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**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at Blackstone Pavilion, Blackstone Playing Fields,  
Woodmancote on Tuesday 09 April 2024, 7.00 p.m.**

**Present:** WPC Cllr Dixon (Chair), Cllr Batchelor, Cllr Morris, Cllr R Noel, Cllr W Noel, Cllr Donald  
**Others Present:** Cllr Mike Croker (HDC), Liz Trundle (Clerk) and nine members of the public

Cllr. Dixon noted that the meeting was being recorded and that CCTV was present in the room which could also be taking images.

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Austin. Cllr Paul Linehan (WSCC) was absent.

**2. Minutes of meeting held on 4 April 2023**

The Minutes of the WPC Annual Parish Meeting on 04 April 2023 were RESOLVED subject to agreed amendments and signed by Cllr Dixon.

**3. Chair's Report 2023/24**

**Playing fields**

I joined the council in 2017 and became chairman in February 2020 and in all that time there has been one topic on the agenda for every single meeting – the lease associated with this facility and grounds.

Let me provide a little background for those unfamiliar with details. The parish own the field behind you, the field closest to the road is own by the Allen family trust, which the council leases for the sum of £100 per year. In November 2003 a 30-year lease was signed with Sussex young cricketers to rent the two fields for the sum of £100 per year, which goes straight to the Allen family trust. This means that for the last 21 years the parishes only single asset has resulted in a net income of zero.

The cricket club originally approached the council for a new lease, as the number of remaining years on the lease decreased and this was impacting the club's ability to secure sports council funding. When I took over as Chairman and reviewed the lease it was very clear that this was not a good agreement for the parish. The lease didn't contain any restrictions on the use of the site, as many residents had been led to believe. Our objective

for a new lease was therefore to ensure it contained these restrictions as well as increasing the rent to a market value rate.

Unfortunately, the tragic accident that befell the Allen family has meant that the Allen family trust can't currently issue the parish council a new lease for their part of the site. This means that we in turn cannot sign a new lease with the cricket club. I am, however, pleased to say that the Council has been successful in conducting a rent review under the current lease. This means as from the 1<sup>st</sup> January this year the rent for this site is now agreed as £5,000 per year, resulting in a profit for the Parish of £4,900 per year.

When the Allen family trust is able to offer the council a new lease, the topic of a new lease containing all the desired restrictions on the use of the site will come up again and the council is committed to making this whole process transparent and putting the lease out for consultation prior to signing.

### **Playground**

One of the conditions of the current lease is that the cricket club needed to install and maintain a children's playground. I am sure many of you will know that the current play area has been out of use for quite some time. The council has always felt that the current playground does really meet the needs of the local community and therefore there was very little to be gained by simply repairing what is currently there – our objective was to replace the whole lot with something more suited to the children in the parish.

On behalf of the council I am therefore pleased to inform you that Sussex cricket have also agreed to pay 50% of the cost of a new playground, up to a maximum of £10,000. The council has also been offered a grant from the CIO that was set up by several members of the council in an attempt to save our beloved parish hall. Whilst the parish hall was not saved, the CIO did manage to secure national lottery funding for community infrastructure projects. The CIO will be closed down shortly and the funds it holds, a little over £10,000, will be donated to the council specifically for the new playground.

The parish therefore has a £20,000 budget to purchase and install a new children's playground this year. Councillors Roger and Wendy Noel are leading this project and will be presenting options for the community to vote on soon. He also encouraged members of the public to attend a forthcoming Extraordinary Parish Council meeting to contribute their thoughts on the new playground.

### **Council members**

I would like to note that Sarah, our council clerk for 3 years, left in September last year – and I would like to thank her for her time with the council. The council was then pleased to appoint Liz Trundle as our new clerk in November last year, I am sure you will all join the council and myself in welcoming Liz to the team.

As I said at the beginning, I have been chairman of the council for over four years now. It has been my pleasure to chair the council, but I feel it is now time for a change. I will not therefore be standing for re-election next month but will remain a member of the council and look forward to working with and supporting the new chair, whoever that may be.

#### **4. Report from Horsham District Council (HDC)**

Cllr Mike Croker gave the following report:

Last year's district elections resulted in a new political colour for HDC, with 28 novice district councillors out of 48, resulting in much learning on the job and establishing new working relationships with council officers.

Much of last year was about the draft Regulation 19 HDC Local Plan, which was finally approved by council for consultation in December 2023. There were many upset parishes, mostly caused by the mismatch between parish Neighbourhood Plans, which typically run to 2031, and the district Local Plan which runs to 2040, resulting in an additional 9 years of housing to find. A key enabler of the draft Plan is the ongoing development of the Sussex North Offsetting Water Scheme (SNOWS) – (nearly) working as a backup if no local water offset is available. Related to this is the Plan's requirement for a predicted water demand of 85l/p/d (Building Regs Part G calculation) to minimise the need for offsetting in new developments – significantly lower than the usual 110l/p/d.

Early in its term council reaffirmed that Horsham District was facing a Climate and Ecological emergency, producing a draft climate action strategy for public consultation, the strategy being approved and published by council in January 2024. A new Head of Sustainability and Green Spaces has been appointed to pursue the strategy and implement annual plans. As part of this approach, Bramber Brooks was purchased for both the public good and nature recovery. The level of financial commitment needed was illustrated in council's recent decision to commit £10.7m (incs £2m contingency) from reserves for carbon reduction and update works to the Capitol Theatre – likely the most expensive of the council's buildings to retrofit.

Another council-owned building, the Drill Hall, is currently subject to sale negotiations with the Lifespring Church in Horsham. As a rather run-down, former MoD building, with strong community ties, this is a complicated sale with the council keen to see a continuing community role for the building, as well as the Church's need for a place of worship and a convention centre.

Council has also committed to the development of a Rivers Charter for the Rother, Arun and Adur, and it's now up to HDC members and officers to work with Arun & Rother, and the Ouse & Adur River Trusts, the Adur River Recovery project, the Sussex Wildlife Trust, the South Downs National Park Authority, the Farm Clusters and landowners, and other stakeholders to develop the Charter.

Senior staff retention is becoming an issue for HDC: The latest pay award of £1925pa or 3.88% if greater (the second year of this 'lump sum' approach) is somewhat in contrast with the commercial sector. Related to this was the recent decision to increase councillors' allowances by the median staff percentage increase of 4.76% - a motion to make this 3.88% (same as senior staff) was rejected.

Staying with finance, the council has set a balanced budget with a 2% increase in the district element, albeit with a significant percentage increase for unparished areas taking them to 2.99%. Green bin and parking charges have also been increased – for the first time in several years. Council Tax Support has been maintained at £195 in 2024/25 for those who need it. Currently the 119-year lease for the Horsham Swan Walk shopping

centre is for sale (as a distress sale) – HDC already owns the freehold. Acquisition would result in greater HDC control of 2.4 hectares of commercial, and potentially residential, space in central Horsham, but would require circa £18m outlay: an obvious conflict with need for carbon reduction retrofits in council owned buildings.

Finally, preparations are in hand to start commercial food waste collections in March 2025, with domestic collection starting in March 2026. Some government support for the purchase of 11 new vehicles and first year's staffing has been promised, but it is unlikely to cover all of the district's costs. Thank you for listening. I am happy to attempt to answer any questions at the chairman's discretion.

#### **5. Presentation by the Henfield Fire Station crew**

Four members of the Henfield Retained Fire Station attended the meeting and gave a full tour and demonstration of how a fire engine is used. This was preceded by an initial talk on the fire service's safety prevention work and its 'Well and Safe' home visits. The crew answered questions about the overall structure of the Surrey and Sussex Fire Service and local 'call-out' procedures.

The meeting closed at 7.57pm.

**Cllr C Dixon – Chair**  
**Woodmancote Parish Council**