

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF BALCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON 29 MAY 2013 IN BRAMBLE HALL, BRAMBLE HILL

Present: The Chairman, Members of the Parish Council, Mid Sussex District Cllr Gary Marsh together with c55 members of the public.

1 Apologies for Absence

Received from Cllrs Dennison, Huxley, Talman plus Mr & Mrs Dutton, Mr & Mrs Short.

2 To approve the minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting held on 29 May 2012 (circulated)

Suzie Horne questioned the accuracy of the Minutes because of the omission of a question about air pollution with regards to fracking. Her comment was noted. The Minutes were subsequently proposed by Cllr. Rodney Saunders and seconded by Mr George Wiginton, a vote was taken and they were signed off by the Chairman as a true & correct record.

3 Matters Arising

Information was given on the history of a proposed Halt Sign in the centre of the village (outside Threads). The Secretary of State had twice declined the request because the location does not meet the required criteria and there has been no fatality at that junction.

4 Chairman's Report

The Chairman explained that the Council was half way through term and was working well as a team. During the year Richard Greig had retired after 10 years as Clerk and was a great loss to the Council and he was thanked for his outstanding and professional service. Rosemary Robertson was introduced as his "up and running" successor. Also in the year the Council had lost Robin Lindsay-Stewart who had also worked tirelessly for the Parish for 10 years, always with a joyous glint in his eye. He is still in our hearts. Cllr Linda Short had also resigned due to the pull of a grandchild in Australia, but she had not given up all ties with the Council, happily still helping out at events. The Chairman introduced new Cllrs Katherine Daniel and Kevin Bottomley. Katherine had already been working on the Neighbourhood Plan team for over a year and Kevin was well known in the village. She impressed upon the audience that this was a strong team with real skills.

The Chairman summarised the Council's on-going activities. The **Neighbourhood Plan** process was moving forward with policy decisions imminent including infrastructure expenditure. She urged village involvement because these were long term decisions which would impact on the children currently at Tiggers as they moved into adulthood. On **Traffic** related matters it was reported that there had been some success with speed restrictions, but to the North of the village what had been proposed was not implemented in full and BPC were working to try to rectify this. The Newlands Parking issue was being dealt with by a working group who were exhibiting their proposals at a Drop-In Session in Bramble Hall on Saturday 8 June. The **Snow Plan** had worked well and the Council were proud of achievements here. **Youth Club** had been reinstated thanks to the work of Cllr Carol Jarvest, the Club saw regular attendance of between 17 -20 young people and the governance model was being used across West Sussex. Staff were funded by Action in Rural Sussex and the Club were using Bramble Hall in Winter and moving to the Recreation Ground in Summer. **Bramble Hall** was up and running; Balcombe Babies had moved in and Youth Club were using the premises. Bookings were slow and there was the option to

end the lease after 18 mths. **Speedwatch** will be disbanding next month because only one volunteer remained and there was no one willing to act as Co-ordinator. The efforts of those involved were acknowledged and thanks extended. Hopefully Operation Crackdown would make a difference. The Chairman thanked all the team with special mention of Cllr Robin Williamson (RW) for his work as Responsible Financial Officer, Cllr Rodney Saunders (RS) for his commitment, often working 35 hours a week, and Cllrs Peter Huxley (PH), Catherine Dennison (CD) and Carol Jarvest (CJ) for their contribution to Youth Club.

Fracking – the work that had been undertaken was referred to and is shown on the website and in the Annual Report. Cuadrilla had only made contact 3 weeks ago inviting BPC to attend a meeting where they set out their plans. They plan to explore for oil Mid-June and depending on the results would a) plug the well if nothing found, b) extract oil in the conventional way, c) consider applying for a licence to frack. RS informed parishioners that BPC was monitoring developments closely and gave two updates. 1. Cuadrilla have still not been awarded a drilling licence and the Environment Agency had asked for further documentation on groundwater risks before this would be granted. 2. RS read a detailed document received from Cuadrilla earlier that evening (subsequently posted on balcombeparishcouncil.com). The document gave further information on traffic movements, flaring, air quality monitoring and waste water management.

5 Financial Report for Year 2012/13 ending 31 March 2013

The RFO reported that last year went to budget with a surplus carried forward from Neighbourhood Plan under spend. Likewise the Victory Hall grant had been carried forward because it was not spent last year. He explained that the target revenue from Bramble Hall rental was £7,800 with expenditure forecast at £15,000 although the application of small business rates relief had reduced that figure by £1,500. There were questions from the floor about the criteria being applied to see if Bramble Hall was viable, and why money hadn't been spent to upgrade the Pavilion instead. It was stated that financial considerations, impact on other community spaces and benefit to the village would be the criteria used. CJ reported that an extension to the Pavilion had been considered before Bramble Hall became available and that would have been a very costly option. It was asked if there would be money available for legal costs which might be incurred in any anti-fracking campaign. The Chairman reported that BPC was constrained by the Precept available which was determined many months in advance. The RFO pointed out that money could be made available from "Other Projects" or "Other Village Organisations," although this would mean diverting funds from other organisations. There was hope that a successful grant application for Neighbourhood Plan funding would release money. Cllr Acraman at the last BPC meeting had suggested that there may be funding available from WSCC.

6 Questions from the Floor

The Chairman circulated a copy of the questions raised at the last BPC Meeting with answers provided.

Laurie Dunne thanked RS for reading the letter and asked that his colleagues at Imperial College be allowed to pass comment. He expressed concern about flaring of gas especially as the Environmental Protection Agency in the US had banned it from 2015, he asked that a letter be written expressing residents concern. * see page 4

Paddy Horne noted that the Cuadrilla spokesperson contradicted what he had earlier said about the "innocuous" nature of the flares in previous correspondence.

Sue Taylor questioned facts in the letter to households from Cuadrilla which mentioned “production” of oil in the past, and suggested that BPC should write to the company expressing concern that villagers had been misled.

John James said that he had written to Cuadrilla about safety concerns and had received a letter back which he was happy to share – he will send to the Clerk.

Sheila Illsley asked about traffic movements and was told that the planned route for HGVs was from Junction 10a and not through Cuckfield. She thanked BPC for their hard work on this issue.

Alan Rew suggested that the room used for the Cuadrilla drop-in session was not fit for purpose being too cramped, and he questioned who had chosen the venue. He also talked about the need for proper public engagement which he felt had not happened. BPC promised to recommend a larger venue if approached again.

Kathryn McWhirter concurred with these sentiments and said that a public meeting and one-to-one conversations would have been more desirable. **Laurie Dunne** echoed this wanting a formal meeting with Cuadrilla for questions which could be properly minuted.

Graham Gosney praised BPC for its exemplary report on the meeting with Cuadrilla.

John James suggested that the upcoming drilling was a fait accompli and depending on the results, Balcombe should take up the fight after that to avoid polarising factions.

George Wiginton wanted to thank BPC for the snow plan, the noticeboards and the gritting bins.

Louisa Delpy felt that it was unclear what BPC was doing to stop Cuadrilla and asked what its focus was, and how parishioners could help. (RS answered that the Working Group was meeting next week and its objective was to a) monitor activity, b) recommend what BPC should do and c) to carry it out. The Working Group would report at the next BPC Meeting on 17 June, the Group may well co-opt others to help, at present it was Rodney Saunders, Kevin Bottomley, Katherine Daniel, Robin Williamson, Peter Huxley and Alison Stevenson. BPC was already receiving legal advice on a pro bono basis from a “friendly” lawyer).

Louisa Delpy wanted BPC to be one step ahead of Cuadrilla and mentioned the 28 September deadline for renewal of licence and comments made by the oil company that it was more dangerous to stop drilling than to carry on at times.

Sandy Chen wanted people to work together to find ways to stop fracking. He asked about potential liability and asked if BPC had contacted Lloyds to understand the insurance implications. RS said that the Association of British Insurers had so far refused to answer questions.

Owen McDonough asked about the impact on house prices.

Kathryn McWhirter accused BPC of allowing the planning permission.

Gary Marsh quickly retorted that this was a falsehood, the County Council had made the decision and at that time no one had made any objection, not the water companies, the railways, highways etc.

The Chairman questioned how 11 unpaid volunteers on BPC were expected to have better knowledge than a team of experts and the Enforcement Officer from the District Council, Highway Engineers and so on, all of which were paid employees.

Gary Marsh went on to say that the Parish Council had no power whatsoever on the issue and attempts should be made to mitigate the risks involved but that was all that could be done.

RS informed those present that BPC policy had been to find out as much as possible, to inform the village and listen to views: the poll had demonstrated that 82% of the respondents (284) who voted were against fracking.

Paddy Horne queried whether Cuadrilla had adequate insurance he also expressed dismay that he perceived that other Councils had been unequivocal in their opposition to fracking whereas BPC had not. He asked why Councillors chose not to give their opinions.

The Chairman stated categorically that she chose to “serve the community and not my own opinion.”

Graham Gosney praised BPC as “hardworking” and pointed out that the poll had not been unanimous with only a 40% turnout.

John James said that Cuadrilla insurance brokers were rated in the top quartile and argued that it was the Government that was forcing the issue. He called for diplomacy and not drastic action.

Paddy Horne drew attention to the fact that a final consent for drilling had yet to be provided and that one of the conditions of the licence was a proper engagement process with the public. He argued that the drop-in session did not constitute a proper engagement process and BPC should seek robust legal advice.

The Chairman brought the meeting to a close at 8.30 pm in view of the fact that Richard Greig’s retirement party was already delayed.

Signed.....

Date.....

* Laurie Dunne subsequently asked that a further sentence in Item 6 be amended

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).**”