

THE STEYNING ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD ON THURSDAY 11th APRIL 2024 AT 6.00 PM IN THE STEYNING CENTRE

Cllrs Present: Cllrs Norcross {Chairman}, Hanson, S. Alexander, M. Alexander, Bell, Trundle, Lloyd, Young, S. Alexander, Linfield, Foxwell, Johnson and Ballance.

Speakers : Pete Crawford, Horsham District Council – Head of Parks and Countryside
Andrew Griffith, Member of Parliament for Arundel and the South Downs

Clerk : John Fullbrook

Deputy Clerk : Hazel Roxby

Members of the Public : 104

Meeting Commenced : 6pm

DRAFT MINUTES

1. WELCOME BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Sharp and Campbell.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 20TH MARCH 2023

Cllr Norcross **proposed, seconded** by Cllr Hanson that the draft minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 20th March 2023, be agreed as a true and fair record. **Agreed, 33 For, 0 Against, 2 Abstained**

4. MATTERS ARISING

None noted.

5. THE CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT ON THE YEAR 2023 – 2024

Cllr Norcross read a prepared statement, reporting on the business transacted by the Steyning Parish Council during the Year, April 2023 to March 2024. The Full Text of the Statement is appended to these minutes, and set out below is a summary of some of the notable points of interest :-

- **Contractors** - New grass-cutting contractor appointed, following poor service review of previous company. Early results of this service are pleasing, and street cleaning/ bin emptying contractor continues to provide highest possible level of service.
- **Grant Support** - £6,900 worth of SPC Grant monies awarded to 10 local and deserving groups and organisations, such as Steyning in Bloom, Steyning Bowls Club and the Vintage Rally Festival.
- **Community Engagement** – The Council is beginning to start attendance at the monthly Farmers Market so that Councillors can be asked questions on any subject by residents in a less formal setting
- **Town improvements** – The Council lobbied District Council to paint the High Street bins; re-line the High Street Car Park; cut back on unruly vegetation at car parks and on highways; and to install better site security measures at Fletchers Croft to dissuade use by travellers
- **Volunteer Groups** – A new addition to the councils many volunteers is a group called the 'Snow Angels' who are tasked with spreading rock salt on local paths during icy weather

- **Street/Park furniture additions** – A number of memorial trees, 5 new park benches and a picnic bench have been installed by the Council this year
- **Youth Service** – Following the previous service provider going into administration, the three local councils have determined to take the service ‘in-house’, and new staff for this service are currently being interviewed
- **Planning** – Another busy year for this committee with more than 70 application submissions being reviewed by members, as part of the Councils role as a statutory consultee
- **HDC Local Plan Consultation** – As part of the Councils response to the Regulation 19 submission, SPC robustly challenged the nature and extent of the proposed Glebe Farm development, while supporting smaller brownfield ‘in-fill’ sites
- **Steyning Community Centre** – The facility has continued to thrive as a hub for activities, classes and events
- **Hazel’s retirement** – Hazel Roxby, the Deputy Clerk, is retiring and after 26 years of loyal service, will be greatly missed – Residents showed their appreciation with a round of applause
- **New Council** – A new Council was elected in May 2023, SPC is the only council in West Sussex to have had a contested election, which is testament to how much residents care about our town
- **Forthcoming Projects** – The Council plans this year to progress CCTV installation to protect play facilities and public buildings; EV Charging Point installations; changing Fletchers Car Park back to a long-stay facility, research more efficient heating systems at the Steyning Centre, and submit a number of Traffic Regulation Orders to help deal with street parking issues at a number of sites across the town

6. QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAIRMAN {in summary}

Q – Very interesting what was just said, - would Council consider trying to get more information out to the Public to inform residents more, via for example newsletters.

A – The Council is considering more ways to engage in better communications with residents including articles in ‘Your Steyning’ and via new social media platforms, and the in person attendance of the farmers market. This would augment the fact that all this information is available and regularly reported on the SPC website

Q – Very pleased that there is a new youth worker being appointed – will they have any premises to work with

A – The Clerk reported that Upper Beeding Sports Centre, Steyning Sports Centre and limited use of the Cuthman’s centre was available for this purpose, plus other locations, including the Steyning Centre.

7. RESPONSES TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS ON PARISH MATTERS.

None sent to the Clerk

8. BRAMBER BROOKS {in summary}

A short presentation by Pete Crawford, on the future management of this local wildlife reserve.

- Horsham District Council completed in January 2024 the purchase of Bramber Brooks – a 34 Acre site for £396,000, to protect it for the benefit of the local community.
- It’s an area with varied wetland habitat adjacent the River Adur, which poses some interesting questions in terms of its future management, it being a designated wildlife site, plus a scheduled ancient monument
- An important site for wildlife with a lot of use by local residents, and with huge potential for further habitat diversity enhancement, particularly the wetland ditches promoting greater associated bird species
- It will become an integral and important part of the ‘Weald to Waves’ project, from Ashdown Forest to the coast, providing 1200 continuous connected hectares of land being managed to promote wildlife
- The department is also supportive of the adjacent Salting’s path improvement scheme and White Bridge renewal projects
- The land has permissive access, but there are areas which are not open to dog walkers
- Seasonal Ponds are to be dug, and the spoil we will be used to provide raised walkways around the site, with the addition of some small footbridges. This work to be commenced in early summer 2024. With the site to be opened to the public in 2025
- The land might also be opened to grazing to help manage and avoid overgrowth of ‘scrub’ and it is hoped the site will benefit from local voluntary support

Q – What is meant by additional fencing?

A – Existing fencing will be reinforced or replaced

Q – If your aerial photograph went higher it would have included other areas that are also similar, like Glebe Farm, - what is HDC doing buying this land and keeping it for wetland, and yet Glebe Farm is going to be built over?

A – This land acquisition was looked at in isolation, and because it was quality land. Suggest the District Councillor is contacted to discuss this matter

Q – Why spend money on this project when the White bridge is not being dealt with?

A – The White Bridge is not within the purview of the District Council – Its West Sussex County Councils remit

Q – Perhaps for context how does Bramber Brooks compare to other HDC sites.

A – There are three other big sites of similar in size in the district, with a group of dedicated rangers looking after them

9. ANDREW GRIFFITH MP, 'Q & A' {in summary}

Andrew welcomed questions from the floor on local issues and concerns

He introduced this section of the meeting by talking about his introduction to life as a serving member of parliament, and the fact that he had been an MP for 4 years now. He noted there are three main things you do as an MP, with the job never quite being intuitive or in balance. These are, first and foremost, a legislator within the House of Commons – making and influencing those laws, on behalf of the constituents. Second, is to spend the tax payers money responsibly – that's about a trillion pounds each year. Getting the balance right is clearly important and takes time both for national concerns, but also for ensuring local projects are supported, such as *Weald to Waves*. Third, an MP has to be a convenor, trying to influence local bodies and organisations to do the right thing for the local community. A recent example being the White Bridge project.

He spoke in support of strong and vibrant High Streets, protecting the environment, and ensuring transport infrastructure is maintained appropriately. He spoke against unsustainable developments, such as Glebe Farm. And holding District and County Councils to account in terms of the decisions that are made.

Then the Q&A session began:-

Q – You say you are for biodiversity. Why in parliament have you voted against improving water quality, against biodiversity, and against improving air quality?

A – He suggested these are complicated matters, and brought up the example of making sewage systems work, and maintaining clean rivers. The fact is that rivers are cleaner now than they were, and they are being monitored, whereas they were not monitored correctly up until about 2014. The new Environment Act ensured Southern Water now has a legal duty to monitor rivers and to do something about problems that occur. Sometimes you don't vote in favour of a Bill as an MP, if you are not happy that it doesn't go far enough.

Q – Steyning has lost its High Street Banks, - could you as a facilitator, drive a Bank Hub for Steyning?

A – Bank Hubs are a good idea. However, one of the considerations is, what impact will this have on the local post office, which is also a vital part of the community.

Q – Could we discuss Glebe farm as it is likely most people here are interested in this matter.

Q – The issue with Glebe Farm, is the size of the development. What can you and the Parish Council do to reduce the numbers or to stop the scheme going ahead?

A – Cllr Norcross answered on behalf of the parish council, noting it could do almost nothing, as it is only a planning consultee, and it has already protested about the scheme via the district councils consultation process. Andrew answered that his position is completely against this development. It's the wrong site, with a high water table. It's not sustainable. The houses are unlikely to be 'affordable', when that's what we need. It's an example of 'top down' planning which is development led, and built without taking on the views of the residents. We should utilise *Brownfield* sites. He said he would continue to use his voice to influence and present reasons against this scheme at planning committees. He urged residents to make it absolutely clear that they will fight against the scheme all the way.

Q – You said one method was to speak with our district councillors – Are they responsible for the local plan, and secondly do we not already have enough houses allocated to our area?

A – The plan was voted on in November 2023, and I don't know why it was put into that plan, but you need to hold district councillors accountable for their votes on this matter. We have a massive amount of house building in

this area, and it seems the infrastructure like roads, GPs, and schools, cannot cope with what's already in place, let alone more. Its not that we should stop building altogether, we just need to build better and more sustainably.

Q – Over 90% of people in Steyning have objected to this development, as per the consultation data, what concerns me is that the number of houses might creep up.

Q – You are talking about an influx of over a 1000 people with this development. Also, what would need to be done to convert the Cement Works into a housing development?

A – We do not own the Cement Works. So all that can be done is to encourage the planning authorities to look for economically and environmentally viable schemes for sites such as this.

Q – It seems that the Cement Works is not an economically viable site because it is full of asbestos. Isn't this why it isn't happening?

A – Four years ago there was no dialogue about the viability of sites like the Cement Works, but today there is dialogue happening about this, even if there was to be an asbestos issue, and this is a positive step.

Q – I heard that the problem with the Cement Works is that it lies on the border between two district councils, and they cannot agree on anything.

A – Everything worth doing in life is hard.

Q – A year ago I completed an online consultation form about the Cement Works and have heard nothing since. Also, there are many points which should exclude the Glebe Farm development from happening, not least the fact that there are many brownfield sites which could be used.

Q – Could you use your influence to gain a better mobile signal?

A – I could take that forward to mobile phone companies , but would need to know if it's a universal problem. On broadband, there is good news – The government is trying to ensure everyone in the country has access to broadband. Sometimes companies will do this without incentives, sometimes the government will need to incentivise to ensure there is a service in place. Lastly in rural parts, when there is no commercial viability, the government will fund companies like Cityfibre, who are to start connecting 70,000 homes in West Sussex's rural communities. If you write to me, and you live in an unconnected area – I can find out if you might benefit from this project. Its going to start in 2025, and conclude in 2026.

Q – Parents with push chairs, or older people using mobility scooters would all likely agree that the state of the twittens in Steyning is very poor. – Why are government not helping local councils deal with things like that?

A – It might be that speaking with the Parish Council could be the first place to go to get a better idea as to who you speak to in order to get particular problems sorted out. Sometimes there are financial pressures but sometimes its about informing the right people in order to get something done.

The Chair thanked Andrew for his comprehensive Q&A session and invited residents to join members in some refreshments which were about to be served.

10. DATE OF NEXT ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – 17TH MARCH 2025

The Chair closed the meeting at 7.58 pm

Signed Date 17th March 2025
Chair