

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD AT
BEECHWOOD HALL ON 26th APRIL 2012**

Mrs J.Toomey, Clerk to Hamsey Parish Council
Bowling Green, Chiltington Lane, East Chiltington BN7 3QU, East Sussex
Tel: 01273 890621 Email: clerk@hamsey.net

Present: Cllr. J.Harmer (Chair)

Apologies: K.Froude,
pcso.Sally-Anne Reed

In attendance:

Mrs J Toomey – Clerk to the Parish Council
Cllr.R.St.Pierre- East Sussex County Council
Cllr.D.Edmunds – Lewes DC
Michael Bell, Vice Chair of Beechwood Hall trustees
4 members of Hamsey parish council
3 representatives from Lewes district Council
10 members of the public

Meeting commenced at 7.00pm.

- 1) Apologies for absence – as listed
- 2) The chair, Justin Harmer, welcomed those present.
- 3) Minutes of the 2011 Annual Parish Meeting were agreed and signed
- 4) County Councillor Rosalyn St.Pierre reported that she had assisted residents at Bevernbridge to oppose a change to the planning restriction over the road to the Old Brickworks site. She has also looked into increased parking for rail users at Cooksbridge. She was concerned about the possible impact on water supplies if permission is granted for fracking in Lewes District and is calling for a full report. Working with a Lewes Cllr. And an Offham resident, has helped improve safety at the Landport fork and is also pushing for 20mph and safe zones in rural areas. Still trying to get a safe footway to Beechwood Hall.
5. Lewes District Councillor Donna Edmonds had not yet arrived and there was no report.
- 6) The chair of the parish council, Justin Harmer, thanked the three Parish Councillors who stepped down during the past year, firstly Robert Baughan, his achievements mainly with train services and the station partnership which has seen huge improvements at the station and extra stopping services at Cooksbridge. Terry Squires, who was on the council for several years, his common sense and generosity with his time was much appreciated and Rob Pinder who was only on the council for a short time but always made a valuable contribution. Council had welcomed Ian Ginn, Bill Rendall and Rose Armstrong onto the council this year. There is a vacant place on Hamsey Parish Council, if anyone would be interested in joining please do come forward.

He said thanks are due to Jenni Toomey for her continued hard work not only with the Parish Council but also the management of Beechwood Hall is much appreciated. Also Kevin Froud, who's invaluable work enables the Parish Magazine to be produced to such a high standard.

South Downs National Park - thanks are due to Richard Winter who has attended many Park meetings on our behalf. The parish council will keep up to date on park matters.

Planning, we have had very few applications so far this year.

Footpath to Beechwood Hall - the council has been pursuing various alternatives but has so far had no success, we will be continuing to explore every possibility.

School and Chandlers Mead parking. Mainly put on hold while a new head teacher was appointed, this will be pursued this year.

The Council and Beechwood Hall committee have regular meetings to keep each other informed as to future plans for the hall and grounds. we have two councillors as hall trustees.

Rail Services - councillor Baughan has done a fine job pursuing Southern Rail regarding improved train services. Cllr.Ian Ginn has now taken over this role.

The Local Core Strategy will be discussed tonight, a response was made by the council last November.

Finance report from the parish clerk and RFO:

The parish council had held the precept down again for last year and ended the year with healthy deposits of over £20,000 enabling a reduction to be put in place for the coming year. Expenditure during the year included office and administration expenses of around £6,350: Subscriptions £331: . Grants of over £600 and £500 towards maintenance of the Old Hamsey Churchyard. Expenditure at the hall of around £1,650 covered the cost of mowing, hedge trimming and clearing the dog mess bins. Insurance was down from the previous year at under £1,500. Audit fees also down, around £250. Website and Newsletter costs were around £776 but over £300 came back in advertising revenue. The council made no grant to Beechwood Hall last year as it had been able to generate enough income to cover its own running costs. This is not the common situation for village halls and its very good to see the hall so well used. This summer the parish council will be financially supporting the village festival in July. Residents wishing to inspect the accounts for the year should contact the clerk to make an appointment.

7) **Michael Bell, Vice Chair of the Beechwood Hall trustees** said Beechwood Hall and the Rural Park had been operational for four and a half years and is firmly established as a popular venue for both residents and non-residents. A significant operating surplus is now being generated each year and reserves are very strong. Clear management and financial structures are in place and working well.

Management

A number of trustees have stood down in the year. Thanks to Sue Rowland, Emma Taylor and Fiona Morton for all their hard work – and particular thanks are due to Lynda Ridge for her enormous contribution to the development and management of the hall. Trustee Tom Walker has taken over the running of the maintenance group, with sterling support from trustee Jim Edwards. Links with the parish council were strengthened with councillors Rose Armstrong, Mike Dodd and Terry Squires becoming trustees, though Terry has since stood down for personal reasons. Jo Hughes stood down as chair though she remains a trustee with particular responsibility for maintenance of the grounds. Vice chair Michael Bell is acting chair until a replacement is elected, hopefully at the June meeting. Mike Hirst resigned as the trustee nominated by partner organization, Hamsey School, and head teacher Helen Smith has been nominated to replace him at the AGM in May. Sadly Jeanette O'Connor and Martin Huseyin have indicated that they do not intend to seek re-election as trustees. Jeanette made an enormous contribution to the development of the new play area, while Martin has provided invaluable legal advice to the trustees.

In support of the trustees, Andrew Featherstone has proved to be an excellent treasurer, while Kevin Froude has replaced Jane Baldwin as minute secretary and taken on a wider secretarial role. Jenni Toomey has proved to be a dynamic and efficient bookings manager. Contracts for the provision of services by the bookings manager and the hall cleaner have been being finalised. These clearly define the relationship between these service providers and the trustees.

Overall the trust is very well managed. Clear roles and responsibilities have been defined and are in operation. Written reports from the treasurer, bookings manager and the maintenance group are submitted for review at trustees meetings every two months. These meetings have a clear agenda which identify all new and ongoing issues for discussion and resolution. The minutes report key aspects of the discussion and highlight all action points with individual responsibilities.

Finance

The closing balance of the trust's combined Business and Reserve accounts on 31st March 2011 was over £34,000 – an increase of some £4,800 over the year. £700 of this is held for the Hamsey Heritage Project. The trustees have agreed that a prudent minimum level of reserves, to cover uncertainties in the use and maintenance of the hall, would be in the range £10,000 to £15,000. This leaves just under £20,000 available to further the aims of the charity, which the trustees intend to apply to the construction of a storage extension to the hall, as further explained below.

Bookings remain stable, despite the adverse economic environment. Preferential rates apply for residents, who continue to enjoy the hall - running or participating in classes, or organizing private parties. The hall is a popular venue for wedding receptions and these events help the trustees to keep rates low for residents. The hall is also used by numerous outside organizations including the Sussex Police Choir and the East Sussex Dance Group. The facilities make it an ideal venue for the National Childbirth Trust meetings for mothers and babies – now extended to toddlers.

Booking forms have been updated and a cancellation condition introduced to protect the trustees. To simplify management, those who make regular bookings are now required to pay in advance.

The trustees have decided to run the hall at the current level of activity, rather than to promote further expansion. Trustees considered seeking an extension in licensing hours at weekends to attract more parties, but rejected this to protect the peace and quiet of neighbouring residents. An increase in hiring rates was considered but given the economic situation and the trust's healthy financial state, the trustees decided not to change them.

Hall Management and Maintenance

Trustee Tom Walker now runs the maintenance group, which also comprises trustee Jim Edwards and keyholder Brian Philpott. Their devoted and skilful work as volunteers is a major contribution to keeping running costs down and generating a healthy operating surplus. The hall benefits from a variety of renewable energy systems. These were thoroughly reviewed and found to be working well, with the wind turbine making a useful net contribution. With the manufacturer of the wind turbine having gone out of business, an alternative specialist contractor has been identified to undertake the regular maintenance required.

Particular attention is paid to maintaining the play area so that it remains safe for use by children. The trustees used the additional grant from Groundwork to pay for an outside storage container and maintenance equipment for use in the play area and grounds.

The parish council continues to pay for mowing and hedge cutting along the public highway. A tree donated by trustee Rose Armstrong has been planted to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee and a plaque will be added.

Projects and Issues

The trustees have agreed in principle to the building of an internal storage extension to the hall. As well as simplifying storage, this will also enhance the space available in the main hall. Three estimates have been obtained, of which two will be progressed further. Given the strength of reserves and the nature of the project, the trustees did not believe a grant application would be successful. Instead they will look to self funding, with a financial contribution from the parish council.

Trustee Fiona Morton led some work on enhancing the facilities in the grounds, but trustees decided to put this on hold pending further consultation with the local community.

The trustees, led by Mike Dodd, are taking a leading role in promoting and organising a parish festival in the hall and grounds in July. This will be jointly funded with the parish council.

A safe footway to the hall along Beechwood Lane remains the biggest issue. East Sussex County Council does not consider it a priority and the costs involved are beyond the resources of the local community. However, the trustees will continue to press the case.

Conclusion

Hamsey Parish is a small community of only 600 people. We are rightly proud of our village hall and grounds, the volunteers who helped to develop it and those who continue to run it in a highly professional manner on behalf of us all.

8. Discussion on the Emerging Core Strategy for Lewes District

Representatives introduced themselves as Ed Sheath, Natalie Carpenter and Cllr. Tom Jones and distributed a document outlining the core strategy

Lewes District Core Strategy Update

General

- Lewes District Council, in partnership with the South Downs National Park Authority, are preparing a strategic plan for the District that will run up until 2030. This plan will be called the Core Strategy.
- This plan will set out the high level policies on issues such as housing, business development, infrastructure provision, design and flood risk.
- The District Council/National Park Authority consulted upon the Emerging Core Strategy between September and December 2011. This document can be viewed at: http://www.lewes.gov.uk/Files/plan_Emerging_Core_Strategy_Final.pdf
- This document presented a number of options for different policies, including in some cases identifying a preferred option. Despite this, no final decisions had been taken on any of the policy areas.
- Views were sought on all the policy options, and people were invited to put forward alternative approaches.
- The majority of the representations received focussed on the options being considered for housing development.
- A document summarising all of the representations has been prepared and published at: http://www.lewes.gov.uk/Files/plan_ecs_consultation_summary_document.doc
- Taking into account these representations the next stage of the Core Strategy will be prepared and consulted upon in late Summer/early Autumn.
- This document will be called the Core Strategy Proposed Submission and it will indicate the District Council/National Park Authority's policy approaches they wish to implement.
- Representations made on this document will be considered by a Planning Inspector, who will conduct a public examination into the Core Strategy.
- Subject to the Planning Inspector finding the Core Strategy 'sound' it is due to be adopted in late Spring/early Summer 2013.

Issues specific to Hamsey Parish

9. The Emerging Core Strategy set out the proposal for 30 new dwellings to be delivered at Cooksbridge in the period up until 2030. It does and will not set out the sites that will be built to deliver these dwellings – this could be for a Neighbourhood Plan to decide.
10. The Emerging Core Strategy also identified a need to deliver 11 additional permanent pitches for Gypsies and Travellers in Lewes District in the period up until 2018.
11. A site assessment study was undertaken, which examined a number of sites across the district in terms of their suitability for accommodating some of the 11 pitches.
12. Only two sites were identified as having some potential, which included an extension to the site to the north of the Petrol Station at Offham for 3 additional pitches.
13. Views were sought on this suitability of this site, as well as a site at Denton, and people were invited to submit additional sites to be considered (a number of such options have been submitted).
14. No decision has yet to be taken as to which sites will be allocated to meet the need for 11 additional pitches.
15. There are an additional 13 policies in the Emerging Core Strategy, which if taken forward are likely to have implications for future development in Hamsey Parish.

Neighbourhood Planning

The Localism Act has introduced a new tier of plan-making into the planning system. This is in the form of neighbourhood planning.

Neighbourhood planning allows for Town and Parish Councils to prepare detailed planning policies for their area.

Such policies will need to be prepared in consultation with the local community (they will be entitled to vote at a referendum that decides whether to adopt the policies, or not) and should be consistent with the higher level policies prepared at a national level (National Planning Policy Framework) and at a district level (the Lewes District Core Strategy).

Lewes District Council / South Downs National Park Authority will provide support for those Town and Parish Councils who wish to prepare a neighbourhood plan.

Over 3,000 comments had been received between Sept./Dec.2011. The proposed submission would go to the planning inspector late summer 2012.

9. Questions from the floor.

Q. Where did the need for 11 pitches arise?

A. In 2010, 11 pitches were recommended arising from a gypsy/traveller assessment from 2005. Various aspects were looked at including vacancy rates which would discount existing pitches and also the need within areas which have a high level of unauthorised camps. At that time 19 pitches was suggested.

Q. How are travellers identified from other unauthorised campers?

A. They are recognised as a separate ethnic group and proof is needed of their status.

CLlr.Jones said that if any of us changed our life style and started 'travelling', then we would qualify too.

Q. Why do some choose housing?

A. Because it is recognised that some wish to settle and if pitches are not available they are placed on the housing list.

Q. How many pitches at Bedingham?

A. 10 but this is a transit site, not permanent.

Q. Why are they called travellers if they don't want to travel?

A. It's part of their culture.

Q. The Core strategy recommends 7 pitches for Offham. What is a permanent pitch?

A. A touring van and vehicle, static van and amenity block.

At this point a section of an LDC document was read out - "sites should be in proportion to the area". This site was considered an unacceptable increase to the Offham population – 20% was suggested – and this was felt to be contrary to the document. LDC answered that this criteria had yet to be looked at. The next stage of the core strategy will need to conform with the national policy.

Q. Were owners aware that their sites were being considered?

A. The sites were surplus land or had been put forward by the landowners or had previously been used as camps. The questioner said he owned one of the sites and had never been consulted.

Q. Were Parker Dann advised by LDC which of the sites should be seen to be suitable?

A. No. Sites were assessed against set criteria. No guidance was given. Parker Dann set the methodology and this was available on line. The project brief was not available.

Q. Would there be any more consultation before the summer submission?

A. No formal consultation but all views would be considered. Previous correspondents would be told when the document went forward.

Q. Who can occupy the pitches?

A. That depends if it is privately or publicly owned.

Q. The site was originally illegally occupied as formerly agricultural land. It now has permission for four pitches. If expanded to seven this would be 70% of predicted total need and is disproportionate.

A. This would be considered before the document is finalised.

Q. If the site is privately owned who pays for the upgrade?

A. The owner who could apply for a grant or could sell the pitches to self-finance.

Q. Is there any objection from highways? There were two fairly high speed crashes at the garage in the last 2 years, resulting in a pump being badly damaged, right next to the travellers entrance.

A.. No but the hedge would have to go.

Q. Wouldn't taking the hedge out make the site very visible?

A. The intention is not to hide the site but to landscape it.

Q. How many people can occupy a pitch?

A. Generally just one family but no limit to numbers subject to environmental constraints.

Q. Are the environment agency aware that the site floods?

A. Extensive drainage will be needed.

Q. Its a low point so where will it drain to?

A. Don't know.

Cllr. St-Pierre said she was very surprised that the traffic issues have not been taken seriously and if the site is approved she would lobby for a lower speed limit (presently 60mph) and traffic calming. She questioned the future management of the site because the owner is rarely there. The school also had concerns because some years were full and the school will be unable to accommodate any influx, which would also be disruptive to the children already in place.

Cllr. Donna Edmonds suggested that if the site had not already been occupied by travellers, the flooding problems and highway issues would have ruled it out.

Q. Is the present area big enough to accommodate more pitches?

A. No, it would need to expand into the greenfield area although the guidelines advise use of brownfield sites.

Cllr. St-Pierre said the report found only 2 of the 14 sites looked at were considered suitable. She felt the Parker Dann report to be inadequate and more serious consideration needed to be given to material considerations.

LDC – It will be reviewed and highways consulted.

Q. If highways objected through a safety audit, would that rule the site out?

A. Yes

Q. Could highway consultants put forward recommendations?

A. Yes.

Q. If 11 pitches needed, why not spread them round the area?

A. No suitable sites.

Q. If site proceeds who pays for highway improvements which might be needed?

A. The landowner.

Q. Don't LDC prefer a private site over a public one because they don't have to fund them?

A. No because grant funding is available.

Q. Doesn't it make sense for private owners to develop the sites leaving LDC to sell public land for profit?

A. Ideally yes, private sites would come forward.

Q. What if the site gets permission but the owner decides not to proceed?

A. Hope that wouldn't happen.

Q. Some static vans have 5 or 6 bedrooms so shouldn't the number of people be looked at?

Q. Isn't it easier to put a site here because there are less voters?

Q. How do we go forward from here?

A. This meeting was a good start. LDC will listen to concerns if there is evidence to back them up. LDC would actively work with Hamsey PC on a village plan

Q. Will there be a chance to discuss housing in the parish?

A. Not tonight as time has run out.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm and the chair thanked those who attended.

Refreshments were served by the clerk to the parish council.