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Village Centre
Trinity Road
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West Sussex BN6 9UY

MINUTES of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING held on Tuesday 21 May 2024 at 7.00 pm at the Village Centre

Present: Cllr Malcolm Llewellyn (Chairman of the Parish Council) and Claire Majsai (Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council & Chair of Community Engagement Committee). Councillors and staff of the Parish Council. Representatives of the Woodland Flora and Fauna Group, the Hurstpierpoint Society, Hurst Re-think, the Lost Woods Project, Hurst Meadows Conservation Volunteers Butterfly Survey Group and approx. 35 members of the public.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Helen Bedford opened the event, welcomed everyone to the meeting and ran through the housekeeping matters. Cllr Claire Majsai explained the format for the evening and that the theme was Nature on Your Doorstep. There was also the opportunity for all present to complete the four simple questions that were set out around the room and also via the QR code on-line about the things they like about the Parish, what can be improved, what the Parish Council should focus on and what nature means to you and what people do to encourage it. This feedback will help develop the Parish Council's new Strategy.

2. Welcome from the Parish Council Chairman

- 2.1 The Chairman, Cllr Llewellyn welcomed all those present to the meeting and explained that the focus of the meeting is to update residents on the work of the Parish Council over the last year, and on listening to the local community to help shape future priorities. The Chairman reminded residents that there were only certain services that the Parish Council provided directly as explained on the "What We Do" banner but it would be happy to take up causes and lobby others as necessary. The Parish Council's Annual Report is available in printed paper copies and on-line.
- 2.2 The Chairman listed some of the key achievements of the Parish Council over the previous twelve months including new safety surfacing in the South Avenue Play Area, newly planted trees in the Recreation Ground and in Walnut Tree Field in Hurst Meadows, repairs to the flint wall in St George's Lane, a review of litter and dog bins, notice boards in Hurst Meadows, the planning for a drainage project in Reeds Lane Recreation Ground that will take place over the Summer, followed by further play equipment next year. The new east/west cycle route through Hurstpierpoint is being completed by West Sussex County Council after some twenty years of lobbying for a safer route for children to get to school. There had been challenges from vandalism in the public toilets and at the Court Bushes Community Hub to be overcome. Martin Sadler had personally initiated and maintained the heritage apple orchard in Hurst Meadows and the Orchard has been designation as a National Plant Collection by the Plant Heritage charity. A Wassail event was held in January to sing to the apple trees to help them produce bountiful blossom and apples this year. The Parish Council responded robustly to the second stage of consultation on the review of the Mid Sussex District Plan by MSDC, which sets out the policies and sites for development up to 2038, and proposes some 4,000 new homes in the local area. There were some 1300 representations received from across the District. We are now waiting for a Planning Inspector to be appointed by the Government who will review the Plan for a final time.
- 2.3 The Parish Council was able to keep the increase in its part of the Council Tax bill, called the precept, as low as possible at 2.97% for an average Band D type property. The Parish Council is not capped in its increase unlike the District and County Councils whose budgets are under pressure. They will be looking at their non-statutory services and alternative options for the future. For example, in 2015, MSDC were going to close the public conveniences in Hurstpierpoint, so the Parish Council stepped in and took them over. This year the budget to operate them represents 5.5% of our precept or £17,500 – so these additional liabilities if taken on will come at a cost. Other opportunities include the old Methodist Church that has now closed. The Parish Council managed to get it registered as an asset of community value and now the Church intends to sell it, the opportunity exists

for a group to get together to raise funds to purchase it for the community. Large halls/meeting places with a good capacity are in demand in the local area. If any groups are interested in joining this initiative, they should let the Parish Council know.

2.4 Finally, the Chairman opened up the floor to questions:

Q1 – A resident who enjoys jogging around the streets was concerned over the number of over-growing hedges forcing pedestrians and push chairs into the roads. In response, the Chairman explained that he agreed with the comment and will continue to use any influence he can to pressure West Sussex County Council Highways to improve the issue. The Parish Council has no powers to enforce this matter but had included the problem in its Hurst Life articles, appealing to home owners to maintain their hedges. It is also important that all residents report their concerns to WSCC, via their website, as they have a new enforcement team for this issue. The Parish Council would organise the cutting back of the tree on Iden Hurst which was raised as an urgent concern, immediately.

Q2 –A resident asked why the tall tree in the Trinity Road car park had been cut down. In response to the question, the Chairman explained that the tree was apparently diseased, so MSDC had it felled completely.

Q3 – A resident asked why brambles are cut back on Wolstonbury Hill but not in Hurst Meadows. In response to the question, the Chairman explained that the fields are being managed in pockets to attract the maximum amount of wildlife, so for example, some areas are cut and the arising collected for the Skylarks. Some is left for small trees to grow which will shade out the brambles. Cllr Majsai explained the South Downs is about the flowering plants on the chalk downland, and Hurst Meadows is clay so has to be managed differently. All areas have been studied carefully with Dr Judd (Ecologist). Birds especially love the mixed habitats and the talks tonight would explain more.

Q4 –A resident requested additional benches in Hurst Meadows. In response, the Chairman explained that there were already plans for four additional benches that will be made and installed by the Monday Group.

Q5 –A resident complained about the noise made by lorries turning in College Lane when they realise they can't get to the College and requested signage. In response, the Chairman explained that WSCC was harmonising the speed limits in College Lane, Chalkers Lane and part of Malthouse Lane but will look at the issue of signage with them.

Q6 –A resident felt the magnificent old Methodist Church building should be saved and used for community activities like youth projects and possibly a climbing wall. In response, the Chairman agreed, but the funds would need to be found!

Q7 –A resident wanted a copy of the route of the new cycleway. In response, the Chairman explained the route will initially turn off Hassocks Road into St George's Lane, through the St George's Green and north of the Millennium Garden, coming back out on Brown Twins Road, down Trinity Road, over Cuckfield Road and down Manor Road to Western Road towards Albourne Road. The longer-term plan remains for the twitten between Highfield Drive and St George's Lane to be a safer route to avoid Randiddles Corner. The twitten needs to be re-designated and widened before it can be used as a cycleway. The cycleway surface will be permeable stone with a hedge through Hurst Meadows to screen it from the views looking south from the College.

Q8 –A resident asked if Solar Panels had been investigated for the Village Centre Roof. In response, the Chairman explained the Parish Council wished to include Court Bushes Community Hub as well. The Village Centre has been investigated by MSDC as part of a wider WSCC initiative to provide local nodes for generation and consumption. We are awaiting the report.

The Chairman thanked residents for their questions.

3. Introduction to the Presentations by Chair of the Community Engagement Committee: Cllr Claire Majsai introduced Karen Laver from the Lost Woods Project and Laurie Jackman a local ecologist.

3.1 The Lost Woods Project

Karen Laver explained the purpose of the Lottery Funded Lost Woods project managed by Action in Rural Sussex. Lost Woods are defined as those in danger of being lost, especially ancient woodlands defined as having been undisturbed for over 400 years. Pockets of woodland can be isolated, invaded by weeds, over grazed by deer, at risk of diseases and climate change threats. Some argue they should just be left alone but humans have always used woods for fuel, food, building homes and ship building. The aim of the project is to identify woods at risk, assist the landowners to manage them and reconnect communities with woodlands and build skills for sustainable outcomes. Tilley's Copse wood was used as a pilot for the scheme. Woodlands provide huge health benefits and people are encouraged to walk through woods and notice nature such as bats, dormice and butterflies. Apps are now available to help identify plants e.g. the Flowers of Britain App or Merlin App for identifying birds.

3.2 Nature on Your Door Step

Laurie Jackson showed photos of a large number of her favourite plants and wildlife from Hurst Meadows that walkers could look out for. These included skylarks, common whitethroat, parakeets, newts, nightingales, ground ivy, the early bumble bee, wild garlic, hoverflies, treecreepers, firecrest birds, dragonflies, damselflies, woodmice, field vole, kestrels, sparrow hawks, moths (buff tips), yellowhammers, oxeye daisies, birds-foot trefoil, tufted vetch, red bartsia plant, arboreal butterflies, purple hairstreak, brown hawk dragonfly, sharp leaf lily, slow worm (a legless lizard), hemp agrimony, batman hoverfly, hummingbird hawk moth, brown hairstreak, barn owls, nocturnal bats such as the brown long-eared bats, flowering ivy and ivy bees, holly blue butterflies, honey bees and finally the redwing bird. Laurie wanted to whet everyone's appetite and encourage everyone to record what they see on the iRecord App.

4. Conclusion

Cllr Claire Majsai thanked the speakers. Cllr Majsai ran through feedback from the survey and key points raised included:

What's Good: Access to countryside, shops, friendly people in a lovely community and friendly shop keepers.

What's Not So Good: Potholes, uneven pavements, cost of housing, lack of parking, lack of public transport in the evenings.

What the Parish Council could do: Better lighting in the public toilets, better traffic management/parking, better mobile signal, fight large developments, protect the countryside.

What Nature Means to You: Birds, hedgerows, hedgehogs, don't keep cats, No Mow May.

Finally, Cllr Majsai thanked everyone for attending the event and reminded everyone to look out for the volunteer sessions and bird walks that are put on for all to attend.

Chairman