

# Balcombe Parish Council

[www.balcombeparishcouncil.com](http://www.balcombeparishcouncil.com)

**Chairman:**

Alison Stevenson

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**Clerk:**

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**Members as at 1 May 2014:**

Kevin Bottomley	01444 811755	Peter Huxley	01444 819264
Katherine Daniel	01444 811368	Carol Jarvest	01444 811559
Alan Dearden	01444 811989	Rodney Saunders	01444 811598
Catherine Dennison	01444 919168	Mike Talman	01444 811230
Simon Greenwood	0207 370 6830	Robin Williamson	01444 811519

**Mid Sussex District Councillor:**

Gary Marsh 01444 811320

**SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE PARISH CLERK**

- Providing residents access to planning applications and advising Mid Sussex District Council or West Sussex County Council as appropriate of the Parish Council's comments and recommendations.
- Arranging subsidised rail cards and bus passes for the over 60's
- Publishing Parish Council news in the Parish Magazine and the Mid Sussex Times, and on the Parish Council notice board and the Parish Council website.
- Acting as Executive Officer of the Parish Council and maintaining links with Mid Sussex District Council, West Sussex County Council and the Sussex Police.
- Taking bookings for pitch hire and use of the recreation ground, and making arrangements for the maintenance of the pavilion.
- Taking bookings for Bramble Hall
- Managing the contract for the provision of street and footpath lighting
- Supervising and coordinating the duties of the Parish Ranger

## Annual Parish Meeting

Thursday 15 May 2014

7:00 pm in Bramble Hall, Bramble Hill.

# Balcombe Parish Council



## Annual Report

### 2013-2014

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

### Last Lap

We are about to start the last year of our four year tenure as a Parish Council, one of the most challenging of years behind us and some equally challenging goals still ahead.

Our new Parish Clerk Rosemary has proved a great asset in, at times, a fraught year, as have our new Councillors, pulling their weight in impressive style. I hope you will join me in saying a thank you to all the Councillors for their considerable and varied work this year. I don't think we have ever been so busy and their commitment has been humbling. I am proud of the team.

### Events and Aspirations

I could hardly write a report on 2013-14 without mention of the oil exploration and protests that have not only affected our daily lives but pushed Balcombe well and truly into the media spotlight. Not only has it been challenging for all of us but it has unquestionably caused rifts in our wonderful village that I fear may take many years to heal. The exploration bore is finished but the application to flow test it is currently under consideration and any consequent development of the Lower Stumble site lies ahead. I ask that we all go forward into this year remembering that freedom of speech prospers only in an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for the opinions of others.

This year will most crucially see a big push for our Neighbourhood Plan. The aim is to get the plan in place before the elections next spring. Please engage with us as much as you are able. The plan will set the framework for development in our village for years to come and it is vital that it reflects our needs.

Successes this year have been the growing use of Bramble Hall without the bankruptcy of other venues and the taking over of employment of the youth worker, plus some developments on traffic and parking.

### Web Site

Please visit the Parish Council's website [www.balcombeparishcouncil.com](http://www.balcombeparishcouncil.com) for news on village issues and information on our activities. Last year we had 3500 hits on one day in August with the world media regularly pulling updates from our site. You can sign up for automatic notifications of new posts.

### Working Groups

The Parish Council is organised into working groups: Traffic Matters, Planning & Environment/Neighbourhood Plan, Facilities & Amenities, Young People, Safety & Security, Rail and Oil. Each group consists of three or four Councillors one of whom acts as team leader. The reports that follow tell the fuller story of the past year and set out some of our goals for the coming year.

*Alison Stevenson*

## BRAMBLE HALL

The Parish Council's lease of Bramble Hall from the United Reformed Church Synod has now been running for a year. Use of it is increasing steadily without any evidence of a significant loss of income to the other community spaces in the village.

While the lease is for three years, the Parish Council can exercise the option to terminate on 30 September 2014. A decision will be made at the June meeting of the Parish Council. If it decides to continue the lease, then as March 2016 approaches consideration will be given to negotiating a much longer lease of the building, which would make it a community facility for many years to come.

*Rodney Saunders*

## NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Progress towards a Neighbourhood Plan for Balcombe has proceeded slowly over the last year. We have worked closely with Mid Sussex District Council to produce a sustainability appraisal, a necessary step in the process towards completing a Plan. We have been guided in our work by a group of experienced consultants, having secured a grant from central government to support their working with us. With the guidance of MSDC and our consultants we are increasing our understanding of what is required to produce an acceptable Plan. 'Front runner' councils such as Slaughton have found the process far from streamlined. However we are now committed to bringing the Plan to referendum by May 2015. This will be a plan to see us through the next 20 years and so it's vital that we get it right and ensure the plan is based on what the community wants and needs. These are the key dates when we will be asking for your opinions:

Exhibition of proposed housing sites: 12 – 20 June 2014

Exhibition of the pre-submission Plan: 17 – 31 July 2014

Exhibition of the Final Plan: End September 2014

Referendum: April/May 2015

There is more information on the Parish Council's website where we are posting documents as they are completed. Do take a look and email us with your comments. If you would like to join the small team working on the Plan, particularly if you have any experience of planning, please do contact us.

*Katherine Daniel & Catherine Dennison*

## FACILITIES & AMENITIES

Over the past year we have been involved with various projects including Bramble Hall, the Youth Club, notice boards, street lights, tidying-up grass verges after works in Newlands and clearing-up after winter storms. We also undertook the replacement of three finger posts at the junctions with Mill Lane, Stoney Lane and Bramble Hill.

During 2014-15 we intend to carry on with various projects including country footpaths, pavements and, of course, the winter snow plan which we did not have to activate during the past winter. Last but not least we will tidy up the front of Bramble Hall. If any residents have any suggestions for other projects we will be pleased to consider them.

*Catherine Dennison & Mike Talman*

## PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT

The most important planning matter this year will be the production of our Neighbourhood Plan as detailed elsewhere in this report. Alongside this we continue to monitor applications in and affecting the Parish. Larger plans have included Clay's Lake flood alleviation scheme which was granted permission late in 2013 with the site access route via the High Street as initially proposed having been removed. We have also lodged formal objection to the Penland Farm development. The urbanisation of the northern fringes of Haywards Heath, adjacent to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and the consequent increase in the volume of traffic through Balcombe are both matters of concern.

*Alison Stevenson*

## RAILWAY

The Railway Group made early progress with developing points of contact at both Southern and First Capital Connect. A representative of Southern came to visit us and undertook to take up a number of points concerning the standards of service offered at Balcombe including parking, ticketing and property matters.

The tendering of the franchise for this service, the results of which are expected to be announced in September of this year, has resulted in a lack of commitment and follow-up from both Southern and First Capital Connect on the points we have raised.

It remains that the ticket office is staffed at a level that is below the minimum obligation set in the existing franchise and that the ticket machine ranges from being a poor alternative to a broken one. However, the permit to travel machine has been turned back on at our request. The modern, heated shelter on the northbound platform has also had its problems with both the building and more recently, vandals.

If any would-be traveller overcomes these hurdles, the train service itself has also been pretty poor, especially over the winter.

It is expected that there will be just one company appointed in the new franchise, which should at least improve communications. The terms of the new franchise seem to be the same for Balcombe in terms of the minimum number of train services.

***Kevin Bottomley***

## TRAFFIC MATTERS

A “Traffic Regulation Order” (TRO) is required for any measure that is legally enforceable. Two applications by the Parish Council for TROs have been recommended by the Central Mid Sussex County Local Committee and are currently being processed by West Sussex County Council.

One, which has now been in the pipeline for nearly three years, relates to speed limits on the B2036 north of the village. Apparently the original scheme that the Parish Council had requested did not comply with Department of Transport guidelines. The County Council had proposed a watered-down version that was compliant. With the invaluable assistance of our local County Councillor, the County Council has now been persuaded to implement the original scheme, i.e. a gradual reduction from 60 mph at the Cowdray Arms to 30 mph outside the Church, with a 50 mph speed limit on the High Street. The process to obtain authority for a scheme outside the guidelines has taken a great deal of time but we are optimistic that it will be implemented during 2014-15.

The other application is for single yellow lines on Newlands to restrict parking by commuters and other users of the railway station. All parking on this road other than in designated parking bays will be prohibited between 11.00 am and 12 noon, Monday to Friday. This will be enforced by Mid Sussex District Council. The Parish Council’s application, which followed extensive consultation with residents of Newlands, was finally recommended by the County Local Committee in February of this year. Again it is hoped that this measure will be implemented during 2014-15.

***Rodney Saunders***

## OIL EXPLORATION MATTERS

It has been a very busy year for the Parish Council and the Oil Exploration Working Group. Rodney Saunders led the group for the first half of the year and I have done so for the latter half. Cuadrilla was on site over the summer period carrying out the drilling operation for which it obtained planning consent in 2010. There was an unexpectedly large civil protest, which grew in numbers and prompted a considerable police presence. At its peak, there was a large encampment and the illegal occupation of a grazing field. There were a number of arrests including one Balcombe resident and the Brighton MP Caroline Lucas. The road was frequently blocked or closed and Balcombe found itself in the media spotlight – reluctantly. Cuadrilla left the site in September at the expiry of its planning consent.

The Parish Council arranged for both the Environment Agency and West Sussex County Council to address the residents of Balcombe. Both events were well attended and informative.

In January 2014 Cuadrilla made a new planning application to carry out flow testing of the well. In order to gauge public opinion of this latest application, the Parish Council instigated a consultative ballot which was administered by Electoral Reform Services. This asked every resident on the electoral register to consider how they would like the Parish Council to respond to this planning application plus two questions on future planning applications [1] that might include hydraulic fracturing or alternatively, [2] without the use of hydraulic fracturing. The results of the consultative ballot demonstrated that a “simple majority” oppose oil exploration of any kind but also demonstrated the need for balance and respect for the opinions of others given that there is significant support for the opposing view.

The Parish Council undertook a detailed review of Cuadrilla’s current planning application, and took into account the outcome of the consultative ballot in preparing its objections.

The Parish Council has received several requests to comment on the protests that have taken place in Balcombe. In the summer of 2013, the Parish Council produced banners that attempted to convey its opposition to illegal protest, most of which were vandalised or de-faced. The Parish Council is opposed to any illegal act while, at the same time, it will defend the rights of groups and individuals to protest legally, peacefully and respectfully.

The current planning application is to be determined by West Sussex County Council over the next few weeks. If planning consent is granted, the Parish Council will continue to press that all possible measures are put in place to limit the impact on Balcombe and its residents and that the authorities who are charged with duties to monitor or enforce any conditions, do so.

***Kevin Bottomley***

## YOUNG PEOPLE

The Youth Club is back up and running following a break whilst we moved from Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS) as a service provider to hiring youth workers directly. The Youth Club is run using funds from the precept and some small fundraising contributions. We have also been able to secure some funding for equipment such as storage cupboards and games.

The Youth Club is well attended and this is a testament to the great youth workers we have and the wonderful space that we now have at Bramble Hall. Bramble Hall provides a warm, safe and comfortable environment with separate spaces for a variety of activities.

The Youth Club welcomes all senior school aged young people and is open term time 7-9pm on Monday evenings at Bramble Hall.

*Carol Jarvest*

## SAFETY AND SECURITY

We have regularly represented Balcombe residents on the police authority Neighbourhood Watch Panel. We continue to supply modest financial support to Balcombe Neighbourhood Watch, as well as moral support, both of which will continue during the coming year. Police statistics for 2013 indicate that the amount of crime in Balcombe is less than in other adjacent Parishes.

Our village Speedwatch team has in the past made a valuable contribution to road safety in the village. Sadly, after its disbandment last summer, it has still not been resurrected as we are still in negotiation with the police authority regarding their practical involvement in the scheme.

Dangerous potholes in some of the roads within the Parish are constantly monitored and reported to the West Sussex County Council for their attention. Over the coming weeks Bramble Hill and Foxwells are to be completely resurfaced as is the junction of Mill Lane and Haywards Heath Road.

Welcome packs are being handed to new residents of Balcombe and are very well received. Please contact the Parish Clerk if you are new to the village and would like one.

*Alan Dearden*

## FINANCE

The table on the page opposite sets out the budgeted and actual financial performance of the Parish Council in the year ended 31 March 2014, and the budget for the year ending 31 March 2015. The figures are provisional as at the date of this report and are subject to final approval by the full Parish Council

In the table, 'Facilities' refers to expenditure in connection with the recreation ground, the pavilion and general maintenance.

We maintain our Precept (that part of the Council Tax allocated to the Parish Council) at £60,000.

The reserve carried forward from 2013-14 to 2014-15 is higher than budget. This is largely due to grants received, primarily that for the Neighbourhood Plan, and the deferral of budgeted expenditure on the Plan until 2014-15.

*Robin Williamson*

*Responsible Financial Officer*

	Budget 2013-14	Actual 2013-14	Budget 2014-15	Notes
<b>INCOME</b>				The Precept for 2014-15 is unchanged. Income in 2013-14 was above budget, and includes grants for the Neighbourhood Plan (£6,300), for Bramble Hall and for repairs to the verges in Newlands.
Precept	60,000	60,000	60,000	
Recreation Ground	2,200	2,466	2,200	
Grants & Sundry Income	100	8,775	100	
Pavilion FC Usage	1,200	1,463	1,500	
Bank Interest	700	318	200	
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>64,200</b>	<b>73,022</b>	<b>64,000</b>	Actual figures for 2013-14 are less than budget as less than anticipated was spent on communications and lighting, and the absence of snow meant that the Snow Plan was not activated.
<b>ROUTINE PAYMENTS</b>				
Clerk Salary & Allowances	10,500	10,917	10,300	
General Administration	8,800	5,858	6,250	
Public Lighting Usage & Maintenance	8,000	5,695	6,500	
Facilities	3,700	3,031	3,450	
Snow Plan	2,500	(157)	2,500	
Ranger Services	3,600	3,032	3,800	
Concessionary Fares	600	445	400	
<b>TOTAL ROUTINE PAYMENTS</b>	<b>37,700</b>	<b>28,821</b>	<b>33,200</b>	
<b>GRANTS</b>				2013/14 includes grant c/f from 2012-13.
Youth Club	2,500	2,500	2,500	
Victory Hall	7,780	7,780	4,500	
Other	1,500	970	1,500	Expenditure on Oil Exploration Matters in 2013-14 was the cost of the consultative ballot. Provision has been made for possible further expenditure in 2014-15. Underspend on Neighbourhood Plan in 2013-14 is carried forward to 2014-15.
<b>TOTAL GRANTS</b>	<b>11,780</b>	<b>11,250</b>	<b>8,500</b>	
<b>PROJECTS</b>				
Oil Exploration Matters	1,500	2,051	5,000	
Neighbourhood Plan	18,700	4,126	14,000	
Other Projects	2,000	2,320	2,000	Loan was repaid in full in 2013-14.
<b>TOTAL PROJECTS</b>	<b>22,200</b>	<b>8,497</b>	<b>21,000</b>	
<b>TRAFFIC CALMING</b>				
Traffic Loan Repayment	5,832	5,832	0	
Traffic Calming	1,000	0	1,000	
Speedwatch	500	0	500	The budget for 2014-15 is based on the Parish Council leasing the building for the full year. although the Parish Council has the option to terminate the lease at the break point on 30 September 2014.
<b>TOTAL TRAFFIC CALMING</b>	<b>7,332</b>	<b>5,832</b>	<b>1,500</b>	
<b>BRAMBLE HALL</b>				
Lease	7,000	6,920	7,000	
Running Costs	5,000	905	2,295	
Non-recurring costs	3,000	3,996	0	The Parish Council's own use is not included in the rental income. This is estimated to equate to about £3,000.
Total Costs	15,000	11,821	9,295	
Less Rental Income	7,800	3,660	4,400	
<b>NET BRAMBLE HALL</b>	<b>(7,200)</b>	<b>(8,161)</b>	<b>(4,895)</b>	
<b>TOTAL INCOME, EXCL. VAT</b>	<b>72,000</b>	<b>76,682</b>	<b>68,400</b>	
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE EXCL. VAT</b>	<b>94,012</b>	<b>66,221</b>	<b>73,495</b>	
<b>SURPLUS/(DEFICIT), EXCL. VAT</b>	<b>(22,012)</b>	<b>10,461</b>	<b>(5,095)</b>	
<b>VAT NET</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>607</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>SURPLUS/(DEFICIT), INCL. VAT</b>	<b>(22,012)</b>	<b>11,068</b>	<b>(5,095)</b>	
<b>RESERVES</b>				
At start of year	32,326	32,326	43,394	
Surplus/(Deficit)	(22,012)	11,068	(5,095)	
<b>AT END OF YEAR</b>	<b>10,314</b>	<b>43,394</b>	<b>38,299</b>	