

HENFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

The **ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** held in the Henfield Hall at 7.30pm on Tuesday 1st March 2011.

The meeting was chaired by Mr Peter Sheppard, Chairman of Henfield Parish Council. Fourteen other Parish Councillors were present together with Mr L Barnard (West Sussex County Councillor), Mrs S Matthews (Horsham District Councillor). In attendance was Mr P Hill (Parish Clerk), Mrs H Grant (Parish Secretary), Mr R Nye (Council Works Officer). The Chairman also welcomed Police Sergeant Bob Trevis and Police Community Support Officer James Josling from Sussex Police and the 66 residents in attendance.

1. Welcome by Chairman of Henfield Parish Council

The Chairman welcomed those present, reminding them that this was not a Parish Council meeting but a Parish meeting principally for residents to make their views known and question their elected representatives regarding matters relating to Henfield.

The Chairman went on to present Long Service awards to volunteer collectors of the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal. Brenda Camp received an award for 25 years, and Don Baggott accepted an award on behalf of Betty Hills who sadly passed away recently, in respect of 40 years.

2. Introduction of Parish, County and District Councillors

At the invitation of the Chairman the Councillors introduced themselves to the meeting.

3. Signing by Chairman of Minutes of 2010 Meeting

The Chairman signed the Minutes of the Parish Meeting held on the 2nd March 2010.

4. Presentation to launch consultation on the new Community Action Plan

The Chairman introduced Mr Tony Jackson, Chairman of Henfield Community Partnership. Mr Jackson informed the meeting that the first Henfield Action Plan was distributed in December 2004 and to deliver the Actions in the Plan Henfield Community Partnership was formed, made up of volunteers and representatives from the Parish, County and District Councils, as well as from adjoining Parish Councils. All actions in the Plan have been achieved.

Mr Jackson reported that about eighteen months ago the Partnership started the foundation work for the new plan including a questionnaire. More recently the Partnership commissioned a telephone survey to residents in Henfield and the surrounding area, recognising that Henfield is the hub for the area.

The Chairman produced to the meeting the draft Community Action Plan pointing out that it appeared the aim of Government with the "Big Society" initiative is to move the running of local communities much more back to within that community and the Plan fitted with such an initiative. He indicated the Plan broadly outlines some of the key aims the Parish Council and Community Partnership may seek to move to but it does not identify specific actions. He stressed the need for the community to express its views and provide feedback for the draft Plan. He also indicated that the Plan is available on the new Council website, and urged those present to respond and get involved by indicating what they would like to see for Henfield in the next four years.

Mrs M Simmonds, noting no young persons were present at the Meeting asked that some way be found to distribute to parents of younger children copies of the draft Plan and to involve them and the school in the consultation. The Chairman indicated the point would be taken forward and efforts would be made to get the youth involved.

5. Open Forum for Residents to address the meeting in respect of matters relevant to Henfield Parish

A resident thanked Councillors involved in clearing the snow last winter. She appreciated Cagefoot Lane is a private road but referring to the dangerous potholes in the road, asked if it could be adopted by the Highways Authority. Mr Barnard (West Sussex County Councillor) indicated that by and large the County Council is against adopting private roads as it is an unfair burden on Council taxpayers.

Mr John Donaldson indicated that he lives in Nep Town Road and is regularly asked where Red Oaks Nursing Home is. He asked for signs pointing persons in the direction of both that rest home and Upper Mead. He accepted these were private establishments but they both provide a boost to the economy and employment opportunities within the village. Mr Morgan (Chairman, Lighting and Open Spaces Committee), referring to the brown signs which appear advertising particular premises, advised that the cost involved in providing these signs falls on the owners of the premises to which the sign relates and it would be for the nursing homes to apply to West Sussex County Council for permission. Mr Barnard felt that West Sussex County Council would look upon such an application favourably if asked.

Mr Richard Searle referred to improvements to the website which now identified individual street lights and felt this was a big improvement. He hoped that with the Big Society, individual residents would report lights outside their homes which are faulty.

He also indicated that he found the new High Street fingerposts and noticeboards elegant and well-produced but was concerned the cost involved has fallen on the Council taxpayer. The Chairman informed Mr Searle the project was taken forward by the Community Partnership after consultation with the Parish Council. Mr Jackson (Chairman, Henfield Community Partnership) indicated work started two years ago with the Partnership, Hidden Britain and local businesses joining together to see how the local economy could be boosted by attracting visitors to the village. The fingerposts and maps in the High Street, together with maps in the car park and at Swains resulted from the project. Funding was from donations from local businesses together with a European Union grant of 80% of the cost. The Chairman felt this was an excellent example of the community working in partnership to achieve actions.

Mr Brian Harker considered it deplorable that no effort was made to keep the road open to St Peter's School during the winter snow. He also complained that no street gutter clearance is taking place although he felt the Parish Council's Litter Pickers do an excellent job. Mr Barnard (County Councillor) reported that West Sussex County Council distributed 4,000 one-tonne bags of salt for local communities to use in such circumstances. He indicated they have 23 gritters which treat 1600km of roads, sometimes three times a night. It is just not possible to have the number of gritters and snow ploughs necessary to treat all West Sussex roads, bearing in mind they would only be needed for about ten days a year. In respect of the decision to close the school, Mr Barnard indicated this is often made before the gritter has the opportunity to treat the road, pointing out that the local headmaster lives away from Henfield and many schools in West Sussex are in rural areas. In respect of gutter clearance, Mrs Matthews (District Councillor) confirmed this is Horsham District Council's responsibility but there is not sufficient money available to do this on a regular basis, pointing out the principle councils responsible for the Henfield area are having to operate on a very reduced budget, but she hoped that treatment of the gutters will take place in the spring.

Mr David Chesterfield referred to a discussion at last year's meeting about development of the Public Conveniences and Post Office site and asked for an update. The Chairman confirmed there is no indication Henfield will lose its Post Office. Regarding any development, the site is owned by Horsham District Council, whilst the Post Office and surrounding land is privately owned. A number of schemes have been put forward to Horsham District Council and there is existing planning consent in relation to two retail outlets and flats on the toilet site. He indicated when the Post Office went on the market it was felt there may be an opportunity to provide a joint development scheme but this fell through. The Chairman understood there is now interest being shown by developers to create something on the site but this is at a very early stage and he is to meet with Horsham Council later in the week to find out more. He confirmed Henfield Parish Council has made it clear to Horsham Council that it wants to see toilets and shelter facilities provided on the site and, in addition, would welcome the site being developed as an open space for the benefit of the community. He stressed development of the site had not progressed further and in the meantime Henfield Parish Council continues responsibility for maintaining the toilets to ensure they remain open.

Mr Brian Backhurst complained about persons parking on double yellow lines and zigzag markings outside One Stop in Henfield High Street. Sergeant Bob Trevis acknowledged this is a problem. He indicated Police have been issuing £80 fixed penalty tickets and one vehicle was towed away by Police. Regarding the yellow lines he indicated enforcement is now the responsibility of Horsham District Council.

Mrs Deborah Carter pointed out it is three years since Henfield Parish Council was asked to provide allotments and the waiting list now contains some 40 persons. She asked if an approach was made to Charles Church, new owners of the Parsonage Farm development site at the recent exhibition regarding land being made available for allotments. Mr Morgan advised the meeting that every landowner around Henfield had been approached regarding either selling or leasing land to the Council for allotments but these approaches had been without success. He also indicated that Sunleys, the previous owner of the land, and Horsham District Council were approached regarding provision of allotments on this site but without success. He understood Charles Church were approached but felt if any land can be provided it would only accommodate a few allotments.

Mrs Wynn Saunders complained about the sudden closure of the only petrol garage in Henfield. The Chairman indicated that he had spoken to Shell who anticipated the garage would re-open during March or April. He confirmed Henfield Parish Council had been given no real prior warning of the closure. However Council was instrumental involving the Environment Agency and read the following statement issued by Horsham District Council on 17th February 2011:

"The Shell Garage at Golden Square, Henfield, has been closed by Shell due to hydrocarbon contamination encountered during works to replace the petrol interceptor. Shell has instructed its consultant URS to investigate the extent and origin of the contamination. During the middle of February 9 groundwater wells and vapour monitoring wells were installed around the forecourt under supervision of the Environment Agency. Currently the scale and severity of the contamination is not known but wells along the boundaries with adjoining residential properties so far have not shown significant vapour or hydrocarbon ingress. Monitoring is continuing and the site is likely to remain closed for the next few weeks. Due to the potential for groundwater contamination the Environment Agency is leading the investigation. The risk of off-site migration is significant given the shallow depth of the water table. There may be a need for Horsham District Council to become more actively involved if off-site migration is confirmed or the Environment Agency is satisfied that there is a significant risk of harm".

Mrs Pamela Chaston introduced herself as Editor of Henfield Parish Magazine and informed the meeting that readers are enquiring about possible reduction of bus services in Henfield with the withdrawal of bus subsidies. Mr Barnard (County Councillor) reported that bus subsidies are being looked at by a group of Councillors with a view to saving £2m over the next three years. He indicated that some subsidised bus journeys cost over £7 per journey and he understood the most heavily subsidised services are those which will be affected first. During the next financial year the saving to be found is £500,000 but at present he was unable to say whether any local services are under threat. He also indicated this relates to subsidised services, not concessionary services, which the County Council has now taken over responsibility for

Mr Martyn Thomas understood HART was recently unable to respond to two ambulance calls. Mr Richard Nye (Council Works Officer and HART Responder) informed the meeting that a number of Responders are not now available. He indicated that when a 999 call is received by the Ambulance Service, a text message goes to the HART Responder on call, but sometimes the Ambulance Service do not call the HART Responder, or withdraw the request to attend, depending on the nature of the call. Mr Chris Simmonds informed the meeting that HART responded to 65 calls in January which compared with a monthly average of 30 such calls. The Chairman called on members of the public present to consider becoming volunteer responders.

Mrs Backhurst asked if there is any known timescale for the Parsonage Farm development. Mr Ray Osgood (Chairman - Council's Plans Advisory Committee) responded that the archaeological report required by the outline planning consent has now been completed and will go to Horsham District Council. He understands it is proposed to lodge the next step of the planning application in respect of reserved matters in the spring. Horsham District Council will then consult the Parish Council and local residents before making a decision. He indicated Savills, who are representing the developers, Charles Church, indicated at the recent exhibition of the development that, if the planning process goes through without problems, development should start later this year. One resident pointed out that the field has been sown for crop.

Mrs Backhurst also asked if the Library will be affected by the planned County Council budget cuts. Mr Barnard (County Councillor) indicated that all County Council services are being looked at as savings of £79m have to be found over the next three years. He did not know of any plans present that would impact on the Library.

6. Approval of the date for next year's meeting

The date of the next Parish Meeting was approved for Tuesday 6th March 2012.

Mr Chris Simmonds thanked Henfield Parish Council for all the hard work they have done during the last year and this expression of thanks was supported by the meeting.