

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

**Minutes of the Annual Meeting of electors held on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022 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 Paul Seeley (Chair of the Parish Council).

**Present:** representatives of the Parish Council, the Residents' Association, the Parochial Church Council, the Village Hall Trust; Badminton Club; Climate Friendly Parish; Coffee for Carers; Helping Hands; East Dean Players; Flower Show; Gardening Club; Hedgehog Street; Local History Group; OpenArt; Over 50s Fitness; Short Mat Bowls; Table Tennis; Parish Magazine editor; Village Webmaster; and a number of electors of the parish (approximately 80 residents in all).

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

1. **WELCOME:** The Chair of the Parish Council welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming, as the community returned to normality after successive lockdowns. He praised the way the community had pulled together, and was now moving on.
2. **MINUTES:** The minutes of the last Annual Village Meeting, held on 17 May 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair of the Parish Council.
3. **ANNUAL VILLAGE REPORT 2022:** Normal activities had been curtailed in the past two years, but a number of village organisations had continued in some form, and a number of reports from them were available to view in the Annual Village Report 2022. *[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](mailto:clerk@edfparishcouncil.org.uk)].* The following oral reports were presented to the meeting:
  - **Chair of the Parish Council** – Councillor Seeley referred briefly to some headline items from his written report, including the changes of membership and roles on the parish council, assuring the community that all councillors tried to represent everyone equally. There had been some successes, including the installation of speed roundels and moveable reactive speed signs, to combat the problems of speeding that had been aggravated during the lockdowns. A Speedwatch Group had been formed and was about to relaunch for the coming summer season. Reports of vehicles caught speeding were sent to the Sussex Police, and three reports would lead to a home visit which was a useful deterrent.

A replacement bus stop had at last been installed to serve Downs View Lane, following sustained pressure, and was being well used. The council had resolved to register for the Local Council Award Scheme and hoped to progress through the three stages of the scheme to the Gold standard. Finally, regarding the council budget and finances, full information had been circulated in the Annual Report and in an addendum to it, covering the years from 2016/17 to the present. This demonstrated that the council was financially sound, and spending on key causes, with the intention of remaining on track.

- **Parochial Church Council** – the Rector, the Rev David Baker thanked the parish council and the Residents' Association for their work (especially the installation of the speed camera), and welcomed the end of 'hibernation' for the community. He outlined regular church activities which were up and running again (e.g. coffee and company; coffee for carers), and the children's groups which were restarting on Sunday mornings. The Grange care home participated in some of these activities; it had recently changed hands and future prospects were looking good. The parish churches would be contributing to the Platinum Jubilee celebrations with a special exhibition of art from the community and special services. Finally, tribute was paid to the Community Watch team, to Dr Shawcross and to Lesley d'Urso (Chair of the Residents' Association) who had worked hard to offer local support to refugees from Ukraine. Two families had now arrived.
  
- **A Climate Friendly Parish** – Mr P Williamson drew attention to the fact that at a time of many crises, the crisis facing the environment was the greatest of all. Yet Sir David Attenborough, the recent recipient of a prestigious award from the United Nations, could still refer to success stories (e.g. the resurgence of whale populations). People did know what should be done, but needed to get organised. Research, learning and advocacy would be key activities, contacting landowners to promote environmentally positive changes. The parish council had signed up as a corporate supporter of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill (though Mr Williamson would have welcomed individual signatories as well). The South Downs National Park Authority had put out a call for Nature Sites and would support the mapping of potential sites, giving advice on future management and encouraging the connection of such sites to one another, as well as buffering them from harmful neighbours, and assisting with grant applications in furtherance of such work. Restoring the interconnectivity of nature sites would be highly beneficial. A group of supportive residents had formed with an interest in outdoor learning events and advocacy, and more members would be most welcome. [Contact [ourbitedf@gmail.com](mailto:ourbitedf@gmail.com)]
  
- **Helping Hands (formerly Community Watch)** - Dr Shawcross welcomed the rise in community spirit and the increase in volunteers she had seen in response to the pandemic. The Helping Hands volunteers did not provide personal care, but would provide practical help of almost any other kind, and importantly company, to combat loneliness and isolation. Talks with a practical emphasis were also provided from time to time, e.g. on combatting scams, and doing advance care planning. A future session was planned on food banking. The

group had links to St Wilfrid's Hospice, and through them had contact with residents needing palliative care. Finally the group through their convenor Joan Colin, in cooperation with Lesley d'Urso (Chair of the Residents' Association) had convened a large public meeting for residents willing to help refugees from Ukraine – a very considerable commitment. In short, the parish remained healthy and helpful. Long might it continue so.

- **The Badminton Club** – Maurice Horlock issued a general invitation to this friendly club meeting on a Wednesday evening and also offering table tennis and social events including an annual BBQ. Participants could normally expect three games per evening, and subscriptions could be spread by monthly standing order.
- **East Dean Players** – Marilyn Sharpin presented the good news that the Players would be back in November with a comedy and returning to the pre-pandemic norm of two plays per year, in the spring and autumn, with a wide variety of themes. Rehearsals were held on Mondays and Thursdays in the Small Hall, and anyone interested would be welcome to come and see. The Players would welcome not only actors but also members who could help in any other capacity, e.g. with costumes, scenery or finances. Currently they needed a Secretary, and would be glad to hear from anyone interested.
- **East Dean and Friston W.I.** – Cheryl Veitch reported that although this branch of the W.I had been disbanded, it had done so after raising over £400 for the food bank in Eastbourne. This social concern, in difficult times, should be recognised with thanks.
- **The Flower Show** – Cheryl Veitch presented the good news that the Flower Show would also be returning (on the Sunday before the August Bank Holiday) for the first time since 2019. It would feature not only displays of flowers, fruits and vegetables but also crafts such as needlework and cookery. There would be a special prize for any entrant who had never entered before but wins a prize in 2022. A full schedule would appear in the July issue of the parish magazine.
- **The Gardening Club** – Tony Deadman issued a general invitation for new members to join this thriving club which had 50 members and met once a month, with a full programme of activities and speakers on a wide range of topics. Members would also exchange ideas, plants and seeds. Membership cost only £8.50 per year and benefits included a discount at a local nursery and quarterly newsletters, as well as a share of bulk supplies purchased at favourable rates. Two or three coach trips per year would be organised to key centres of excellence such as Wisley and Borde Hill. There would be no Strawberry Fair in 2022 because of the potential clash with the Jubilee, but there would be a Garden Trail with ticketed entry (£5 per person) and teas on sale. The Club would have a stall at the Village Fete with plants and produce for sale. All enquiries would be most welcome.

- **Local History Group** – David Giles the new Secretary of the group drew attention to the wealth of history and resources relating to the parish. The Group had been formed in 2000 to research and record using these resources. The membership fee was only £7 pa and group meetings (on the fourth Tuesday in the month) would normally hear from a speaker on a topic of local interest. Members could attend on Zoom. Sixty five booklets had so far been published and were available for sale, with a discount for members. This friendly group would always be glad to welcome new members.
- **OpenArt** – John Dann (Chairman) reminded the meeting that this biennial event had been founded in 2008 and had only been missed in 2020 because of the pandemic. It would be re-launched in September 2022, but as a precaution it would not be taking place in private houses but in both halls of the village hall (24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September, 10am to 4,pm both days). Twenty three artists had so far registered to participate and more would be welcome. Most exhibits would be for sale. There would also be a musical performance on the evening of 24<sup>th</sup> September by the Fretful Federation Mandolin Orchestra (tickets £10). Further updates would appear in the parish magazine.

The Chair thanked all these contributors.

#### 4. PARISH COUNCIL QUESTIONS FOR THE MEETING

The Chair then put the following questions to the meeting on behalf of the parish council:

- **Donation for Ukraine** – the council had considered making such a donation, up to a maximum of £1,000 from its general donations budget of £2,000 for the financial year 2022/23. The council wished to consult the meeting first: would such a donation be supported in principle, and would residents prefer that it be given to a local organisation helping refugees, or to a national organisation? These questions were put to the meeting and there was clear majority support for making a donation and making it to a local rather than a national organisation. The Chair thanked the meeting and stated that he would look into suitable recipients in consultation with the Helping Hands organisation and the Rector.
- **Parish council budget priorities** – all residents were invited to let the council know what they would like to see the council prioritise. There were no responses at the meeting, but residents could make suggestions or comments to the council at any time.
- **Parish Action Plan** – similarly, all residents were invited to send in proposals for new projects they would like to see the council undertake, bearing in mind that any proposals taken up would need to be within the council's powers.

## 5. MEET THE COUNCILLORS

The Chair introduced the councillors present, explaining that all councillors sought to work on behalf of the community as a whole, but that each also had special areas of interest, which he invited them to speak about briefly:

- **Simon Thorogood, Tree Warden** - Councillor Thorogood thanked residents for the welcome he had received since arriving in the parish in 2020. As Tree Warden he kept a watching brief on all trees on parish council land, plus those elsewhere in the parish protected by Tree Preservation Orders, and all the trees in the Conservation Area centred on the old village of East Dean south of the A259.
- The Chair read a statement on behalf of **Councillor Tim Bryant, Chair of Planning**, who could not be present. In the year ended 30 April 2022 the council's Planning Committee had considered 41 applications, of which 37 had been either recommended for approval by the South Downs National Park Authority, or at least not opposed, and two had been opposed. The SDNPA had approved 29 applications in line with the parish's recommendations, refused two in line with the parish's recommendations, and approved one against the parish's recommendations. One had been withdrawn, one deferred by the SDNPA and 7 were pending decision by the SDNPA. There had been issues between the SDNPA and the parish, particularly over enforcement, and it had been felt that the parish was too remote from the SDNPA's base in Midhurst, Hampshire. Two councillors and the Admin Officer had visited Midhurst to discuss outstanding issues. It was now hoped that with the opening of the SDNPA's new offices at Seven Sisters, communications would be improved. In other news, the Village Design Statement was to be reviewed and it was hoped to have a draft ready by July/August for consideration in the autumn. Similarly, the Neighbourhood Plan which had been put on ice during the pandemic would now be relaunched with a new Chair for the Steering Group, new group membership and new Terms of Reference. In particular, the new focus would be on policies for land use. Other concerns which might be desirable but would not be enforceable would be mentioned in an appendix. More information would be supplied after the June parish council meeting when it was hoped to appoint a Chair for the Steering Group.
- **Hollie Milligan, Communications** – Councillor Milligan who had won her seat in the May 2021 by-election thanked all those who had voted for her. She stated that she worked full time and was also a parent, which had led to her handing over her first area of interest – the Environment – to Councillor Bustard, and taking on Communications, especially digital communications. In this way she hoped to enable the parish council to reach a wider variety of people, both in and out of the parish.
- **Michael Bustard, Environment** – Cllr Bustard (voted in at the December 2021 by-election) had taken on the role of Environment Lead with assistance from Cllr Milligan and Mr Williamson. He had been a resident of East Sussex for 35 years, with experience on Heathfield parish council, and had served on Wealden District Council's Standards Committee. He had moved to Friston five years ago. The council was limited in its resources and in its powers, and this had to be borne in mind in

proposing environmental initiatives. The council should be able to add value whenever it was involved, and with this in mind he would bring an Environmental action plan to a future council meeting for discussion.

- **Grant Fowler, Recreation Ground** – Cllr Fowler (voted in at the May 2021 by-election) stated that he looked after the recreation ground and its facilities, especially the pavilion and play area.
- **Phill Hill, Defibrillators** – Cllr Hill (first elected in May 2011 and every four years since) introduced himself as the longest serving councillor still left from his intake. He now had a longer perspective which could be helpful for new projects. His particular brief was to look after the council's stock of defibrillators. He praised the proactive nature of the council and its members over the years.
- **Chris Lees, Highways and Rights of Way** – Cllr Lees (elected May 2021) stated that he had grown up in the parish. One of his current concerns was to keep rights of way unobstructed, and he thanked residents whose cooperation in trimming their hedges etc. was nearly always forthcoming. Residents were always welcome to report any issues. Cllr Lees also chaired the twice-yearly county liaison meetings (strengthening Local Relationships), dealing chiefly with Highway matters concerning the roads and their signage
- **Mike Keller, Platinum Jubilee Working Party** – Cllr Keller stated that the parish had a long history of involvement in Jubilee celebrations, from Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 onwards, and the tradition was being maintained. Multiple activities were planned for Her Majesty's Jubilee and the half term week preceding it, with the main event from the parish council being the participation in the national lighting of beacons across the UK, and across the Commonwealth, on the evening of 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022. He outlined the programme for the evening and announced that there would be a collection for the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Air Ambulance, which was the council's Charity of the Year 2022/23.

In conclusion, the Chair recalled that Cllr Keller had been the Chair before the pandemic, and that due to the cancellation of the Annual Village Meeting during the lockdowns he had never been thanked for the work he had done at that time. Now was the time to thank him – *there was a round of applause from the meeting*. The Chair also thanked the council's two officers, Katrina Larkin and Debbie Picknell.

## 6. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

The following were discussed:

- **Antisocial driving and speed signs** – a complaint was made that the new speed signage in Gilberts Drive, provided by the parish council, was being used by some bikers to record their speed rather than to moderate it. Noise from doctored exhausts was also a considerable nuisance. The Chair stated that even though the signage could be misused, it was having some effect and was preferable to having no

signage. It was also moveable. The parish council had lobbied Maria Caulfield MP, Eastbourne Borough Council and Wealden District Council to get extra protective measures put in place, including Public Spaces Protection Orders and noise cameras. Speed roundels had also been provided in Gilberts Drive by East Sussex Highways. A resident queried whether these were in the best locations, but the Chair advised that the locations were chosen by East Sussex Highways to meet their safety criteria.

- **Parish Action Plan** – a resident asked what was in the Parish Action Plan. The Chair stated that the new plan had not yet been drawn up and that the council would welcome suggestions from residents on projects for inclusion.
- **Tidying of Downlands Way Shopping Precinct** – a resident thanked the council for clearing away the rubbish that had accumulated in the old bin bay.
- **Electronic bus stop signage** – A resident requested that electronic signage be provided at the bus stops. In theory an app was available on mobile phones but in practice the signal was not good enough.
- **Mobile phone signal** – the point was made that the mobile signal locally remained poor and in some locations non-existent. It should be strengthened. The Chair stated that permission had been given for a new mast but that the provider had subsequently chosen not to install it.
- **A parish wind turbine** – given the escalating cost of heating and lighting, a resident asked if a small wind turbine could be installed in the parish. The Chair responded that the market for renewables was moving rapidly, along with the technology, and this could be kept in mind.
- **The proposed Exceat Bridge** – there was a mixed reaction to the plans for the new bridge. If the stalemate between the South Downs National Park Authority and East Sussex County Council continued the government funding could be withdrawn within one year. The Chair stated that the parish council had lobbied both bodies for action, and that residents should add their voices. However, some residents were concerned that if the project were completed it would bring extra traffic through the village.
- **Dangerous parking at the junction of the A259 and Micheldene Road** – attention was drawn to the danger of exiting Micheldene onto the A259 when visibility was obscured by parked vehicles. The Chair agreed that there was an ongoing problem in this tight location, which could be exacerbated by current building work.
- **Parish Energy Survey** – a resident recommended that the parish council prioritise a local energy survey following the recent example of Balcombe Village in the Lake District. This would be a good project for the parish Action Plan and the clerk was requested to research it.

- **Use of the Horsefield** – it was noted that the Horsefield was rarely now used for horses, and this was felt to be a loss to the village. Part of the field could be used for parking on Village Market days, and it was suggested that this contributed to making it unsuitable for animals. The Chair noted the point, but queried whether there was in fact any demand for use by livestock. The Gilbert Estate would be consulted.
- **Could bonfires be banned?** – a resident raised this question, but the Chair had to state that the parish council did not have powers to ban bonfires. Wealden District Council was in charge of regulating such activities but did not ban them and would not intervene except in very rare cases.
- **What price democracy?** – a resident complained that the parish council having raised the precept for 2022/23 to allow for the possibility of financing contested by-elections, might use the money for other purposes and keep the precept at the raised level in future years. The Chair explained that in 2021/22 the parish council had unexpectedly had to finance two contested by-elections at considerable cost. It had been unprepared because for at least twenty years no elections had been contested in the parish, even though they had been held every four years as required by statute, and the opportunity for by-elections had been offered for every casual vacancy. Accordingly in 2022/23 the budget for elections had been raised by £6,000 (not £12,000 as had been alleged). The council's stated position on the future of the elections budget was that a decision would be deferred until the autumn. In the last six months of the life of the current council no casual vacancies need be filled (general parish elections being mandatory in May 2023). From October 2022 onwards the council would review the budget for 2022/23 and look ahead to future years, with all options open.

**7. CONCLUSION:** Councillor Seeley thanked everyone for coming, and formally closed the meeting.

*There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.15 pm.*

Signed: ..... (Chair of the meeting) Date: .....