

PARISH OF BILLINGSHURST
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
OF ELECTORS
BILLINGSHURST CENTRE
WEDNESDAY 17 APRIL 2018, 7.00PM

Present:

Cllr P Berry, Chairman of the Parish Council
Clerk to the Parish Council, G Burt
Office Manager, BPC, Mrs E Berry
C.I. Miles Ockwell, Sussex Police
12 Parish Councillors
1 Member of the Press

1. Presentation

The Chairman welcomed C.I. Miles Ockwell, District Commander for Worthing, Adur and Horsham who had been in the role for 12 months. He explained that in the last 5 years, Sussex Police had had to find £50 million savings out of their £250 million budget. Sussex Police had unfortunately been more reliant on government grant than say adjoining Surrey. They had started by cutting low-hanging fruit, but then had to look much more widely. There had been an increase in firearms officers, but these had been taken from other roles. The force had also to respond to increases in the reporting of domestic and sexual abuse cases, highlighted by the post-Jimmy Savile type investigations. To an extent cuts in other public services, Mental Health and youth etc., had had a knock-on effect in that the Police were having to deal with more such issues. The local Police's priorities were mainly: keeping communities safe; protecting the vulnerable; prevent and respond to harm. It achieved this by investigation, response and prevention. Previously the Police expended much time investigating crimes that may never be solved. With fewer resources, by analysing early on whether a crime was likely to be solved, it could prioritise resources accordingly. The Police were still good at responding as response officers had not been cut. More locally, an issue of concern was gang-related drug-dealing incl. 'Cuckooing.' The Police were working closely with schools to try to prevent vulnerable kids being targeted by such gangs. (County-line drug dealing.) To an extent, the populous in a rural area may be more naive about some crimes than the populous in larger metropolitan areas, therefore making them more vulnerable. It was important to interpret crime statistics with some pragmatism. For e.g. there had been a 9% increase in crime in Billingshurst Parish in the last two years, but this equated to 32 crimes. This compare to a 14% increase across the Horsham District. There were 3 more burglaries than previous. The way crimes were reported also affected statistics. In Billingshurst, there were currently more crimes of domestic abuse than criminal damage. All cases of domestic abuse get investigated. Alcohol-related crime had gone down 33% in the last 2 years. He personally was very keen on a visible policing presence (in areas irrespective of crime levels) which had been dubbed 'Operation Minster.' Engagement with the public at a local level was very important, and he had tasked PCSOs to ensure they were seen even in the most isolated areas. He had started to take response teams away from emergency calls (work levels permitting) one day per week to other areas, to get them *out and about*. Police often ran street briefings and attended other high-

football community events to help get officers out in the community. He said that the increase in the Policing Council Tax will allow for real growth once again. In the next two years, there would be an additional 400 officers and allow other officers who were due to go to be retained. As a result, there will be more officers in prevention incl. Community Investigation Teams. They also hoped to improve the ease with which the public can contact the Police.

In response to questions, he said:

He welcomed the Council's decision to support new Neighbourhood Wardens. They worked well in other areas and they looked forward to their commencement.

He appreciated that thefts of tools from vans had a serious effect on tradesmen's livelihoods. Whilst often it may not be possible to solve individual thefts at the time, it was very important to report them as by seeing patterns, the Police could often solve crimes at a later date. The Police were getting better at joining the dots. 'Operation Blackout' was targeting vehicle crime.

He was unable to answer a question about costs of policing the oil drilling site at Broadford Bridge. Firstly he didn't know the answer and secondly, Police HQ had already declined a F.O.I. request. On a similar subject he did not know how and to what extent the police recharged say, policing at football grounds etc.

Taking on board a comment that residents of more rural areas are less likely to see the benefit of the increase in Police Council Tax than residents of larger towns, he advised that things should improve but it will take time to recruit and train new officers.

In the last two years there were 64 domestic abuse crimes in Billingshurst, all investigated.

The previous Schools Liaison Officers had been given a broader remit than before, reflecting that what happens at school doesn't just stay in school.

He noted the reports of drug smoking / dealing at SRG and near Carpenters.

Volunteers such as those manning Police Hubs were vital to the Police.

He could not state the % of time spent front-line policing versus paperwork, but said that hand held tablet-type devices had reduced the amount of form-filling.

He understood that not everyone had access to or could use PCs, tablets, smart phones, APPs etc. so wanted to make it easier for such residents to be able to contact the police. Sussex Police took approx. 600 999 calls per day.

Whilst he appreciated that some preferred to use the anonymous Crime Stoppers, without a name etc, it was difficult to initiate an investigation. Only if several people also reported via Crime Stoppers might a flag be raised somewhere.

He couldn't comment on the suggestion that crime will rise if the population rises.

C.I. Miles Ockwell was thanked for attending.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting on 5 April 2017.

The draft minutes having been circulated previously were taken as read and **RESOLVED** that they be accepted and signed as a true record.

3. To Receive the Annual Report of the Parish Council.

The Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr P Berry reported on the activities of the Council over the past year, attached Appendix A.

4. To Receive the Audited Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2017

The Clerk to the Council, Mr G Burt gave an overview of the Council's finances over the past year and looked to the year ahead, attached Appendix B.

5. Question and answer session with Electors.

None

Meeting finished at 8.27pm

APPENDIX A

**ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE YEAR
2017 –2018**

Cllr Paul Berry, Chairman of the Council

As usual it has been a very busy year for the Council.

During the year, Cllr Joe Horwood resigned and Cllr Brian Spicer took his place following a bye election.

On **STAFFING**, we said goodbye to our former Litter Wardens Tobias and Haydn and I would like to record the Council's thanks to all their hard work over the course of the years. We welcomed two new Litter Wardens: Alan Swainson and Colin Ellis – both have settled in very well.

Our Councillors, who all give of their time freely, supported by Officers, run much of the day to day affairs of the Council through our **COMMITTEES** which all meet in public and to which anyone is always welcome to attend.

The **PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT** Committee met on 18 occasions in the last year and considered 127 planning applications. The Committee chose not object to 109 of these; eight of which were subsequently refused by Horsham District Council.

The Committee objected or strongly objected to 13 applications; eight of which were granted permission. These applications included Brinsbury Fields at Adversane, an amendment to the approved development of 45 houses on land at the GP Surgery, and an additional four houses on the remaining allotment land on Little East Street. Decisions are still awaited on five applications.

A Parish Councillor attended the Planning Committee (South) Meeting at Horsham District Council at which the application for Brinsbury was considered. He spoke in objection to the plans but reported later that, although the planning objections raised during the consultation process were considered valid, they were outweighed by the perceived economic benefits of allowing the application.

Continuing the planning theme, our **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING Committee**, upon which sit representatives of several partner organisations, has been working very hard, meeting near-monthly in addition to an ambitious program of very successful consultation events required to give our evolving plan the necessary community legitimacy. Having established what residents think should be the priorities and possible solutions, the team are now sifting all this information with a view to start putting a draft plan together which of course will be consulted upon further.

The **PROPERTY** Committee, meeting bi-monthly, oversees the management of the Council's various sites and other equipment and street furniture in the Council's care. It too has been very busy over the past 12 months:

At Jubilee Fields:

- The Committee agreed to the marking out of additional football training pitches, the erection of a sectional garage in the storage area, additional car parking and the installation of a new perimeter fence to satisfy football league requirements.
- New fencing has been installed along the access road leading into the site together with signage to try to discourage parking in the passing places.
- WSCC is taking forward a Parish Council request to provide lighting on the footbridge across the bypass to the site.
- An interim survey of trees was carried out at last summer to ensure that there was nothing urgent outstanding following on from the transfer of the site from HDC to the Parish Council.

At Station Road Gardens:

- New signs have been erected at the three entrances to the site.
- We were thrilled when the Gardens secured a silver gilt award in the South & South East in Bloom competition. This was the first entry for the site and the success was a real testament to the hard work and commitment of the Council contractors, staff members and the volunteers of the Friends of the Gardens.

At Lower Station Road Recreation Ground:

- Members will shortly be considering a specification for the improvement of the main gateway to the site. As soon as the specification has been agreed by the Committee, officers can proceed to get quotations for work which it is hoped will be undertaken later this year.

Elsewhere:

- The Public Conveniences in Mill Lane were finally refurbished at a cost of approximately £67,500, largely funded by S106 contributions and after a few

initial teething problems, are receiving much favourable comment. We have entered them into the *Loo of the Year* Awards and look forward to the results.

- Thanks to sponsorship, a Christmas Tree was returned to the Village Green last December, much to the great delight of parishioners. The Council is always looking for sponsorship and/or funding to allow consideration to be given to extending the scheme further down the High Street.
- The sponsorship of High Street planters has proved to be a great success, so much so that all but one of the sponsors wished to renew for this coming season. It has been proved so popular that we are adding the bed on the Village Green to the scheme. We have recently approved the purchase of a second hand water bowser for the Council's Garden Contractor to use to water the displays more regularly. This is particularly important as we are also entering the centre of the village into South & South East in Bloom this year. We have already started to receive entries for our own local competition.
- The Committee agreed to support and encourage a WSCC-led Volunteer Scheme which would help with the clearance of footpaths and overgrown vegetation.
- We were very sad to hear of the passing of Mr Fred Humphrey who was a long term resident of Adversane. It is believed that Fred was involved with the building of the Adversane Hall many years ago and he was always the person who opened up the hall in readiness for the Council's autumn visits to Adversane.
- Further wooden posts were erected last autumn on the Adversane Green to deter unauthorised vehicle access to the site.
- A new bench has been installed at Cleveland's Gardens to replace an aging bench that was vandalised.
- We are awaiting a quotation to install an additional street light at Little East Street for which funds are already available.
- There was significant damage to play equipment at Manor Fields last autumn and officers are working with insurers to agree a way forward for replacement equipment.

In the next year we are looking to possibly connect the Pavilion at Jubilee Fields to the mains sewerage system; provide some bat and bird boxes at appropriate locations; a large scale tree survey and mapping project and of course seek an operator to provide light refreshments on a seasonal basis for a one year trial at Station Road Gardens.

The **FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES** Committee continues to keep a close eye on the Council's finances, about which the Clerk will report on in detail separately.

The Committee has sponsored the setting –up of a Community Speedwatch team who are now active.

The Committee has worked with residents in Five Oaks on the installation of gateway features and we are now applying for licences to install a Speed Indicator Device (SID) nearby.

We have received what must be a record number of requests for traffic calming, mainly for areas about which we are already aware. Unfortunately many requests we have made in the past to WSCC have been declined, often because they do not score high enough when WSCC compare them against other requests.

The Council continues to fund regular youth sessions in the village, in a tri-partnership with Horsham Matters and Pulborough Parish Council. It also supports other voluntary organisations in the village by way of our **GRANTS** program and in 2017-18 awarded the following:

Grants awarded by Billingshurst Parish Council	
Summary	
Applicant	2017-18
Victim Support Sussex	50.00
West Sussex Association for the Blind	100.00
St Catherine's Hospice	200.00
Billingshurst Centre	2,000.00
Billingshurst Community Partnership Luncheon Club	600.00
Billingshurst Community Transport	1,500.00
West Sussex Mediation Service	150.00
	4,600.00

The Council welcomes grant applications at any time of year.

Full Council itself has been preoccupied during the last few months with the announcement that we were to lose our three banks. We were pleased to facilitate opportunities on two occasions for residents to tell the banks what they thought and we would have let you tell a third, but they withdrew at the 11th hour. A private meeting was subsequently held and a report on that will be given on another occasion. This was one of those issues where the Council was able to try to champion the community's interests. We knew the banks would not change their minds but it was important that they knew what you thought and we hoped that the comments given might help shape any planned visits by mobile banks in the future.

The Council, along with other Parish Councils in the district was approached by Horsham District Council who was offering to help fund new Neighbourhood Warden Schemes. As the Parish Council had looked at a similar scheme before which it had been unable to progress, together with the significant impact on the Council Tax, it was keen that parishioners' views were known prior to the Council taking a decision. To this end, we are extremely grateful to all those who sent e-mails or letters giving their views. This was one of the most successful consultations ever undertaken by the Council, and as a result of the resounding number of comments in favour, we look forward to seeing the Wardens out and about by late Spring/early Summer. We are sure that they will help deal with the anti-social behaviour and many other issues that you told us were important to you.

The **BILLINGSHURST CENTRE COMMITTEE** continues to meet monthly to oversee the Billingshurst Centre of which the Parish Council is the Sole Managing Trustee (and meets as Trustee approximately 3 times per year.)

Daily management is left to Manager Norma Sullivan supported by an excellent team. Satisfaction amongst hirers continues to rise, which is also reflected in the accounts where income is set to exceed operational expenditure once again. Projects currently being considered are CCTV, improved surface drainage to the rear and refurbishment of the toilets. The Parish Council continues to try its best to communicate with its residents using different media such as Facebook, Twitter and website. In response to a suggestion we have increased our number of pages in the monthly Village Tweet from one to two. We are always happy to consider further suggestions.

Since joining the Council in 2003, I have seen the Council improve the way it communicates with its parishioners considerably. Sadly, public attendance at Parish Council and Committee meetings remains low and often there is a limited response to consultations etc. Many people probably feel that when commenting upon matters to their local Councils and other organisations that they are often ignored. This is perhaps particularly the case given the amount of largely unwanted development we have seen the area, and continue to see: we are losing our banks and have seen changes in our waste collection services. Many feel that they have been ignored regarding such matters. I want to take the opportunity to remind our parishioners that your Parish Council is non-political, your most local Councillors do not act on behalf of political parties, they vote independently based upon what they as individuals think is in the best interests of Billingshurst, I strongly believe that in a majority of cases, your Parish Councillors vote upon matters taking the majority view into account, there can be no better example of this when the Council was deciding whether to proceed with Neighbourhood Wardens; 80% of the comments received were in favour of proceeding.

I urge all our Parishioners to take a more active interest in matters the Parish Council is involved in, tell us what you think and get involved. The Council makes it easier than ever to let you know what it is up to, via its web site and social media and monthly updates in the Village Tweet. There is an election in 2019, democracy would be seen to be better served if over 15 candidates stood so it was a contested election, so please consider standing.

A full version of this report will be put on the Council's website but in closing may I thank all Councillors and staff, both inside and out for all their hard work and support over the last year. Whereas it is perhaps a little unfair to single anyone out I would particularly like to thank the Clerk who joined us around 18 months ago and has made great in-roads in improving the Council's procedures and helping to ensure that the Council runs professionally, openly and legally. Thank you to Cllr Lesley Wilding who stepped down as Vice Chairman last summer and to Cllr Alan Grant for taking on the Vice Chairman role last September.

Billingshurst Parish Council at 31 March 2018

Chairman Cllr Paul Berry
Vice-Chairman Cllr Alan Grant

Clerk
Office Manager
Assistant Clerk
Office Admin

Mr Greg Burt
Mrs Liz Berry
Miss Jo Booth
Mrs Sarah Meyer

Litter Wardens

Colin Ellis + Alan Swainson

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Twitter: [@BillingshurstPC](#)

Parish Council as at 31 March 2018

Cllr Barry Barnes	13 Carpenters, Billingshurst	01403 780660
Cllr Paul Berry	8 Nightingale Walk, Billingshurst	07880 507 666
Cllr Garry Commins	130 Forge Way, Billingshurst	01403 780527
Cllr Adam Du-Lieu	110 High Street, Billingshurst. RH14 9QS	07835 935 064
Cllr Alan Grant	Tanners Cottage, Lordings Road, Adversane	01403 784165
Cllr Dave Homer	24 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst	01403 782824
Cllr Miss Sue Kingston	15 Daux Avenue, Billingshurst	01403 782820
Cllr Paul Leaney	11 Rowan Drive, Billingshurst	01403 783812
Cllr Roy Margetts	47 Coombe Hill, Billingshurst	01403 784487
Cllr Andrew Pearson	Denecroft, Little East Street, Billingshurst	01403 782080
Cllr Jon Perks	6 Hawthorn Way, Billingshurst	07863 336 999
Cllr Ken Peters	31 Saddlers Close, Billingshurst	07874 855 387
Cllr Brian Spicer	7 Wood Croft, Billingshurst	01403 785173
Cllr Mrs Lesley Wilding	26 Carpenters, Billingshurst	01403 783192
Cllr Mrs Sarah Wilson	37 Carpenters, Billingshurst	01403 786271

15 Councillors

0 vacancies

Next Parish elections May 2019.

The **Full Council** meets on the first Wednesday of every other month and has the following Committees:

Planning and Environment	meets at least monthly
Property	meets bi-monthly
Finance and General Purposes	meets monthly
Billingshurst Centre	meets monthly
Working Practices	meets bi-monthly
Neighbourhood Plan Steering	meets monthly

APPENDIX B

REPORT OF THE RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER

Copies of Part 2 of the Annual Return for 2016-17 have been circulated; these are the most recent audited accounts for the Council. I suspect however that you are more interested in the 2017-18 accounts and a summary of these are shown below.

2016-17	Income	2017-18
1,727.45	Parks & Open Spaces	3,912.55
10,296.15	General Admin	9,367.84
17,322.28	Highways	39,559.74
5.15	Lighting	-
443.91	Interest	113.78
21,409.01	VAT Refunds	45,519.48
280,790.00	Precept	258,408.00
6,572.00	CTR Grant	1,314.00
	BCC Salaries recharge	15,678.72
27,650.00	One-offs to Reserves	57,995.07
	Vat on income	4,145.08
366,215.95		436,014.26
	Expenditure	
48,228.22	Parks & Open Spaces	42,015.83
55,754.69	General Admin	55,289.25
118,483.83	Salaries	155,598.90
20,296.42	Village Halls	20,492.70
2,933.84	Highway Cleaning	3,884.26
3,842.47	Lighting	2,761.34
3,007.36	s137	4,425.80
7,358.27	VAT paid to HMRC	22,121.15
22,494.39	From Reserves	118,601.64
18,903.12	VAT paid to suppliers	36,615.86
301,302.61		461,806.73

Points to highlight are:

1. These are only draft based on Receipts and Payments, not Income and Expenditure which is what the final accounts will reflect.
2. Even though the Precept went down, Income overall is up due in part to significant S106 contributions being received, and on the flip side expenditure is up, for the same reason, that is, expenditure on the Public Toilets refurbishment.
3. Salaries are up, this is due primarily to having to pay the permanent members of the Centre's staff for ease of pension contributions, via the Council's own Payroll, not the Centre's. As you can see, these are being reclaimed from the Centre.
4. Following *Best Practice*, the Council appointed a new Internal Auditor for 2017-18. This means that *fresh eyes* are looking at how we do things and he has already made several suggestions that we have, or will be acting upon.
5. 2017-18 was the last year we were in receipt of the Council Tax Reduction Grant received from the Government via Horsham District Council.
6. Because the Council didn't take forward the Community Warden Scheme in 2016-17 the Precept went down in 17-18, effectively returning the amount in its entirety taken from Council Tax Payers in 2016-17, honouring a pledge made at the time.

Looking to the year ahead:

- a) The decision to fund the new Neighbourhood Wardens will mean that the part a Band D Council Tax payer will pay to the Parish Council will increase from £67.72 to £86.04 from 1st April 2018 (27.06%). This follows a reduction in 17-18 of 11.62%.
- b) The Council is moving from a multitude of spreadsheets on which it keeps its accounts to a bespoke software package from this financial year.
- c) The Council is only in a position to undertake significant projects where the majority if not all funds can be secured from grants and other sources.

G C Burt
10/04/2018

