

MINUTES OF HORSMONDEN PARISH COUNCIL
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD IN HORSMONDEN VILLAGE HALL AT 7.30 P.M.
ON MONDAY 11TH MAY 2009

Present: Cllr Robins (Chair)
Councillors Cheesman, Clemson, Hughes, Kerrigan, March, Stevens, Parker and Fletcher.

In attendance: Lucy Noakes (Clerk)
20 members of the public
KCC Cllr King
Cllr Callow (TWBC)

Declarations of Interest: Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct were invited.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllr Slade (TWBC)

2. **PUBLIC SESSION.**

John Naylor addressed the Council to ask if Horsmonden Parish Council could try to participate in the free Trees scheme again next year, as they had not done so last year. Cllr Robins said that HPC was limited on space for new trees on Parish Council property .but would try and participate if possible.

Mr Stevens addressed the Council and Parish to comment about the current state of the fencing around the primary school as he had noticed that the fence near the front gate had been in a bad state of repair for a very long time. He said that he could not understand why the school had spent so much money on a new gate entry system, and yet they did not make good the boundary fencing. Cllr King agreed with this statement.

Mrs Jones asked if the Parish Council intended to do anything with the old Tithe map. Cllr Robins said that the Clerk was trying to arrange for it to be collected by KCC Archives, who had expressed an interest in it.

3. **MINUTES OF THE 2008 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 6th May 2008 were recommended for approval by Cllr March, seconded by Cllr Clemson, voted for unanimously and duly signed by the Chairman.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

Cllr Robins spoke about the footpath up to Lewes Heath and explained how major improvements had been made to it during the last year and the water now seems to have been restored to its original course. Robin Morton said that although improvements had been made, he was still concerned that when heavy rainfall is experienced, flooding may still occur.

Isobel Kerrigan asked the Council if they knew when the new recycling contract which was spoken about by TWBC would come into force. Cllr Callow said that she believed it was due to happen

before the end of May 09, but understood that the receptacles for putting tins and plastics in was still being discussed by TWBC. Richard Larkin asked if the plastics recycling facility would disappear at Paddock wood once there was doorstep recycling and Cllr Callow said she understood this to be the case.

Cllr Stevens said that he had spoken to a senior member of the cycling club recently and had been informed that they were in consultation with the police and government about rewriting the cycling rules and regulations as these are very out of date.

5. **DEBATE ON PUBLIC CONVENIENCES**

Cllr Kerrigan outlined the events over the past year which had led to TWBC's decision to close the Public conveniences in Horsmonden if the Parish Council did not agree to take on the responsibility for them. This had commenced in November 2007 when Cllr Bullock had met with the Chairman and Clerk to suggest that the toilets could be under threat as TWBC needed to reduce its expenditure on these items. During August 2008 Cllr Callow and Cllr Kerrigan had met with Paul Barrington-King who said that TWBC were determined to cut costs by offloading the public conveniences. It had been suggested that if the Parish Council took on the maintenance of the toilets then they would receive the money set aside for compliance with disabled regulations.

At the end of 2008 Richard Powell (TWBC) had put together a report and recommendation to TWBC that certain public conveniences be closed. In January 2009 TWBC Select Committee called in this decision for scrutiny, but ultimately the same decision was reached.

In March 2009 members of the Parish Council met with Richard Powell again and were told that the toilets in Horsmonden would definitely close and be demolished at the end of April 2009 if the Parish Council did not agree to take over responsibility for them. TWBC agreed to extend the date of closure for one month in order to allow the Council time to address parishioners about the issue during the Annual Parish meeting.

The parish Council had been informed that quotations received by TWBC for disabled compliance amounted to between £40, 000 and £60,000, but as far as they understood, small councils may not be required to comply with disabled regulations.

Cllr Kerrigan put it to the Parish that the toilets could be maintained in their current state at an estimated maximum cost of £6000 per year, which amounted to approximately £6 per parishioner per year, or 50p per month; although it is hoped that the Parish Council may be able to get the toilets cleaned at a cost lower than that which TWBC are currently paying.

Cllr March stated that this would not allow for any updating of the toilets or compliance with disabled regulations, and said that there were possible alternative which should be considered. She had investigated portable loos which could be positioned on the village green or wherever they were needed at a cost of £650 per annum for one disabled unit and £2300 per annum for one disabled and one standard unit. This would include all maintenance of the toilets.

It was mentioned from the public that there were no toilets at the Roman Catholic Church and often those coming for a funeral or service there may need to use the public conveniences.

There was a suggestion that those using the village green for events could be asked to make a donation towards up keep of the toilets.

It was put forward that many people passing through the village for various reasons make use of our facilities and Cllr March asked if parishioners were willing to pay for this. Mrs Kerrigan said that on the whole she believed that the toilets were mainly used by parishioners rather than passersby. Mrs Kerrigan asked if TWBC would let the Parish lease the building for any other use if it didn't want to maintain it as a toilet (For instance a small library or storage room?)

Cllr Hughes mentioned that within the Parish Council there was not the facility to carry out all the administration involved in taking on the toilets at present and this would therefore also involve a greater cost to the Council and ultimately the Parish.

Cllr Robins rounded off by saying that Parishioners should bear in mind that they may be required to pay a 7% or 8% increase in Council tax as well as a one off cost in the future for disabled compliance, if the Parish decided to take on the responsibility of the toilets. A vote was put to all present and this resulted unanimously in favour of the Parish Council taking over the toilets.

Cllr King (KCC) suggested that there would be more and more self help needed by communities in the future as the squeeze in public finances gets progressively worse.

6. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Library

Cllr briefly recounted the events which had led to the closure of the public library. In July KCC had made the decision to close the library based on child protection issues. Although in October OFSTED maintained that they had never made any statements in their reports about child protection issues. Following this the Parish Council had written to KCC to ask them to ensure that procedures were put into place to check the veracity of all information which was used in decision making processes. The Parish Council have now received a reply assuring them that this would be the case in all future decision making procedures.

Parish Council representative on School Board of Governors.

Cllr Hughes had written to the Clerk presenting his formal resignation from the position of Parish Council representative on the School Board of Governors with effect from 31st March 2009. Cllr Hughes felt it pertinent to provide some details about his reasons for resigning, before the Council asked if any other member would be willing to uptake the position.

The main reasons cited by Cllr Hughes for resigning were that he no longer felt comfortable being on the school board as he largely disagreed with the way in which the board operated, but felt that he would be unable to change this as he was in a minority. He also disagreed with one particular action by the Headmaster. A discussion then took place which included members of the public, regarding the conduct of the Headmaster of the Primary School. It had been felt by members of the community that the Headmaster, although living outside the parish, had been trying to secure a place for his daughter at the primary school by claiming to be living in the village. This could possibly have jeopardised a position for another child in the parish. When these concerns had been mentioned to the Council previously, members had suggested that if there were any problems

associated with the way in which the school conducted its business, then the Parish Council would have a duty to parishioners to ensure that matters were dealt with by the necessary authorities, and the concerns of Parishioners on this topic had been passed on to KCC for investigation at this time.

Cllr King said that the admissions rules of the school would be adhered to closely and not broken, and that this matter had been investigated by KCC. Caroline Davis, a member of the School Board, was present and summarized the admissions policy for the school, which was, she stated, the same throughout the country. Mrs Denis said that the sibling's policy had caused some oversubscription problems at Horsmonden in the past few years, although these rules had been welcomed by locals when numbers of local children had dropped dramatically in the past.

Cllr Fletcher had offered to fill the vacant position on the school board; however, on reply the school board said that in light of issues regarding the library, they felt that at present they could not accept a new PC member on to the Board. A discussion then took place about the makeup of the Board of Governors at the school and Cllr Robins stated that he felt that there should be more independent members and less parent and teacher governors.

Cllr King said that he felt that enough time had now elapsed since the closure of the library and that it was appropriate for a new member of the Council to be a member of the school board. He suggested that all sides should put the history behind them so that the community could move forward in the future.

The Institute.

Vandalism during the past year had led to an insurance claim to replace many broken tiles on the roof. The parish Council had replaced the flat roof over the bar area at a cost of £4575.

The Parish Council have prepared the Trust documents and Lease agreement ,but are currently seeking more nominees to step forward as trustees as they do not currently have enough.

The Village Hall

During the last year the extension has been completed including a new kitchen, disabled toilet facilities, entrance area and replacement windows, and the Parish Council had provided a quarter of the costs associated with this project.

The car parking area has just been completed in block paving at the front of the building and this has been paid for by the Parish Council as landlords.

The Village Hall committee now have plans to convert the old kitchen area into storage and a bar area.

The parish Council extended their gratitude to Cllrs Stevens and March together with all the other members of the village hall committee, for their dedicated work on this project.

Play area

The Parish Council discussed several different suppliers for Play areas over the past year and a decision was reached to use Playdale, as the preferred supplier.

After many design issues, Playdale has now commenced work at the site.

The final cost of the Play area will be in the region of £47, 500.00 (net) as it has increased by another £500 in respect of a solution for the entrance and step at the front of the area.

Old Tithe Map

KCC archives have now agreed to take possession of the old Tithe Map.

Horsefair

The Parish Council had met with the Police following last year's event. There had been issues with traffic management and racing, as well as litter, soiled nappies and human excrement. Les Bateup had managed to remove piles of straw and spread the manure over the green and had needed to harrow the green owing to the fact that it was so compacted after the event.

The Police had been surprised by the size of the event.

Housing Needs Project

Following interviews with several Housing Associations last year, the Parish Council appointed Orbit (RSL), as their preferred partner to work with on the project.

Several potential sites had been identified and looked at by TWBC but to date none of these have been made available for purchase for the project. Cascade Homes had put in an application for housing on one of the preferred sites, but permission had been denied by TWBC planning for this application.

In April the Council held a Public meeting to discuss the progress so far.

This project will be ongoing.

Millennium Fund

The parish Council have now agreed to spend the monies set aside on a bronze plaque which will be set into a circular, granite table to be situated on the Village Green, opposite Heath Stores. It is hoped that the Parish Council Notice board and footpaths map can be re-sited around this structure. The bronze plaque shows a map of the village and features places of historical interest. Livingstone Foundry, who are making the plaque are currently awaiting a disc which will enable them to create the bronze work.

Street Lighting Contract

EDF announced that they would no longer be able to maintain the street lights after 31st march 2009. Following this the Parish Council received quotations from various providers and agreed to award the contract to Southern Electric Company at the agreed charge of £110.58 monthly (net).

Parish Council Notice board

In February the Council approved the purchase of a green notice board at a cost of £1581.61 from Sign of the Times. This has been received and is awaiting installation.

Pollarding of Trees on Village Green

It was decided that all 8 limes would be pollarded at once this year and this work has now been completed.

Cllr Robins went on to thank all of the councillors for their work this year as it has been extremely busy. Ken Mills also requested to thank the Councillors for their work at this point. Thanks were also extended to the Clerk. Ewen Kellas was given thanks for all his work with the Social Club and the Institute Building in the last year. Ewen Kellas thanked the Councillors in return, for all their work and for the council's financial help with the Institute.

7. **PRECEPT AND ACCOUNTS**

The accounts for 2008-2009 (Account Summary attached at Appendix 1) and the Precept for the year 2009-2010 (attached at Appendix 2) were presented to the meeting. It was proposed by Isobel Kerrigan and seconded by Edna Jones, that the accounts be accepted and this was unanimously agreed by the members present and signed by the Chair and the Clerk accordingly.

Cllr Hughes was thanked for his support and help with regards to the Finance Committee.

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Isobel Kerrigan mentioned that there is a build up of litter and rubbish in our verges. It was explained that TWBC has a schedule for litter in the lanes and around the village at different times of year and that the Fly tipping line is very quick to respond when called.

John Naylor commented that when the library closed, the public computers were also lost. He wondered if the Council could try and find somewhere else in the village to house some computers.

Cllr Robins reminded everyone that the Council meets on a monthly basis and invited parishioners to come and air their views at any of the meetings as these didn't have to be saved for the annual meeting.

Cllr Stevens asked Parishioners present how they felt about the Christmas lights, as there has been a lot of vandalism over the past few years which would suggest an element of the community doesn't appreciate them. Those parishioners present expressed that they were keen to see the lights go up again this Christmas. It was suggested that the Council try to involve as many youngsters as possible in putting up the lights as this may give them a sense of being part of the process and encourage them not to damage the lights. It was also suggested that the Council look at the possibility of rope lights which are less easy to vandalise. A Parishioner also stated that it should not be forgotten that much of the damage could well be done by those who do not live in Horsmonden, as with the graffiti suffered at the sports ground.

Edna Jones asked if anything could be done to address the drug problems in the village, as often youngsters could be seen near the sports ground in the afternoon, and sometimes there was evidence of a problem behind the Village hall.

A parishioner asked if the village would be entitled to a refund in Council tax if we did not get allocated another PCSO

A parishioner asked if there was any way that the Council could negotiate to get some of the existing social housing stock transferred so that it could only be used to house those connected with

the village in some way, as often when families are brought in from elsewhere they do not integrate well, and often they do not wish to be here.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.20 p.m.