

HASSOCKS PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 21 APRIL 2016 AT 7.30 PM IN THE PARISH CENTRE, ADASTRA PARK, HASSOCKS.

Present: Ian Weir (Chairman), Sue Hatton (Vice-Chairman), Kate Bailey, Jane Baker, Leslie Campbell, Ian Credland, Justine Fisher, Judith Foot, Peter Gibbons, Bill Hatton, Nick Owens, Darryl Sinclair, Andy Petch and three members of the public.

Clerk: Jo Whitcombe

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Carol Wise
Frances Gaudencio

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 APRIL 2015

The minutes were accepted as a correct record.

3. GUEST SPEAKER

The Guest Speaker had sent his apologies due to an unforeseen circumstance.

4. CHAIRMANS REPORT

The Chairman gave an overview of the work of the council during the year.

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. The council is interested to hear the views of residents, but I should point out that the meeting has no decision-making powers. I will give a general overview of the Council's work in my Chairman's Report.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

This has been a year of significant change for the Parish Council as we responded to the challenges and opportunities of the Localism Act and the recent appointment of a new Parish Clerk.

Most notably, work continues on the Neighbourhood Plan which has now reached consultation stage. Whilst the plan has been assisted by a group of very able local residents several of whom are experts in their own fields the Parish Council has also employed an experienced consultant to steer us through the intricacies of National Planning Policy. Hassocks' favoured location close to the South Downs, with fast links to London, Gatwick and Brighton make the village very attractive for developers and the Neighbourhood Plan is essential to maintaining the rural look and feel of our village.

During the year we have worked to improve the environment of Hassocks through a number of projects which are covered in the Grounds and Environment Report, but I must mention the Spitalford Bridge Project, right in the centre of Hassocks. The project involved work on the bridge, the Herring Stream beneath and provision of a new bus shelter which also acts as a viewing point and information point for the unique downland

stream. This project involved co-operation with Hassocks Amenity Association, indicating what can be done when the Parish Council and Community Groups work together.

Indeed, a small group of councillors are currently working with volunteer members of the community to address a need for youth activities.

The Parish Council has lobbied hard on behalf of the village to ensure that Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) and West Sussex District Council (WSSC) listen to our voice over Planning and Education issues and deliver improvements such as the Hassocks and Keymer Traffic and Parking Scheme. This scheme started from a local consultation by the Parish Council in 2012 and following a review by WSSC is now about to go out to Public Consultation.

Shortage of places at primary school has been a major issue this year and the Parish Council has continuously pressed WSSC to deliver both a quick short term solution and a longer term proposal. The problem is aggravated by the fact that WSSC no longer provides new schools, commissioning them instead via Academy and Free School providers. I have heard, only this week that there will be an additional entry for 30 additional places available at the Infants School from this autumn.

The Parish Office provides the first port of call for a wide range of enquiries from the public handling nearly 4000 enquiries each year. It provides help and information on Parish Council matters as well as directing residents to sources of help for District & County Council matters and advice on issues not related to council activities. The Parish Centre also hosts Mid Sussex District Councillors 'surgeries' where residents can come for face to face help and advice.

Hassocks Parish Council continues to fund mobile refuse collections in the village. It also funds dog bins in Adastral 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 Adastral Hall, Hassocks Amenity Association, Hassocks Twinning Association, HKD Transition, St Catherine's Hospice and also helped to fund the Christmas Lights and marching band who led the parade at the Light Up Hassocks event.

The trend to localism and reduced funding for WSSC and MSDC emphasises the growing importance of Parish Councils in providing additional services that were previously not in their remit, such as Youth Services. Whilst the Parish Council makes strenuous efforts to get value for money in everything that it does, and will this year implement a program to reduce operating costs by amongst other actions upgrading to LED lighting and reviewing suppliers, we are committed by new government legislation to providing pensions for our staff which has required a modest but noticeable increase to our precept of £4.50 per year at Band D. this equates to 45 pence per month.

This brings me to the main news of the year - the appointment of our new Parish Clerk Jo Whitcombe. Hassocks is no longer a small parish – we have a community of over 8000 people, with a village centre hosting a good range of businesses and with significant tourism potential as the Gateway to the South Downs. We also have significant issues around support for our community groups and providing after school facilities for our young people. With the challenges facing our Parish over the coming years we were looking for someone with the skills to handle a significantly more pro-active approach to local issues and able to link the Parish Council with local community organisations. Jo worked for Burgess Hill Town Council and has a reputation as someone who gets things done, having led the implementation team for the Burgess Hill Green Circle Network.

At the same time I would like to acknowledge the work done by our previous Parish Clerk Linda Baker who served the Parish for over 13 years and to the Parish Office

Team, Tracy Bates and Jane Barker, who carried a heavy load very capably during the changeover period.

Finally, I would remind you that 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 the commitment and enthusiasm they bring to the work of the Parish Council in serving the interests of the village.

THANK YOU

Ian Weir – Chairman, Hassocks Parish Council

5. REPORTS BY COUNCIL COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

(a) Grounds and Environment.

The Chairman of the Grounds and Environment Committee gave an overview of the work of the Committee during the year.

GROUND AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

I took over as Chairman of the Grounds Committee in September 2015. At the December Meeting of the Parish Council it was resolved to dissolve both the Grounds Committee and the Environment Committee with effect from the 1 January 2016 and to form a new committee to combine the two roles, known as Grounds & Environment Committee from this date. I was elected as Chairman of the new committee. There are therefore three parts to my report.

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE TO DECEMBER 2015

This committee has worked to improve the Parish and Village environment. The Hassocks and Keymer Traffic and Parking scheme resulted from considerable work done locally by the Parish Council and now forms part of the WSCC infrastructure plan for 2017/18. A consultant has prepared a proposal which will go to public consultation as soon as funding is guaranteed. Public spending cutbacks means that the Parish has had to continually press WSCC to progress this scheme.

As part of the long term Tree Planting programme carried out in co-operation with the Hassocks Tree Group and WSCC a further 26 trees have been planted around the village. The Parish Council has also supported the Hassocks Amenity Association Green Group with projects for improving the rural feel of the village, including the installation of an additional iron basket, on the wall on the east side of Grand Avenue, which will be planted by Hassocks Amenity Association to match the existing basket outside Mansell McTaggart.

As the Chairman said in his report one of the major projects completed this year was the installation of a new bus shelter adjacent to Spitalford Bridge. The shelter is designed to cater for both bus users and visitors wishing to view the adjacent Herring stream and includes both seating and an information point explaining the uniqueness of the stream.

The second major project was the replacement of all the litter bins in the Village. The design of the new bins makes them easier for the bin crew to handle and being an all-in-one design avoids the loss of lids prevalent with the previous ones. The rectangular design is also pretty attractive!

And our final major project was the creation of a new footpath and Woodland Walk through Parklands Copse. The Parish Council worked with Sussex Wildlife Trust to design a route that would give an attractive walk whilst ensuring minimum impact on the flora and fauna of the Copse. Contractors cleared the route and created the pathway whilst the Monday Group installed two bridges to bring walkers close to the stream and give everyone the opportunity to play **Pooh Sticks**. The woodland part of the route is designed to be useable by accompanied wheel chair users and for walkers the path connects to existing footpaths leading to the South Downs.

The Parish Council has regularly provided grants toward the cost of the Christmas Lights in the village centre.

From this year the Parish Council will take over the supply and maintenance of the Christmas Lights allowing the Light Up Hassocks Team to focus all their fund raising and organisation skills on the Christmas Event & Children's Parade.

GROUNDS COMMITTEE TO DECEMBER 2015

The Grounds Committee worked to maintain the Parish Council's own grounds including Adastra Park, Adastra Park Community Pavilion, the Burial Ground, Allotments and Talbot Field.

One of the major events of the Grounds Committee was the presentation of a proposal by two young people who put forward a proposal to enlarge, refurbish or replace the existing Skatepark in Adastra Park. This is now a major ongoing project which has required a new Skatepark Sub-Committee to be formed in order to progress the project forward with a view to complete renewal of the Skatepark with something that will be suitable for all ages.

The Grounds Committee has also worked with HAHA (Hassocks Allotment Holders Association) to further improve the facilities at the allotments. The Grounds Committee agreed to the extension of the car park and helped to part fund it.

GROUNDS AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE FROM JANUARY 2016

The new committee has so far met once since its formation, focussing on a significant list of outstanding items including an improved Skatepark, Parklands Copse Opening and improvements to the running of the Community Pavilion as well as considering future events in Adastra Park.

One thing that has been made clear is that expectations of the Adastra Pavilion need to be raised, by both the Parish Council and the users of the Pavilion. To that end the Parish Council staff have been working tirelessly to resolve this and I would like to take the opportunity to thank the staff for carrying out this task.

The Committee also agreed to fund the removal of moss in the tennis courts in the park. This is a very difficult problem to eradicate given the location, so will be an ongoing task to keep the moss from returning.

Finally I wish to record my thanks to all members of the previous and new committees and the staff of the Parish Council for their help and assistance in improving our village and the facilities that the Council provides.

Peter Gibbons - Chairman of the Grounds and Environment Committee

(b) Planning

The Chairman of the Grounds and Environment committee gave an overview of the work of the committee during the year.

PLANNING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

The Planning Committee of the Parish Council meets once every three weeks to examine and comment on Planning Applications received from Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC), the local Planning Authority. We also receive applications from the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) which cover those parts of the Parish which lie wholly within the National Park designated area. These areas include Jack and Jill Windmills, Clayton Hamlet and the area around Oldland Mill. Members of the public have the opportunity to attend Planning meetings and are given time to voice their concerns regarding applications which are of particular interest to them. We always do our best for the Community and take into account local views when considering applications, where appropriate. We can only recommend to MSDC, acceptance or refusal of an application on specified planning grounds.

Unless an application is particularly controversial, MSDC usually endorse our recommendations, but they are not obliged to do so.

In July 2015, we were advised by the Planning Inspectorate that the application by Gleeson's for 97 dwellings on land to the west of London Road (Ham Fields), which went to an appeal hearing earlier in the year, had been dismissed by the Inspector who held the inquiry. As a result, Gleeson's applied to the High Court for a Judicial Review as they disputed certain elements of the Inspector's report. The appeal should have been heard in February, but didn't take place so it will have to be re-run at a future date. At the end of last year, we received another application from Gleeson's for 55 dwellings on land to the west of London Road. The Parish Council recommended refusal for similar reasons to the previous application. These were primarily on the need to protect the local gap between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint and the pollution levels at Stonepound Crossroads which has been declared as an Air Quality Management Area. This application is with MSDC for determination.

The outline application from Rydon Homes for 140 dwellings on land to the north of Shepherd's walk which was received in March 2015 is still with MSDC for determination.

We still await an application from the Hassocks Golf Club for residential development on part of the golf course.

The bulk of the applications received concern minor extensions and alterations to existing properties. Unless we consider that these are out of keeping with the street scene, or affect neighbouring properties, they are normally recommended for approval. We have a Tree Warden who advises on applications concerning the removal or lopping of branches on trees within the parish. The Committee is most grateful for his advice and recommendations. It is understood that work is progressing on the restoration of Jack Mill.

I would like to thank my Committee and the office staff for their support and help over the past year. This is very much appreciated.

Leslie Campbell – Chairman of the Planning Committee.

(c) Policy, Resources and Communications

The Chairman of the Policy, Resources and Communications committee gave an overview of the work of the committee during the year.

POLICY, RESOURCE AND COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

The Committee has continued to fulfil its monitoring role with regard to Finance and Resources. The 2015 Precept was developed to maintain and improve our service to Hassocks Parish Residents within financial constraints. This has included increased opening hours of the Parish Office to facilitate greater and more convenient access to the Public.

We continue to improve our communication with residents and other stakeholders through a variety of sources, which include "Face Book", and a dedicated Parish Web page, in addition to articles in local publications.

We have successfully filled Councillor Vacancies as they have occurred and have a competent team who bring their skills and expertise to the many challenges which face Parish Councils at this time. The Parish Council holds 'Competent Council Status' which confers powers of authority to undertake a greater variety of services.

Following the resignation of Linda Baker, our Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer for many years, the Staffing Committee interviewed a strong field of Applicants and have successfully appointed a new Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer. Jo Whitcombe joined us and the Parish Office team, in this role on February 2016 and we would like to extend a warm welcome to her.

I would like to say a special thank you to Tracy and Jane for the sterling work they did during the transition period before Jo took up her post.

Thank you to PR&C Committee Members for their ideas, contribution and hard work which has achieved successful outcomes

Judith Foot – Chairman of the Policy, Resource and Communications Committee

(d) Neighbourhood Plan Working Group

The Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group gave an overview of the work of the committee during the year.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN WORKING GROUP ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

Members will recall that we set an optimistic and aggressive timeline to deliver a Neighbourhood Plan in as an accelerated timeframe as we can whilst being thorough and ensuring we meet the requirements of producing a robust and enduring plan.

The year has been very busy for the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group (NPWG) and I would like to extend my thanks to both Councillor and Co-opted members for their continuing support.

Last year I reported on the early results of the consultation event we held in January 2015. Ultimately there were 436 response received by the end of February 2015 and we published the full results during April 2015.

We continued gathering and strengthening our evidence base during the year running up to the consultation event we held in July when we asked the community to indicate an order of preference for the 15 sites which were noted as being available for development.

There were 1,045 respondents and the results are available on the Parish Council website.

In September there was an extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council which was held at Downlands School, the NPWG had made recommendations to the Parish Council in respect of assessed need, allocation of sites, allocation of Local Green Space. All the recommendations were approved by Members.

Subsequently we prepared the Regulation 14 Pre-Submission Plan for ratification by the Parish Council, the Regulation 14 Plan was published in January 2016 closing on 16 February 2016. Since when we have been considering the consultation responses and as soon as this activity is concluded we will prepare the Consultation Statement and Regulation 16 Plan containing any revisions that may be considered appropriate due to the responses from the Regulation 14 consultation. The Regulation 16 Plan will require ratification by Members before publishing and proceeding to Examination and finally Referendum. We are hopeful of reaching this stage by the middle of the year.

Ian Credland – Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group.

6. OPEN FORUM: OPPORTUNITY FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO RAISE ANY LOCAL ISSUES

Sian Phillips mentioned the Parklands Copse official opening of the new footpath and said what a lovely event it was with so many of the community turning up. It was a very good idea to have the Scouts involvement. She asked whether the stream could be cleared and wondered whether this could be done in the summer with the Scouts help. She was concerned that now the Parish Council had developed the footpath, would there be a community expectation that this would become an official Right Of Way and asked how would that effect the adjacent land owner?

Frank Rylance asked the Parish Council to look at how it engaged with the Public mentioning in particular the Councils website. He had looked for some minutes and agendas that were not available and others appeared to have been archived prematurely. He went on to say that the Policy, Resource and Communications meeting should be driving the Councils communications and overseeing the budgets but some of the meetings had been cancelled.

The meeting concluded at 8.00pm

Signed _____ Date _____

Title _____