

# HARPSDEN PARISH COUNCIL

## Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at Harpsden Village Hall

on

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017

Present: Cllr Kester George (KG) - Chairman  
Cllr Malcolm Plews (MP)  
Cllr Catherine Rubinstein (CR)  
Cllr Tony Wright (TW)  
Cllr Paul Harrison (PH) - SODC Councillor  
Cllr David Bartholomew (DB) – OCC Councillor

Residents: About 21

John Hodges Trust for Harpsden Hall Richard Wilson (RW), Rod Birkett (RB), Jonathan May

In attendance: Mrs Sarah Tipple (ST) - Harpsden Parish Clerk

1. **Welcomes:** KG welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** The minutes of the APM held on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2016 were signed as a correct record.
3.
  - i. **Financial Report:** The financial report for the last year was available for everyone to examine. The report was proposed by TW and seconded by CR. It is attached to these minutes at Appendix 1.
  - ii. **Chairman's Report:** KG gave his annual report, in which:
    - He maintained that the joint Henley/Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan (NP) was still the Council's best line of defence against unwanted housing developments.
    - He encouraged parishioners to respond to the consultation on SODC's new local plan, which outlined sites in the District for yet more new houses and employment.
    - He made reference to the appeal by the owners of Thames Farm against the refusal of large-scale development at the site which would be heard in June. With regards to the ongoing problems along Gillotts Lane, KG explained that he was fully supportive of Odette Moss's concerns which she had expressed in a letter to the Henley Standard. David Chenery, another Gillotts Lane resident, wanted improvements made which included hard kerbing along both sides and a full upgrade of the lane's substructure. DB explained that despite OCC's obligation to maintain highways, there was insufficient money from central government to afford the £160m required to bring all the county's roads up to standard and the £20m per year thereafter to maintain them. He suggested lobbying the local MP, John Howell, for greater focus on rural roads. A full text of KG's report is attached to these minutes at Appendix 2. KG then introduced Richard Wilson, Chairman of the John Hodges Trust for Harpsden Hall, who would report on the Trust and its recent activities.
4. **John Hodges Trust for Harpsden Hall**  
RW gave an interesting and comprehensive insight into the Trust's background and recent activities and the main points covered were as follows:
  - The Trustee board consisted of Rod Birkett, Kester George, Jackie Harris, Jonathan May, Clive Rose, Rev'd Robert Thewsey and himself as Chairman. Sarah Tipple was the Clerk.

- John Hodges (1849 - 1924), a wealthy bachelor whose family were the last to own most of Harpsden as their private estate, left property and money in a Trust to benefit the local community. He was keen to ensure the people of the parish were well looked after, that there were activities on offer that provided a counter-attraction to drinking in public houses and he encouraged team sports wherever possible.
- The objectives of the Trust were the provision and maintenance of a hall and playing fields for use by local inhabitants, and the relief of financial hardship for those living in the parish and its surrounding neighbourhood.
- Users of the hall and the sports facilities encompassed all age groups from pre-schoolers to the elderly, including Harpsden Pre-School, children's dance groups, adult Zumba and Pilates classes, the Henley Players, the Royal British Legion, the Women's Institute, AFC Henley and Harpsden Cricket Club.
- RB explained that the Cricket Club had moved to its current location in 1907 and had enjoyed club cricket until 2014, whereupon it had joined the Marrant Chilterns Cricket League, fielding two teams in the 2016 season without losing a match. The firsts were currently playing in the first division and the seconds in the third. Major projects to relocate the cricket square and to refurbish the pavilion had been overseen by Charlie Stevens and Joanna Cary respectively, both local residents. Financing for both had come from several sources which included Sport England, OCC, individual donations and a donation from the Trust. The ground was often used by juniors, thereby fulfilling one of the main wishes of John Hodges. The ground was in excellent condition and the Club was looking forward to another successful season.
- RW explained that the football field had been leased to Newtown Football Club in the past and was currently leased to AFC Henley. The extension of their lease in 2015 had enabled AFC to obtain significant funding from the Football Association to carry out huge improvements to the pavilion. The football field was available for local residents to use when it was not being used by AFC Henley or when maintenance was required, and the field adjacent to the hall could be used by local residents unless the hall was being hired out to either its regular or ad-hoc users.
- There had been increased emphasis recently on donating to Good Causes and the Trust had been able to make donations to, amongst others, the Pre-School, Riverside Counselling in Henley, the YMCA, a local Scout group, a local Parish Nurse, the Harpsden Fete and Singing for Fun therapy sessions at a local nursing home. If anyone came across other local causes the Good Causes committee would be delighted to consider them.
- Regarding the Trust's property portfolio, the project to build a caretaker's flat above the meeting room was nearing completion. A project to refurbish or redevelop no 2 Hall Cottages, owned by the Trust, with the possibility of offering accommodation at the more affordable end of the spectrum for locals would be underway soon, following the death last year of the Trust's very long-term tenant, Dennis Piggott. The Trust's other property, no 1 Hall Cottages continued to be occupied by Marcus Hooker, the hall's caretaker.
- The Trustees were always keen to coopt new members. Trustees with legal and marketing backgrounds or expertise would be a welcome addition to the Trustees' current skill set.
- Answering a few questions from the floor, RW explained that the Finance Committee of the Trust maintained a detailed cash flow forecast going forward several years which enabled shrewd financial planning while good investment management had enabled the Trust to grow its endowment. The beneficiaries of the Good Causes fund encompassed residents and groups both in the village and the surrounding neighbourhood. A twice yearly newsletter informing residents of the Trust's activities would be well received, and Sue Wright, editor of the Parish Magazine, would be delighted to include an article about the Trust in the next edition. KG explained that the Parish Council was the first tier of local government and was quite separate from the John Hodges Trust and the Harpsden Parochial Church Council, whose concern was running the Church.

**5. Thames Farm:**

Cllr Tony Wright then gave a brief history of the planning applications at Thames Farm. Recent applications had included 110 homes, 95 homes and the conversion of the barn into four dwellings. The 110 home application had been turned down at appeal, but this decision had been overturned on a technicality. The applicant had just decided not to appeal again against the 110 home decision, but the appeal for the 95 homes application would be heard in Henley from 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> June. TW urged residents to comment on the appeal before the deadline of 11<sup>th</sup> April. The Parish Council website [www.harpsdenparishcouncil.org.uk](http://www.harpsdenparishcouncil.org.uk) contained links to the Parish Council's own response and that of its neighbour, Shiplake Parish Council. The main areas of concern were highways safety, the urbanisation of the rural area and the lack of sustainability of the site. TW's full presentation is attached at Appendix 3.

**6. Open Forum for Other Issues**

- i. Lucy's Farm vs Thames Farm:** As neither had received an allocation in the NP, KG and the Council would strongly oppose development at both sites.
- ii. Gillotts Lane:** KG had met SODC very recently and had been reassured that restrictions on Gillotts Lane would be in place before any work started at Highlands Farm.

KG closed the meeting at 8.30pm.