore the earlier processes and reject the County Structure Plan, the District Local Plan and the decisions of the Planning Inspector. If an ESCC committee can do that, let's not bother with due process; or, as I prefer to see it, if we have a clash between the heavyweight process of County and District Planning and a pip-squeak committee of ESCC, let's not bother with the ESCC committee – they should all resign in disgrace.

To make matters worse, the reports before ESCC's committee and to the Lead Member who has responsibility for ESCC's land at Maresfield Camp (yes, ESCC owns the land to be mis-appropriated to the waste site!! – wow; if you had that conflict of interest, you would be so careful to get it right, wouldn't you), overlooked key issues, had factual errors, had a serious mistake in the methodology of the transport assessment directly affecting the possibility of traffic mitigation in Batts Bridge Road, ignored a recommendation of the Environmental Health Officer (he is from WDC and his point about noise from glass tipping and the need to restrict hours of operation was so clear and simple you have to think that it was ignored either through bloody mindedness as Not Invented Here or by oversight), and involved one key decision at a completely daft time. The latter was the decision to grant the lease to Veolia, which was taken before the outcome of the planning application was known.

Having been through the small print of all this with great care, I felt so dis-heartened that I wondered if it's worth being a parish councillor. Of course it is, because it is only if people like us exist that we can identify and fight incompetence on this grand scale; and we are trying our best to

do so.

There is another side to the coin. I have seen many examples of decent, able people trying hard in our public service, and of their achievements. To my mind there are real successes. Sussex Police, in particular, which had such a low reputation in the 1990s, has turned around; its adoption of the community policing concept is in itself first rate, but behind that is an organisation which has accepted the challenge of change and made it happen. We have pressed for recognition of the different needs of the rural communities in policing, particularly the impact of the minority who drive very fast; we have been given a very good hearing at a high level, and have seen our concern addressed by new provisions in the Policing Plan. And though the NHS seems to be in disarray, many people report that if you are really ill and need hospital treatment, what you receive is absolutely first-rate care. If you are in Brighton or elsewhere along the coast, you will see the big improvement in public transport; and so it is on the railway with the new Uckfield line; and so it is in Wealden's towns with a first-rate re-cycling scheme.

But until someone addresses the incompetence issues in local government, we will continue to have water shortages, inappropriate waste site decisions, a very poor county with no ability to bring in the investment needed for regeneration (except in hotspots of deprivation like Hastings, which receive central government money). All this is a failure of local government. I hope you will pay attention to it and play your part in harrying the authorities for improvements.

Where the improvements are to come from is recognition of the underlying problems. Indirect democracy is unacceptable; it occurs in bodies of great power such as the Regional Assembly and the Strategic Health Authority which are unaccountable to the electorate and inaccessible

through complete facelessness. The calibre of staff needs to be improved, and so long as authorities are small they provide no career path, no highly able leaders at the top of each specialisation to train up the juniors, and inadequate experience. And above all, clarity of purpose and vision is needed, which requires not only good management but a reduction in the huge number of bodies involved in provision of local services.

Dream on? No - fight on! All these issues need to be addressed and we, the people, need to make sure our concerns are known and acted upon. I hope you will.

... dull, small beer, and with a gentle whiff of Dad's Army ...

..until someone addresses the incompetence issues in local government...

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

MAY 2006

MONDAY 29th
Maresfield Village Fete

JUNE 2006

SATURDAY 24th
Nutley Village Fete

JULY 2006

SATURDAY 8th
Fairwarp Village Fete

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Your Bus, Your Call.... Tim Sparrow



The Parish Council, working further with neighbouring Parish Councils has secured additional funding to ensure that the Easy-link bus will continue to provide a door to door service for local residents – Mondays to Tunbridge Wells and Thursdays to Crowborough. It is there for ANYONE to use who has difficulty accessing public transport (and also where public transport is inadequate or non-existent). While this is a service which is particularly valuable to older people, it is not exclusively for them. Also, if the service is over subscribed then there are back-up arrangements to provide more capacity. So, come on, we have saved it, let's use it. Full details are available from the Parish Office.

The Parish Matters

This newsletter is about YOUR Parish. Let us know what you think; what council matters you want to know about; what articles interest you most. Just call Tony Allen on 714555.

MARESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

FAIRWARP

Guy Hardy	712647
Steve Leany	712115
Chris Stephens	712464
Roger Street	713227

MARESFIELD

John Gutteridge	764781
Ken Ogden	761433
Ray Tester	712519
Mike Cranfield	749770

NUTLEY

William King	713798
(Chairman)	
Hanno Fry	712410
Tim Sparrow	713460
Peter Tester	712117
Charlie Stevenson	712823

Parish Matters News in Brief

Slow Down and Give Space

This is an initiative by the Ashdown Forest Villages Road Safety Partnership to encourage people to slow down and drive within the speed limit. The enclosed leaflet gives more details. Please sign up and make the commitment.

The Partnership is made up of the Conservators, East Sussex County Council, Sussex Police, East Sussex Fire & Rescue, and representatives from Forest Parishes. The 'Slow Down' initiative was formally launched at the Forest Centre on the 16th May and followed by a week of operating Speed Indicator Displays (SID's) at approved locations on the Forest. Maresfield Parish volunteers were responsible for operating a SID outside of the Duddleswell Tea Rooms on the B2026. There was also Police enforcement during this week.

In the week prior to the SID exercises, and in the week following, measurements were taken of traffic volumes and speeds using road loops, and it will be interesting to see the data from this, which should be available in early July.

The Parish Council continues to press Sussex Police for the reinstatement of the Speed Watch initiative so that we can address these issues in the rest of the Parish. Please volunteer to help us with this.

An Even Better Community Bus? Want to be a Driver?

Elsewhere in this edition, we report on the further success of the Parish Council in leading a group of local parishes to provide a door to door community bus service. In this part of Wealden we are generally poorly served by public buses and have no organised community bus to fall back on. The Fairwarp bus was a gem which has sadly now had to be curtailed. One or two Crowborough based organisations have voluntary buses (like the hospital) but much more can be done. So, the parish, again in concert with other parishes and Crowborough Town Council has secured some limited funds to develop a locally based community bus organisation. The idea is to have access to buses and drivers that are properly licensed, and have been subject to safety and transport legislation checks. Furthermore, these drivers will be able to provide both regular (like the Easylink) and one-off occasional trips both for individuals and for clubs and societies, at a reasonable rate, very much along the lines of the Fairwarp bus.

If anyone is interested in helping develop this idea and/or wants to volunteer as a driver in due course, please contact the Parish Office. As with many things to do with the community, we can make it happen if we can get a little help please!!!

The Local Development Framework (LDF)

LDF is the new process for long-term planning covering a 20 year period (2006-26) and it should work far better than the old Local Plan system.

We have polled Parishioners at fetes, in small "focus groups" and in three village meetings; and the resulting draft documents (one per village) have been available for review by Parishioners for some time. Our documents set out key facts and issues for each village and identify what we wish to see done and not done in the plan period. Please have a final look at these documents and let us have any last comments- they are on our web site (www.maresfieldparish.org.uk) or available at the Parish Office.

FAIRWARP POP-IN

A brief reminder, that coffee, tea and biscuits are available at: The Foresters Arms (by courtesy of John Lyon) every Wednesday morning from **10-11.00am**. All welcome.

NUTLEY POP-IN

Coffee, tea and biscuits available at Nutley Church Hall, every Wednesday morning from **10.15-11.15am**. All welcome.

FREE BUS TRAVEL
OVER 60 OR INCAPACITATED?
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