

Ditchling Parish Council Annual Parish Meeting 8th March 2016

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Old Meeting House on Tuesday, 8th March 2016 at 7.30pm.

Present: Cllrs.Madden (in the Chair), Smith, Robinson, Madden (Mrs), Lever, Jones (LDC), Jim Sheppard (ESCC) and the clerk Mrs Michelle Warner.

Apologies for absence: Apologies received and accepted from Cllr McBeth, Ingham and Banfield.

1. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 17th March 2015, having been circulated, were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.
2. Report of Parochial Charities. Brian Clutterbuck, Chairman of the Dame Isabella Sprott Eleemosynary Charity gave some information on the history of the charity which was founded in 1378. The Parish Council appoints 4 Trustees and these 4 Trustees then appoint 4 co-opted Trustees. The current Trustees are Brian Clutterbuck, Rev David Wallis, Mrs Angela Earwicker, Mrs Mary Holman, Mrs Dorothy Porter, and Dr Miriam Wynn, Mrs Naomi Jerrey and Mrs Maralyn Hine. During the year Mrs Agnes Sellens resigned, Agnes was a Trustee for many years and Charity is very grateful for her contribution. The income is in the region of £650 per year. The Trustees have recently instituted a policy of making more meaningful grants to fewer people. Mr Clutterbuck thanked his fellow Trustees for their help and support over the past year.
3. Parish Council Chairman's Report. In the absence of Cllr McBeth the Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Madden as the Vice-Chair read the chairman's report.
 - a) **New car park:** Through the neighbourhood plan survey carried out in the village in 2014, we found there to be a pressing need for a second car park in the village. Then site chosen for this is a small field just past the 30mph limit sign on 2116, on the right hand side as you head towards Keymer on the Keymer Road. We have negotiated a 50 year lease with the owner, and are now in the process of requesting planning permission from the South Downs National Park, and access permissions from East Sussex County Council. When we have sorted this out we will proceed, and we hope this will be of great use to the village, the nearby village green, the museum and church. There has been some comment regarding "building" in this sensitive "strategic gap" area between Ditchling and Keymer, but in reality no building will take place, and it will just involve access, and stabilising the parking surface.
 - b) **Recreation Ground:** At the cost of over £100,000 the main football pitch on the recreation ground now has a modern drained playing surface, which should be resilient to wet weather, even through a winter similar to the one we have just endured. You will hear more of this from Phil, the chair of the grounds committee.
 - c) **New Clerk:** As you may know Mary Holman our long standing and much respected Clerk retired in 2015 after 42 years of service to the parish. We advertised the post had had eighteen candidates apply. We chose what we considered to be the best ten of these, and over two days of interviews we appointed Michelle Warner, an ex councillor from Buxted, who I am pleased to say has proven to be a very capable replacement for Mary.
 - d) **Neighbourhood Plan:** The Neighbourhood plan has been running for several years now. As you may know, when this was first suggested the council decided that this was a Ditchling wide initiative and would be handed over to the people of Ditchling to assess and complete. Tom Dufty has been the chair of the neighbourhood plan steering committee since its inception, and has run it with a very steady hand. In a few weeks there will be a six weeks consultation period, when all the council tax payers of the parish will be asked their opinions on the suggested plan. Based upon their comment, we will submit the plan to a government inspector, and after their comments have been dealt with, the plan will be put forward to parish wide vote. We hope to complete this process by early summer.

- e) **Finance:** Finance decisions by the parish council are dealt with the full involvement of all councillors, by this I mean that all councillors are involved in and will vote on all and any fiscal proposals. Last year we had some exceptional items in the budget, for the local elections and preparation for the proposed car park. This year those items have been removed such that we will actually have a small reduction in the parish precept, of £1,440 (That's the amount of council tax we ask for, from council tax payers). This year it is set at £81,082. This is open government, and the full budget can be viewed on the Parish website. Incidentally we also hope to update and improve our web site during the next few months.
- 6) **Planning:** Planning is one of the major preoccupations of our council meetings. We deal with these many applications on your behalf, and have dealt with 55 applications since 1 April 2015 theoretically once a month, but routinely there are so many, that we need to discuss these at two week intervals. We try very hard as a council when assessing these applications, to improve and maintain the look, feel, nature and heritage of our ancient parish village. It is not a simple task and there are challenges looming, through cutbacks by Lewes District Council.

May I please add as a final comment, that we have a couple of "casual vacancies" for new councillors, and we would welcome any resident or person who works in the village who could volunteer to join the council, in order to help us in our endeavours to run an effective and meaningful council, on behalf of the village.

4. Grounds Committee Report The Chairman Cllr Smith reported on the drainage works on the football pitch next to the Pavilion which had started in the spring of 2015, later than planned, due to the extremely wet autumn of 2014. The drainage has been seriously tested this winter and been found to be working well, with water gushing out from the outfall pipe into the stream. It has not been possible to complete the secondary drainage this season and the football club have had to play all of their home matches on other grounds. The Parish Council has agreed to waive hire charges for next season so that the club can return to a sound financial footing. We will be looking to recover some costs from the contractor at the end of the contract. There will be a launch of the new football pitch in August linked to the clubs plans for a fundraising event. Cllr Smith thanked the Cricket Club, the Stoolball Club and the Football Club for their co-operation during the drainage works. The Pavilion Club is currently carrying out works to upgrade the changing facilities. The sinkhole by the small pitch has been investigated by Southern Water who found no drainage issues. The hole will be filled in over the next few weeks. Improvements to the Recreation Ground will continue enhancing this community asset.
5. Lighting Committee Report The Chairman Cllr Madden reported that new contractors would be maintaining the streetlights from 1 May 2016. The total lighting budget was set at £14,200 with £8,500 of this amount for repairs. To date £2,746 of repairs have been invoiced, but work totalling £7,806 has been ordered or completed but not yet invoiced. Overall the repair budget will be overspent by £2,000. The cost of replacing a lantern on a streetlamp and providing a separate supply is over £2,000. Replacing a streetlamp completely and providing a separate supply can cost as much as £3,500.
6. Footpaths Committee Report Cllr Robinson reported on a very wet year. The Monday Club was thanked for their work with bridges & styles. Members of the public have been very good at reporting overgrown hedges and we hope that this will continue. The committee were thanked for walking the paths.
7. Burial Ground Committee Cllr Jones reported that the burial ground was benefitting from an improved entrance.
8. Lewes District Council Report Cllr Jones reported that the Lewes District Council Local Plan was expected to be approved by Inspectors in the next few months, the Plan will then be adopted. From June 2016, the South Downs National Park Community Infrastructure levy

will be in force. The South Downs National Park Plan is progressing well with an initial inspection expected this summer and adoption in 2017. There was a training session held today at Lewes District Council offices in preparation for full online planning, paper copies of planning application will no longer be provided. This will save officer time and speed up the process. Some Parishes have commented that 3 months notice is insufficient and does not allow enough time to plan for expensive new equipment, but most Parishes already have this equipment. There will be a Neighbourhood Plan meeting tomorrow evening for Councillors and others to have a first view of the printed plan. In celebration of the Queen's 90th birthday a group of volunteers 'cleaned for the Queen' last weekend. The clean up was a great success, but volunteers cannot collect litter on much of Beacon Road, as it is not safe for roadside working. Lewes District Council have been asked today prioritise a clean-up in this area, which is likely to result in the closure of the road for half a day. Two significant planning applications from Ditchling are due to come before the Planning Committee shortly; the application to erect three dwellings at South Street, and the application to demolish The Royal Oak Public House and erect 7 dwellings. In both cases the planning officers have recommended approval.

9. County Council Report Cllr Sheppard reported on County Council finances. The increase in precept has been set at 1.99% in order to avoid an expensive referendum required if the increase exceeds 2%. The Government has committed a further 2% to be used for adult social care. Overall 75% of the County Council budget is for adult social care and children's services. When spending is cut in response to reduced funding from central government the council tries to protect the vulnerable, this is not always possible and day care centres such as the one in Newick are being closed. Keith Glazier, the Leader of the Council and seven other council leaders in the South East have applied for additional funding to meet the needs of the elderly, (who are present in East Sussex in much greater numbers than the national average), cuts of £2-7million in the current year and next year following savings of £78 million since 2010 were not possible without undermining services to the vulnerable. East Sussex, West Sussex and Surrey County Councils will be merging eventually to share services, on roads, schools, social care etc. Cllr Sheppard spoke about the proposed Chichester by-pass and the importance of preserving the Goodwood Estate.

Questions from the public:

Chris Davis asked **when the streetlamps covered in plastic bags would be repaired?**

The Clerk responded that this work had been ordered in January, the new lanterns for 5 Lewes Road and 5 East End Lane were due to be delivered by the end of March, the contractors then have to wait for UKPN to give a date for the supply to be transferred which could be up to 4 weeks. It is hoped that the repairs will be carried out by the end of April.

June Davis asked **who was responsible for the loose bricks in the pavement?**

Cllr Jones & Madden responded that this was the responsibility of ESCC highways, the local highways steward has assessed the pavements and white lines indicate where repairs are needed. Cllr Sheppard advised that all highways problems are reported using the inline facility. It is useful when reporting a blocked drain for example if a photo is supplied and these are easily uploaded to the website.

Sandi Munier asked **if the roads in Ditchling would ever be resurfaced and noted that they would also need to be dug out as they are almost level with the pavement in the High Street?**

Cllr Jones advised that potholes took priority as these cause the most damage. The road surface is poor. Cllr Sheppard advised that there were insufficient funds to resurface B roads.

Lynne Spellman asked **how the expensive initiatives in the Neighbourhood Plan would be funded?** Cllr Jones explained that some funds would come from developers section 106 monies, soon to become community infrastructure levies. Once the Neighbourhood

Plan is adopted the community will receive 25% of community infrastructure levies rather than 15%. The Neighbourhood Plan allows for a minimum of 15 additional homes in Ditchling, the actual number built by 2030 is expected to be higher. Mrs Spellman asked how improvements to the recreation ground for example would be funded. Cllr Smith advised that grant funding would be sought, commercial sponsorship is another option.

Chris Davis noted that he had been a member of the housing committee of the Neighbourhood Plan Group and asked **whether the SDNP was responding logically to housing sites put forward.** Cllr Jones noted that the South Downs Park contained industrial and built up areas and that the SDNP was slowly recognising that local housing and a vibrant local economy were essential to the success of the Park. It is important that houses built are of good quality and of the right stock.

Ian Lambert asked **why there is not more publicity about the faster broadband** that is now available in half of the village? Cllr Robinson advised that all of the Parish Councils discussions regarding broadband are available on the parish website and notice boards.

Elizabeth Leaver asked **whether any decision had been made on floodlights at the tennis court?** Cllr Jones & Madden responded that no planning application had been received. The South Downs National park has a dark skies policy and the promoter had been advised to seek advice from planning officers.

Sandi Munier asked if any thought had been given to purchasing the 3 parcels of land at Keymer Road. Councillors responded that this had not been discussed. The price was not known. A consortium of local people could tender for the plots if they wished. Historically 200 people came together to purchased the green by the Church. It is felt that there are sufficient planning policies in place to protect this strategic gap effectively and there is no need to purchase the land.

The Chairman thanked his fellow Councillors and the Clerk for all their hard work, especially Cllr Smith who has had a very busy year dealing with works to the recreation ground.

The meeting closed at 8.35m.

Chairman

10 May 2016