

THE VILLAGES OF BIRLING GAP, CROWLINK, EAST DEAN AND FRISTON

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of electors held on Friday 17th May 2019 in the Village Hall, Village Green Lane, East Dean, commencing at 5.30 pm with displays from village organisations. Business commenced at 6.30 pm

Meeting convened under Schedule 12, Part III of the Local Government Act 1972.

In the Chair: Councillor M Keller (Chair of the Parish Council).

Present: representatives of the Parish Council, the Residents' Association, the Parochial Church Council, the Village Hall Trust; the Roads Company; village clubs and societies (sixteen of whom mounted displays); and approximately 80 other residents.

In attendance: Katrina Larkin (Parish Clerk) took the minutes.

1. **WELCOME:** The Chair of the Parish Council welcomed everyone to the meeting. He reported that at the general parish elections held on 2 May 2019 all seven previous councillors had been declared re-elected unopposed, and at the Annual Parish Council Meeting held on 16 May he had been re-elected as Chair.
2. **MINUTES:** The minutes of the last Annual Village Meeting, held on 26 April 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair of the Parish Council.
3. **ANNUAL VILLAGE REPORT 2019:** A number of village organisations had published written reports of their activities in the past year, and these were available to view in the Annual Village Report 2019. [Note: Copies are available on the council website in the Library section, <http://www.edfparishcouncil.org.uk/index.asp>, or can be obtained from the parish clerk, email: clerk@edfparishcouncil.org.uk]. The following oral reports were presented to the meeting:
 - **Chair of the Parish Council** – Councillor Keller highlighted some of the items from his printed Annual Report for the year.
 - **The Residents' Association** – Bob Salmon (Chairman) addressed the question: 'What does the RA do for me?' The Association was active in furthering the welfare of residents through persuasion and through the provision of information and advice. Its policy was to work with the parish council. It organised the Village Fete and was currently supporting the moving of the cricket square and helping the Bowls Club. It organised Team Grit when required; took responsibility for the maintenance of the trees on the Greensward; issued warnings of possible criminal activity in the area; and helped with individual problems such as lost pets. Its AGM would be on 25 July 2019, and all were most welcome.

- **Parochial Church Council** - Steph Carter presented apologies on behalf of the Rev David Baker (Rector) and the Rev Andrew Spear (Associate Vicar). Details were given of special events coming up, including the Annual Village Service and the Holiday Club (23-26 July) open free of charge to 5-11 year olds. A community Choir had been formed during the year and had performed at the carol service and at Ivy House Day Centre (for people with dementia). A mission action plan had just been launched and all were encouraged to come and see, grow and care.
- **East Dean (Downlands) Roads Company** – Mr Corbett (Chairman) and Mr Lockyer (Secretary) outlined the role and responsibilities of the company. Residents of some 600 homes on the Estate were eligible to become shareholders but only 20 had chosen to do so, and more would be most welcome (shares were £1 each though no money was actually taken). The next AGM would be on 7 August 2019 at 7.00 pm in the Village Hall. In the current financial year 70% of householders had so far paid their contributions, but 90% was the norm. The missing 10% could only be recouped when houses changed hands. The next areas to be resurfaced would be Windmill Lane (to Friston Close) and The Link. With 42,000 m² of tarmac to be maintained at a current cost of £17.50 per m², each resurfacing lasting about 20 years, and most of the Estate Roads already 26 years old, there was a strong argument that the contributions received by the Company should be increased. Currently the voted minimum annual figure was only £75.
- **Bowling Club** – Tim Pontin (Secretary) encouraged residents to visit the Club founded in 1936 on a site with wonderful views. The club house and patio had been newly refurbished; the rink levelled with 5 tons of soil; and the gutters and irrigation repaired. Work would carry on next winter as part of a 2 year programme. Running costs were high due to green maintenance etc. but the Club acknowledged with thanks help received from the Residents' Association and the parish council. Bowls was competitive but social too, with evening BBQs after matches, and some formal events through the year. New members, both playing and social, were always welcome.
- **Fruit, Vegetable and Flower Show** – Cheryl Veitch encouraged residents to participate in this annual event which also featured crafts and baking, as well as children's categories.
- **East Dean Women's Institute** – Mrs Veitch reported that this branch was about to celebrate its 90th anniversary. New members were always welcome (second Wednesday in the month in the afternoon).
- **East Dean Players** – this was another long running society and continued to be very well supported. Recent performances had been a sell-out.
- **Parish Magazine** – another village institution with a much appreciated role in the community.
- **The Gardening Club** – Tony Deadman reported that this club was one of the largest in the village with 180 members – but still welcoming more. The Club had much to offer for a modest subscription of £7pa: monthly speakers, a wide variety of gardening supplies which could be home delivered (with discount from Paradise Park), visits to gardens, and social occasions including special events such as the annual Strawberry Fair. A true gardeners' forum.

- **Local History Group** – David Lister explained that the Group wanted to lift its profile and study the environs of the parish as well as the home area. It had 140 members and as a special offer invited new members to attend the next 6 monthly meetings for only £5. There would be 10 lectures per year, plus two outings and a Christmas lunch. The Group had so far published 58 booklets on matters of local interest, available to members at a discount.
- **Micheldene Women's Institute** – Jo Taylor (Secretary) spoke about this lively and friendly branch with over 90 members, and outlined its activities. The branch had five book clubs, a family history group, various craft groups, a lunch club and a ukulele group. It supported local charities with £1,500 of donations per year: these included a Christmas refuge, a food bank and St Wilfrid's Hospice. All were welcome.
- **OpenArt** – apologies were presented on behalf of John Dann. The sixth biennial event held in September 2018 had featured 30 displays in 11 locations, with presentations by Sheila Hay and Sarah Sturton, and a major closing event at the Village Hall featuring performance art with dancers from Covent Garden. Most exhibitors had sold work. Thanks were due to the committee and their Patron, Grayson Perry; the sponsors; and those residents who had kindly loaned their houses for the exhibitions. The next OpenArt would be in 2020 with planning under way from autumn 2019.
- **Over 50s Fitness** – Frances Mace introduced this group which had begun in 1974 at the invitation of the W.I., in the Farrer Hall (a squash!). The formats had changed over time but the group would always work hard and have fun. Sessions were held on Wednesdays at 8.45am from September through to April and all were welcome.

The Chair thanked all these contributors and introduced three presentations on behalf of the parish council:

- **Council Budget** – Cllr Kevin Godden (Lead Member for Finance) gave an illustrated talk about the council's budget and its budgeting procedures.
 - The council had a duty to set a precept (the parish's share of council tax) by the end of January each year, with a budget outlining how the money would be spent. A list of all the services provided was displayed – from mounting the Annual Village Meeting to maintaining the War Memorial. For 2019/20 a new budgeting process had been followed and a Working Group had been formed to review those heads of expenditure that were routine and essential, any potential savings, and capital projects or growth areas, with a view to investing in the community. Value for money was a key concern. The meeting was shown comparative figures for the parish precept, the average town/parish precept, and the tax payable to Wealden District Council. The amount payable per Band D household in East Dean & Friston had gone up by 2.75% in 2019/20, to £60.23, but this was still considerably lower than the average, and the increase resulted partly from other authorities reducing services to save money and leaving parishes to assist on a discretionary basis. The following were highlighted:
 - Cuckmere Buses - the parish council paid a support grant of approx. £2,000 pa to Cuckmere Buses for the local service 41, but the average

- number of passengers was only 6 per week. This would be kept under review.
- Mowing services – a cost breakdown of these services was provided: £2,463 pa was spent on mowing privately owned land and this would be reviewed in consultation with the landowners.
 - Verge cutting – East Sussex County Council had reduced its contribution to this service from £1,499 to £341, due to austerity. The parish council would make good the shortfall.
 - Waste collection – the parish council had also provided new litter bins and obtained new cleaning equipment and paid £1,400 pa to Wealden for bins in public places to be emptied.
 - Council grant scheme – in 2018/19 £2,000 had been paid out towards community schemes and services including churchyard maintenance. In 2019/20 this would be increased to £3,000.
 - Cleaning Friston Pond - £1,000 had been set aside for maintenance and improved visibility on adjacent roads.
 - Capital Projects – the following were planned: refurbishment of bus shelters; major refurbishment of the pavilion; refurbishment of War Memorial railings; the road safety scheme at Friston; new fencing at the play area; and the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan; total: £47,000 over the next two years.
 - Full details of the Budget presentation would be available on the council website.
- **Neighbourhood Plan** – Cllr Tim Bryant (Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group) and Cllr Lesley d’Urso (Vice Chair NPSG) gave a presentation on Neighbourhood Planning, outlining the process to be followed and the benefits to be gained from it.
 - A Neighbourhood Plan Area covering the whole of the parish had been formally approved by the South Downs National Park Authority, and a Steering Group of volunteers had been formed. The total project cost would be approx. £28,500 over two years, and grants towards this should be made by the SDNPA and government sources. The key task of the Steering Group would be to represent the views of the community. An information sheet would be posted to every household and followed up by a questionnaire. The responses would show the community’s priorities. The Steering Group was independent of the parish council, though some councillors were members of it. Its supervisory authority would be the SDNPA, and the eventual draft Plan would be subject to examination by a Planning Inspector and subsequent approval by a local referendum. The whole process would take about two years.
 - Reasons for preparing a Neighbourhood Plan – the experience of oversight by the SDNPA as planning authority had so far been disappointing: the authority’s base in Midhurst, Hampshire was far removed from East Dean and could seem out of touch. Some recent decisions had lacked clarity, and the parish should have clarity and a measure of local control. The parish had a Village Design Statement which was a statutory document and a material consideration in any local

planning application, but the development of the SDNPA's new Local Plan and the amendment of the National Planning Policy Framework meant that the VDS was technically out of date and needed updating. The most efficient way of updating it would be to incorporate it into a broader Neighbourhood Plan.

- Vision for the future – the community needed a shared vision. Where should any new houses be built, and of what type, if at all? What should be done to protect green spaces, or improve accessibility? How should local assets (including not only communal facilities like the village hall, but also agricultural assets) be protected and enhanced? The Steering Group needed a mandate to start answering these questions.
 - Aims and Objectives - the responses to the consultation should enable the Steering Group to draft a statement of Aims and Objectives to be submitted to the SDNPA for approval. This would then be worked up into a draft Plan for further local consultation and formal Examination and, if found sound, approval by referendum.
 - The Neighbourhood Plan would be statutory and have legal force. This was the reason for the rigor of the process to be followed.
 - The Steering Group had a stand at the back of the meeting room where preliminary thoughts would be most welcome. However, suggestions could be sent in at any time e.g. via the council website www.edfparishcouncil.org.uk or any Steering Group member.
- **NHS pop-up clinic** – the parish had been offered the opportunity to host a pop-up clinic open to any resident aged 40-74 who wished to have a personal 'MOT' lasting 20-30 minutes. If enough residents were interested the parish council would make the Small Hall available for one day. The Chair asked for expressions of interest. About two dozen residents expressed an interest.

4. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION: The following were discussed –

- **South Downs National Park Authority Liaison** – the parish magazine, the council website, the village website and the council minutes routinely referred to reports from and liaison with representatives of Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council, but not the South Downs National Park Authority. Regular updates from the SDNPA should be provided and would be appreciated. The Chair stated that there would shortly be an election of two representative councillors from East Sussex parishes to be members of the SDNPA. The person appointed from the Wealden parishes would fulfil this role. In addition, Wealden District Council had appointed Cllr Michael Lunn (recently elected as District Councillor for the new South Downs Ward, comprising East Dean and Friston, Alfriston, Long Man and Cuckmere Valley) to be their representative on the SDNPA.
- **The Post Office** – the future of the village post office remained in doubt. The current sub-postmaster would not continue in that role. Two enquiries had been made by other potential providers, one to run the post office on its own and the

other to take over the whole business, but any new provider must abide by the Post Office requirement that the facility be open from 8.00 am to 5.00 pm, which might not be feasible for a small shop, especially as a rural post office was only permitted to offer a small range of services. Cllr Lunn and Maria Caulfield MP were negotiating with the Minister in the hope of achieving a change of policy. The proposal to re-open the post office was not dead but did depend on a change of policy which might not be achievable.

- **Moving the cricket square** – it was noted that due to the hazard of cricket balls hitting the new houses alongside the recreation ground it would be necessary to move the cricket square 20 metres south. This did appear to be feasible and the Cricket Club was leading on the project. A question was raised as to whether this could have been avoided as the Gilbert Estate had offered to pay for moving the square in advance of obtaining planning permission. This would have depended on the parish council withdrawing its objection to the development, which residents were strongly opposed to. The objection had therefore been maintained and the offer withdrawn. Now, the landowner was offering a donation towards moving the square, which would be matched both by the parish council and by the Residents' Association. The balance would need to be raised by the Cricket Club.
- **The Drove** – there was widespread concern at the closure of The Drove, which many had assumed to be a public right of way. Unfortunately the existence of the right had not been proven. In 2016 the parish council had tried to demonstrate the existence of the right by gathering testimonies from residents, but the evidence had not been found sufficient by the East Sussex County Council as the regulatory authority. The landowner asserted that that he had closed the path without notice on one day a year for many years, thus asserting his ultimate right over it. In these circumstances, the burden of proof rested with those who would assert the existence of a public right. A legal challenge could be made in front of a Lands Tribunal but would be very expensive and the council had decided not to use public money in this way. The council nevertheless still believed that The Drove was a *de facto* right of way. The provision of a new pavement along the west side of Gilberts Drive alongside the new housing development had partly eased the inconvenience of the loss of The Drove.
- **Dark Sky** – a complaint was made about the proliferation of security lights which was compromising the formerly peaceful nights locally. The Chair confirmed that the parish was covered by the Dark Skies policy in the emerging Local Plan and that new planning applications were routinely scrutinised for possible light pollution. However, there was no legislation covering perimeter lighting which was often triggered by a proximity switch. An appeal was made to residents to ensure that any outside lights on their property did not point upwards. An explanatory article would be put in the parish magazine.
- **The Downlands Estate Roads** – concern was expressed that not everyone was paying their contribution to the funds of the Roads Company, even though

payments were set at a modest level. The Company faced the difficulty that the covenanted payments were not index linked so the full amount of the annual contribution was partly a voluntary payment. The suggestion was made that if the functions of the Company were absorbed into the parish council and the payments into the council tax this problem could be overcome. The Chair stated that the Company had been founded retrospectively as the developers of the Estate had shown no interest in ongoing maintenance. Credit was due to the residents who had filled the gap by setting up the non-profit making Company. The parish council had asked East Sussex Highways whether there was any possibility of the roads being adopted, but there was no possibility. The roads had not been built to modern standards, and if brought up to standard would require lighting and pavements. The council noted the suggestion that they should take over the functions of the Company, but no change could occur unless all the residents were of the same mind.

- **TV Mast at The Link** - a new 60' pole had been erected (with planning permission) next to the old TV mast but appeared not to be in use. The old equipment should be dismantled when the new equipment was operational. Residents requested an update. The Chair stated that this would be pursued with the SDNPA.

5. CONCLUSION: Councillor Keller thanked everyone for coming, and formally closed the meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.05 pm.

Signed: (Chair of the meeting) Date: