

MINUTES of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING held on Tuesday 26 May 2015 at 7.30 pm at the Village Centre, Trinity Road, Hurstpierpoint

Present:

Stephen Hand (Chairman of Council)
Allan Brown (Vice-chairman of council)
9 other Parish Councillors
The Clerk, two Assistant Clerks, Maintenance Officer and Cemetery Officer
34 Members of the public

1. Introduction by the Chairman: The Chairman welcomed those present and introduced the councillors attending the meeting. The two new councillors were particularly introduced and special thanks were expressed to those who had retired, including Sue Bourn who was present at the meeting. The Chairman introduced councillor and past Chairman John Wilkinson, who had recently been also elected to Mid Sussex District Council. It was noted that apologies had been received from County Councillor Peter Griffiths and Parish Councillor Judith Marsh.

2. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 29 May 2014: The Minutes were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Annual Report of the Council 2014/15: The Chairman Stephen Hand presented the Annual Report for the Year 2014/15. Thanks were expressed to past Chairman John Wilkinson for his work over the previous three years. Stephen Hand then described the challenging past year, with its emphasis on strategic and large scale planning issues, including the 'calling-in' by the Secretary of State for Local Government of three large planning applications (Little Park/Highfield Drive, College Lane, and Kingsland Laines) and the subsequent public enquiries and decisions in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan proposals. It was noted that two of the Neighbourhood Plan identifies sites at Chalkers Lane had started construction. The Chairman acknowledged that the planning permission for the Little Park development did impact on some residents. The Chairman explained the cooperation with the local PCSO and police, and noted that low crime rates in the area. There had been a number of grants made to local organisations and it was hoped that more groups would apply to the Council for funds. The Council had recently granted £35,000 to the Sayers Common Village Hall, to enable the completion of the extension. The programme of upgrading the Council's streetlights was progressing, as were the replacement and addition of seats and noticeboards. There were larger projects in the planning stage, including the High Street Improvements, Pitt Lane upgrade, and the development of the South Avenue childrens' play area, all of which would be explained later in the meeting. The Chairman concluded by thanking all Council Members, the Committee Chairmen, and the Clerk and staff team, for their work in the past year.

4. Financial Report of the Council: The Clerk to the Council presented the audited Annual Accounts for the Year 2013/14, the draft Accounts for the Year 2014/15, and the revenue budget for 2015/16. In 2013/14 the Council had a deficit of £63,000 due to one-off expenditure on Neighbourhood Plan, High Street Improvements design, and professional planning advice on response to applications for large developments. In 2014/15 the expected large capital expenditure on the high Street and new parkland did not come forward, and the actual expenditure was much less than budgeted. Correspondingly, the income from s106 development-related funds was also not received. The overall effect was a small surplus in the Year of £11,000. For 2015/16 the planned budget shows considerable income from s106 funds, and corresponding expenditure on the delayed High Street and parkland works. The Council was also planning to carry out the South Avenue play area development. Although large s106 funds were expected, some of these were 'commuted sums' intended for the long-term maintenance of the parkland and would therefore remain in the Council's funds for the time being. The Clerk explained that the Council only received money that was locally raised, with no grants from central government or local government. The typical Council Tax for the Parish was just over £60 per year for each household. The Council's finances were in good order, with no significant borrowings or outstanding liabilities. There were no questions from the meeting on finance issues.

5. New projects: The Chairman introduced the following:

South Avenue Playground: Cllr Julia Shorrocks explained that it was planned to extend the existing play area and to introduce more contemporary and innovative equipment. The existing equipment was nearing the end of its useful life and required replacement. An expensive aspect of the scheme was the ground cover, which needed particular treatment. It was hoped to undertake the development in early 2016.

Sayers Common Village Hall: John Wilkinson advised that the Council had taken a loan of £35,000 from the Public Works Loan Board at a very low interest rate and repayable over 5 years, and then made a grant of the Village Hall committee to enable the extension and improvements to be completed. The front of the building was the now very successful village community shop.

Pitt Lane upgrade: Cllr John Lowman explained that the residents had been consulted and plans were being prepared to improve the alignment of the road, particularly the unmade section, and it was expected to carry out the works in autumn this year.

'Hurst Meadows' parkland: The Clerk said that the first stage of the country open space was about 12 acres of parkland around the new development of 17 houses north of Highfield Drive. As part of the planning permission, the Council had negotiated to receive the land and a commuted sum of £97,000. It was expected that the land would be transferred to the Council later in 2015 and the preparatory works for its use as a conservation area would be completed in mid 2016.

6. Council's business plan – Community Life: : The Chairman asked Cllr Matthew Stokes to explain the plan. The Council's current Parish Plan (Community Life 2011-16) was coming to the end of its period and a new Plan would be prepared this year. The matters addressed would be new projects and initiatives, but not land development which was the business of the Neighbourhood Plan. It was hoped that residents would take the opportunity of contributing towards the development of the business plan. Cllr Stokes took the opportunity of recounting the recent experiences about street-naming on the new Chalkers Lane development, and explained his desire that past notable village residents should be recognised, particularly local women. The developers had taken some persuading but had eventually agreed to the proposals, and several new local names would be shortly appearing.

7. PARISH 2013 Neighbourhood Plan: The Chairman reminded to the meeting about the successful referendum on the Council's Neighbourhood Plan, on 12 February 2015, with a 42% turnout and a 92% support. The Plan had since been formally 'made' by the local planning authorities. The Plan had established a number of important planning principles for the Parish area, including the role for 'local gaps' between villages. Over the last year there had been decisions on three significant planning applications, which had all been judged against the then emerging Neighbourhood Plan. An application for 90 homes at College Lane had not been supported by the Neighbourhood Plan, although the District Council elected to grant permission. However, the Secretary of State (DCLG) had 'called-in' the application, a public enquiry had followed, the Planning Inspector recommended refusal on local gap grounds, and the application was refused. Proposals for 140 homes at Little Park and 17 homes at Highfield Drive had been part of the Neighbourhood Plan, but was rejected by the District Council. Again, the Secretary of State had 'called-in', a public enquiry resulted in the Inspector recommending permission, which was then granted. The third application for 120 homes at Sayers Common was rejected by the Neighbourhood Plan, and by the District Council, but recommended for permission by the Planning Inspector. The Secretary of State had overruled and refused permission. However, in this case the applicant had sought a Judicial Review, and the judgement had just been published this month, saying that the Secretary of State should reconsider his decision, which was now awaited. The Chairman again acknowledged the potential impact of the Little Park development in particular, on residents in the immediate area. He then raised the issue of the District Council's emerging District Plan, which was expected to go the public examination later this year. Concerns existed that, until the new Plan was adopted, all planning decisions had to take account of the Government's planning requirement for a '5-year housing land supply'. Until the District Council could demonstrate satisfactory revised lower targets, they were under considerable pressure to grant new permissions.

8. Traffic and parking issues: The Clerk explained that the High Street Improvements Scheme, which had been in planning for more than 5 years, had been delayed in the last few months due to procedural reasons in the County Council, but was now expected to proceed in August this year. Recent successes on the part of the Parish Council had been the request for parking restrictions around junctions in Trinity Road, and in the area of Albourne Road, around the allotments and the junction with Western Road. Improved traffic flow and better sightlines had resulted from these changes. Concerns still remained about increasing demand for parking in the central area of Hurstpierpoint. The Clerk explained that the growing use of the Health Centre, St Lawrence School, and the changing nature of businesses in the high Street, all contributed to local commuter parking. It was intended to carry out a survey of carparking in the autumn of 2015, to try and understand the issues. A search was continuing for an additional carpark close to the village centre, but so far without success.

9. Open forum for the public: The Chairman took open questions from the meeting and the following matters were raised:

- (1) Carparking on Manor Road: There was considerable congestion with all-day parking. Could 'residents –only' parking be investigated? Answer: It was agreed that this would be considered by the Council's Working Group.
 - (2) Trinity Road: A previous suggestion that the grass verge be removed, to widen the road and allow 2-way traffic. Answer: It was noted that this had been referred to the Highway Authority, but the question would be raised again.
 - (3) High Street Improvements Scheme: It was suggested that it would not work and that it was not a good use of public money. Traffic lights would be a better solution. Answer: It was explained that the use of traffic lights had been explored but was not technically feasible.
 - (4) Parking enforcement: there was a need for much improved enforcement. Answer: a small team of traffic wardens were run by MSDC for the whole District. The Parish Council had pressed for more resources.
 - (5) Carparks: A suggestion of two areas of land off Trinity Road. Answer: these would be investigated.
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(6) High Street Improvements: Concerns about how the road closure would affect access. Answer: pedestrian access to all areas would be available.

(7) Sayers Common Village Hall: What payback arrangements were in place? Answer: The £35,000 funds were grant from the Council to the Village Hall committee, and no payback was required.

10. Closing remarks by the Chairman:

The Chairman thanked all those attending and noted that he was pleased to see public participation in many aspects of the local community. The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.

Chairman
