

Date: 07 July 2022

Title: Report Item 9 – Local Council Award Scheme

By: K Larkin (Parish Clerk)

Purpose: To report on progress and to put forward a draft Parish Action Plan and a draft training and development policy

Recommendations: a) To note the report
b) To approve the Parish Action Plan
c) To approve the draft training and development policy

Introduction

1. The council at their meeting on 3 March 2022 agreed to register as applicants for a Foundation Award under the Local Council Award Scheme. It was agreed that this would best be done when normal post-lockdown activities resumed, beginning with the Annual Village Meeting on 20 May 2022, when the community could be consulted about actions to be included in a re-launched Parish Action Plan. A number of actions are in progress from the pre-covid era and can be continued or re-launched, and a few more suggestions were made at the AVM.

Parish Action Plan

2. Here is a list of possible items for inclusion in a re-launched Parish Action Plan:

- a) **To prepare a Neighbourhood Plan with update of the Village Design Statement** – the Village Design Statement currently in force was adopted by the South Downs National Park Authority as a Supplementary Planning Document in 2016. In addition, the whole parish was designated as a Neighbourhood Planning Area in 2019, with the intention that the VDS should be updated and integrated into a wider Neighbourhood Plan. These projects are now being re-launched following the Covid lockdowns. A new factor is the recent announcement by the SDNPA of a Local Plan Review with its own timetable which the parish council is advised to integrate with so far as is practical. The Chair of Planning will report further on this at the council meeting on 7th July 2022. There is a budget for this project.
- b) **To provide extra speed signs on A259** – a Traffic Management Working Group was set up during the Covid lockdowns to combat problems of anti-social driving that had already been noted by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and were exacerbated during the lockdowns. In consequence, speed reactive signs have already been installed in Gilberts Drive, and the second phase of the project to install two more signs on the A259 is currently being worked on. A site meeting has been arranged with East Sussex Highways and the ESCC Licensing officers to agree suitable locations on the verge of the A259. There is a budget for this project.

- c) **Defibrillators** – the parish council took over the stock of seven defibrillators previously owned by the East Dean Responders in November 2019, and has since worked to install them in an even spread across the parish, including one gifted to the Beachy Head Chaplaincy Team. Most recently (April 2022) the sixth one was installed at the top of Micheldene Road with sponsorship from SE Water. One further site is now needed for the seventh defibrillator to serve Friston, and a Lead Member (Councillor Hill) has been appointed to take this forward and see to the maintenance of the equipment. There is a budget for this project, held in a ring-fenced reserve fund.
- d) **To launch social media communications** – this was first proposed in 2018 and a policy was drafted but did not proceed. The General Data Protection Regulations were introduced and the council waited to see the effects of these changes. It is now possible to re-launch this project with a new Lead Member (Councillor Milligan) who has relevant expertise.
- e) **To campaign for adequate mobile phone signals** (and in the interim to campaign for electronic bus stop signs, as bus company mobile apps do not work in the village) - Planning permission was granted for a new mobile phone mast in 2017 but was not implemented, and the consent has now expired. Telefonika have told the council this has happened for 'commercial reasons'. The council is concerned that the decision to abandon the new mast installation came a short while after the Government had announced it was to begin talks with Mobile Phone operators with a view to getting them to share masts in rural areas (August 2021). The inference drawn was that, with Telefonika unable to have exclusive access to the new mast (and particularly to the roaming fees from the many foreign tourists visiting Birling Gap and the Seven Sisters), they were no longer willing to go to the cost of installing such a mast which, by their own assessment, was the only way to achieve proper coverage in the village. The parish council can do no more than keep raising the topic, and in the meantime try again to get electronic bus stop signs installed on the A259.
- f) **Post office** – a new proposal made at the Annual Village Meeting 2022 was that the council should request visits from the mobile post office as it appears that permanent premises cannot be found.
- g) **To provide disabled access to the cricket pavilion** – this project was discussed in July 2020 in the context of moving the cricket square (a major project at the time, now completed). It did not proceed at the time, and would require careful planning owing to the placement of a manhole cover close to the intended location. However, the Cricket Club have requested that it be considered again as it would considerably improve access to the pavilion, providing proper disabled access for the first time (there being a proven need for it), and also make it safer to move heavy machinery around the site. There is no budget for this project but the parish council has received the sum of £1,534.42 from the South Downs National Park Authority as its share of the latest instalment of the Community Infrastructure Levy on new builds etc., and this is unbudgeted income because it is unpredictable, and it has to be spent on infrastructure provision. Once the project has been costed, grant applications can also be considered.
- h) **Play area upgrade** – there are currently no specific proposals.
- i) **Resurfacing of tennis court** - a sum of £1,000 has been budgeted to start a sinking fund for this project

- j) **To support environmental projects within the council's powers.** The following have been suggested:
- Interpretation boards at the recreation ground - the Residents' Association has requested a grant of £500 to part-fund the provision of interpretation boards on the wildflower strip on the western boundary of the recreation ground (i.e. behind the pavilion). The strip has yet to develop and the council has agreed to wait and see how it evolves, for review in the autumn.
 - Re-wilding a portion of the Greensward (owned by the Greensward Company) – in the autumn of 2021 the Company requested a grant of £500 to pay for this project. The council was concerned that this would entail public money being used for a project on privately owned land which is already mown at public expense. It was agreed that the council should set aside a budget for Environment projects in 2022/23 and reconsider the re-wilding proposal in the autumn of 2022. A budget of £1,000 in total has been set aside for such projects in 2022/23.
 - Provision of Electric Vehicle charge points in the shopping precinct – the council has pressed for the inclusion of charging points by Wealden District Council in the village car park which Wealden owns, but has been told that this will not be included in the first roll-out. Similarly the parish council has registered with East Sussex County Council to be notified of and included in any projects run by them, but so far there have been none. The parish council has also expressed an interest in installing one or more charging points in the shopping precinct parking area, but there is no budget for this in 2022/23.
 - Provision of a parish wind turbine – this is a proposal made at the Annual Village Meeting, and needs further research. The limiting factor, apart from cost, is likely to be the lack of a suitable and available site.
 - Undertaking a parish energy survey – this too is a proposal made at the Annual Village Meeting which requires further research. The suggested prototype comes from the parish of Balcombe in the Lake District, which has a website www.repowerbalcombe.com. It is focused on providing community-owned, locally generated energy through clean, renewable technologies, and encouraging the move away from climate-changing fossil fuels. It has been running since 2013 and depends on individual initiatives by local businesses, schools and other landowners, all striving to reach the same end. It is an excellent example and does depend on long-term local collaboration, such as the parish council might encourage but cannot require. However, some data is available to undertake a local energy survey as a starting point. The parish council will wish to support practical action by local people.

Training and Development Policy

3. NALC has a published template for a training and development policy which applies only to staff, and is geared towards councils where training and development for substantial qualifications is contemplated, covering issues of cost and paid leave. It is suggested that what is required in East Dean and Friston is a more general policy covering both councillors and officers, outlining what is recommended to meet local needs, sometimes without incurring fees. The council has a training budget of £500 for staff in 2022/23 and £375 for councillors' course fees. Some training and updating is now done on Zoom free of charge by the East Sussex Association of Local Councils. A sample policy borrowed from Theale parish council is appended to this report and councillors are invited to approve this as a template for their own policy (though clauses 4.2a and 4.3 are not immediately relevant as the clerk/RFO does have the CiLCA qualification)

Registration

4. Once the Parish Action Plan and the Training and Development policy have been approved, the council will be able to register as an applicant for the Foundation Award and submit the relevant evidence to support its application. There will be a registration fee of £50 and an accreditation fee of £80, both within budget.