

**LAMBERHURST ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
Minutes of the Meeting held 18th April 2017**

Present:

The Vice- Chairman, Lamberhurst Parish Council, John Uren (JU)

Chris Hamilton (LPC Minutes Secretary)

Mr Jim Boot, Community Planner, Associate with Action for Communities in Rural Kent

Ms Claire Tester, Planning Advisor, High Weald AONB Unit.

40 members of the public (including parish councillors and the parish clerk)

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Vice-Chairman welcomed all those in attendance to the meeting. He explained that the LPC chairman, Denis Cruse, was unable to attend for personal reasons and read the Chairman's report, in his absence.

2. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This is attached as Appendix 1.

3. INVITATION TO COUNTY/BOROUGH COUNCILLORS/ LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES TO SPEAK OR GIVE REPORTS

Borough Councillors

JU explained that EH was currently engaged on Her Majesty's Service as a territorial Army reservist.

Speedwatch

Sam Nicholas reported that a Lamberhurst Community Speedwatch group was now formed. Locations for operation had been identified and some training had been given. More volunteers were welcome. Anyone interested should let her know.

4. OPEN DISCUSSION

DHB replied to a question about the application for erection of eco-lodges at Bewl Water. He explained that Lamberhurst had been allowed to comment despite the fact that Bewl Water was not technically in the parish and had made a robust objection, as had Ticehurst and Wadhurst. Between 50 and 60 letters had been received in relation to the application, only one of which had been supportive. There was no indication of a timetable for the work. Asked what the main objections were, DHB replied that this was an AONB, an area for bird watching, sailing and fishing, where it was quiet and there was no light pollution. There was not a strong enough case being made to proceed with such a project in such an environment. There were fears that the long - term outcome might be a "Center Parcs" type development.

5. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

JU introduced Jim Boot, Community Planner, Associate with Action for Communities in Rural Kent, who would run this part of the meeting. He explained that the Neighbourhood Plan was in essence a document created by local people that set out the preferred planning policy for the given area. It aimed to help protect the things a community cared about, such as important local green spaces, as well as make improvements to the local area. For example, it could show where buildings could and could not be built, what they should look like, and what they could be used for. It could also help to encourage the kind of development that a community would like to see more of. A neighbourhood plan would inform the borough council's local plan. A neighbourhood plan carries the same legal weight as plans drawn up by the local council, and gives the community a powerful voice that must be listened to when decisions are made about development in the area. For example, the local council must consider what is in the neighbourhood plan when making decisions about planning applications and developers or landowners must follow it if they want to obtain planning permission.

He explained the various stages of the process of creation of a neighbourhood plan from the launch through to the final document. He gave some examples from other villages such as Wye and showed some basic data relating to Lamberhurst which might inform such a plan.

JB compared the neighbourhood plan with previous models of parish plan e.g. village appraisals and showed where they overlapped and how they differed.

The aim of this launch event was to seek agreement from residents to develop a neighbourhood plan. As with TWBC's local plan, this could influence development until 2033.

He then introduced Claire Tester, Planning Advisor of the High Weald AONB Unit. The Partnership works with other bodies interested in rural areas with a duty to implement section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs when making decisions that affect the designated area). She explained that the High Weald Partnership has an advice note, giving guidance on the legislative background and where to find information. The advice was based on their Management Plan which was updated yearly. She explained that the five key components of "Natural Beauty" were geology, settlement, routeways, woodland and field and heath. HWP had pulled together all evidence in maps for each parish. These were available on their website. They could help in the planning process, for example by advising on sites for development or for local green space or advising on policy wording.

These presentations were followed by an activity in which the public were asked to identify something that was good about the village, something they would like to change and a dream they had for it. After an interval for refreshments JB analysed the results of this activity, where the rural nature of the community and the community spirit were identified by many as good features. Common threads for change or dreams were the local shop and businesses, public transport and the mobile phone and broadband signals.

There followed a question and answer session. Questions are here shown in bold and italicised.

What is possible to address in a neighbourhood plan and what is not?

JB explained that some things fitted better into the neighbourhood plan model than others. Broadband speeds, for example, might be more easily addressed by lobbying BT etc. He reported that some neighbourhoods were putting together a more holistic

plan and developing the neighbourhood plan from specific needs that were identified within this.

What are the timescales for the development of a neighbourhood plan?

To produce a neighbourhood plan takes between 18 months and 30 months (similarly so the local plan of the borough council) A 10 - 15 year plan period is typical. However there was a great deal of uncertainty. Housing development, for example, depended on sites coming forward for development and the Housing White Paper would commit local authorities to reviewing their plans every 5 years. The neighbourhood plan would perhaps need to do the same.

Can you give us a flavour of what the 2033 Local Plan involves?

There was an expected population growth of 16% in the borough by 2033 (20,000 people) The plan was to build 650 homes per year across the whole borough (twice the current rate).

To what degree is this driven by the private sector as opposed to the public sector?

Developers put forward sites – they are not imposed upon them – but they can sit on their plans such that nothing materialises. With the demand for social housing it is possible to do a housing needs survey to identify demand and approach landowners to ask if they would consider selling small plots at below market price. Sites can thus be allocated and a trust set up for affordable housing.

What is the danger of not having a neighbourhood plan?

It reduces ones influence. Without one it is only possible to respond or react. With one in place one can have some say in shaping the future.

The neighbourhood plan does not stop other planning applications from going ahead

The neighbourhood plan has to be borne in mind. It gives the parish the chance to be proactive rather than reactive, to give a “Lamberhurst” flavour to development, using preferred designs and materials for example.

As the only village with no plan, would we be “easy pickings”?

60% of areas have now begun the process.

What is protected in the parish at the moment? It is important to understand where we are before deciding what we want.

The clerk indicated maps on display and explained that all this information was readily available.

JB added that it was possible to reach the end of the process and still decide that the neighbourhood plan did not really provide the answer.

What are the risks of doing a neighbourhood plan?

Wasting money. Increased expectations that the plan would solve everything. There might still be development that the parish did not want. There was a legal requirement that the plan should be considered but it could still be taken into account yet ultimately ignored. (It might prove impossible to identify land sites or show a housing supply)

Can one get started and go in whichever direction one pleases?

Yes – and the grant would not need to be paid back. Make sure that you have a good number of volunteers from the outset (at least 20)

At the close of the Q and A session a show of hands showed a majority in favour of pursuing a neighbourhood plan. JU asked that completed forms be dropped off at the village store or at the Elephant’s Head. LPC would discuss this at the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.40pm

APPENDIX 1

Chairman's Report for 2016-2017 **for the Annual Parish Meeting 18th April 2017**

In May last year the election for Parish Councillors was unopposed, and returned were eight who had served up to that time – namely John Uren, Clive Stott, Rolf Smith, David Hurst-Brown, John Francis, Denis Cruse, Steve Cannella and Bernard Bryant. One, Ian Mepham, stood down and we must record our thanks to him for all his work on behalf of the community, especially for the residents at Hook Green. In his place Sam Nicholas has become a councillor and we welcome her most heartily. Barbara Uren has been an efficient Clerk and Chris Hepher likewise as Minutes Secretary – she also keeps our information on the parish website updated. Our Borough Councillor Edmund Hastie, our County Councillor, Alex King and our MP Greg Clark have continued to support the Parish. Edmund is a member of the Territorial Reserve and is currently on Her Majesties Service and we wish him well. Alex King stands down in May – he has been our County Councillor for many years and has been a great supporter of the parish throughout, allocating his time and his budget in generous measures to the concerns of the Council, especially with the bypass and subsequent work and the rebuilding and then the extension to the primary school. The Parish's views are represented at regular meetings of the TW Parish Chairmen at the Town Hall, and the local section of the Kent Association of Local Councils: your Chairman tries to attend as many of these as possible. Cllrs and the Clerk also try to make reasoned responses, as far as their areas of expertise permit, to a plethora of consultations, often running to tens of pages, from TWBC or KCC.

The responsibilities for Common Land and allotments continue to take up much of the Clerk's time, duties she performs with admirable efficiency. The Council has sought advice about the best way to manage much of the wooded areas of Common Land to maintain its character and biodiversity and this work continues. There are some allotments vacant should any parishioner want one. Dog fouling and the lack of responsibility of some owners to clear the deposits has been highlighted by some parishioners, and some organised a clearing up of dog-poo bags which have been left in various places. There is an erroneous belief that because they are described as biodegradable they will decompose if left hanging in bushes or trees. They need to be placed in a litter bin and they will then degrade in landfill.

Road safety in the parish has continued to give concerns, and your Council has supported requests for some review of traffic calming and for speed checks at certain locations. An interactive sign has been supplied on School Hill and should be operational soon. Representations have been made to Kent Highways and Greg Clark concerning traffic speeds through Hook Green and a meeting is awaited. Following the Council's liaison with Kent Highways and Education departments and the primary school governors, and with the support of Alex King, a part of Spray Hill has had a footway installed, improving access to the school from Spray Hill. Your Council had a meeting with the management of Scotney Castle concerning parking on busy days and learned of their plans to increase capacity on site.

Your council has made comments on planning applications, giving local information which the officers at the Town Hall might not be aware of, making constructive suggestions where appropriate but recommending refusal of inappropriate proposals. Proposed developments at

Bewl Water, although outside the parish boundary, would affect some parishioners and councillors have been keeping a watch on the plans.

Your Council continues to work with the WMH managers for the upkeep and improvements of this important memorial to parishioners of earlier generations. A grant was made to assist the formation of the Community Cinema, and this venture has now taken off successfully. A flagpole has been affixed to the front of the hall. The re-alignment of the Christmas lights on the village green met with general approval and it is expected that these will give Christmas cheer for several years to come.

Following the discussion at last year's APM and the support expressed, the Council has continued to work with TWBC about the Civic Amenity vehicle. The outcome is that it will be retained with part-funded from the parishes, but The revised collections by the Civic Amenity vehicle – alternating fortnightly between compostable waste and residual waste – has been successful for both parish users and TWBC whose recycling rates have been increased.

Council Meetings are on the second Tuesday of alternate months, starting in January, and these are public occasions to which any Parishioner can come. At each there is a 15 minute session from 7.30p.m. for questions, suggestions and comments to be brought to the Council. Please do come along to PC meetings and give us feed-back – all are welcome to see how we conduct business in your name! Thank you for your support.