

HASSOCKS PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING held on 14th May 2019 at 7.30pm in the Parish Centre, Adastra Park, Hassocks.

Present: Parish Councillors - Jane Baker, Georgia Cheshire, Bill Hatton, Sue Hatton, Leslie Campbell, Frances Gaudencio, David Hammond, Frank Rylance and Ian Weir.

Visitors: 5 Members of the Public. (1 from item 4b)

Clerk: Ian Cumberworth

Deputy Clerk: Tracy Forte

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. Absent without apology, Cllr Kate Bailey.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8th May 2018

The minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on the 8 May 2018 were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

Many projects that the Parish Council embarks on take several years to achieve and it is particularly heartening to report a number of significant achievements:

1. The first stage of the Hassocks Traffic and Parking Scheme has now been delivered which has improved parking availability around the shops and traffic flow in a number of roads. The second stage is now with WSCC for final approval this summer which will address issues in other village centre roads that are often obstructed by heavy parking.
2. The Neighbourhood Plan, which suffered a severe setback due to issues with the District Plan, has been reworked in consultation with MSDC and is now ready for the final stage (Regulation 16) prior to examination by an independent inspector in the late Summer.
3. Completion of a new Business Plan for 2018 – 2023 – which will address the needs of our community over the next five years.
4. A masterplan for Adastra Park to improve facilities in line with resident's requests. The first stage – a new Skate Park is currently being built ready for use over the summer holidays. Later stages including improved facilities for teenage users will be introduced over the next 2 years.
5. Working with HKD Transition on Green Infrastructure Projects, such as the rain garden in the park, designed to reduce flood risk and also provide an example for residents to copy.
6. Addition of a Cremation Lawn to the Burial Ground for the interment of ashes.

Also I want to acknowledge the part played by voluntary groups. By funding new equipment or materials the Parish Council supports the work of:

1. The Monday Group who build stiles and footbridges and repair local paths
2. The Speedwatch Group who work with Sussex police to reduce speeding

3. The Woodland Flora and Fauna Group who help maintain Talbot Field
4. Hassocks Tree Group who organise tree planting on our verges
5. Remembrance Garden Volunteer Team who keep it looking good.

In addition the Parish Council directly facilitates:

1. Hassocks Christmas Lights
2. Hanging Baskets in the village centre
3. Remembrance Day Parade
4. Occasional *Refuse Collection Events* at Belmont Road and Dale Avenue
5. Dog Waste Collection bins
6. Grants to local organisations that support our residents

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 approx. 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.

Whilst the Parish Council does all of the above, it also gives feedback and raises issues with the District and County Councils and currently is a contributor to:

1. MSDC Planning on the wider effects of the Strategic Site at Ockley Lane and the need for tangible community benefits.
2. WSCC on the need to develop and implement a long term plan for School Provision in Hassocks.

It is important to emphasise that 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

Work has been proceeding on the Adastra Park Masterplan. One of the major components of this plan is the forthcoming installation of the long awaited replacement skate park. I am pleased to state that construction of this work has already been started and work should be complete by early summer.

Work on the traffic and parking scheme for Hassocks continues. Once again I am pleased that the first phase of this scheme has already been implemented and that the second phase is also well advanced.

Work on the Burial Ground has been carried out to improve the area designated for the interment of ashes.

A volunteer group of keen and positive residents has been established to work on the Garden of Remembrance. I would like to thank Councillor Jane Baker in taking a lead in getting this much needed task started.

Finally, I would like to thank each and every member of the Grounds & Environment Committee for all the hard work that they have carried out over the past year.
Cllr Peter Gibbons

A further Member of the Public joined the meeting.

(b) PLANNING

As ever the Planning Committee has been very busy – the flow of applications never stops! Over the year the Committee considered 167 applications made up as follows:

Application type	Number	Recommendation for approval rate %
Single story extension	37	89%
Two storey extension	33	85%
Loft conversions including hip-to-gables	26	77%
Agricultural & commercial buildings, and signs	15	73%
Social facilities, and footpaths	9	100%
New individual houses	8	25%
Conditions variation	8	75%
New group up to 10 houses	5	0%
New group up to 500 houses	4	25%
Total excluding trees	145	76%
Trees	22	Not analysed
Overall total	167	

The reason for the low success rate at Parish Council level of large applications of 101 up to 500 houses, is that in the main the developers are attempting to build in an area that is not designated for housing and lies both:

- a) outside the areas so specified in the regulation 16 Neighbourhood Plan (as was) or more recently the Regulation 14 revised draft neighbourhood plan; and
- b) outside the areas so specified in the MSDC District Plan.

The MSDC District Plan was adopted on 28th March 2018 so applied for the whole of 2018-19, and has made it easier for HPC Planning Committee and MSDC to be congruent on applications, except where MSDC subsequently decided to increase housing density over and above levels in the District Plan. Consideration of previous Minutes show that HPC Planning Committee moved from recommending refusal of the 165 housing density at the Golf Course, to approving it in November with no documentation as to why the recommendation had changed. This is a material omission and for 2019-20 the Planning Committee should vow to do better as regards the transparency of its decision making.

The reasons for the low success rate of individual new houses and groups of up to 10 houses, are several: either the proposed home or homes lie in an area of countryside or in the South Downs National Park, not designated for housing; or it comprises infill that was considered by the Committee to constitute overdevelopment, making it contrary to the Neighbourhood Plan and District Plan.

Turning to extensions, single storey and two-storey extensions are approved the most easily, with success rates of 89% and 85% respectively. Loft conversions are more controversial, with a 77% approval level, because many involve side extensions with windows overlooking neighbours.

Looking ahead to the coming years, the Government has seen fit to bar new houses connecting to the gas grid – but not bringing this in till 2015. This is an attempt to mitigate global warming in the “too little, too late” category. So Hassocks Planning Committee needs to do better. I would advise the future planning committee that it recommends what some councils in East Sussex are already doing – i.e. for new builds it recommends making self-build plots available that are supplied with water, electricity and a form of air-source or ground source heat but not a gas connection. This helps tip the balance towards sustainability in advance of some decent building regulations that will insist upon it. HPC Planning Committee can cite the fact that the UK Parliament has voted to declare an ‘Environment and Climate Emergency.

I look forward to working with the newly elected Hassocks District Councillors to achieve and ensure truly sustainable development.

Cllr Nick Owens

(c) POLICY, RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Policy, Resources and Communications Committee could be called the driving force of the Council. The Committee in effect oversees the whole Council. It sets and reviews the guidance and standards for the Council and members and ensures the Council is accountable.

This has been a year of consolidation. We have:

- Reviewed and agreed new Members induction and training and also some councillor protocols.
- Invested in new display boards and communications software.
- Agreed a new investment policy.
- Taken an overview of the Parish Council’s business plan and tracked our progress against this.
- We have again achieved a balanced budget and increased reserves to cover unforeseen operational costs and funds towards projects which are being implemented. Thanks to the Clerk for his guidance in enabling the Council to achieve a balanced budget.
- Worked towards achieving improving communications about the Council’s projects with residents and this will be a focus going forward. We have tried to achieve more consistent, proactive and regular communication with the community.

I would like to thank all of the Members of the Policy, Resources and Communications Committee for their work on this Committee.

Cllr Frances Gaudencio

(d) NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN WORKING GROUP REPORT FOR 2018/19

The Parish Council faced a dilemma in 2018.

After initially accepting the 2016 Regulation 16 Neighbourhood Plan Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) refused to progress it to Examination on the grounds that it did not provide enough housing to meet the requirements of the Draft District Plan.

The District Plan was finally adopted in March 2018. It allocated a large number of new homes in Hassocks to meet the demands of the wider sub region.

The Parish Council therefore had to decide whether to proceed and prepare a new Neighbourhood Plan to comply with the new reality or simply not to bother.

After much deliberation the Council took the pragmatic view that the interests of our community would be to accept the inevitable and to make the best of it in order to obtain the maximum benefits for our village.

We therefore prepared a new Plan on this basis and submitted it for public consultation under Regulation 14 of the neighbourhood Plan Regulations. This Plan sets out a vision for our Parish from 2014 until 2031. This is the period of the District Plan.

The aims of the Plan are to:

- Provide a framework for future development in the Parish,
- Protect and enhance existing open spaces,

- Harness development value to improve infrastructure, and
- Encourage high quality design and sustainable development.

The Plan takes full account of the higher housing requirement for Hassocks set out in the District Plan. The Strategic Site for 500 new homes on the Land North of Clayton Mills is included in the Plan. The inclusion of this site, together with the other sites which already have planning permission, such as Saxon Mills and the Hassocks Golf Club, ensures that the Parish can fully meet the District Plan Housing Requirement for Hassocks.

There is no need to allocate anymore land for residential development in the Plan Period.

The Public Consultation on the Plan commenced in January and is now complete. Our new Plan has been very favourably received by the community but less well by the development world who would like to build yet more houses in our village and by MSDC who object to the details the Green Space and Gap Proposals.

All the consultation results are now under consideration by the Working Group and our views will be submitted to the Full Parish Council for decision in June.

The Parish Council will submit a Regulation 16 Plan to MSDC in the early summer.

Cllr Bill Hatton

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

Sian Phillips, Downs View Road, Hassocks noted that the only statutory duty of a Parish Council is to provide allotments. With the increase in population and houses in the village, and a growing waiting list for current allotments, Miss Phillips requested that the Council would give consideration to the provision of a further allotment site.

The Chair thanked Sian Phillips for her comments and stated the Parish Council would review the points raised.

The meeting was formally closed at 7.50 pm.