

THE STEYNING ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD ON MONDAY 16th MARCH 2026 AT 6.00 PM IN THE STEYNING CENTRE

Cllrs Present: Cllrs Norcross {Chairman}, S. Alexander, M. Alexander, Bell, Young, Sharp, Johnson, Hanson, and I. Alexander.

Speaker : Aidan Timmons; Head Teacher Steypning Grammar School.

Clerk : John Fullbrook

Deputy Clerk : Leanne Poole

Members of the Public : 36

Meeting Commenced : 6pm

DRAFT MINUTES

1. WELCOME BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Linfield, Ballance, Foxwell and Trundle.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 17TH MARCH 2025

Cllr Norcross **proposed, seconded** by Cllr I Alexander that the draft minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 17th March 2025, be agreed as a true and fair record. **Agreed, 14 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstained**

4. MATTERS ARISING

None noted.

5. THE CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT ON THE YEAR 2025 – 2026 *(in summary)*

Cllr Norcross read a prepared statement, reporting on the business transacted by the Steypning Parish Council during the year April 2025 to March 2026. 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 :-

- The purpose of the meeting is to update residents on parish council activities over the past year and to give electors an opportunity to raise matters important to the community. This report being a brief overview of the councils activities over the year, then to allow time for guest speakers and refreshments.
- The Finance & General Purposes Committee has had another productive year, with audits completed and contracts successfully overseen.
- The decision to increase the precept by 8.9% was not taken lightly, and was largely due to a combination of rising utility costs, increased maintenance expenses, Neighbourhood Plan review costs and anticipated legal costs linked to local government reorganisation.
- In terms of projects; Chandlers Way pocket play park was installed and established, agreement reached with WSCC on High Street/Church Street railings renewal; improved maintenance of the Memorial Gardens and an expanded parish-wide tree maintenance programme.
- The Youth Service provision has continued to expand and indeed is beginning to be limited by available space whilst the potential CCTV installation project is currently in the public consultation phase.

- The future focus for this committee into 2027 will be to continue its review and understanding of Local Government Reorganisation; navigate through the potential transfer of assets such as the towns car parks from Horsham District Council; and to coordinate ongoing devolution planning. It will also be negotiating a new lease with Steyning Cricket Club whilst supporting plans for a new pavilion at the MPF.
- The Community Committee are working towards completing the installation of new visitor information boards planned at the MPF, together with the Steyning & District Partnership, and have installed two new memorial benches plus soon to be completed planters, bollard and bins as part of their upgrading of the main access point.
- The Remembrance Garden upgrade has allowed for the biggest attendance for very many years at its now parish council coordinated annual Armistice Day service.
- The Abbey Road conservation volunteers have continued to complete pond restoration supported by the Gatewick House owner plus ongoing management of paths, and stream banks, as well as the planting of hundreds of trees and new hedging shrubs plants and bulbs.
- The parish council are working closely with the primary school and local resident volunteers to bring forward long term Chandlers Way park improvements.
- There have been several successful traffic regulation schemes implemented this year including on Tanyard Lane, Church Lane, Jarvis Lane and at Wykeham Close.
- A new chairman (Cllr Ian Alexander) was appointed to the Joint Parishes Cemetery Committee, and his main goal is to expand the St Botolph's Cemetery capacity before the approx. 4 years' worth of room for coffin burials runs out. A new land agent will likely be assisting with this project.
- The Joint Parishes Youth Committee has overseen continued strong progress since May 2025, with a new focus on governance, safeguarding and structured oversight via the introduction of more key performance indicators. The Youth club attendances remain strong, and its sessions are gaining a positive community reputation.
- The Planning & Premises Committee meet every month and have reviewed nearly 100 planning applications (Mar 2025–Feb 2026). 11 objections have been raised with most of these upheld by the district planning authorities.
- Working with the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Committee, a huge amount of effort has gone into attempting to influence in a positive way the Glebe Farm (Glebe Fields) development, focusing on design, sustainability, and accessibility
- Consultation responses have been submitted to SDNP Technical Advice Note (retrofitting historic buildings) and the Draft National Planning Policy Framework to name but a few.
- The Steyning Centre continues to gain strong bookings and consistent use with an average income of approx. £5,000 per month, with continued positive feedback from hirers.
- Film nights remain popular (some 100+ attendees, profitable), with a newly installed sound system in the Coombe Court adding audible quality to these and other shows.
- And members have agreed for the installation of new sliding doors and an enclosed porch for improved energy efficiency and accessibility at the Steyning Centre
- The caretaking team have been strengthened by the addition of a new member of staff, Paul Evans, who has settled in very well and has already gained positive feedback in terms of professionalism and support.
- In a wider context the Council has had a busy and productive year with the ongoing monitoring of Glebe Fields development being hugely important as was the replacement of the Clock Tower hammer restoring once again the chimes, these being much appreciated by most residents!

6. QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAIRMAN

None

7. RESPONSES TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS ON PARISH MATTERS.

Three questions/ statements had been sent to the Clerk which related to queries concerning the School development, and especially in relation to the proposed loss of the schools astroturf facility, and how potentially devastating this could be to the four clubs and their nearly 200 members that use the pitches on a regular basis. The Clerk had handed hard copies of these emails to Mr Timmons so that he could attempt to respond within his presentation.

8. STEYNING GRAMMAR SCHOOL REDEVELOPMENT {in summary}

A short, illustrated presentation by Aidan Timmons, to outline the plans for the new development of the Grammar School which is due to start this year {proposed Summer Recess 2026}, and to engage in a Q & A session with residents to discuss any points they would like to raise.

- Aidan explained that this presentation was the second he had made to the Parish Council concerning this development, and that it followed a period of community engagement and public consultation, which had recently been completed, and that the formal planning application would be submitted to HDC shortly.
- He further explained that he had only recently been made Head Teacher at Steyning having previously been Head of a similar school at Petersfield, but that he was incredibly excited by the prospect of being part of arguably the most significant developments at Steyning Grammar in its entire 400 plus year history, and indeed potentially the largest school redevelopment in the entire Country over the next 5 years.
- The presentation was to take the form of a series of slides that would take residents through the design and technical aspects of the proposed development, with some reasoning behind some of the choices made, with then a short conceptual video tour of the proposed new campus, with an opportunity for questions at the end. Assisting Aidan in case there were questions relating to for example the Church Street site, which was almost at the point of completion of sale, was Mr Rod Scott who's the chair of governors, but who also sits on the Steyning School Foundation committee.
- Though the school has recently academised, it remains under Church of England control and has a rich Christian heritage. But history does not make up for the lack of investment over a long period of time, and indeed it had been recognised as being amongst the worst 200 schools (in terms of fabric of the buildings) in the Country, hence having secured the finances to complete this project from the Department of Education. The build was also to consolidate and bring together three day school sites onto one.
- The developers call it *a new civic presence*, as previously it had been difficult to know which end is the front and the back. There's no real sense of your walking into the school either way. The new civic presence, will be a frontage on the Horsham Road, using flint tones as the developer pushed local designs and colours reflective of the local area .
- Aidan described the main structures and functionality of each building – which were to be either two or three stories high. Aidan showed the access roads leading to at long last, reasonably sized Bus and Car parking space with also clearly defined cycle access and through routes. The current leisure centre remained outside the scope of works but the entrance to school and Leisure centre would make more sense in the new format.
- There were to be new outside play surfaces / courts. Covered areas, courtyards and seated areas designed to provide a reflective / relaxed feel plus a faith space for students and staff and community users.
- An increase in the amount of trees planted. There are some historic trees which obviously will remain standing, particularly on the fields, which won't be touched. The roofs are '*green roofs*', plus all have photovoltaic solar panels on them. And also there will be a high specification ground source heat pump facility. So overall it will be a fantastically sustainable school, which is to be net zero rated.
- Recent negotiations have allowed for a new gate to allow for access for the primary school children to be able to come straight onto the new site on occasion to aid transition.
- Many of the facilities will be open to community use including new 3G floodlit sports area, indoor sports facilities and a multifunctional and very flexible large capacity seated area, which would be perfect for theatre projects. It's a beautiful historic site, but there are some artefacts that are to be salvaged from the old site such as the pulpit tables and chairs that go way back, and the head teacher's desk which will go on display in either the school or library and some artifacts will be reused in for example the faith spaces.
- After public consultation the floodlights over the MUGA courts in the south west section were removed, due to them being too close to the rear gardens of residents living in Coxham Lane. Aidan went onto to address the three written questions submitted to the Clerk before the meeting, stating that he completely appreciated the attention around the removal of the Astroturf pitch which is being used by a number local hockey and football teams, and he recognised that there's a real challenge to come up with a solution there. He stated that indeed Sport England have launched an objection to the proposal to the Department for Education, because of the removal of an existing sports facility.

- He stated the ambition remained to have a 3G pitch and that the plans have been submitted as such. He also emphasised the importance of avoiding any delay to the planned construction timeline as it was absolutely pivotal to the school that work begins this year. Curriculum wise the students will need a 3G pitch for football and rugby as an astroturf pitch will no longer suffice, and the grass pitches are poorly drained and therefore these do not suffice either. Sadly Hockey is not in such demand at the moment. So the PE department are very keen to go for the 3G pitch as well. An objection is noted so it will be what the planners then decide they want to do.

Then the Q&A session began:-

Q – My name's Victoria Finnegan. I'm the district councillor for Steyning and Ashurst. Thank you very much for that exciting update. I'm actually quite pleased the fabric of the building was so bad that you get this opportunity to have this good regeneration. I'm really impressed with the green sustainability aspect and credentials that you're putting forward. Also, I find very impressive the sort of phasing, the spacing, and the design for the students. I think that's all been very considered and very impressive.

Just to raise the point that I think you've heard and are going to hear again tonight, is about the hockey. I'm lucky enough to have had three children play at county level hockey and really do see the benefit mentally and physically, that hockey can give. And I promise you there is no better social side for a family than hockey, from young to the veterans. So I think it'd be a real shame to close the door on this now and I really hope it isn't a closed door and that things can be looked at to do with keeping hockey going within the community in Steyning. Also there are concerns about the microplastics from 3G pitches, so I'm glad you got some feedback from Sports England. I was going to ask that, if we can do anything in terms of HDC to support the hockey groups, then please get in contact.

A – Yes, thank you.

Q – All your diagrams show that the 3G all-weather pitch is marked up for hockey. That's misleading. You cannot play hockey on a 3G Pitch. So you're misleading people.

A – I'm not intentionally doing that. I haven't done these diagrams. Apologies. So the all-weather 3G pitch has been the proposal for some time. I realise now that you cannot play hockey on 3G, and I understand that's really frustrating. We are part of the community that your school is situated within, and we want to provide wonderful facilities. We are obviously constantly soul searching on this one really, because no one wants to lose a great facility, however first the pitch needs replacing as it is now. And second the issue for state schools, is that you cannot use astroturf pitches any longer. I have had a hockey pitch at my previous school, but just a training one that I managed to get some funding for through Sport England. But the full size ones are very rare. And replacing it is the challenge and as a state school, we just don't have the finances on a 10 year maintenance programme to be able to do that. That's the problem, it is the sustainability of that over time. Who funds that? Where does that come from? I don't know. If Sport England might come in and finance it, we would do that for you in a heartbeat.

Q – What artificial surfaces can be used for hockey?

A – Water or sand based Astroturf can be used and 3G cannot. So I'm not making this decision alone, trust me, because I do not operate in that way. It's about weighing up all aspects. And I'd say at this point, the Department of Education, and the diocese specifically, are both saying you need this 3G facility first and foremost for the children. It will be enormous for our ability to do the sports that are played en masse. And that's the tipping point really in terms of decision making.

Q – But due to the timescale with the astro being removed first and the 3G being the last to be constructed everyone will need to wait 4 years for it

A – Yes, that's right unfortunately. So this isn't obviously a great selling point for people wanting children to come to Steyning in the short term, as we are going to lose significant outdoor space during this period. In the meantime we end up with our fantastic fields. But they get muddy. There was an amazing rugby match just a few months ago and that wiped the pitch out. We won the cup but unfortunately we lost the pitch for a number of weeks. And that's the challenge that we have with natural fields. But it's for the greater good over time. By the end of those four years we will have amazing facilities for the children to experience.

Q – You've got this brilliant development in school. It's going to bring in so much. You've got the Glebe development, with lots of people coming in. You've also got a lot of land and a need for more sports facilities. So could you not work with the community and Sports England to produce something bigger a bit like East Grinstead or Lewes. Otherwise we will have to travel to either Brighton or Chichester just to play hockey. You could increase your revenue if for example you put some padel courts in. That's where the revenue is.

A – I would love to get paddle courts. That would be fantastic. They're an absolute money spinner, aren't they.

Q – If you are going to have 3G, would you consider a cork or an alternative because of the rubber crumb and also microplastics?

A – 100%. I would absolutely, happily. Because I particularly focus on the environmental impact.

Q – Can I just get you to clarify about the 3G pitch? You said that you need the 3G because that's better for football and rugby and that's what people want. But if the kids are not playing hockey, then they don't know what it is. And the school hasn't been particularly good at teaching hockey for a long time, even though they've got an Astroturf pitch. You mentioned issues with the water. But surely if you're building a brand new pitch, why can't that be a super duper self-draining astro pitch?

A – We aren't allowed to do football and rugby fixtures on the Astro. So that is really important.

Q – But we already have a 3G pitch in the village.

A – We do, and I totally get that's frustrating as well. However, what we have been offered is use of that pitch during the daytime for our kids which will be good curriculum-wise. The argument is that a 3G gives even greater ability to support local teams. Now I completely appreciate that would be emotionally upsetting for someone who's a hockey enthusiast.

Q – Could you just clarify. Will you be getting funding from the England football association for that pitch?

A – Not at all, no.

Q – I echo Victoria's comments about sustainability and the green credentials. That's really good to see. Will the faith area be multi faith or Christian?

A – We're a Church of England diocese school. Our responsibility is for the curriculum and to be able to educate children in a theologically rooted vision of the faith. But as a school our responsibility is also to ensure that is within the broadest understanding of all faiths for British families. It would be a faith space for anyone to consider and crucially to reflect, which is very powerful.

Q – Could you just confirm the walking access for the children, and how they're going to access the site?

A – We are safe as a school, and we need to have secure lines of access so in some instances they are electronically buzzed in. But children are able to access the school either by the coach park entrance, or via a pedestrianised path along the side of it in shooting fields, or if driving as a sixth form student into the Car Parks. Ultimately there's three points of access, therefore.

Q – So there will still be children walking up the Horsham Road to access the school. I'm just very conscious that pavement is not that safe.

A – No, it's not great. And that was raised recently.

Q – We are worried about the Horsham Road. Because as a footpath, it's very narrow. I think, keeping that on the agenda, is part of the wider neighbourhood plan around travel and transport. That was the question I was going to ask when you came and presented to a number of us recently and a rather good idea came up, which is that the coach park could also be used as the bus stop because the current bus stops are both slim and dangerous. Is that idea still being considered?

A – I think the challenge is so complex, actually, getting the land swaps and everything put in place is very difficult as it also involves the Leisure Centre parking spaces.

Q – Was it lodged within the public consultation do you know?

A – I don't know. I mean, I'd love to make it work, but I can't see that working at the moment.

Q – The consultation period was launched on the 23rd December, and including the holiday period finished on the 22nd January – that's not very community engaging.

A – It was indeed available for that time.

Q – Won't the 3G pitch have floodlighting too – that impact gardens and houses?

A – Light levels have been discussed and the least impactful conclusions drawn.

Q – Could the grass pitches be drained better, as a farmer I know it's possible at a relatively cheap cost?

A – I think our site team does a good job.

9. The SPC Chairman concluded the Q&A and thanked Mr Timmons for his comprehensive, interesting and in many ways exciting presentation as well as his being able to discuss and attempt to deal with the issues raised by the residents. She reminded residents that when the plans went on the HDC portal, there would be a final opportunity to raise an objection, and then invited all present to join members in some refreshments which were about to be served.

10. DATE OF NEXT ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – 15TH MARCH 2027

The Chair closed the meeting at 7.27 pm

Signed Date 15th March 2027
Chair