

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
OF ELECTORS HELD IN BILLINGSHURST CENTRE
WEDNESDAY 5 APRIL 2017 AT 7.30PM**

Present:

Cllr P Berry, Chairman of Billingshurst Parish Council
Clerk to the Council, G Burt
Office Manager Mrs E Berry
Assistant Clerk, Ms J Booth
Graeme Lewington and Sandy Henney, Wey & Arun Canal Trust
Twenty Members of the Public.

1. Approval of the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting on 11 May 2016.

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

2. 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.

3. To Receive the Audited Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2016

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.

4. Question and answer session from the Public.

- a) County Councillor Mrs A Jupp thanked the Chairman for a comprehensive report, the Council for all their work, and looked forward to continuing to working with the Parish in the year ahead.
- b) Parish Councillor Mr Paul Leaney commented that he had not been invited to attend any BSRA meetings for some time. He was advised that the BRSA were being pressed for some dates for a meeting.
- c) Dr Anna Currado was concerned about the prospect of oil-drilling at Broadford Bridge. Exploratory drilling was due to commence in six months. She believed that it would not be a conventional *Nodding Donkey* operation, but would use more rigorous methods to extract the *Tight Oil*. A public meeting was planned for 30 April in Pulborough. She quoted from an affected landowner in Surrey whose life had been *ruined* by such extraction.

The Chairman replied that the site was in West Chiltington Parish and that we had been advised that the proposed method was not Fracking. We had as a Parish Council made comments in the past on those aspects that might affect our Parish, mainly on traffic.

Dr Currado replied that the previous owners, Celtique Energy in 2013 had proposed conventional drilling, but the new owners UKOG may look at alternative methods.

The Chairman advised that the Parish Council would consider commenting further should another application come forward.

Dr Currado added that many people were worried about the project and were suspicious as to the reliability of some of the information provided by the applicant.

County Councillor Mrs A Jupp advised that the Environment Agency would be considering any variation on the current licence, not WSCC.

Parish Councillor Mrs L Wilding said the current Environment Agency consultation confirms that the application is not for Fracking.

- d) Parish Councillor Mrs L Wilding said the Parish Council had done on a good job on maintaining its own watercourses and ditches.

5. Guest Speakers

Graeme Lewington and Sandy Henney from the Wey and Arun Canal Trust gave a presentation on the work of the Trust, including current and future projects; how they derive their income; the economic contribution to the local area; the benefits to wildlife and the need for more volunteers. The Chairman thanked them for attending and talking about such an interesting subject.

Meeting finished at 8.40pm

APPENDIX A

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR THE YEAR 2016 –2017

Cllr Paul Berry, Chairman of the Council

Once again it has been a very busy year for the Council.

We started the year with 14 **COUNCILLORS** and one vacancy. Following the resignation of Cllr Natalie Van de Braam, we co-opted Jon Perks and Sarah Wilson, as no election was called. As a result of them coming forward, we are now up to full strength.

On **STAFFING**, Beverley Bell our Clerk moved onto new pastures and we welcomed Greg Burt. Tobias Mothe, our popular Litter Warden will be leaving shortly and we are currently recruiting.

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 continues to see a year-on-year increase in the number of applications to be considered and it has often been necessary for the Committee to meet twice-monthly in order to meet the strict deadlines set by Horsham District Council (HDC).

Over the past year it has considered 119 planning applications. The Committee did not object to six which were subsequently refused, and objected to 19 which were subsequently approved.

Amongst this 19 were a development of 45 houses on land near to the GP Surgery, reserved matters applications for the 475 dwellings on land East of Billingshurst, the development of 87 dwellings on land at Kingslea Farm and 51 dwellings on land south of Marringdean Acres.

Decisions are awaited on applications for commercial development on land at Brinsbury campus and 14 dwellings on land currently occupied by Little Gillmans Cottage, Marringdean Road.

Continuing the planning theme, our **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING** Committee, upon which sit representatives of several partner organisations, has been working very hard, meeting monthly in addition to an ambitious program of very successful consultation events required to give our evolving plan the necessary community legitimacy. Throughout last summer and autumn, Councillors and volunteers attended many events in the village, asking residents for their views, which continued in the New Year with four very well-attended events, 3 here at the Billingshurst Centre and one at Adversane. This information is being shaped into a *Vision and Objectives Statement* and actual policies which will be consulted upon further.

We received many submissions in response to our *Call for Sites* from land owners and would-be-developers. Many of these sites will probably be discounted as they will fail the key sustainability test. Of those that remain, we hope that some will be able to deliver some key new facilities identified by the community, in addition to the housing which all too often seems to be the price we have to pay for such facilities. Residents are asked to remember that the Neighbourhood Plan can't be used to necessarily stop development, but guide that development which we are obliged to have. We can't stop change but we can try to manage it to the community's benefit. We are very grateful to all residents who have responded to this ongoing project. Whilst I don't tend to like mentioning individuals on these occasions for fear of missing someone out, I am sure there would be universal support for thanking our Vice Chairman, Lesley Wilding for the unbelievable amount of work she has put in to this project, by way of the laborious task of number-crunching the hundreds of responses, which are on our website for all to see, into a meaningful format.

The **PROPERTY** Committee 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:

- faded white lining in the car park was refreshed;
- the rope-climb trim trail equipment was replaced;
- non-slip surfacing was installed to the fishing lake pontoons;
- successful grant funding in the sum of £7,500 enabled significant improvements to the wooden skate ramp;
- emergency ditch clearances were undertaken;
- after ten long years of waiting, the land-transfer from HDC to the Parish Council has taken place;
- this transfer has allowed for the lease between the Parish Council and Billingshurst Sports & Recreation Association (BSRA) to be finalised.

At Station Road Gardens:

- last autumn, the Committee updated the Memorandum of Understanding with the Friends of Station Road Gardens (FOG) and continues to work with the group in maintaining and improving the site;

- there have been close negotiations with West Sussex County Council (WSCC) and the Weald School to get repairs carried out to the fencing that borders Council land; these works have just been completed and include the provision of a new pedestrian gate.

At Lower Station Road Recreation Ground:

- over the course of the coming months, it is hoped to progress the replacement of the bridge and combined access/gateway improvement projects.

Elsewhere:

- the committee was invited to provide HDC with a list of Community Priorities last summer. Following consultation with local groups and organisations, a list of upcoming and future projects in the parish was passed on.
- further funding was secured of almost £50,000 to upgrade and improve the public toilets in Mill Way, which should commence this year.
- we are inviting sponsorship of our High Street planters this summer. This is an opportunity for local businesses to promote their names to a wider audience at the same time as showing their support for the local community.
- unfortunately, the Diocese of Chichester's Church Buildings Council refused to permit the installation of a new electronic winder at St Mary's Church, to be funded by the Parish Council, pending funds being amassed for the more expensive repair of the historic winding mechanism. This means that the Parish Council will no longer be providing any further support to the maintenance or future repair of the clock.
- commitment has been secured from BT for the repair and repainting of the Listed red telephone box next to the Sorting Office in the High Street.
- Last summer saw the distribution of a brand new Parish Guide, funded entirely by advertising.
- finally, much positive feedback was received for the new Christmas lights, following the commencement of a three-year contract; we hope to be able to improve the scheme further as funds permit.

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.

It also looks at highway issues, particularly traffic calming which seems to remain a priority for local residents; last year we put forward several schemes to WSCC and have made some progress. They have agreed to take forward schemes to slow traffic in Stane Street by The Alders; for a footway in Marringdean Road, and for lighting across the bridge leading from the village to Jubilee Fields. Agreement is nearly in place for new gateway features at Five Oaks. Hopes for speed-activated flashing light devices at other locations are progressing more slowly, as we may need to commission traffic data surveys for WSCC to permit such signs, even if someone else is paying for them. We lobbied for the 40MPH speed limit at Adversane to be extended further south to cover Brinsbury College, but this it seems is yet to be determined. Unfortunately, a request for a parking survey for the High Street was declined

In February, the Council decided to try to encourage locals to set up a Community Speedwatch scheme in Billingshurst and we will be publicising this soon.

The Council, working with the Flood Action Group continues to take a close interest in all drainage matters and will be progressing further *Operation Watershed*-funded projects in due course.

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 2016-17 awarded the following:

Applicant	2016-17
Victim Support Sussex	50.00
Age UK	1,000.00
Central & South Sussex CAB	100.00
St Catherines Hospice	100.00
Billingshurst Community Partnership Luncheon Club	600.00
Billingshurst Community Transport	1,000.00
West Sussex Mediation Service	125.00
Kent, Surrey & Sussex Air Ambulance	200.00
HomeStart	50.00
	3,225.00

The Council welcomes grant applications at any time of year, and we have just approved a new Grants Policy which should ensure consistency in the ways we consider applications.

We are often consulted on larger more strategic documents being prepared by other councils and in doing so, try to champion Billingshurst's corner when given the opportunity. In the last year we have been consulted on HDCs Infrastructure Levy Draft Charging Schedule and Economic Development Plan.

We raised concerns about the changes in opening hours at the Household Waste Re-cycling Site and more recently, HDC's changes in rural car parking charges; the Council was very disappointed that HDC seem to have ignored local businesses, the public and our concerns. For the sake of our local businesses, we do hope that our concerns are proved wrong.

The Parish Council continues to try its best to communicate with its residents using different media such as a page in the monthly Village Tweet, Facebook, Twitter and website. We are always happy to consider further suggestions.

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. Several improvements have been undertaken, most notably new curtains, tables and chairs, which have all been funded through Section 106 contributions.

A fuller 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, and on that note, I am happy to take any questions.

APPENDIX B

REPORT OF THE RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER

Copies of Section 2 Annual Return for 2015-16 have been circulated; these are the most recent audited accounts for the Council. As the 2016-17 year only ended 5 days ago, you will appreciate that limited figures are available. However, draft income and expenditure is as follows:

Income & Expenditure Accounts				
31 March 2016	INCOME		31 March 2017	
£			£	
0	Parks and Open Spaces		1,727	
7,069	General Admin		10,296	
0	Salaries		-	
26,425	Highways		17,304	
214	Public Lighting		5	
248,589	Precept		280,790	
10,955	CTR Grant		6,572	
442	Interest		440	
35,065	One Off / To Reserves		27,650	
328,759			344,784	
	EXPENDITURE			
42,479	Parks and Open Spaces		52,489	
33,387	General Admin		65,184	
141,736	Salaries		107,399	
20,295	Village Hall		20,296	
5,332	Highways		2,820	
3,462	Public Lighting		3,878	
5,865	s137		3,007	
0	Election		-	
51,639	One Off - From Reserves		18,957	
994	VAT bfwd		-	
305,188			274,030	
23,571	Net Income		70,754	

Points to highlight are:

1. As I say, these are only draft based on Receipts and Payments, not Income and Expenditure which is what the final accounts will reflect.
2. Income is up, due of course to the increase in precept;
3. Expenditure is down, due in part to a period when the Council was without a Clerk;
4. The Council did not undertake a project to provide Community Wardens;
5. Several applications for Section 106 monies were obtained to meet the costs of various projects, which would otherwise have been funded from the Council's own balances. These are shown as so-called *one-offs*.

Looking to the year ahead:

The Council Tax Reduction Grant received from the Government via Horsham District Council is being reduced from £6,572.00 to £1,315.00.

As mentioned above, the Council didn't take forward the Community Warden Scheme and as such, has resolved to return the amount in its entirety taken from Council Tax Payers last year to fund the scheme, honouring a pledge made at the time.

Thus the amount that the Parish Council will be collecting from Council Tax Payers in this new financial year will be £258,408, a reduction of £22,308 or 7.97%.

In terms of what it will mean in Council Tax bills, a typical Band D property will see a reduction from £76.63 to £67.72, a decrease of 11.62%. Unfortunately whilst we will be putting your money back in one of your pockets, West Sussex County and Horsham District Councils and Sussex Police will be taking from the other due to increases in their respective precepts.

The Council looks to save money where it can, recently changing to both cheaper photocopier and phone suppliers, holding slightly less meetings and making more use of e-mail rather than post.

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.

The measures outlined above show that the Council is prudently managing its finances to ensure that it is able to continue to afford to provide local services on your behalf, for the very best value possible.

I am of course very happy to take any questions.

G C Burt
05/04/2017