

# HASSOCKS PARISH COUNCIL

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING held on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at 7.30pm in the Parish Centre, Adastra Park, Hassocks.

Present: Parish Councillors Ian Weir (Chairman), Nick Owens, Sue Hatton, Jane Baker, Bill Hatton, Leslie Campbell, Peter Gibbons, Emma Wood, Frances Gaudencio, Mark Higgins, Georgia Cheshire, Kate Bailey, Judith Foot and Victoria Standfast

Visitors: Five members of the public and Cllr Kirsty Lord  
Clerk: Ian Cumberworth

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.

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

### 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9<sup>th</sup> May 2017

The minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on the 9 May 2017 were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

### 3. CHAIRMANS ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

We will be receiving 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 in my Chairman's Report.

The last year started with a big event. In early June Hassocks Parish Council had the honour of hosting the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of our Twinning Partnership with Montmirail (France) and Wald Michelbach (Germany). This was a major 3 day event which gave us the opportunity to show-off Hassocks to our visitors. Hassocks Twinning Association with support from Parish Councillors and Staff as well as many others in the village produced a memorable 3 day experience for our guests, the high point being a very British Village Fair in Adastra Park. The weather joined in by remaining hot and sunny right up to the moment our Twinning Partners set off for home. It was, for me, one of the most fun events I've experienced as a Parish Councillor. Regrettably other aspects have not been so positive – our Neighbourhood Plan has made no progress over the last year mainly due to a change of policy by Mid Sussex over the allocation of housing to the large villages, which was driven by their desire to get the District Plan approved. As a result Hassocks is expected to take considerably more houses over the 20 year period and this resulted in the Placing of a Strategic Site for 500 houses to the north of the village.

In all matters that affect the Parish such as the Strategic Allocation, planning applications, road improvements, School provision etc. - the Parish Council makes strong and in many cases lengthy representations on behalf of the community and frequently (but not always) this can result in proposals being modified to reflect local needs.

I wish to highlight a number of activities that we are currently working on:

1. A new Business Plan for 2018 – 2023 – to address the needs of our community over the next five years
2. A second stage to the long running Traffic and Parking scheme to improve parking availability for residents, shoppers and visitors in the village centre and create passing places on a number of heavily used residential roads

3. A masterplan for Adastral Park to improve facilities in line with residents' requests.
4. Working with HKD Transition on Green Infrastructure Projects designed to reduce flood risk and also provide an example that others can follow.

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 over 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 Adastral Park and around the village, the marshalling for the Remembrance Day Parade, the Christmas Lights on Keymer Road, and also makes small grants to local organisations to help support their activities. Awards were made to Jack and Jill Playgroup, HKD Transition, St Catherine's Hospice, St Peter and St James Hospice, as well as Sussex Air Ambulance and the Victim Support and Mediation Services which often support Hassocks residents.

This November is the centenary of the end of the First World War and the Parish will be funding the erection of a Silent Soldier within the Remembrance Garden to commemorate the event.

It is important to emphasise that the 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 Cllr Ian Weir

## **4. REPORTS BY COUNCIL COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

### **(a) GROUNDS AND ENVIRONMENT**

Over the past year the work of the Grounds & Environment Committee has centred around two main projects, these being the Adastral Park Masterplan, and traffic and parking schemes. Both of these two projects have had separate working groups.

Of these projects, probably the Adastral Park Masterplan is the most complex. For many years, whilst the park has been able to provide play facilities for younger children, there has been less provision for older children. The Masterplan's objective is to provide a valued amenity to all residents regardless of age or mobility, and fit for the needs to present and future generations of Hassocks residents. To that end a programme of consultations for residents to participate in, has already started. This work was started over a year ago and was mentioned in my report of 2017.

The traffic and parking scheme seeks to redress the balance of the needs of local residents against those who require longer term parking such as those who work in the local community, as well as those who live in outlying areas but use the local station to commute to other areas. The use of the station is important to residents because it has helped to justify an increase the frequency of trains stopping at the station from three trains per hour to four trains per hour from mid-May every day, including Sundays as well as later 'last trains' from both Brighton and London.

Other work of the committee has been to pay for repairs to the bus shelter on London Road that was damaged in an arson attack, supporting the street tree planting project that has been

running for a number of years, improving the burial ground management and facilities and the provision of hanging baskets in the village centre.

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. Cllr Peter Gibbons

## **(b) PLANNING**

The Year to March 2018 has for the Planning Committee been one of extreme highs and extreme lows – a real roller coaster.

The work of the planning Committee is framed in the context of the District Plan and the emerging neighbourhood Plan. It was only on the dying days of 2017/18 (on 28<sup>th</sup> March to be exact) that the District approved a District Plan – the first since 2004, therefore up to that date we were largely flying blind as to policy and subject to the Government's hateful "presumption in favour of development, where the District Plan is out of date".

Thus, 2017/2018 has been a year where multiple developers have been eyeing up our "strategic gaps" (which the new District Plan now calls "local gaps" between Hassocks and Burgess Hill and between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint), and putting in speculative applications for development.

Hassocks Parish Council recognises the need for housing development and in its draft (regulation 16) Neighbourhood Plan had over 300 houses allowed for, with 140 north of Clayton Mills and 130 on the golf course site. We sought to provide this housing and to leave open as green space, land at Ham Fields and Friars Oak fields for recreation, as indeed these spaces are widely used for today, being fairly wet and subject to flooding.

In the event, MSDC and the Secretary of State saw fit to ignore our earmarked green spaces and has allowed first 97 houses at Ham Fields, then a further 32 after MSDC encouraged Barratts to increase the housing density to 36 per developable hectare<sup>1</sup>. Our only success in this regard, has been to prevail on Barratts to remove house No 3 from the Ham Fields development as even they agreed that their plan constituted oppressive and un-neighbourly over development.

Friars Oak Fields does constitute a major victory: that potential development by Rydon Homes was opposed by the Parish Council and numerous residents, notably and to great effect by FOFRA - The Friars Oak Fields Residents Association, with a successful outcome.

Our Chairman has referred to the so called "strategic allocation" of 500 houses in the MSDC District Plan, to land west of Ockley Lane. Many of you will know this land as the beautiful open space that forms the main strategic gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill, over which there are sweeping views out to the South Downs which lift the hearts of visitors and residents alike as they enter Hassocks by train. Both Mid Sussex and, on appeal, the Planning Inspector ignored our arguments and those of over 1,000 residents of the parish for protecting this space, in favour of giving it up for Crawley overspill. The chances of Crawley workers choosing to live in Hassocks are perhaps relatively low, but there will be added commuter burden on the village from workers located in London and Gatwick.

Besides all these major planning matters the Planning Committee has considered approximately 10 planning applications from residents and local businesses for house extensions, tree surgery and business use variations every three weeks, so around 160 applications in the year, recommending around 95% of these for approval.

As we head into 2018/19, we look forward to building a constructive relationship with Mid Sussex in the areas of improved energy efficiency in the new developments coming forward, so as to development designs that maximise pedestrian and cycle access, and which deliver

houses that are close to carbon-neutral and which support the use of electric vehicles for a cleaner, healthier community.

The exemplar house in this regard, is No 2 Dale Avenue whose planning application we supported by speaking at MSDC's planning committee. The Year to March 2018 has for the Planning Committee been one of extreme highs and extreme lows – a real roller coaster. The work of the planning Committee is framed in the context of the District Plan and the emerging neighbourhood Plan. It was only on the dying days of 2017/18 (on 28th March to be exact) that the District approved a District Plan – the first since 2004, therefore up to that date we were largely flying blind as to policy and subject to the Government's hateful "presumption in favour of development, where the District Plan is out of date".

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The exemplar house in this regard, is No 2 Dale Avenue whose planning application we supported by speaking at MSDC's planning committee. This house uses air source heating, solar panels and high levels of insulation. MSDC's planning committee members saw the light and voted to support the application, against their officer's advice. We hope to work with them to continue to innovate high quality housing design in Hassocks.

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Cllr Nick Owens

## **(c) POLICY, RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATIONS**

Following the successful appointment of a new clerk from February 2017, we have ensured many changes and improvements to our financial management, policies and ways of working within the Parish Council. We have a hardworking staff team who are committed to good customer service and to supporting councillors. I would like to thank them for all that they do.

### STAFFING and TRAINING

We have a full time clerk, a part time deputy clerk, two part time administrative assistants and a Grounds person - to deal with the increased workload of managing our services to a growing village. All office staff benefited from training courses this year including for Burial Grounds procedures, Managing Allotments and the 'Parish Online' system which enables the digital mapping of assets and plans as well as other data. The clerk has attended several training courses including one on new Data Protection regulations and has embarked on his CILCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration) qualification.  
3 Councillors have also been on training in connection with Planning, as has the Deputy Clerk.

### FINANCE

This year we decided to raise the precept more steeply in order to ensure we have sufficient funds in the Revenue budget to support our day to day operations, staff costs and overheads.

We do also hold reserves and these are for the following reasons:

- A working balance to help cushion the impact of uneven cash flows
- A contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events or emergencies
- A build-up of funds to meet known or predicted requirements or projects – such as improvements to the park - referred to as earmarked reserves.

We had in the past used our reserves to avoid steep precept rises but if we continued to do so, it would have become unsustainable to use the reserves to fund operational costs.

### POLICIES

Policies are necessary to comply with legislation and to guide the way in which we do our work. Among those reviewed this year are our Financial Regulations, Developer Protocol, Risk Management, Allotment Procedures and Standing Orders.

### ASSETS

We have a variety of assets and have updated the Asset Register using the Parish Online System to easily identify their locations and value.

### COMMUNICATION

Several press releases have gone out this year mainly to update residents on the position of the Neighbourhood Plan. By the time of this Annual Parish Meeting we will also have had a public engagement event on proposals for improvements to Adastra Park. This will have been widened through outreach into various community locations and through the Parish website.

### BUSINESS PLAN

We need to manage change and also to be a proactive Parish Council so we are in the process of finalising the Business Plan which will set out the future direction of the Council over the next 5 years. We have been aiming to be realistic about what can be achieved with the staffing and the

financial resources we have, and yet enable some tangible benefits for the community. We anticipate the Plan will be published in the very near future. Cllr Frances Gaudencio

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

The Neighbourhood Plan Working Group is composed of eight parish councillors and three members of the community. The purpose of the Group is to formulate the Neighbourhood Plan in close consultation with the community.

Unfortunately I have to report that no progress whatsoever has been made in the progress of the Plan to adoption in the past year. This is because, although the Regulation 16 Consultation Plan was submitted to Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) in June 2016, and submitted to public consultation in July and August of that year, the District Council has refused to allow it to proceed to public examination.

The reason for the MSDC decision to halt the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan was said to be that the Plan did not meet the revised housing requirement for Hassocks, 882 homes, as set out in the, then, Draft District Plan. The District Plan was adopted, in March this year almost two years after the submission of the Regulation 16 Consultation Plan. It is very important to note that the housing figure specified in the Consultation Plan, 290 homes, was arrived at after extensive public consultation and an exhaustive sustainability appraisal and that it was accepted as sound by MSDC in 2016.

The Parish Council were therefore denied the opportunity to argue the case for the 290 homes in front of an Independent Inspector. The Parish Council questioned the legality of the MSDC position and asked for the Plan to proceed. MSDC consistently refused to allow this. Be that as it may, now the District Plan has been formally adopted it is the legally binding Development Plan for the District, and for Hassocks. It will now be necessary to take account of the much higher housing number. The question as to how, and if, the Council wishes to progress the Plan will be a major decision to be taken early in the next Council Year.  
Cllr Bill Hatton

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

There were 5 members of the public present who observed proceedings and 1 member of the public spoke. Frank Ryland raised three points:

- i) An enquiry as to whether it might be possible for all 'working groups' to publish minutes.
- ii) He stated that on occasions the on-line presence can be a bit weird in that some meetings scheduled to take place go into archives before the meeting is actually held and finally that he felt on occasion minutes could be published more promptly.
- iii) Mr Rylance suggested that the Council consider laying out the committee tables differently so that no Councillors have their backs to the public to assist those people with hearing difficulties following the meetings.

Mr Rylance also took the opportunity to thank all the volunteer Councillors for the complex work they undertake on behalf of the community and he felt that as the size of the parish and complexity of the work now undertaken it would be more fitting to call us a Town Council.

The Chair thanked the public for their comments and stated the Parish Council would review the points raised.

The meeting was formally closed at 19.55 hrs