

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 15 MAY 2014 AT 7.00 pm IN BRAMBLE HALL, BRAMBLE HILL

Present: The Chairman, Members of the Parish Council, Mid Sussex District Cllr Gary Marsh, West Sussex County Councillor Bill Acraman, Parish Clerk, Rosemary Robertson, together with c50 members of the public and a speaker from the National Citizen Service.

Before the meeting Paddy Horne asked to clarify the nature of the meeting because he felt that last year it had been closed down peremptorily by the Chair without consulting the electors present. The Clerk explained that it was not a Parish Council meeting but the Council were obliged to organise it, pay the expenses, and Chair. She stressed that it should be a social evening reviewing the year. Paddy Horne then wanted to clarify the standing of all those present, ie all were electors and were of equal standing. He spoke about the possibility of a poll that could be taken if 10 electors demanded. The Clerk said that no resolution could be voted on unless it was on the Agenda.

1 Apologies for Absence

Received from Cllrs Talman and Greenwood. Cllrs Jarvest and Huxley arrived late.

2 To approve the minutes Annual Parish Meeting held on 29 May 2013 (circulated)

Suzie Horne asked that Item 6 be amended to read “the Cuadrilla spokesperson contradicted what he had earlier said about the “innocuous” nature of the flares”. The minutes were annotated, and the Minutes were signed by the Chair as a true & correct record.

Laurie Dunne subsequently asked that a further sentence in Item 6 be amended (see * page 4)

3 Chairman's Report

Alison Stevenson spoke about the last leg of this Parish Council and the current team of Councillors as being a very strong team: a group of people with a real skill set. She stressed that this year the **Neighbourhood Plan** would be of major importance to protect Balcombe from the sorts of speculative developments which Haywards Heath and Pease Pottage had faced, especially with no District Plan in place. She said that Balcombe was protected in part by the willingness of local landowners to engage and bide their time. Balcombe has recently published a Scoping Document for the Strategic Environmental Appraisal thanks to the considerable effort of Cllr Daniel. The Scoping Document is on the BPC website. This has been through its statutory consultation and in the last few weeks the team had been appraising sites against this. There would be engagement sessions on 12 & 14 June in Bramble Hall. She urged involvement by villagers. **Youth Club** – we now employ 2 Youth Workers having taken over this responsibility when AiRS doubled their fees. Thanks to Cllr Jarvest and RR for sorting out the contracts and to Cllrs Dennison and Huxley for their involvement. On **Traffic** matters Alison made reference to the BBC programme “Parking Mad” which featured the Newlands parking issue. She listed two success stories, the graduated speed limit about to be introduced to the north of the village, and the Traffic Regulation Order about to be implemented in Newlands which would restrict parking for one hour 11 – 12 noon each weekday thereby stopping commuter parking. Thanks to Cllr Saunders. **Bramble Hall** was up and running and it was hoped that revenue would meet the lease cost this year, there were a number of regular weekly bookings. **Facilities & Amenities** – fingerposts were now finished and the repair of verges from the various works in Newlands was ongoing. The Snow Plan was not needed 2013/14. **Trains** – Cllr Bottomley had made a little headway on staffing issues but the sporadic ticket machine functionality was still an issue. There was some hope in a possible reduction in parking charges. Until the franchise was awarded there was limbo. **Speedwatch** was still not in operation because of lack of volunteers.

Neighbourhood Watch was overseen by Cllr Dearden who was also responsible for potholes and stated that he would happily take calls from residents on this. Bramble Hill, Mill Lane and the area outside the shop were all due for re-surfacing. **Oil Event/Issue** – AS said that the Oil Issue was the biggest issue that Balcombe had faced as a community since the coming of the railway or the World Wars. No matter what happens over the Summer we are all still here unlike the World Wars when men didn't come back. Despite the considerable FFBRA campaign and wider opposition campaign WSCC had passed the Cuadrilla application - a considerable disappointment for all of us. Balcombe had been mentioned numerous times at the Shale Industry Conference – the Balcombe event was a watershed moment. Communities faced with the same issue would feel the benefit what has happened in Balcombe the push down here has made our name known worldwide and has made a difference. Sue Taylor interjected to give a report that FFBRA will be lodging a judicial review AS asked for copies of the correspondence to be forwarded to the Clerk – a letter goes from their lawyers to WSCC re areas where they believe that due process was not followed.

4 Financial Report for Year 2013/4 ending 31 March 2014

Cllr Williamson, the Responsible Financial Officer, congratulated the Clerk for impeccable book keeping. He referred to the circulated figures in the Annual Report. He explained that the Precept had been kept at £60,000 although it did appear to have gone up 4.5% this was due to the government subsidy being withdrawn and the figure being adjusted accordingly. Income had increased due to grants coming in. Routine payments were similar to last year but there had been no Snow Plan spend. Bramble Hall was expected to register a loss and did. The net result was a significant surplus because Neighbourhood Plan costs had not materialised, they had been carried forward and the budget set at a similar level to last year. Bramble Hall revenue was looking more positive even without the Parish Council's own use of the building factored in (£3,000/£4,000); if it was, then the hall would almost be breaking even. BPC finances were looking in good shape. A figure had been added in for Oil Exploration Matters as a contingency. A member of the audience asked about the Precept in relation to the loan for the traffic calming. Cllr Williamson explained that the loan had now been paid off but the Precept should not be reduced in view of cuts to other services that BPC may have to fund and the likelihood of future capping to precept increases. Cllr Gary Marsh said MSDC faced cuts of £2,000,000. There had been 0% increase in Council Tax since 2000.

5 Questions from the Floor

Richard Greig asked that Correspondence Lists for meetings be posted on the Noticeboard.

Joy Hopkins drew attention to the poor state of the footpath near the lake and asked that it be cleared. Laurie Dunne as a Footpath Inspector said that the footpaths were inspected once a year, he was happy to have problems reported to him through the Clerk.

Susie Horne said that the WSCC decision to allow the flow test of the Lower Stumble well was deficient because there had been no community consultation. She asked if there had been any consultation with a show of hands, there were none. AS had reported this at the Shale Gas Conference that Cuadrilla had not carried out any consultation.

Gary Marsh drew attention to the fact that someone was recording the meeting: AS said that the Parish Council were also recording.

Kathryn McWhirter asked how much and what the allocated Oil Exploration Matters money would be used for. She was told £5,000 and it was not known what it would be needed for. She also raised the issue of the defective ticket machine at the station which was illegible if the sun was shining. KB had reported this, another machine was promised.

Paddy Horne spoke about a blockade in Australia which had prevented an oil company from operating, riot police had been deployed but the licence of that company had been suspended

because of its failure to engage with the community. He spoke about the successful blockades in Balcombe, Barton Moss, Beverley and condemned the behaviour and deployment of the police in these situations arresting people that were protesting peacefully. He urged people to speak out against intimidation and bullying from Sussex Police against people who were exercising their hard won freedoms, otherwise we would drift into a situation comparable with the Continent before the Second World War.

Sue Taylor asked if Parish Council meetings could be set up in a “U” shape so Councillors could be seen by the public. She also said that a letter, which had been unearthed under a Freedom of Information request, had made it clear that Cuadrilla had told DECC that the only way to make Lower Stumble viable was if it was hydraulically fractured. She asked that this be put on the Balcombe Parish Council website.

Alan Rew was critical of the way the meeting had been organised with a lack of publicity. The Clerk defended herself saying that the meeting was mentioned in the Annual Report which went to every household in the village, it was listed on the Parish Council website, it was in the Parish Council section of the Parish Magazine, and in the Village Voice section of the Mid Sussex Times. AS lamented the fact that in the past, pre-Oil Exploration, no one had ever attended these meetings except ex Councillors. Alan Rew suggested villagers should be invited to propose items for the Agenda. This was noted for next year. Engagement was welcomed.

Patrick Rusk asked that mowing on the Green be restricted to allow for wild flowers. AS said the verges at the bottom of Newlands were left wild.

Anne Boxall asked if a microphone could be deployed in the future for these meetings.

Paddy Horne said that things could be improved and the Clerk offered to resign, she attempted to introduce the speaker for the evening with Mr Horne still holding the floor. It was then clear that Cllr Acraman wanted to speak.

Cllr Bill Acraman spoke about the second runway proposal at Gatwick and felt that it was the most important issue that the village was facing, he urged everyone to take an interest in this. He thought it would have considerable impact across the County with the number of houses needed, knock on effect with villagers becoming amalgamated and associated traffic problems. AS explained that Cllr Daniel had joined the Gatwick Liaison Group

Cllr Gary Marsh thanked BPC for its objection to Penland Farm which would be re-submitted. He spoke about the need to get a Neighbourhood Plan in place for protection from developments especially in the absence of a District Plan. He asked that BPC share the consultation document on the Second Runway at Gatwick.

There followed a talk by James Donougher from the National Citizen Service which is a government funded opportunity for 15 – 17 year olds to get involved in a community project and learn new skills. The programme is a two week residential course in the summer which offers outdoor activities to get active and meet new people. Then a week designing a community project. This costs £50 per person with the government funding £1,000 towards each student. There are 250 places to fill in West Sussex and still 50 funded places to fill. A brilliant opportunity and a great thing to have on a CV. James urged people to advertise the scheme widely www.thencsnetwork.org.uk or call 0800 0279111.

Gordon Brine wanted to know what action would be taken to keep roads open if the protest returns in the summer. Would there be a better plan to allow people to go about their daily lives. AS stated that BPC had no influence on law and order issues or roads, which was the duty of the police and WSCC, she said it was a balancing act to maintain people’s rights but to uphold the law. She spoke about the WSCC Resilience Group that meet to discuss this, and Gary Marsh said he would talk to Gordon Brine after the meeting.

***Laurie Dunne** handed an amendment to the 2013 Minutes to the Clerk which read
“Laurie Dunne stated that he would respond personally to refute the Cuadrilla statement on flaring emissions which was factually wrong. He would send a copy of the letter to Cuadrilla, Francis Maude MP, the Environment Agency and Balcombe Parish Council. (Later BPC demanded a response from the EA on this letter but never received one.)”
He pointed out that all the work on the footpaths was done by volunteers with very little funding and there was discussion with Joy on the walking of footpaths: Joy would be happy to inspect/walk the paths near the village.

Susie Horne asked Gary Marsh about his comment that Cuadrilla were not coming back this year. He responded that he had been told that they would not come back this year, and to fulfil the conditions it might take a long time, but agreed there was no formal undertaking set. **Leslie Fairweather** thanked the work this BPC had done over the last year. **Paddy Horne** said that it was good that there was no police presence at the meeting. He asked about the Resilience Meetings and said mass arrests were inappropriate.

The Chairman took a show of hands of the electors present and with only one dissent brought the meeting to a close at 8.45 pm.

Signed.....

Date.....