

# MINUTES OF HORSMONDEN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD AT 7PM FOR 7.30PM START ON TUESDAY 28 MAY 2024

## **Present:**

Cllrs March (Chair), Davis, Larkin, Russell, Sheppard, Baylis and Baxter-Smith

## **In attendance:**

Lucy Noakes (Clerk)

47 members of the public including member of Bassetts Farm Forum

Cllr Darrah (TWBC)

## **Declarations of Interest:**

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

No interests were declared.

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR**

Cllr Jenkinson

Cllr Richards

Cllr Knight (TWBC)

Cllr Mobbs (TWBC)

Cllr March welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked fellow councillors for putting themselves forward for re-election to serve on the Parish Council for another term.

Thanks were given to Ian Currie for his time served as a Parish councillor and a welcome to Diane Baylis, the newest co-opted member of the PC.

### **2. PUBLIC SPEAKER(S)**

This year the Parish Council welcomed members of the Bassetts Farm Forum (BFF) to speak at the Annual Parish Meeting.

Cllr March introduced Andrew Winser as the speaker representing the BFF and at the same time thanked the group for all of their hard work over the past year and ongoing, as well as their assistance to the PC .

Mr Winser and the group had prepared a presentation which explained who the BFF were and how they came about, briefly outlining the planning history at Bassetts Farm over the past few years and setting out some of the thoughts and challenges raised by the BFF and the PC .

Points of the presentation included :

- A brief overview of the timeline of the TWBC Submission Local Plan and its likelihood to reach fruition by the end of 2024.
- The TWBC call for sites and how this affected Horsmonden's limits of built development by allocating sites in the new TWBC local plan.
- How these planned developments are likely to affect the population of Horsmonden by increasing this by approximately 42%
- How the current developments at the Brenchley Road site and Bassetts Farm do not fully adhere to policies in the TWBC Submission Local Plan or Horsmonden's made Neighbourhood Plan (HNHP) which is the most recent planning legislation relevant to these developments.
- How the BFF feel some of the inconsistencies with planning legislation could be overcome
- What is happening next :The next stage of examination for the TWBC Submission Local Plan which includes hearings which the PC has asked to attend; potential revision the current application by Persimmon Homes; TWBC's planning committee will decide on the Bassetts Farm application as the Local Authority.
- An outline of how parishioners can help by making comment on the planning portal, and potentially attending the planning committee meeting at TWBC when that happens.

Specific inconsistencies between planning policy and the current Bassetts Farm proposal were outlined during the presentation and include:

- development outside the set limits of built development,
- medical centre location on land which was allocated for community use,
- allocation for landscape buffering is being ignored,
- the housing design doesn't follow (HNHP) or the High Weald Design Guides,
- layout is car dominated and housing mix doesn't comply with (HNHP),
- the allocation for the site is wider than Persimmons ownership area however this is being ignored in the housing figures put forward for this proposal.

Problems were also highlighted concerning the access to and from the site :

- the main vehicular access from the Goudhurst Road requires traffic calming on the main road to prevent potential for danger with an estimated ten-fold traffic increase,
- the proposed foot way on Goudhurst Road is too narrow for buggies and accessibility vehicles to pass each other,
- the proposed emergency access route via old Back lane is narrow and potentially dangerous,

Cllr March thanked Mr Winser and the BFF for their help in understanding the complexities of the proposal. She mentioned that the Parish Council had also commissioned Alison Eardley the specialist planning consultant to help the PC in preparing comments for the planning applications put forward by Persimmon Homes, and the cost of this had come from the parish precept last year.

**3. PUBLIC SESSION -The public are entitled to raise any subject matter of relevance to the Parish and have up to three minutes each to speak. The content will be briefly minuted.**

The following points were raised and answered :

Would potential change in central government affect housing allocations in the future?

Mr Winser said that the Local Plan was likely to come to fruition by the end of 2024 which would bring more certainty with regards to applying local policies, but major change to housing numbers could only come from the top down. He felt it was possible that central government might ask Borough Councils for even greater housing allocations in the future and this could lead to another call for sites in the Borough which may lead to more housing allocations locally.

Litter was raised as a problem just outside the village centre and in a particular location defecating in a layby was also indicated as a regular problem. The parishioner wondered if this could be resolved somehow.

Cllr March explained that the PC can only organise litter picks within the 30-mph limit and although this had been done regularly in the past, there had been very little litter collected in this area. Most of the litter seems to accumulate just outside this area where it is considered too dangerous to organise a litter pick. Some of this is picked up by those living adjacent. Highways England is responsible for litter picks on the A21 and the road has to be closed off for this to take place. Cllr March asked Cllr Darrah if the Borough Council might be able to put up any CCTV or signage in the layby to prevent people from defecating there, and suggested that the PC might look at additional signage to indicate the whereabouts of their public toilets for those passing through.

The effects of the Bassetts Farm and other large planning applications on School parking was mentioned as a potential big problem in the future as there is already insufficient parking at school drop off and pick off times.

Cllr March said that the PC had already drawn attention to the problem with parking for school access when commenting on this application. Mr Winser said that unfortunately it is not likely to be considered a great problem as it will be said that children can easily access the school on foot, however in reality a lot of parents will drive on rainy days etc. This highlights the need to ensure good 'walkability' with attractive access which encourages people to want to walk. Cllr March reminded people of the demonstration on the village green where she marked out the footways proposed for the Goudhurst Road. It showed how narrow the proposed footway was and that two buggies or mobility scooters could not pass.

It was asked if anyone knew why the initial development at Bassetts Farm had halted recently . No one knew the answer to this; however, it was considered a possibility that there may be some problems encountered with building out the footway on the Goudhurst Road, which is a condition of the planning application .

It was asked how more people could be encouraged to comment on the Bassetts Farm application on the TWBC planning portal . Mr Winser said that the BFF realised people were busy and had tried to make it as easy as possible to appoint them in the right direction . He suggested encouraging as many people as possible to sign up to their website <https://www.bassettsfarmforum.co.uk/> so that they could keep them up to date and remind them when action was needed.

It was asked if basic pointers could be provided by the BFF group for commenting on Bassetts Farm application and Mr Winser explained that this had already been done by the group but that he would put the pointers on their website again.

It was pointed out that if people felt that any increase in traffic would be problematic to the village , they should add this to the comments on the planning portal .

It was asked if the BFF would have a stand at the upcoming HoVEC events in June. This had not been planned but the group would consider it . Cllr March mentioned that the 'What's on Here' event had not happened this year as it was very time consuming to organise and hence HoVEC had decided that it was something which they could only run every two years or so . Mr Winser went on to explain that up to ten speakers could speak at the TWBC planning committee meeting as well as the PC, so he urged parishioners to consider speaking and to contact the BFF so that the speeches could be coordinated.

#### **4. MINUTES OF 2023 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

The 2023 Minutes had been reviewed and it was proposed by Mr Winser and seconded by Mr Davies that the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting Minutes be accepted as a transcript of what took place at the meeting. Voted unanimously.

#### **5. CHAIR'S REPORT AND OTHER PC UPDATES:**

Cllr March updated those present about projects which the Councillors had been working on over the past year:

The Clock Tower- major repairs were under way with the clock tower, consisting of masonry work inside to repair cracks in the brick work, replacement of some of the wooden structure on the roof , and the planned replacement of the pitched roof at the top of the tower. The works have necessitated removal of the clock mechanism and faces as well as placement of scaffolding around the whole tower . A grant had been applied for to help with the costs of the pitched roof and it was hoped that if

successful this may cover 50% of the cost of the new roof .It was estimated that the works might be complete sometime in July .

HIPs – (Highways Improvement Plans) The Council had negotiated with KCC to secure new signage for the Maidstone Road, Lamberhurst Road and Yew Tree Green Road and it was hoped these would be in place soon .

HDAG- The PC had set up a new advisory group called Horsmonden Development Advisory Group (HDAG) which consisted of Parish Councillors and volunteers from the community . The groups remit was to look at large developments in the village and assist the PC in works connected with this. The group was chaired by Mr Winser and works closely with the BFF and the PC to achieve the best scenarios for the village .

Fromandez Drive wildflower project- The ‘Bee Friendly’ group consist of volunteers and Parish Councillors led by Cllr Larkin to carry out work to create a wild flower meadow. This would be advantageous to insects, wildlife and parishioners. Pathways had recently been cut into the meadow to provide a walkway enabling parishioners to enjoy the work so far. This project will be ongoing .

The PC continue to aid HOVEC and other groups to organise and run events on the Village green – this involves ensuring the necessary insurances and risk assessments are undertaken and arranging maintenance of the Green to coincide etc and allow events to take place.

The PC have set up the ‘New Village Hall Group’ within the PC which looks at all possibilities for a new or refurbished Hall and reports back to the Full Council. The Council commissioned an architect to look at the existing VH last year and draw up plans for a possible refurbishment and extension , which have now been costed. The next stage will be to look at plans for new halls on the Brenchley Road site and Sports Ground and finally to hold a village wide consultation to decide which option is best . Decisions will need to incorporate information gathered about S106 monies which are still being negotiated between TWBC planners and developers for the Brenchley Road site and eventually for the Bassetts Farm site. It is hoped that the S106 conditions, once decided, will incorporate some flexibility to enable a refurbished or a new Village Hall, depending upon which the village chooses.

A small group within the Council are also working with Voltalia on the Bockingfold Solar Farm to be located on the Maidstone Road .They are looking closely at construction traffic management as well as the Community Benefit Fund which Voltalia have set up to fund small projects in the community which fit the criteria for their funding .

Cllr March confirmed that the Parish Council meet for a full meeting each month and then again two weeks later for a planning meeting . She thanked her fellow Cllrs for their hard work and time given as well as the Clerk and Assistant Clerk .

## **6. PRECEPT 2024-25 AND ACCOUNTS SUMMARY 2023-24 - See Appendix 1 & 2 attached**

The Precept for year 2024-25 had been circulated prior to the meeting. As Chair of the Finance Committee, Cllr Russell spoke about the Precept for 2024-25. (Appendix 1 attached.)

He explained that the main increases this year were to cover the following :

- £20,000 to cover the Major works being carried out at the clock tower (as outlined earlier by Cllr March)
- £4000 for professional fees in case the PC needed the help of a planning consultant again
- £3000 towards a streetlighting Ear Marked Reserve to start saving up for the replacement of our street lights which were now showing some signs of age .

Cllr Russell also pointed out that the Council had still been able to make provision for Grant Funding of £1000 for small local projects, as well as providing the youth entertainment for the Sunday afternoon at the Summer festival held by HoVEC.

Increases in the precept had been offset by savings where possible especially in connection with electricity costs where the PC had used an energy broker who had managed to reduce bills for the street lights, toilets and Village Green electricity boxes.

Cllr Russell summarised the increase to represent 36p per week for a Council Tax Band D household. This represented good value for money for the services provided.

Cllr Russell then went on to explain the figures in Appendix 2 which summarise expenditure and income for the year just gone.

The large opening income figure of £98360.79 included £84000 of investment income which came back to the Council in July last year. Other income included insurance claims, interest and s106 monies which were claimed from TWBC to pay for repairs in the play area.

He explained that the items under 'Administration' running costs were made up from many items including the clerks' salaries, office costs, insurance costs, professional and audit fees and subscriptions etc.

Although the Council has to pay out VAT on any invoices received , it is able to reclaim all VAT spent which helps to reduce costs .

He explained that whilst the Council's Ear Marked Reserves have been maintained where necessary, Councillors have managed to end the year with General Reserves looking much healthier than in the previous year – at over £40,000.

It was explained that the Fixed Assets of the Council had to be accounted for in a particular way where items are valued at cost price. This could have the effect of

making them appear lower than they actually were, but assurance was given that everything had been accounted for in the correct manner .

The Chair then thanked everyone for attending ( including Councillors and Clerk) and thanked the Bassett Farm Forum and Mr Winser for their interesting and informative presentation .

**There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8:48 pm.**

DRAFT