

HASSOCKS PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING held on 9th May 2017 at 7.30pm in the Parish Centre, Adastra Park, Hassocks.

Present: Ian Weir (Chairman), Sue Hatton, Jane Baker, Leslie Campbell, Peter Gibbons, Bill Hatton, Darryl Sinclair, Chris Hobbs, Frances Gaudencio and Georgia Cheshire.

Visitors: one member of the public and Kirsty Lord
Clerk: Ian Cumberworth

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Nick Owens, Kate Bailey, Judith Foot, Justine Fisher, Victoria Standfast

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21st APRIL 2016

The minutes were accepted as a correct record

3. CHAIRMANS REPORT 2016/17

Over the last two years the Parish Council has been making the challenging transition from a small organisation to one geared to the demands of a large and growing community and capable of delivering a wider range of projects and services that have resulted from the growing emphasis on localism in public life.

Many of these changes have taken place behind the scenes and relate to the day to day running of the Council – aspects such as the overhaul of out-of-date business and financial procedures to ensure that the council operates both efficiently and in line with good practice; Health and Safety arrangements to ensure the safety of the community when using our facilities; the introduction of pensions for our staff in line with new government legislation as well as taking on areas of work previously run by the larger District and County Councils.

One area I wish to highlight is Youth Work – previously this was a professionally staffed service which supported young people through activities, advice services and Youth Clubs run by West Sussex County Council. This service was lost several years ago due to budget cuts. Yet since that time young people have consistently identified it as something they would like provided. Not an easy task when you consider the personal commitment required as well as legal and safeguarding issues that must be addressed. However, with the commitment of two of our newer councillors Justine Fisher and Kate Bailey and the involvement of Streetmate the Parish Council has been able to re-provide this much-needed service.

Another area that has made progress is the Hassocks Traffic and Parking Scheme which after several years with WSCC will see work on the first stage take place in the current financial year – 2017/18. Cost constraints resulted in some aspects of the original scheme being omitted, but strong local feedback has resulted in the submission of a second stage to address these omissions and it is my hope that this stage can be fast tracked for delivery in 2018/19.

As part of the emphasis on Localism the Parish Council has pressed ahead with our Neighbourhood Plan with the aim of ensuring that the District Planners know what the Parish wants when determining Planning Applications. However, I do have to say how disappointed we are as a Parish with the delays that have occurred in getting the District Plan in place. Without the protection of a finalised District Plan we have experienced challenges that go against the communities wishes. However, continuing with the Neighbourhood Plan is still the best way to ensure that our village remains an attractive and enjoyable place to live.

Shortage of places at Primary School has continued to be a major issue this year and the Parish Council has been actively engaging with WSCC to ensure that finding a suitable site and gaining

an Academy Sponsor to build and run the new school remain at the very top of the County Council's *to-do* list.

As part of our service to the local community, the Parish Office continues to provide 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.

The council also funds mobile refuse collections in the village; dog bins in the Adastra Park and around the village, and also makes small grants to local organisations to help support their activities. Awards were made to St Catherine's Hospice, Hassocks Amenity Association, Adastra Stoolball Club as well as the Victim Support and Mediation Services which often support Hassocks residents.

The Light Up Hassocks Event which provides a wonderful community evening just before Christmas and often brings in visitors from outside the village has been supported for many years by the Parish Council with a grant towards the lights. Since last December the lights which illuminate the Village Centre have been provided and maintained directly by the Parish Council – which has reduced the cost and enabled the Light-Up-Hassocks organisers to focus all their fund-raising and organisation on the main evening event at the end of November.

This June (2017) is the 25-year anniversary of Hassocks' Twinning with Montmirail in France and Wald-Michelbach in Germany which will be celebrated here in Hassocks with a 3-day event in early June when we will host visitors from our twinning towns. The Local Councils of all three places strongly support the Twinning events and this year the Hassocks Twinning Association has been working hard to provide an interesting mix of events and activities for our guests.

It is important to emphasise that Parish Council carries out a wide range of activities and projects many of which you will hear about in the other Committee Reports and I am constantly impressed by the dedication and time given by my fellow councillors to work on behalf of the community. They are supported by our Parish Clerk and his team – all of whom show equally strong commitment in their work.

To all of you I would like to say THANKYOU

4. REPORTS BY COUNCIL COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

(a) GROUNDS AND ENVIRONMENT

This committee has tackled a number of issues that have arisen over the year. Some issues have been successfully resolved whilst others are ongoing.

The Sports pavilion in Adastra Park is an example of this. It became obvious that the cleanliness and upkeep of the pavilion was becoming an issue. Part of the problem was that the original carpet tiles were worn, and dirty and difficult to keep in a presentable condition. The committee therefore decided to replace the carpet tiles with a more durable flooring that is much easier to keep clean. In addition, professional cleaners are contracted to clean the pavilion once a week. These two actions together appear to have satisfactorily improved the internal condition of the sports pavilion.

Following requests to improve Adastra Park by various residents, particularly with regard to provision of play equipment for older children, the committee invited a Play England consultant to give advice regarding the long-term future aspirations for the park. This has been carried out and the committee is currently seeking quotes to carry out a fuller consultation that will involve residents in helping to decide the future development of the amenities of the park. That said the committee remains fully committed to the provision of a new and improved skate-park and have earmarked funding for this work to take place. Inevitably this will result in a delay to the skate

park, but the committee are sure that taking a review of the amenities within the park, will better serve existing and future residents for decades to come.

In recent months there have been a number of break-ins and thefts of property taking place at the Parish Council's allotment site. The committee has been working with the Hassocks Allotment Holders Association in exploring options and taking preventative action. This will be monitored and the work is ongoing. On a brighter note the committee have been able to fund some improvements to the allotments, including an extension to its car park, and improved drainage. The committee supplied the materials and volunteers from the Hassocks Allotment Holders Association provided the labour.

43 street trees have been planted around the village over the period 2016/2017. Funding for this has been provided by Hassocks Parish Council, and this year we have been fortunate to have received additional funding from West Sussex County Council as well as from various village organisations and individuals.

Another initiative starting this year is a significant increase in the number of hanging flower baskets in the centre of Hassocks. This involved the co-operation of various shops and businesses in Hassocks and will result in some 31 hanging baskets being fixed to shops and businesses along with a further 20 lamp post baskets.

Finally, I wish to record my thanks to all members Grounds and Environment Committee and the staff of the Parish Council for their help and assistance in improving our village and the facilities that the Council provides.

(b) PLANNING

The Planning Committee of Hassocks Parish Council (HPC) meets regularly to review and comment on Planning Applications received from Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) who are the local Planning Authority. We also receive a small number of applications from the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) which concern those parts of the Parish which lie wholly within the boundaries of the National Park. These areas include Clayton Hamlet, Jack and Jill Windmills and the area surrounding Oldland Windmill.

Members of the public have the opportunity to attend Planning meetings and are given 15 minutes at the start of the meeting to ask questions and raise any concerns that they might have in respect of a specific application, on the current agenda.

We always strive to do what we feel is in the best for the community as a whole, and we will take into account local views where appropriate. It is important to remember that MSDC as Planning Authority makes the decision, and we can only recommend approval or refusal of an application, on planning grounds. MSDC invariably go along with our recommendations for the majority of applications, but we can and do have a difference of opinion on applications particularly those which propose major housing developments.

In November 2016, MSDC granted planning permission for 130 dwellings on land to the north of the Shepherd's Walk estate which is known locally as Friar's Oak Fields. This was despite strong opposition from HPC as this was not one of the preferred sites recommended for development in the forthcoming Neighbourhood Plan.

There was also considerable opposition from local residents who formed an action group to oppose the proposed development. This application has been called in by the Secretary of State and will be considered at a Public Inquiry in June 2017.

In January 2017, after referral, the Secretary of State allowed the appeal for the development of 97 dwellings on Land to the west of London Road (Ham Fields). Again, this was despite strong opposition from HPC as the site wasn't recommended for development in the forthcoming Neighbourhood Plan and was also against the wishes of local residents.

The application for 130 houses on Hassocks Golf Course was approved by HPC and by MSDC and to date, we await further developments.

The above are the most contentious applications received during 2016/17 and the remainder are for minor extensions and alterations to existing properties. Unless we consider that these affect neighbouring properties or are unduly out of keeping with the overall street scene, they are generally recommended for approval.

We have a very able 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.

Finally, I would like to thank my Committee and the Office Staff for their support and assistance over the past year. This is very much appreciated.

(c) POLICY, RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATIONS

Terms of Reference:

Briefly the committee examines matters concerned with finance, resources, legal compliance, forward planning, policy, communications, economic and tourism development, youth and staffing matters.

Within the committee, work groups are formed to take on specific work. The Committee works closely with the Parish Clerk and his staff to ensure the smooth running of the Council. We are fortunate to have a full complement of Councillors with a diverse range of skills and expertise.

Finance

In January, after consultation with Committee Chairs, a precept (budget) for 2017/18 was agreed to provide finance for the general expenditure incurred by the Council. The Council has healthy 'free' reserves and projects were identified by Committee Chairs in consultation with interested residents.

Training

Training for Councillors and staff is another aspect of the Committee's remit and the Council highly recommends training for new and existing councillors to assist them in understanding the possibilities and boundaries of their role. We also actively encourage staff to undertake relevant training. However, this is under the remit of the Parish Clerk.

Policy and Procedures

Policy and Procedures reviewed this year include: Standing Orders, Financial Procedures and Dignity at Work. These tasks are ongoing and reflect the rapid changes that Parish Councils experience.

Communication

The Parish website is a source of information and includes a Business page. We are constantly looking at ways to improve our communication with residents.

The Staffing Group

The group worked closely with SALC (Sussex Association of Local Councils) which resulted in the successful recruitment of Ian Cumberworth as RFO and Parish Clerk. Welcome to Ian who joined the Council in January 2017. Thank you to Justine Fisher for leading on this task.

Economic and Tourism Group

Two successful Traders Events have been held. The purpose being to exchange information, to put Traders in touch with one another and explore if Traders would be interested in setting up a Traders Group. These sessions produced some useful ideas which will be actioned where possible. Thank you to Frances Gaudencio for leading this group.

Youth Work

Following a considerable amount of research Justine Fisher and Kate Bailey set up a successful Youth Club in Aadastra Park, and future plans may include a Youth Club in a more permanent location.

New Business Plan for 2018-2023

A group has started work to produce a new Business Plan. We are aiming for completion in time for the next round of Precept planning.

(d) NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN WORKING GROUP REPORT FOR 2016/17

The development of the Neighbourhood Plan has involved a huge amount of work and involved significant public consultation. I have summarised the processes the Council has followed in developing the plan and the key issues/challenges it has faced.

Regulation 14 Pre – Submission Consultation Plan completed April 2016. Over 200 comments received.

Sustainability Appraisal also submitted to MSDC. This concludes that 300 additional dwellings (excluding Windfall Sites) are the maximum achievable without environmental damage.

Regulation 16 Submission Version of Plan submitted to Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) June 2016.

MSDC accept Plan as sound and commence 6-week public consultation July/August. Several hundred separate comments received from residents/prospective developers and other stakeholders.

Plan proposes 290 dwellings on three sites
Golf Course 130
North of Clayton Mills 140
National Tyre Centre 20

National Tyre Centre is no longer available. This however does not adversely affect the overall viability of Plan.

In November 2016 MSDC resolve to grant permission for 130 dwellings on Friars Oak Fields in spite of strong opposition from HPC and residents. This seriously undermines the Plan. This application has been called in by the Secretary of State and will be the subject of a Public Inquiry in June 2017.

In January 2017, the Secretary of State decides to allow the appeal for the development of 97 dwellings on Ham Fields again in spite of strong opposition from HPC and residents. This further undermines the Plan.

Mid Sussex District Plan Examination held December 2016 and January 2017 requires a substantial increase in housing numbers across the District. The District Plan has been in development for 10 years and originally indicated that 13,600 properties (approx. 600 pa across the district) however at Examination stage the Planning Inspector determined that the plan should deliver 17,442 properties therefore this will have an impact on Neighbourhood Plans. Based on

this assessment it equates to approximately 876 -900 properties pa across the district for the first 5 years of the plan.

This matter is still under discussion but is certain to have serious implications for the Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council is awaiting further advice from MSDC of the numbers of properties they expect to be delivered via Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr Baker indicated that she would like to put on record her thanks to Andy Petch for his great help in Clayton and requested that the Clerk formally write to him setting out the Council's appreciation for his help. Members agreed and requested the Clerk to do so.

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

There was 1 member of the public present who observed proceedings but did not wish to raise any questions or comments