

HASSOCKS PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 27 MAY 2014 AT 7.30 PM IN THE PARISH CENTRE, ADASTRA PARK, HASSOCKS.

Present: Ian Weir (Vice-Chairman), Jane Baker, Leslie Campbell, Darryl Sinclair, Frank Rylance, Penny Wadsworth and five members of the public.

Clerk: Linda Baker

1. **Apologies for Absence.** David Cumberland, Chris Bere, Bill Hatton, Sue Hatton, and Judith Foot.
2. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 21 May 2013.** The minutes were accepted as a correct record.
3. **Report by the Chairman.** David Cumberland apologised for being unable to attend, but he had a work commitment. His report was read by the Vice-Chairman and a copy is attached.
4. **Reports by Committee Chairmen.**
 - a) **Environment and Parking Working Group.** Ian Weir reported on the work of the committees, and a copy of the report is attached.
 - b) **Grounds.** Chris Bere had submitted a report, and a copy is attached.
 - c) **Planning.** Leslie Campbell reported on the work of the Planning Committee, and a copy of his report is attached.
 - d) **Policy, Resources and Communications.** Judith Foot had submitted a report, which is attached.
 - e) **Neighbourhood Plan Working Group.** In the absence of the Working Group Chairman, the Clerk reported on progress with the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan. The group had begun drafting a plan, and as it had become clear that this was a very complex process, and that the plan would need to be robust enough to withstand challenges from developers, the council had appointed consultants, Dale Mayhew, to assist with the process. Dale Mayhew had planning expertise, and were also assisting other parish councils in Mid Sussex with their Neighbourhood Plans, so had experience of the process, and Hassocks was benefitting from the lessons learnt by front runner councils. The Working Group was currently working on a housing needs assessment, and had gone out to the first stage of public consultation with a questionnaire in the May 2014 Talk About, which had gone to every household in the village, and was available on the council's website. Local community groups and interested organisations were also being asked for their views. This would be the first of a number of consultations, and the council was planning an open forum, probably in September 2014 at the Adastra Hall, when residents could find out more about the plan and give their views. The

final version would be subject to independent examination, and would then be put to a referendum. It was unlikely that the final plan would be ready before early 2015.

- 5. Open Forum.** A resident commented that he had been reading the committee minutes on the council's website, and was very impressed by the professionalism of the council, and the range of issues it dealt with. A question was asked about footpath 12 K. Leslie Campbell confirmed that there were no plans to divert the footpath, and that work on improving the surface of the section nearest Lodge Lane would commence on 28 May 2014. The path would be closed temporarily for up to three weeks while the work was carried out. Ian Weir reported the Monday Group had put walkways in to make footpath 8 K more useable, and the council was working with WSCC to improve the surface of a number of rights of way following the bad weather last winter which had made some paths un-useable. A resident asked what the situation was regarding Ham Fields. Leslie Campbell reported that MSDC had refused the application for housing, and the council was very grateful to County Councillor Andy Petch, and WSCC for their support on the highway issues on the site. A resident asked what was happening with the College Lane/Belmont Lane development in Hurstpierpoint. This application, with two others, had been called in by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and the outcome should be known in August 2014. A resident raised the question of parking problems in the village. Ian Weir reported that the report of the council's parking working group was on the council's website, and this gave details of the issues raised. The council was working with MSDC, WSCC and Network Rail to try to find solutions, and WSCC would be looking at commuter parking, and carrying out a survey of the roads surrounding Hassocks Station to seek residents' views on possible action.

The meeting concluded at 8.05 pm.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

Good evening and welcome to the Annual Meeting of Hassocks Parish Council. This is not a formal Parish Council meeting, but an annual opportunity for residents to hear what the council has been doing over the past year and to ask any questions or raise any issues they would like to. The council is interested to hear the views of residents, but I should point out that the meeting has no decision-making powers.

We will receive reports from the council's sub committees on their individual areas of responsibility, so I will not pre-empt these reviews, but give a general overview of the council's work.

The biggest single project the council has been involved in during the year is the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan to shape development of the village for the next 20 years. Residents will have received a questionnaire in the May Talk About as a first step in the consultation process, and we hope as many residents as possible will complete the questionnaire, so that we can shape the Plan to deliver their vision for the village. The Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group will give more detail on the process, but this is a very challenging and complex undertaking for parish councillors, against an uncertain background, as a new District Plan for Mid Sussex is not yet in place. The council has appointed very experienced consultants to assist in this process, and are learning from the experience of neighbouring parishes who have been front runners in neighbourhood planning, but it is going to be difficult to resist inappropriate development in the village until housing numbers for the district as a whole have been agreed.

The council has been working hard to deliver services and amenities to the village within a tight budget, and has reduced the precept for 2014/15 slightly to keep costs to local residents to a minimum in the current difficult economic climate. We have however been able to continue to improve facilities for the village. Two new pieces of play equipment are being installed in the Adastra Park, a new climbing rock aimed at older children and a "tarantula spider" for the children's play area. The council has also approved a project for a major renovation of the Memorial Garden in Adastra Park to mark the anniversary of the commencement of the First World War. The street lights in the village have also been replaced with modern, more energy efficient lights under a PFI contract negotiated by West Sussex County Council. As the parish council's street lighting is managed under a WSCC contract, we have been able to take advantage of this major refurbishment, which will mean that the cost will be spread over 25 years, and energy costs will be reduced.

The council has also agreed funding for three years for street tree planting in the village, which has proved very popular with residents, and is greatly enhancing the street scene, keeping a rural feel to the village.

The Parish Council's new website is proving popular, and provides more information than the previous site. The council is also now on Facebook and Twitter, to provide more platforms where the council can interact more effectively with residents.

The council is pressing for action on the outcome of the parking survey among residents and businesses in the village, but unfortunately it is taking some time to achieve any results, as we are dependent on other organisations such as WSCC, MSDC and Network Rail to progress changes.

We continue our co-operation with other community organisations in the village, and parish councillors serve on a wide range of groups, like the Hassocks Rail Group, the Community Partnership, HAA and the Twinning Association. We have regular meetings with Downlands Community School, and the Vice-Chairman and I have periodic meetings with Hurstpierpoint parish councillors to discuss matters of mutual interest. We have also had discussions with the local MP, Nick Herbert, to raise local concerns.

The Parish Council continues to lobby on behalf of the village on a number of issues, most notably planning, and has submitted comments on the Gatwick Airport Runway Options Consultation, expressing concerns about infrastructure to support any expansion of the airport. The decision on a second runway will rest with the government, but the outcome is likely to have a significant impact on the economy of Mid Sussex whether Gatwick is successful or not. The parish council is represented on the MSDC Gatwick Liaison group which is looking into this issue.

May 2015 will see local elections, and we would encourage residents to consider standing for election to the Parish Council. The council meets on the first Tuesday of every month, and members of the public are welcome to attend to see how the council conducts its business, and the wide range of activities it is involved in. The parish was "warded" for elections, but this was rather confusing for the public, and complicated the election process, so the parish council lobbied to have the arrangements changed, and from the 2015 elections, the parish will be divided into just two wards, Clayton ward with one councillor, and Hassocks ward, with fourteen councillors.

The Parish Centre continues to deal with a wide range of enquiries from the public and provide help and information on parish council matters and an information resource to direct residents to other sources of help and advice on issues not related to council activities. The office dealt with over 3,800 enquiries during the year. MSDC District councillors also run "surgeries" in the parish council where residents can come for face to face help and advice.

The council continues to fund mobile refuse collections in the village, and to fund dog bins in the Adastra park and around the village, to encourage residents to pick up

after their dogs. The council also makes small grants to local organisations to help support their activities. Last year the council awarded grants to the Adastra Hall, the Hassocks Netball Club and the HAA, and also helped to fund the Christmas Lights, and paid for the marching band in the Light Up Hassocks event.

Parish Councillors are all unpaid volunteers, and the complexity of the issues they have to deal with, the legislation affecting local government and the financial challenges they have to face are increasing year on year. I am therefore very grateful to my fellow councillors for all the time and effort they devote to the work of the parish council to serve the interests of the village and to maintain and improve the services the council provides. I would also like to thank the Parish Council staff for their dedication in providing a high level of service to the council and local residents.

In conclusion I would like to thank my fellow councillors for re-appointing me as Chairman of the parish council for 2014/15. This will be the final year of the present council's four year term, and I look forward to working with fellow councillors to continue look after the interests of Hassocks, provide services and amenities for the village, and to meet the many challenges being faced by parish councils as they are being asked to meet shortfalls in services provided by other tiers of local government, and deliver the government's localism agenda.

David Cumberland, May 2014

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE AND PARKING WORKING GROUP

The Environment Committee works to improve the parish and village environment. Last year our Parking Working Group (PWG) conducted a village wide survey on Parking and Traffic Issues and produced a detailed report which was approved by full council in June 2013. The report made 11 recommendations which required action by WSCC, MSDC and Network Rail and over the last 9 months the PWG has held detailed discussions with all these parties who have responded positively with proposals for action. WSCC have included the project in their forward plan and traffic engineers have visited us to discuss the initial stages. MSDC, responsible for the Village Car Parks, have made proposals which will increase the number of off-street parking spaces in Dale Avenue and Orion Car Parks. Network Rail is reviewing the Station Car Parks to increase capacity. This is a long term project and some of the recommendations may take a further 18 months or longer to implement, but Hassocks is fortunate in finding such willing parties to its proposals.

A long term Tree Planting programme carried out in co-operation with Hassocks Tree Group and WSCC has resulted in 225 trees being planted since initiative started in 2008. Residents support the project through collection boxes with over £1000 collected last year and in recognition of resident demand HPC has allocated

£10,000 over the next 3 years to allow the Tree planting group to respond more flexibly to demand.

Each year the village benefits from Hanging Baskets which are maintained by HPC. This year work on replacing the lampposts has delayed these wonderful displays, but hopefully they should be improving the village scene during the summer. HAA has also proposed a number of planting schemes to make the village centre more attractive and we are hoping to support them in this initiative.

HPC maintains the attractive '*Olde Worlde*' finger posts around the village. These need regular repair as the arms decay or are damaged, and repair costs now make it more cost effective to install a completely new post. So when the post at Keymer crossroads needed repair we commissioned a replacement. Despite delays due to the winter weather this is planned to be installed very soon.

In October, HPC conducted a community consultation on the Beacon Centre which received a positive response and resulted in the formation of a management committee prepared to take the project forward. That team has developed a business plan and is currently working to agree a new lease arrangement.

During the year the Hassocks traders association was disbanded and funds lodged with the HPC in case a future group is created.

The well-used Bus Shelter in Hurst Road near Stonepound Crossroads started to collapse last year and HPC has replaced it with a modern wooden structure.

For many years Hassocks has benefitted from a wonderful Christmas event plus our own Christmas lights all managed through the Light up Hassocks Team. HPC supported the event this year through a grant of £300 plus a contribution to allow them to include a Marching Band as part of the event.

The village is fortunate to have a small number of paths that have a hard surface allowing all year use. However last winter was particularly wet and revealed the shortcomings of the current unsurfaced network, particularly the routes from Lodge Lane to Clayton and from The Thatched Inn to Ditchling, and several others where the path is constrained by fencing, with mud and treacherous conditions being the norm for most of the winter. WSCC is planning to upgrade the eastern end of the footpath 12K from Lodge Lane toward Clayton and the Monday Group have made welcome improvements to Path 8K which will improve access during wet weather. Additionally the committee will be looking at ways of improving the network to make it attractive for year round use.

Hassocks has a wide range of litter bins that have been added to in a piecemeal fashion over the years. It is clear that they are no longer attractive and in a number of cases have lost their covers and that the team who empty them are not always locking them correctly. The committee is looking to find a standard attractive and functional replacement and to replace the existing bins over the next few years.

Whilst residents can report Highways matters direct to WSCC, the committee has been closely involved in raising and commenting on Highway matters and we have been strongly supported by our County Councillor Andy Petch. Combined action, last year, resulted in the complete repair and resurfacing of the structurally damaged and

flood prone Keymer Road up to Stonepound Traffic Lights. Currently we are identifying improvement priorities for inclusion in the WSCC Highways and Transport Draft Works Programme.

Finally I really want to thank both the committee and those individuals who have helped achieve the results I report on today. Thankyou

Ian Weir
Chair - Environment Committee

GROUNDS COMMITTEE REPORT.

The Grounds Committee oversees the management of the council's outdoor assets, the Adastra Park, Talbot Field, the Hassocks Burial Ground, and the Parklands Road allotments.

The Adastra Park is being very well used by a number of sports clubs as well as providing a pleasant outdoor space for the general public. The committee is working hard to meet all the competing demands of the numerous users, which has been made more difficult by the very wet winter. The north and south fields are used for cricket, football and stoolball, both senior and junior, and by a croquet club which is increasing in membership. With the cricket season starting quite early, and football starting earlier and finishing later, it is proving more difficult to accommodate all the demands on the fields, but we are working with the clubs to make maximum use of the space. The council has obtained developer funding for major drainage improvement work to be carried out in the north field, which should improve the playing surface, particularly in the winter.

The Parklands Road allotments are full, but the council has reduced the waiting list, in conjunction with the Hassocks Allotment Holders Association, by splitting some half plots into quarter plots. We are grateful to the Association, and the Chairman, Murray Thomson, for all the effort they put into supporting tenants and improving the site. A chemical lavatory has been installed, and the car park surface improved during the year.

The council is installing two new pieces of play equipment in the Park, a climbing rock for older children to replace the wooden chipman unit near the skatepark, and a "jumping tarantulla" for younger children in the children's play area.

The council has also agreed a major refurbishment of the Memorial Garden in Adastra Park to mark the 100 th anniversary of WW1. Work on clearing and replanting will be carried out in the autumn. The gardens were given to the parish in 1924 by Mr Edward Stafford as a memorial to his son, Ewart Stafford, a Royal Flying Corps pilot who died after being shot down at Arras in 1917. The gardens contain the

names of the local men who died fighting in WW1, and the council hopes to liaise with local schools so that pupils have an appreciation of the events which led to the Garden being given to the village.

The Burial Ground Gardens are now under the care of a new contractor, and the council will undertake replanting in the autumn to replace plants which have died or been affected by the last few severe winters. Forty three grave plots have now been used since the facility opened in 2006, and the site has proved an asset to the village as the grave spaces in the local churches have been used up.

We are grateful to Richard Higgs, our Groundsman, who keeps the Adastra Park well maintained, and litter free, and to the office staff who do all the administration for the open spaces, sports club bookings etc. I am also very grateful to the members of the Grounds Committee who commit their time to dealing with the numerous issues which arise in the management of the council's land holdings.

Chris Bere, Chairman, Grounds committee.

REPORT OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Planning Committee of Hassocks Parish Council meets every three weeks to review and comment on the Planning Applications received from Mid Sussex District Council, the local Planning Authority. We also receive a small number of applications from the South Downs National Park Authority which cover those parts of the Parish such as Clayton hamlet and Oldland Mill which are wholly within the National Park designated area. We always endeavour to do what is best for the community, but we can only recommend acceptance or refusal of an application on Planning grounds. The Planning Authority does not always go along with our recommendations, but generally speaking, they are in agreement.

As regards significant developments, 22-24 Keymer Road is well underway for the provision of a major retail unit, and the development of the playing field to the north of Stafford House is also underway. The re-building of Hassocks Railway Station was completed last summer, and I am sure most residents would agree that it is a big improvement on the previous structure! The "Access for All" project was completed last month, and this entailed the installation of lifts to both platforms, and a refurbishment of the stairs and the subway. The project also included the much needed replacement of the shelters on the down platform.

There was an outline Planning application from Gleeson's at the end of last year to build 97 houses on land to the west of London Road, locally known as Ham Fields. This was recommended for refusal for several reasons. Our particular concerns relate to Highway safety in respect of the proposed site access, and to the Air

Quality Management Area in which has been identified at Stonepound Crossroads, immediately to the south of the site. We are also concerned that this represents development in the strategic gap between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint. It is important to retain the individual character of our two communities. The application was recommended for refusal by the Mid Sussex District Council Planning Officer, and this was ratified by the elected representatives at a meeting earlier this month. We are particularly indebted to our County Councillor who managed to persuade West Sussex County Council to object on the Highway issues.

The bulk of the applications received cover minor extensions and alterations to existing properties, and unless they are considered to be out of keeping with the locality, or unduly obtrusive to neighbours, they are usually recommended for approval.

I would like to close by thanking my hard working committee whose support over the past year has been very much appreciated.

Leslie Campbell/ Chairman Planning Committee

POLICY, RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE.

For the Policies, Resources and Communications Committee it has been a quiet year.

We have continued to monitor council resources, and to ensure policies remain current and up to date. Interviews were carried out and new Councillors co-opted. These Councillors are now actively carrying out their individual and team roles on council committees. Members of the Policy and Resources Committee have also worked to improve Council communication links with the public setting up a new website.

Judith Foot, Chairman Policy, Resources and Communications Committee.