

Introduction

Across Rother District Council, communities are working on their Local Action Plans. Some have already completed them. This document is the completed Local Action Plan for the Parish of Salehurst and Robertsbridge.

The action plan process allows residents to voice their opinions on issues that are important to them and on what changes they wish to be taken to make our area a better place to live, work and play in. This completed plan highlights actions that will now go forward, some of which will involve working with the Parish, the District and the County Councils as well as other service providers. The backing of the community for these projects also demonstrates a need when applying for funding. It means your views can make a difference.

How the plan has been developed

In January 2006 the Parish Council formed the Local Action Plan Project Group, a partnership made up of representatives from the Parish Council, Rother District Council and the newly formed Robertsbridge Enterprise Group. They were subsequently joined by the local Youth Development Worker and a representative from Age Concern. A dedicated website, SARLAP.co.uk, was created to keep everyone up-to-date with progress.

A lengthy consultation process followed, including two business fairs, a youth video project which involved local young people interviewing older residents on camera and a village planning day where residents had an opportunity to meet with local service providers and comment on all aspects of the community. Issues highlighted at these events were put into a questionnaire which was distributed to all households and to the local schools. Feedback from these events and the opinions expressed in the questionnaire form the basis of the actions outlined in this plan.



The Way Forward

Many of the aspirations identified by this action plan process need further action, investigation and consultation in order to progress.

Several Action Groups will be required. These will be initiated by the original Project Group but will need strong support from local residents and organisations. Please read the plan and let us know if you feel you have a contribution to make. We have a wealth of knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm in our community - let's make full use of it.

The local action plan is considered to be a working document. To be meaningful and useful it is essential that progress is monitored and communicated in appropriate directions. The various action groups will report progress to the Project Group, who will report regularly to the Parish Council and keep the community informed via the website and the Annual Parish Meeting (Assembly). The plan will be reviewed in three years time.

So many people offered to help in the questionnaire that it will be impossible for the current small team to contact them all individually. We very much hope that those offers of assistance still stand for the variety of initiatives – from organising a sporting club to assisting with a regular village newsletter - so if you could help in any way, please contact the Parish Clerk as soon as possible.



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*You can drop in to the Parish Office in the
Youth Centre on Tuesday mornings or
Thursday afternoons.*

The Past

The parish comprises three distinct areas of settlement Salehurst, Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street.

Salehurst the oldest was recorded in the Domesday survey of 1088 as being in the possession of the Count of Eu and having "land for 4 ploughs, 7 villagers and 8 cottages with 6 ploughs. A church; meadow 16 acres". The present church dates from the late 13th century and has some fine medieval glass and 18th century table tombs with terracotta plaques by Jonathon Harmer.

The first record of Robertsbridge is after the arrival of Cistercian monks from Boxley, Kent. In 1176 they founded a small chapel believed to be near the present George Inn and some time later the then Abbott, Robert de Martin, had a new bridge built about 1 mile west of the river crossing at Salehurst. The latinised form, Pons Roberti, Robert's bridge appears in the abbey records and on the abbey seal. A small settlement grew up on the north side of the river, Northbridge Street, and another on the south bank which became Robertsbridge and ultimately the main settlement for the parish.



Cistercians preferred a more isolated situation and a new abbey was built 1 mile east and on the south bank of the river opposite Salehurst. The abbey was dissolved by Henry VIII and only foundations survive apart from the Abbott's house which is now a private residence. Apart from the bridge, the abbey left another legacy in the Robertsbridge Codex – found in the abbey records, this is the earliest form of intabulated music, and dates from around 1320.



The Abbott of Robertsbridge was also involved in arranging the ransom of King Richard the Lionheart after his capture in Germany on return from the Crusades and the font in the church, carved with salamanders, Richard's emblem, is said to have been a gift from him in gratitude.

A market Charter was granted to Robertsbridge in the 13th century. and it became a flourishing and prosperous town as shown by the many fine timber framed houses dating from the 14th – 17th century: amongst these are the Seven Stars and Rosebank both from circa 1400; 25-27 High Street (circa 1510). The earliest house dates from circa 1390 and is now divided into 4 cottages (1-4 Fair Lane). Northbridge Street has remained a small settlement but the surviving buildings suggest it was also as prosperous as its neighbour.

Although Robertsbridge became the largest settlement, Salehurst remained the parish church. In the 18th century, however, along with many other villages, non-conformist religions challenged the orthodox church. John Wesley visited the village on several occasions, first in 1771 and eventually four chapels were built within Robertsbridge. Three buildings survive, two of which are now private residences.

In 1840 the Post Office opened, the earliest in England and in 1841 Salehurst Primary School opened its doors in Northbridge Street – a National School which replaced the subscription school. The school remained in this location until 1988 when it moved to a new building in Robertsbridge to make way for the bypass which opened in 1992.

The George Inn was the stopping place for stage coaches which were the public transport before the coming of the main line railway from London to Hastings in 1851. The Ostrich Hotel opened in the same year. Another inn, The Railway Tavern was built in the High Street to accommodate the Irish navvies constructing the railway but earned a reputation for drunkenness and bad behaviour – it closed as a pub in the 1920s and was demolished in the 50s. In 1900, the Kent & East Sussex railway was built from Tenterden to Robertsbridge giving access to the main line for the rural villages. The line was closed to passenger traffic in 1954.



By the 1900s, the parish was a thriving community with shops, inns and in addition to agriculture had a number of industries including saw milling, flour milling – both now ceased – and the manufacture of cricket bats. The latter industry, started by James Nicolls, quickly established a reputation and all the leading players from W.G. Grace to the present time have used their bats. The industry continues today as the Gray-Nicolls company, which supplies bats all over the cricketing world.



Like many other communities across the country, the First World War had a profound effect and the distinctive War Memorial clock tower, erected in 1926 records those from the parish who lost their lives in that war and the Second World War.

Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish today

Facts and figures

- A large rural parish in Rother District, 12 miles north of Hastings
- Population of approximately 2600.
- In 1986 the main line railway from London to Hastings was electrified
- In 1987 the hurricane in October caused much damage in the village and surroundings
- In 1992 the A21 bypass was completed taking much of the traffic out of Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street.
- In 1999, the parish twinned with the town of St. Brice Courcelles in France.
- In November 2000 severe flooding damaged over 70 properties and made more than 40 families temporarily homeless. Since then, new flood defences have been installed

The boundaries

In 1894 an Act of Parliament finally separated the civil duties from the ecclesiastical and the civil parish of Salehurst was formed – confusingly retaining the same name and boundaries as those of the church. Some changes in boundaries have been made over the years and in 2000, the Parish Council decided to change the name to Salehurst & Robertsbridge.

Housing and enterprise

Many new houses have been built, particularly in the 1980s & 90s and two of our main providers of employment – the flour mill and the saw mill have closed. Many residents now commute from the village to work. As with other villages, changes to shopping habits and greater mobility has brought about the closure of a number of shops and businesses but the parish has adapted to these changes and is a thriving community. There is a butcher, general store, post office, hairdressers, two florists, a chemist, three farm shops and a second-hand book shop. In addition, there is a travel agent, estate agent, a bank, a forge, a veterinary surgery, an agricultural and four wheel drive centre and a garden machine centre. In addition there are numerous individual traders providing services such as gardening, building and computing. There are four public houses, three with good restaurants, an Indian restaurant and a fish and chip shop. We also have a doctors' surgery and two dentists.

Education

We have a primary school with around 200 pupils and a community college with some 600 pupils, many of whom travel from outside the parish. Sixth form provision is at Bexhill or Hastings College. The flourishing playgroup which for many years used the village hall has now (2007) moved into purpose-built accommodation near the primary school. We also have a youth centre which caters for other villages as well as our own.

Village hall

Robertsbridge Hall opened in 1988 after years of fund raising by local residents and is now used regularly by many village organisations such as WI, Age Concern, WEA., short mat bowls, jumble sales, ballet and slimming classes and for dances. It is also a popular choice for wedding receptions.

Sport and leisure

There are scouts and cubs, brownies and guides with their separate HQs. Parish recreational facilities cater for football, cricket and stool ball; rugby and tennis facilities are available at the community college. In addition to the recreation grounds, the parish council owns or controls over 20 acres of land which is maintained for wildlife and quiet recreation. Adult education classes are run by the community college and the local WEA group. The big event of the year is a fireworks night organised by Robertsbridge Bonfire Society.

Local democracy

The parish council has nine elected members, employs a part-time clerk and rents an office in the Youth Centre which is accessible to residents. The council meets bi-monthly and additionally for planning meetings and other committees. A quarterly newsletter is produced by the council and delivered by volunteers to almost every dwelling in the parish. A web site is maintained which in 2003 won the Web Site of the Year Award which is judged by the National Association of Local Councils.



SARLAP Action Plan

A questionnaire was distributed to over 1000 homes in Salehurst and Robertsbridge. From these 380 replies were received. The following report is based on those responses.

In addition there were 75 replies from pupils from the primary and secondary schools in Robertsbridge. Where these had a different message, the observation has been included in [blue print](#) below.

Transport

		Action
Quiet Lanes	Residents expressed concern about the speed that cars travelled in the feeder roads to the villages. Coupled with the desire to make it safer for cycle and horse riding "Quiet Lanes" were proposed. All the quiet lanes suggested were popular, in particular Bishops Lane, Church Lane and lower Brightling Road.	An action group to be set up to work with East Sussex County Council
Traffic calming	On residential roads residents mainly wanted "no traffic calming". The one exception was in the High Street where 45% of the respondents requested a 20mph speed limit. There was still a strong response of 39% for "no traffic calming".	No action
Pedestrianisation or one-way	Pedestrianisation of the High Street had very little support. There was some interest in the High Street being one-way, but not a significant number.	No action
Extra parking	Suggestions included The Mill and other land adjoining the High street and Station Road.	An action group to be set up to try and identify sites and investigate feasibility, costs etc.
Commuter parking	The survey looked at ways of reducing commuter parking in residential roads near the station. Most respondents thought that parking problems would be relieved by reducing the parking fee in the station car park. There was also good support for timed parking restrictions in problem zones.	Parish Council will continue working with ESCC to address this. It will also take a lead and encourage lobbying of Network Rail to reduce parking fees in its car park.
Double yellow line extension Station Rd western end	Seventy six percent of respondents wanted double yellow lines for a further 30ft or so down the south side Station Road, from close to the High Street, towards the car park.	Parish Council to progress this with ESCC. (Requests for yellow line changes in Fair Lane are with ESCC.)

Public transport	<p>The only location that was a significant problem for residents to get to was the Conquest Hospital, where 20% of respondents had experienced difficulties. Of those with transport difficulties 60% had not heard of the community transport scheme.</p> <p>The majority of respondents use public transport less than 4 times a month. Those that do use public transport, the train to bus is a ratio of 2.7 to 1.</p> <p>Around 18% of school pupils expressed problems with travelling to see friends. Of those with transport difficulties 65% had not heard of the community transport scheme.</p> <p>The majority of pupils use public transport every weekday. Those that do use public transport, the train to bus ratio is 1 to 3.5. (It is likely that this was because many take a bus to school.)</p>	<p>Parish Council to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. publicise the community transport scheme 2. discuss results of the survey with the community transport scheme organisers.
Cycle racks at the station	<p>Around 40 people would make use of secure cycle racks at Robertsbridge station. From the schools survey there would be a further 10.</p>	<p>An action group to be set up to look at implementation with Network Rail.</p>

Crime reduction

Extra CCTV	<p>In all locations respondents strongly favoured no public-funded CCTV. Although many pupils were undecided, of those who made a decision twice as many were in favour of CCTV than those who were not.</p>	<p>No action. Young people's concerns to be explored further and passed on to the relevant bodies including the Community Support Officer.</p>
Extra street lights	<p>Seventy three percent of people do not want more streetlights in Station Road or the High Street. In the smaller sample of school pupils 73% did want one or more lights</p>	<p>Parish Council to keep to existing lighting.</p>
Neighbourhood watch	<p>There was some support for introduction of Neighbourhood Watch.</p>	<p>To identify a resident who would take this on as an action.</p>

Leisure, culture, sport, tourism

Recreation trails/links	The concept of “all year round footpath/ cycle path/ bridleway” had excellent support in all locations, especially from those from Salehurst/Robertsbridge Abbey to Bodiam and from Bishops Lane to Mountfield Lane.	An action group to be set up, linking with ESCC.
Recreation courses for 2 or 4 wheels	<p>A cycle track/course for non-motorised bikes such as mountain bikes received a positive response given that most respondents in the main survey were over 55. <i>This suggestion was popular with pupils.</i> Sites suggested included the recreation ground, pocket park, Bishops Meadow, Mill grounds</p> <p>Only a few respondents wanted a mini-moto track/course created on the outskirts of the village.</p>	An action group to look at the feasibility of various sites for a cycle track with jumps.
Community events/projects	<p>A Summer fete/festival/carnival should attract a high proportion of residents as 236 (+60) said that they would attend.</p> <p>There was also good support for a French market from 202 (+27).</p> <p>Nearly 75% of respondents would use the Rother Valley Steam rail line if it were extended from Bodiam to Robertsbridge. <i>Fewer than half the children would travel on this.</i></p> <p>Nearly 70% of respondents would want to see Robertsbridge’s unique features, past and present (eg codex, cricket, ley lines, hall houses) presented to attract tourists and provide a local history focus for schools. <i>Less than half the children would use this facility.</i></p>	Identify volunteers from questionnaire returns and existing groups (Robertsbridge Bonfire Society, Robertsbridge Enterprise Group, Robertsbridge Arts Partnership, Robertsbridge & District Archaeological Society, Rother Valley Railway, etc.) to take ideas forward. (Those looking at the historical attraction may need to work with the community shop project below.)

Business enterprise

Commercial properties	The overwhelming majority of people wanted to retain existing commercial sites for commercial use. The majority also wanted to see a commercial element if existing brownfield (ie already built on) sites were developed. Most people did not want commercial development on greenfield sites.	Inform Parish Council, District Councillors, Rother District Council planning officers and Robertsbridge Enterprise Group.
Mill site	The Mill site is of key importance for employment use in Robertsbridge. The majority of residents would like to see it used first and foremost for employment and then for affordable housing. The most popular use of the Mill site was an arts facility/theatre (168). After that there was some support for local history museum (147) and a bakery (145).	Inform Parish Council, District Councillors, Rother District council planning officers and Robertsbridge Enterprise Group.
Community Shop	With various commercial properties in Robertsbridge for sale or to let it was vital to find out if the respondents would support some kind of community use or venture. Respondents (223) would make good use of a community bakery in the High Street or Station Road. And 175 would make regular use of a café.	Action group of Parish Council, Robertsbridge Enterprise Group and volunteers to investigate location options and funding opportunities.

Housing development

Affordable housing	It is difficult to persuade developers to provide the much-needed affordable housing when they have small projects. Prospects for affordable housing can be better on schemes outside the development boundary. Most respondents had an open mind and would consider this on the merits of individual locations. The most popular forms of affordable housing were warden-controlled properties and small family homes in terraces.	These views will be passed on to RDC and local councillors.
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Communication

Free Salehurst & Robertsbridge magazine	<p>89% of people would read a regular free newsletter/magazine</p> <p>The free magazine/newsletter was also by far the most requested form of communication. For community events and parish council business the notice board was also favoured. For community events and clubs and societies emails had fair support. For community events and local business news, people also turn to the Rye and Battle Observer. Depending on the activity 7 to 21% of people would look at a website.</p> <p>For pupils the best way to tell them about community events and clubs and societies was the notice board. (It is possible they were referring to a school notice board.) For all other news they preferred the Rye and Battle Observer.</p>	<p>An action group to be set up to examine feasibility of self-funded regular newsletter.</p> <p>Parish Council to publicise existing website.</p> <p>Parish Council to make links with the schools to decide on ways to combine information channels.</p>
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Health

Activities proposed	<p>There were takers for all activities. The most popular was walking activities with 89 expressions of interest. Around 20 children were interested in all activities mentioned.</p>	<p>1. To appoint volunteers to arrange the activities.</p> <p>2. To publicise existing events.</p>
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Education and skills

Mobile library	There is often debate as to whether the mobile library service should be continued. Six per cent of respondents have used the mobile library. 15% plan to use it in the future. There was not a strong demand to change the timing in the main feedback. <i>However 26 children said they would use it if it were available at a more convenient time.</i>	Parish Council to work with schools and ESCC to make the library more available for young people.
Additional learning	Sixty to seventy adults and children expressed an interest in attending courses on health related, computer related, new skills and other courses.	An action group to be set up to liaise with Robertsbridge Community College and other education providers.
Sports clubs	Eighty to ninety adults and children would join a tennis or badminton club. 55 would join a table tennis club. <i>Around 30 school pupils would join an athletics or basketball club.</i>	An action group to be set up to liaise with the two schools and Robertsbridge Children's Services.
New sports facilities	Regarding extra facilities the only very popular idea in our survey was an equipped gym, which appealed to 131 adults and children. <i>Indoor football appealed to 37 young people.</i>	To refer this to the two schools and to Robertsbridge Children's Services.

Statistics from the main return:

Do you live in the village?	313
Do you work in the village?	68
Do you run your own business?	66
Do you attend a school in the village?	18
Do you have unlimited access to car transport?	237

Statistics from the school return:

Do you live in the village?	31
Do you work in the village?	2
Do you run your own business?	2
Do you attend a school in the village?	75
Do you have unlimited access to car transport?	45

Your age?

Under 12	9
12-19	3
20-35	35
36-55	145
56 and over	188

Your age?

Under 12	30
12-19	45

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Partnership

Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish Council

Robertsbridge Enterprise Group

Local Action Plan Project Group

Cllr Michael Rix (deceased)

Cllr Jack Smith

Cllr Tamara Strapp

Karen Ripley, Clerk S&R PC

Phillip Bristow REG

David Claydon REG

Stephen Hardy REG

Cllr Sue Prochak RDC

Ian Coleman, Local Action Plan Development Officer, RVA

Brenda Alderton (co-opted) Age Concern

Debi Carr (co-opted) ESCC Youth Service

Denise Lomas (co-opted)

Organisations

Action in Rural Sussex

Rother Voluntary Action

Local Strategic Partnership

Bexhill & Rother PCT

Rother District Council (Housing, Culture, and Leisure)

Safer Rother Partnership

Sussex Police

East Sussex fire & Rescue Service

Rother Environment Group

The Scarman Trust

The Battle Partnership

Robertsbridge Age Concern

Robertsbridge Youth Club

Rother Homes

Robertsbridge Arts Partnership

Robertsbridge Community College

Salehurst CE Primary School

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Salehurst and Robertsbridge Parish

