

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 8th May 2017 in the Amenity Hall, Stone Cross

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Bruce and Saxby and District Councillor Clark.

2. Welcome

The Chairman, Keith Stevens, welcomed the fifteen people in attendance and read from his report which was as follows;

'We are required by law to call an Annual Parish Meeting between the 1st March and the 1st June each year. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss parish affairs.....basically it is a forum for the council to engage with local residents. Many people, myself included, regard such meetings as being unnecessary where residents already take an active interest by attending council meetings and also rather outdated given that all parishes have websites giving information about local clubs and activities.

But we are a lawful Council....thus tonight's meeting. By comparison to previous year's our activities over the past twelve months have, like most other Councils, been dominated by Planning. At this point last year we were waiting to hear from Wealden District Council about our lengthy response to the draft Local Plan. What a change twelve months makes!! The new draft plan (which should be approved by Wealden District Council in the next few weeks) reduces housing numbers from 20000 to 11456 of which planning permission for 7392 has already been granted. This change in numbers comes as a result of the high levels of nitrogen deposition recorded on Ashdown Forest and no doubt as a result of the responses from and discussions with Parish Councils to the first draft plan. Yes Stone Cross is still down for a large number of new houses but we have, I believe, protected the "in-fills" between the various component parts of the whole parish which is important so that the villages can maintain their own identity. The current embargo on new builds imposed by WDC (in the absence of approved nitrogen mitigation levels) applies to the whole of the district and not just the Ashdown Forest area as many, including the BBC, seemed to think. And yes the nitrate levels on Pevensy Levels are being monitored. They are currently well below the Ashdown Forest but we have already seen what a change there can be over 12 to 24 months.

Towards the end of 2016 we reviewed what the Council has done well over the past few years and I think it's worth reminding ourselves that we:

- Keep the villages clean.
- Give financial support to worthy local causes.
- Chase District and County Councillors to fulfill their responsibilities.
- Look after taxpayers funds with care and spend wisely.
- Provide allotments....with more coming on stream.
- Replace or renew fingerposts signs.
- Review planning applications.
- Talk to builders to obtain the maximum benefit for residents of the parish.
- Maintain the land owned by the Parish including Butchers Field and Westham Pond, Children's and Adult's play park equipment.
- We listen to the public and react wherever possible.

Finally thank to our residents for attending this and our other Council meetings. Thank you also to our District and County Councillors and indeed to the Parish Councillors and of course Alison for keeping us in order. Congratulations to Alison also on achieving her Fellowship of the Institute of Local Council Management’.

3. Report from County and District Councillors

District Councillor Clark was unable to attend but sent the following report;

‘Probably the most talked about subject over the last 12 months is that of the Local Plan. It has been a long drawn out, complicated and frustrating process, and of course a huge amount of work has been, and continues to be undertaken. This work was required by the Planning Inspector following the publication of the issues, options and recommendations in 2015. Tests in the Ashdown Forest have revealed that the damage to the forest is far more extensive than first thought. The exclusion zone now covers the whole of Wealden. This has meant that the number of houses outlined in the “Objectively Assessed Housing Need”, which is a Government formula, has been reduced substantially from 20,000 to 11,456. The proposed Local Plan now includes allocating sites for 4064 additional homes for the period up to 2033. (7392 permissions already given are included in the figure 11,456). The sites are clearly shown in the proposed plan published in March. As always Wealden District Council are aware of the importance, and are continuing to fight for the infrastructure that needs to be in place at the same time as the new homes are built.

Dustbins and waste are of course a topic that never dies. It is a huge positive that Wealden have the best recycling rate in East Sussex. 50% of our waste is recycled, and a further 49% is incinerated at the Newhaven plant, where it is turned into electricity. We are proud to say that only 1% of our waste is sent to landfill.

Continuing negotiations and talks have ensured that Kier have been performing well over the last year. The number of missed bins has decreased. Unfortunately, street cleaning has not been as we would expect, and of course further steps are being taken to improve this service. It is notable that Wealden has saved almost £4m since 2103 when, together with our neighbouring Councils, we entered into the “Joint Waste Contract” with Kier.

Wealden have been negotiating with Kier on the way they manage the contract, and it has finally been agreed that the Kier contract will be terminated in 2019 when a new contractor will be appointed. Under the new contract it is expected that the collection method will remain more or less the same, with the exception of glass. This would be collected in the recycling bin rather than the separate container now used.

Wealden District Council have recently set up a housing company. The company will be run on a commercial basis and is aimed at providing housing for general stock. (for those wishing to downsize) and for general rent (for younger residents wishing to get on the housing ladder and often wanting smaller properties). Housing built will provide some for sale, some for rent, and will include some for shared ownership.

It was of course with regret that Wealden made the decision to raise Council Tax this year and after freezing Council Tax for 5 of the last 6 years the Council did raise their share of Council Tax by 2.8% for the current year 17-18. This is the equivalent of 9.5 pence increase for a Band D property. Government funding gets less every year and Wealden District Council are working hard to provide the essential services that Wealden’s residents are accustomed to.

I am currently serving as Vice Chairman on the Standards Committee. Wealden has a low level of complaints, most being about Parish Councillors.

I sit on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. We take on investigative work by forming working parties to look at important issues. We also invite outside bodies such as South East Water, and individuals such as the Police Commissioner, to come and speak to us. We use this opportunity to put forward our views (including those that have been generally expressed to us by the public), and to make appropriate challenges about services. Recently we fought hard to maintain common sense when the Boundary Commission were insistent on changing the ward boundaries in a way that does not make sense to our villages.

I also attend the CAG (Cabinet Advisory Group) for Community Leadership and Human Resources, when the Portfolio Holder looks to the group for views and advice before making his decisions.

I have attended nearly all the training courses provided through an extensive training programme. My attendance record shows 100%, and apart from meeting dates changing will remain this way. I look forward to serving the ward over the next year'.

County Councillor Pursglove had previously sent his Annual Report which was included in the minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on the 20th February 2017. The Chairman thanked County Councillor Pursglove for everything he has done for the Parish over the last four years.

Tom Liddiard introduced himself as the new County Councillor and said he will take office on the 9th May. He added his thanks to County Councillor Pursglove.

The Chairman then invited representatives of Clubs and Associations to make reports and the following came forward.

4. Reports from Clubs and Associations

Mrs Molog reported on the works carried out at Stone Cross Mill and said the Mill is now a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. She announced this weekend is 'Mills Weekend' and the Mill will be open from 10am to 4pm each day for tours and refreshments.

She said the Trustees remain thankful to the Parish Council for its support.

Mrs Molog had also sent a written report in which she said;

'The Trust was successful in an application to Wealden District Council for a grant of £6000 to replace the gears and install a water heater for hot drinks. Thanks to the work of the volunteer maintenance team the new gears have now been installed ensuring the continual use of the Windmill as a source of wholemeal flour for sale to the bread and cake bakers. The new water heater for dispensing drinks has also been installed and provides a safer method of dispensing hot drinks for visitors. The generosity of the members and visitors has helped to maintain a steady income for the Windmill as the insurance premium has increased as well as increased costs of materials and the never ending maintenance. Last year's spring, summer and winter fairs welcomed a large number of old and new members who enjoyed the never ending supply of home-made cakes, jams and eggs. The Harvest Festival at the Windmill in October and Carol Service at St Luke's Church Stone Cross was enjoyed by many members and visitors. Currently the sweeps will require extensive work as many have been

damaged over the years since they were replaced in 1999/2000 as part of the original restoration. Again another job for the volunteer maintenance team.

The Trust raised concerns regarding the new housing estate being developed beside the Windmill. The revised plans did not include a proposed parking area which has now been used for larger houses. The overall effect of the proposed tree planting and the close proximity of the houses could cause turbulence and possible harmful effect on the Windmill.

A full event calendar is on the Stone Cross Windmill website and also Facebook. If you know of a group that would like to visit the Windmill and also enjoy a cream tea with home-made scones and jam please contact the Chair'.

Mrs Molog asked for it to be noted that she was disappointed that Wealden had not discussed her concerns about the new housing estate and its possible effects on the Mill, at its Planning Meeting.

Councillor Durling reported that outside her role as a Parish Councillor she works with Mrs Molog and Action in Rural Sussex and organises walks to look at the flora and fauna in Peelings Lane. She is also working on a map to show the footpaths in the Parish. Between 6 and 24 people attend each walk, which end with refreshments at Stone Cross Mill. A special farm walk is planned in Hankham at Montague Farm on the 10th March.

Councillor Blaker reported on the activities at Stone Cross Memorial Hall where as the Parish Council's representative he participated in the new Business Plan. He said the Trustees have had to borrow £15000 to carry out repairs needed to the roof.

My Nye from the Hall also sent an extract from the Hall Trustees' Annual Report which said;

'2016 was a year of improvement and change. In June, a major contract to insulate, repair and re-cover the flat roofs was undertaken at a cost of over £20,000. This has much improved the conditions within the Harris Room and Kitchen and minimised the condensation that often occurred. The new covering comes with a 20-year guarantee and gives on-going peace-of-mind. The funding for the work came from a £15,000 loan over eight years from ACRE, a £1,000 grant from the Parish Council and from use of the charity's fund-raising account which was established for such purposes.

New web sites for the charity have been established to ensure that any internet searches for hall facilities in the area will be picked up.

A major piece of work has been the rewriting of the Governing Scheme to ensure it meets current requirements. One of the more important elements of the new Scheme is change to the constitution of the Management Committee. This now consists of up to eight trustees elected at the AGM, up to five trustees appointed by the main user groups (defined as groups using the Hall more than twelve times per year) and up to two co-opted members. The Charity Commission has now accepted the new Scheme.

Work started on preparing a Business Plan for the charity covering the activities it wishes to undertake for the period 2017 to 2022. When complete early in 2017, the plan will be published on the charity's web sites.

Arising out of the discussions on the Business Plan, the charity developed its first-ever budget based on projected activities. The budget informed the charging strategy for

2017, which was designed to ensure that the charity remains financially viable. Although this has resulted in a slight increase in charges, we are confident that the charges remain competitive with other similar facilities in the area.

Changes in management procedures during 2016 included a start on producing a number of policy documents (equal opportunities and reserves policies now complete) and new licences to occupy and hire agreements.'

Mrs Rich from Foxes Hollow Residents' Association said;

'Foxes Hollow Residents' Association was launched in 2002 to look after the interests of members and residents living on the Foxes Hollow Estate. In the early days much of that work focussed on getting the roads and services adopted by ESCC. Large areas of the open spaces were assigned to the Parish Council and we continue to have a good working relationship with the Parish Council.

To raise funds we have always had a membership fee per household which allows us to build up funds to carry out specific works on the estate and fund our newsletters and activities.

To keep the Foxes Hollow name prominent we commissioned the two slate entrance plaques and we have added daffodil bulbs year on year to the estate entrance to give a good show of colour. We spend on maintenance within our estate too, our gardening contractors clear out areas that have become overgrown, tackle some of the bramble issues and cut back ivy and weeds that overgrow footpaths.

We keep an eye on grit bins on the estate, two of which are Parish Council owned and are a little worse for wear internally so we have turned over, broken up and topped up the salt supplies and we continue to maintain our own one.

We co-ordinate a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme to alert residents of scams and concerns. We have just relaunched our members' website which is receiving positive feedback. We operate a membership card which gives discounts at the local Stone Cross hairdressers and pharmacy. One of our creations is a recommended tradesman list which relies on feedback from members.

We are currently working with Persimmon, the developers of the large Wells development which is alongside us. With such a large construction site there are going to be issues with noise, dust and contractors parking but we liaise with the Site Foreman in regular amicable meetings and it has kept problems to a minimum.

Looking forward this year we are looking at getting the estate a bit revitalised. The estate is 25 years old and is looking tired in places. We are looking at using some of our funds to get the estate tidied, weeded and the paths edged.

As always we are happy to continue to work with the Parish Council on matters whether they affect our estate or the rest of the Parish.'

5. Open Forum

Councillor Durling asked for the June agenda to include an item on how to increase attendance at Annual Parish Meetings.

There were no questions from the public and the meeting closed at 7.30pm.