

# STEEP ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY 2015

**CHAIRMAN:** Mrs. Caroline Robinson

**CLERK:** Mrs. Jenny Hollington

## **DRAFT**

### **MINUTES OF THE STEEP ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY – MONDAY, 18<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015** **AT 7.00 P.M. AT STEEP SCHOOL**

**PRESENT:** Caroline Robinson (in the Chair) Terry Cook Peter Thackrey  
Jim MacDonald Peter Cruttenden Jenny Martin  
Simon Bridger

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Dan Oakley – SDNPA Dark Skies Ranger  
Vaughan Clarke – County Councillor  
Nick Drew – District Councillor  
Jenny Hollington - Clerk

There were approximately 35 members of the public present throughout the meeting

**APOLOGIES:** Nick Hurst

APM15/01 **Minutes of the last Meeting** – The Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2014 were approved as an accurate record and signed accordingly.

APM15/02 **Guest Speaker** – Dan Oakley, the Dark Skies Ranger from SDNPA was welcomed to the meeting to explain about the recently launched project to get International Dark Sky Reserve Status for parts of the South Downs National Park.

Dan explained that the south east is one of the most light-polluted areas in the UK, with street and outdoor lighting affecting dark night skies. Orange sky glow from our towns and cities can be seen for miles around and only a small percent of the region can be called truly dark. In many areas the stars cannot be seen at all due to light pollution, showing that there is a lot of waste energy and making it more difficult for us to view the night sky. Light pollution also causes lots of problems for nocturnal animals affecting their ability to find food and remain undetected by predators.

There are a few pockets of true dark night skies within the National Park and these areas are very important – if they were to disappear it would be very hard to get them back. In areas where dark night skies remain, it is possible to experience stars, comets and planets scattered across the sky. Dan urged members of the audience to start looking up to the night sky – it is there to be enjoyed! Small changes such as ensuring curtains are shut so that light can't spill out can make all the difference.

In order to protect the remaining areas of dark skies, the South Downs National Park is asking Parish Councils and residents to do their bit to control light pollution in their area. Dan explained that reducing light pollution at a domestic level is relatively easy and can be as simple as angling a security light so that it shines straight down, using timers, or just reducing illumination levels to the minimum brightness.

He explained that parish councils are being asked to support the campaign by contacting SDNPA to state that:

- They support the dark skies project
- They will look to reduce light pollution where possible,
- They will include dark sky friendly policies in future Neighbourhood/Parish Plans

The Chairman thanked Dan for the very interesting and informative talk on the dark skies project – we are lucky to live within a beautiful, rural part of the South Downs National Park and there is a lot we can do as individuals and as a Parish Council to take this forward, and the Parish Council would look into this at a forthcoming meeting.

APM15/03 **Chairman's Report** –

Caroline Robinson said that both she and Charles Gibson had decided to retire from the Parish Council this year and that she was delighted to welcome Graeme Fairley and Luke Spurdle who had been elected uncontested in

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their places. She thanked Charles for all his work on behalf of the Parish Council in general over many years but more especially for taking on the Roads & Traffic Working Party during the past year, and doing such a brilliant job in fighting for repairs and improvements to road surfaces and infrastructure.

The Chairman reported that it had been another busy year within the parish and that Steep Parish Council had been well represented at the many meetings, forums, workshops and training sessions required. The Planning Committee (Chaired by Jim MacDonald) continues to meet regularly to discuss and comment on the many planning applications for the parish and Jenny Martin continues to work hard at keeping the footpaths in good condition, sorting out repairs and grants.

The issue of the proposed closure of the Sheet Level Crossing continues to cause concern because of the impact this would have on small local businesses, schools and clubs, as well as the residents of Steep Marsh. It is believed there will be a public exhibition by Network Rail in June and residents are urged to attend and respond to any consultation exercise.

Village events continue to go from strength to strength and ensure community cohesion – the Chairman thanked all those involved on committees and working parties who make the events so successful. Special mention was also made of Drake Hocking (the parish Tree Warden) and Rosemary Lilley (who looks after the War Memorial). Also Ray and Johnny Street, who manage the website. The Parish Council, the Clerk, the District and County Councillors were also thanked for their support – they all work tirelessly on behalf of the parish.

In response, Caroline was thanked for all her hard work over the past 5 years as Chairman and before that as a Parish Councillor and presented with a plant for her garden.

### APM15/04 **County Councillor's Report**

County Councillor, Vaughan Clarke, reported that for the 6<sup>th</sup> year running there is to be no increase in the County Council's share of the Council Tax. The government grant to the County Council continues to be reduced which has meant another round of job cuts, albeit at a lower level than in the past. The County has a policy of selling its services to other authorities and public bodies and this helps to keep the workforce more stable.

After the serious damage to Hampshire's roads last winter, caused by the large amount of water, some extra £30m was spent on major repairs and also on filling some 50,000 potholes and more roads will be dealt with in the next financial year. It is an ongoing problem.

New street lights were installed in this area of Hampshire this year, and because they direct the light downwards, the amount of light pollution has been greatly reduced.

The Boundary Commission are looking at Hampshire and will be redrawing the boundaries between divisions. The Petersfield Hangers Division is likely to be increased in size by about 1200 voters for the election in 2017.

Superfast Broadband continues to be a concern, especially in rural areas. In the last few months connection boxes have been erected in parts of Petersfield, Liss and Greatham. 90% of Hampshire's residents should be connected by the end of 2015.

Unemployment in the area is low with a figure of between 0.2% and 1.5% for much of the year – very much below the average for the UK.

### APM15/05 **District Councillor's Report**

District Councillor, Nick Drew, thanked all those who had voted for him and promised to continue to work hard to deliver progress across the Ward. One issue that had cropped up during canvassing was that residents felt they hit a brick wall when trying to raise issues with EHDC officers. Cllr. Drew urged anyone experiencing such problems to get in touch with him (details available from EHDC website).

Issues affecting Steep which are engaging Cllr. Drew's interest include the proposed closure of Sheet Level Crossing, the potential extension of Farnborough Airport and the backlog of litter on the roadsides, caused by the recent changes to regulations (EHDC have now put on extra teams to try to clear this at night and are working out how to deal with the new regulations).

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Cllr. Drew is now the portfolio holder for Economic Development and, as such, is keen to ensure that jobs are available to support people to live in this lovely area.

Cllr. Drew reminded everyone that Cabinet Grants and District Councillor grants are available from EHDC and concluded by thanking Steep Parish Councillors for their support and said he looked forward to working with them in the year to come.

### APM15/06 **Finance Report**

The Clerk gave a brief overview of the Parish Council accounts and reported that there had been a total income of £17,277.62, comprising the precept (£14,000), District Councillor Grant (£300) and County Councillor Grant (£500) towards the bench on Steep Common, Small Grant Scheme Funding of £356 and receipt of developers contribution in the sum of £2120.00 towards Footpath 20).

Payments through the year totalled £15,665 and included grants of £600 towards the Village Newsletter and £250 towards Churchyard maintenance, employee costs of £6319.43, admin costs of £1266.68 (insurance, training, website, audits, etc.). £1658 had been spent on Steep Common (annual inspection and repairs to play equipment, tree work, etc), and there were miscellaneous costs of £508. Allotment income totalling £1807 was transferred to the Steep in Need Charity.

Looking forward, the precept will remain at £14,000 and the Parish Council will endeavour to utilise remaining developer contributions held at EHDC.

As always, the complete accounts are available for parishioners to inspect if required.

### APM15/07 **Public Forum** – There were no issues arising (not already covered by this Agenda, or the Agenda for the AGM) and because of the tight timescales, the meeting was brought to a close.

Members of the public were invited to stay for refreshments before the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council.

The meeting closed at 8.04 p.m.