

LINDFIELD PARISH MEETING

The annual **LINDFIELD PARISH MEETING** was held at King Edward Hall, Lindfield on **THURSDAY, 27 April 2017**, chaired by the Chairman of Lindfield Parish Council, Mr William Blunden.

Present: Lindfield Parish Councillors: Mr W Blunden (Chairman), Mr. M. Allen, Mr. S. Henton, Mr. S. Hodgson, Mr. R. Pickett, Mr. R. Plass, and Mrs. V. Upton.

Councillor Mrs. C. Field (WSCC)
Councillor Mr. A. Lea (MSDC)

6 members of the public

Apologies: Parish Councillors Mrs. M. Hersey and Mr. C. Snowling

In attendance: Mrs. C. Irwin (Clerk, Lindfield Parish Council)

The meeting commenced at 8.00 p.m.

1. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION BY CHAIRMAN, COUNCILLOR MR WILLIAM BLUNDEN.**

In accordance with the statutory duties under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12, paragraphs 15 (1) and 11 (1), the Chairman of the Parish Council, Mr. W. Blunden had called the meeting and now presided at the meeting. The notice and agenda, duly signed by the Chairman and dated 10 April 2017 had been displayed on the Parish Council noticeboard since 10 April and had also been available on the Parish Council's website since that date.

The Chairman welcomed all those present to this meeting of the electors for the Parish of Lindfield and announced the emergency procedures for the King Edward Hall. Apologies had been received from Parish Councillors Mrs. M. Hersey and Mr. C. Snowling.

2. **MINUTES OF THE PARISH MEETING HELD ON 28 APRIL 2016.**

2.1 The Chairman called for approval of the Minutes of the Parish Meeting held on 28 April 2016. These were **AGREED** and the Chairman **SIGNED** the Minutes as being a true record of that meeting.

The Chairman reported on two items from the meeting which had since been considered by the Parish Council:

2.2 Resolutions on the matter of the public toilets on the Common. The Parish Meeting in 2016 had passed two resolutions regarding the proposed public toilets on the Common. Although resolutions of Parish Meetings were not binding on the Parish Council, except in exceptional cases, these had been put on the Agenda for the next subsequent Council meeting for consideration.

1st resolution: "that Lindfield Parish Council should resolve to drop the current plan [for building public toilet facilities on Lindfield Common adjacent to Edge Lea, Backwoods Lane] now to avoid further waste of funds and continued anxiety for a number of residents".

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After discussion, Members had voted 3 for and 4 against with 1 abstention and the motion had therefore been defeated.

2nd resolution: *“That Lindfield Parish Council should arrange for an independent options appraisal to be carried out which takes full account of a health and safety appraisal and full risk assessment in relation to the proposed location to protect the reputation of the Council”*

There had been no proposer to move this second resolution because the Council would be going back to the drawing board and re-examining other options. Without a proposer and seconder the motion could not therefore be debated. However the point being made had been taken on board.

The Council had then agreed a course of action beginning with a further approach to the Cricket Club to find out whether they could support any possible options in terms of the use of the existing facilities under the Community Toilets Scheme, or building a new toilet building either on the side of the pavilion or on the concrete hardstanding, and also to seek greater clarity from Mid Sussex District Council. A further update would be given under the Finance and General Purposes Committee report.

- 2.3 Consideration of giving support to Lindfield becoming a Fair Trade Village. Further to his presentation at the 2016 Parish Meeting, later in the year, Mr. Peter Desmond had submitted a report to the Council requesting support by resolution for this proposal and this had been considered at the Council meeting on 19 January 2017, when it was resolved to support the initiative and, in order to assist in the process of achieving recognition of Lindfield as a Fairtrade Village, Lindfield Parish Council would support the achievement of the stated five goals, in whatever ways it could. It was **NOTED** that Fairtrade coffee had been served at the recent Spring Clean and the drinks at the end of this meeting include Fairtrade wine.

3. COUNTY COUNCILLOR’S REPORT: COUNCILLOR MRS. CHRISTINE FIELD.

Councillor Mrs. Christine Field reported on the work of West Sussex County Council as follows:

“Parish Councils are some of the most important people that County Councillors have to work with. There are few better ways of getting to know the challenges and aspirations of a community, than attending meetings of their Parish Council, which I have had the pleasure of doing here (and at the three other Parishes which make up the division of Lindfield and High Weald) for the past 8 years. I am able to address you this evening, in the midst of an election campaign, because I am not a candidate on May 4th.

To judge from a County Councillor’s post bag, which has now changed almost exclusively to the inbox, one would think that the only problem in the world is the state of our roads and footpaths. These are very important, they are the County Council service which virtually all of us use on a daily basis. Their maintenance and improvement account for a large portion of West Sussex County Council’s expenditure. However, there is far more to the services for which West Sussex County Council is responsible. Frustratingly it can take a long time for things to happen, but there have been some successes in the past year, for example reinstatement of the bus service via Backwoods Lane, which had been partly due to the Traffic Regulation Order to limit parking in the road - an example of working together.

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Over the past year, the struggle to achieve fairer funding for our schools has reached local and national headlines; West Sussex schools receive significantly less per pupil than in other parts of the country, there is no basic amount per pupil and children with special needs need more funding. Many of our schools remain under the umbrella of the County Council such as Oathall Community College. But funding issues affect all schools, including those who have converted to Academies, such as Lindfield and Blackthorns Primaries and Warden Park. Whoever fills my shoes in the future will need to be talking to the community about their hopes and ambitions for your children's future.

At the other end of the spectrum, it is a well-rehearsed fact that our local populations are ageing at a faster rate than others - this is a good place to live - and to live long! We know that as we grow older, we tend to make greater demands on our health and social care services. We shall see these services working far more closely together in future and change in the way they are provided is inevitable. My successors must ensure that this meets our needs and expectations. Looking after ourselves will be the keystone and local communities will be centre stage in that.

The last 2 years have seen increases in Council Tax, after years of standstill. Alongside this have been levies specifically for social care. Despite this, money will remain very tight - but there will be money available for local initiatives. In the past year we have secured some money for the Arts Festival, but there have been very few other applications. I would encourage local groups to look at what is available and to take advantage of it. The Parish should secure its fair share, but admittedly that does mean local commitment as well. The Parish Council is encouraged to point out this funding opportunity when it is aware of initiatives in the village.

Although Planning and Housing are not functions which the County Council fulfils, I am very much aware of the pressures which development proposals are creating and commend you as a community for the way in which you are dealing with all that that brings. It has been a frustration to me that we do not have more power to demand action on the traffic and highway implications of this development, since the weight and speed of traffic is possibly the greatest threat that we all face to our quality of life in this beautiful corner of the country.

Having effective local representatives making views and concerns known where the decisions are made is crucial. I have really enjoyed working with you and wish the Parish Council the very best in the challenges of the coming and ensuing years - thank you all for allowing me the privilege of being a small part of it".

Mr. N. Kerslake stated that, as a member of the public, he felt that a debt of gratitude was owed to Councillor Field - her service to the public and Lindfield was outstanding and she had done fantastic work for this village.

The Chairman added that he regularly attended meetings of the County Local Committee and seen Councillor Field in action, fighting for Lindfield with extreme commitment. She had missed very few Parish Council meetings and had attended ad hoc meetings with members of the public. She would be a difficult act to follow.

The Chairman presented Councillor Field with the gift of an orchid as a token of thanks.

4. DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT: COUNCILLOR MR. ANDREW LEA.

Councillor Mr. A. Lea reported on the work of Mid Sussex District Council as follows:

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This had again been a busy year representing Lindfield at Mid Sussex District Council, with three areas of particular note:

Planning: it could not have escaped anyone's notice that there had been many more applications for development of green field sites, some of which were going through the appeals process and Councillor Lea had got to know much more about planning law due to the complex issues that had arisen.

District Plan: the Planning Inspector had indicated that there should be substantially larger numbers of new homes. Once adopted the District Plan would be beneficial to the planning process and reinforce Neighbourhood Plan policies.

Finance: MSDC had made a major investment in the acquisition of the Orchards Shopping Centre in Haywards Heath as part of the strategy to become financially independent. Councillor Lea sat on the Audit Committee dealing with audit, governance and treasury management and he had always been impressed with the District Council's financial management.

Mr. N. Kerslake expressed concerns about the expectation of the Planning Inspector Mr Bore, who was the appointed examiner for the District Plan, that Mid Sussex would produce a spatial strategy for neighbourhoods to incorporate a large number of additional houses distributed across the district. The Parish and Town Councils should get together with MSDC to be involved in the allocation of housing numbers and argue that the allocation needed to be made on a fair basis.

5. **PARISH COUNCIL REPORT: COUNCILLOR MR. WILLIAM BLUNDEN.**

The Chairman reported as follows:

"As ever this has been an interesting and challenging year for your Parish Council and also frustrating particularly in terms of planning as there is still no District Plan and five year land supply for Mid Sussex and the Lindfield and Lindfield Rural Neighbourhood Plan, which passed referendum and was "made" by resolution of Mid Sussex District Council in March last year, has since been challenged by a consortium of developers. The outcome of this judicial review is still awaited.

We were very sorry to lose two of our Councillors recently - Alan Gomme and Stewart Shortland have both had to resign due to health reasons. Alan contributed a great deal to the work of the Council as a member for nearly ten years and as Chairman of the Planning and Traffic Committee for the last five. As Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group he devoted countless hours of his time, taking the plan through the various stages of consultation, drafting, revision etc. and we owe him a huge debt of thanks.

Stewart was co-opted onto the Council in June 2015 and in that time he was an active member of the Planning and Traffic Committee and Finance and General Purposes Committee. Again I would like to record the Council's appreciation for the contribution he made during this short time and wish them both well for the future.

Changes are also happening at the Parish Office: the Deputy Clerk retired on 13 April, although we are very grateful that he's agreed to stay on to provide cover on a casual basis. The Clerk has also given advance notice of her intention to retire at the end of September, so a busy recruitment period lay ahead. Unlike the District and County

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Councils, which had specialised staff and heads of departments, the Parish Council's Clerk and Deputy Clerk were expected to have in-depth knowledge of a large range of topics.

As with most other local government bodies, the real work of the Parish Council is done in standing committees, of which we have three. I would now like to introduce the current chairmen of committees who shoulder much of the work load.

The Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is Stephen Henton with Ron Plass as his Vice Chairman. This Committee's main purpose is to keep the Council in a sound financial state, together with the Responsible Financial Officer.

The Chairman of the Planning and Traffic is now Simon Hodgson with Chris Snowling as Vice Chairman. The Council is fortunate to find someone so young with a wise head who is prepared to take on this responsibility. This Committee is a particularly busy one, meeting every three weeks to meet MSDC's deadlines for comments on planning applications.

The present team is completed by myself as Chairman of the Environment and Amenities Committee assisted by Roger Pickett as my Vice Chairman and finally Val Upton - the Vice Chairman of the Council.

Despite the challenges and frustrations, a number of achievements can be reported.

Planning and Traffic Committee

The status of the Neighbourhood Plan as a planning policy document is unclear and until the judicial review has been determined we cannot count on it being effective in controlling development. The planning application for 200 homes and a one-form entry school at Walstead is under appeal along with the first of two applications for 130 homes on land at the corner of Gravelye Lane and Scamps Hill. The second application for this development was approved by MSDC in March and it is anticipated that the appeal will be withdrawn. It is unfortunate that when considering highway matters relating to planning applications, the cumulative effect is not a deciding factor.

As reported last year, the Council has commissioned a Traffic Study of the village because there are several areas within the village that have given our residents a lot of concern. The Consultant's Interim Report has been published on our website and the focus of the next stage is the Lewes Road / High Street junction which is already at capacity and will be under yet more pressure as more homes are built.

Finance and General Purposes Committee

A total of £1,975 in grants has been awarded during the 2016/17 financial year, to support organisations whose work has benefits to the local community. The grants budget for 2017/18 remains at £2,000.

The F&GP Committee has thoroughly reviewed the budget and reserves over the last year and the Council agreed its recommendations on the Budget and Precept for 2017/18 in January. The budget is £197,080 and we have increased the Precept by £5,000 to £162,000.

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As stated earlier, we are still pursuing the project to reinstate toilets on the Common. After last year's Parish Meeting we wrote to the Cricket Club to ask whether they would be open to suggestions to make the pavilion toilets available to the public or to allow a new facility to be built either attached to the pavilion or on the practice area, Unfortunately the Cricket Club Committee replied that although they believed that toilets on the Common are definitely needed, they felt that there were too many difficulties with the suggestions we made. The Parish Council has now sought pre-application advice from MSDC about other sites around the Backwoods Lane car park and on the other side of the Bowls Club car park to the one we were putting forward at last year's Parish Meeting. A site meeting with a Planning Officer took place on 13 March and there was a further meeting with the Conservation Officer yesterday and his advice is still awaited.

Environment and Amenities Committee. This Committee has achieved a number of objectives for the benefit of the village, the main items being:

We have added some extra Christmas lights at the very top of the High Street, and the overall effect last Christmas was stunning.

Further bollards have been installed to prevent parking on the paved area between Glyn Thomas and Penny Black.

Last year we added a floating island to the Pond, for the benefit of the wild life.

We've replaced a total of five Parish Council owned street light lanterns in West View and off Lewes Road with heritage lanterns to conform with the West Sussex lights.

We are supporting Lindfield in Bloom and the Council is represented on their committee by Councillors Durrant and Snowling.

A couple of joint projects with West Sussex County Council Highways should come to fruition this year - some additional dropped kerbs and maintenance work on the roadside posts by the pond.

We're also hoping for some progress on joint projects with Mid Sussex District Council - to install some posts around the section of Common along Black Hill, to deter unauthorised incursions and to upgrade the Hickmans Lane playground.

Christmas Festival Night was a huge success thanks to the work of our Deputy Clerk and the Working Group.

We arrange and pay for six refuse freighter visits to the Tollgate car park.

Work is still being done in the village by Haywards Heath Town Council under the Highways Agreement and we have a separate arrangement with them for grass cutting in the High Street and other maintenance jobs such as cleaning seats, litter bins and bus shelters and painting of pond posts and seats)

We continue to organise the Village Spring Clean which has been much better supported over the last couple of years - over thirty people turned out for this year's Spring Clean a couple of weeks ago.

Today we learnt that the Wilderness Field has passed into Mid Sussex District Council's ownership so negotiations can begin for an onward transfer to the Parish Council.

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We obtained permission to take over the former Zipper Club noticeboard for Council and community notices and this has now been refurbished and a new lock fitted”.

6. OPEN FORUM

The Chairman invited comments and questions from members of the public.

Parish Clerk's resignation

Mr. N. Kerslake stated that it had been a surprise to him to hear of the Clerk's impending retirement. He had been on the interview panel in 1996 when she was appointed and he paid compliments to her professionalism and personality.

Neighbourhood Plan Judicial Review

Mr. Kerslake stated that he understood that the Neighbourhood Plan Judicial Review had been withdrawn by the plaintiffs and suggested that the Parish Council should seek confirmation from Tom Clark at MSDC.

Proposed Public Toilets on the Common

Mr. Kerslake stated that in the year since this was discussed at the 2016 Parish Meeting, the public had had no real knowledge about what was going on. It was essential to have agreement on a site with MSDC as owners of the Common and to have support from the Police for the chosen site. The building was likely to cost in the order of £60,000 - £70,000 even for a small two cubicle facility which was a lot of money and the upkeep would be around £10,000 a year. This was a big commitment and the money could arguably be used elsewhere. The Parish Council should think very seriously about whether there was a need to reinstate toilets on the Common after such a long time without them. Commercial organisations would say that it was time to “cut bait”. The Council needed to put together a paper weighing up the pros and cons before moving any further with this project as it was such a difficult issue.

Parish Council representation at MSDC Planning and Licensing Committee meetings.

Mr. Kerslake commented that it had been disappointing that no-one from the Parish Council had been present to speak at recent meetings about the White Horse Licensing application and the District Plan hearing. At the District Plan hearing no other Town or Parish Council representatives had spoken either; Mr. Kerslake suggested that the Mid Sussex Association of Local Councils could consider sending a representative to speak at such meetings.

The Chairman replied that the Chairman of the Planning and Traffic Committee, Councillor Hodgson, was unable to attend these meetings as he had a full time job. Councillor Hodgson added that volunteers had been sought for attending these meetings, but the Planning and Traffic Committee was currently two members short and Councillors were volunteers and had other commitments. He hoped it was understood that the Council had tried to have someone attend the meetings but no-one had been available.

Posts around the Common. Mr. Kerslake thanked whoever had organised the repainting of the posts round the Common and suggested that an ongoing programme should be established to keep them up to scratch.

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7. CHAIRMAN'S CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The Chairman thanked those present for their attendance and contributions. He expressed appreciation to his fellow Councillors for their support over the last year, particularly during these challenging times, especially for the Planning and Traffic Committee with reduced membership so other members were having to share the additional workload. He added that the Councillors were all volunteers and apologised if the Council did not always get it right, but stressed that it did try. The Chairman also thanked the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer and stated that the Council was fortunate to have such a good back-up staff. He also thanked all three members of staff for giving up their morning for the Spring Clean.

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed and invited everyone present to join him for refreshments.