

# HARPSDEN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at Harpsden Village Hall

on

Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019

Present: Cllr Kester George (KG) - Chairman  
Cllr Hilary Andrews (HA)  
Cllr Sara Louise Langton (SL)  
Cllr David Bartholomew (PH) - SODC & OCC Councillor  
Cllr Leigh Rawlins (LR) SODC Councillor

Residents: About 25

In attendance: Anne Marie Scanlon (AMS) - Harpsden Parish Clerk  
Alex Hershaw – Wyevale

1. **Welcomes:** KG welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **Apologies Cllr** Catherine Rubinstein (CR) Cllr Matthew Phillips (MP) & Susie Pragnell (Parishioner)
3. **Approval of Minutes:** The minutes of the APM held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2018 were signed as a correct record.
4.
  - i. **Financial Report:** The financial report for the last year was available for everyone to examine and is attached to these minutes at Appendix 1.
  - ii. **Chairman's Report:** KG gave his annual report, the text of which follows:  
"This year we have had to face the fact that the Planning System framed by Central Government but exacerbated by the County and the District Council has left Harpsden squeezed between two housing estates out of character with our rural tradition: Highlands Park, to the North, overhangs Gillotts Lane, while Thames Farm to the South threatens to engulf Woodlands Road.  
Both these developments diminish life in Harpsden and your Parish Council is doing all it can to mitigate the damage. Naturally, as Highlands Farm is two years ahead of Thames Farm, the first step is to get traffic calming measures agreed and installed on Gillotts Lane, an aim that has come up against the shortage of staff and money at OCC Highways. We have however had marvellous support within the Lane community co-ordinated by Henry Gummer, and indispensable help from our County Councillor, David Bartholomew. As a result, we should have measures in place by next year's APM, albeit with our paying the initial bill with our CIL money.  
Thames Farm is a different sort of threat. Although initially roughly a third the size of Highlands Park, developers are looking to expand it and most, if not all householders on Woodlands Road have received conditional offers for their houses and gardens. Your Parish Council 's provisional reaction is to confine the estate as far as possible, always bearing in mind that there will be some need for exceptions. To begin with, I suspect the main impact of Thames Farm will be on the A4155 into Henley, with more congestion at the foot of Harpsden Road by the Three Horse Shoes, an impact that will, I fear, be worsened by the development of Wyevale further on along the road towards Henley, about which we will shortly hear more from Alex Hershaw.  
Before we do so, I should like to mention one resounding success on the planning front, namely Little Hill Cottage, or as the would-be developer now, prefers, Holly Tree House. There, with the support of his closest neighbours and the Parish Council, the developer won permission to rebuild one house, but proceeded to build two and a half without permission and in defiance of all he had said to his neighbours and your Council. Naturally we all reacted badly and SODC took him to a Planning

Tribunal where he acknowledged his wrong-doing by agreeing to revert to his original permission. My thanks and yours are due to the neighbours who financed a supporting legal defence to which your Council agreed to contribute.

Finally, we have had a change of personnel: Thames Farm was too much for my Deputy, Tony Wright, whose interventions on the traffic arguments against the development, should, in my view, have been decisive; and Sarah Tipple, our Clerk for six years, who now adorns the Surgery at Benson. In their place we have Sara Langton, whose mother sat on the PC before her, and Anne Marie Scanlon, who is making her home in Highlands Park and will keep us informed about life there.

I will take questions on this report after Alex has had his say. Just let me make it clear that he is here to assure us that he will do all he can to make Wyevale a positive addition to Harpsden and the area around us.”

## **5. Open Forum for Other Issues**

**i. Gillotts Lane:** Odette Moss (OM) queried why work had not been carried out on Gillotts Lane since the last APM and why the speed limit outside of the school was not 20 mph. Cllr David Bartholomew (DB) said that while it would not be practical for the police to enforce a 20 mph speed limit, measures to curb speeding were in the proposals for the repairs to Gillotts Lane. He added that both he and the Chairman had put a lot of effort into trying to get the Gillotts Lane repairs done and both were frustrated with the lack of progress.

KG deplored the fact that the building on Highland Farm had been allowed to start before road works to mitigate the effect of the extra traffic had been done on Gillotts Lane which remained the top priority for use of CIL monies. KG informed the meeting that the development at Highland Park would now be 182 dwellings as opposed to the original number of 170, the plans being for more 2-3 bedroom houses and fewer 4-5 bedrooms. The slower pace of building should give the Highways Department time to catch up with the road works.

David Chenery (DC) said that his SatNav device showed the speed limit on Gillotts Lane as 60 mph when in reality it was 30 mph. DB replied that the Council had no control over this and that the individual companies that do mapping and software were responsible.

DC also asked whether the Council had any information on what would happen to Treetops, the house on Gillotts Lane which had caught fire earlier in the year, but KG said that he had no further information.

**ii. Thames Farm:** KG asked the meeting if any of the attendees had views about the proposed building within Thames Farm and also the prospect of developers wanting to build around the boundary of the original site. KG said that the Council knew of at least one resident who was willing to have a development on their land. He stated that developments needed to stop somewhere and the view of the Council was that the place to stop was where the original permission stopped so the Council would seek to restrain developments outside the Thames Farm boundaries.

**iii. Joint Henley Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan:** OM asked for an update on the Neighbourhood Plan (NP). KG replied that the NP had been in abeyance due to the wait for SODC's Local Plan into which the NP had to fit, a delay that would be extended by the need for adjustment after the local elections. HPC thought it was in the best interests of Harpsden to remain with Henley. KG said that it was understood that there would be no more building in Harpsden since the parish had done more than its share by contributing to housing at Highlands Park, Thames Farm and Wyevale. HPC had had difficulty in objecting to the proposed development in Wyevale due to the brown field designation attached to the site and Henley Town Council's support for the development.

Damon Bryant (DBY) asked KG his opinion of the proposed development at Wyevale. KG said that he would have preferred the site to have been left as a green field and had argued for that.

- iv. Policing:** OM asked if Harpsden had a police officer. LR had replied that the area no longer had a police officer or even a Community Support Officer.
- v. Fly tipping:** Fly tipping had been a problem on Sheephouse Lane and several residents wondered what could be done to stop it. KG said that in the first place SODC could be asked to clear any rubbish and the Clerk could arrange this with the Environmental Department. In the longer term the PC hoped to get the Lane made more of a clear way. It was the third priority for the CIL monies (after Gillotts Lane and the Valley Road) and HPC hoped that improvements would discourage fly tipping.
- vi. Alex Hershem presenting proposed plans for Wyevale**

KG introduced Alex Hershman (AH)

AH introduced himself as a member of the family who owned the land of the former Wyevale Garden Centre. He said they had received planning permission to build up to forty residential and some commercial units on the site. AH had said that the site was derelict and an eyesore. He said that his reason for attending the APM was to meet the Harpsden community, to hear what locals had to say and try to alleviate any concerns. AH also said that he would be happy to answer questions via email.

DBY asked at what stage in the process the Hershman family were at. AH had answered that they were in the process of completing a legal agreement with SODC and were clarifying things like open spaces, affordable housing, confirming exits and entryways. AH had said that he expected the Section 106 negotiations would be completed in the coming weeks and the family would then go through the process of community engagement. He expected development to start early next year. DBY liked the plans and thought they would be good for the area.

AH said that his family had previously renovated a Grade I listed building (Fawley Court) which had been a "labour of love" for the previous ten years. KG hoped the house would be open to the public at some point as the renovation work was well worth seeing.

SL asked AH if there would be commercial properties on the Wyevale site. AH had replied that the site had originally been designated for commercial use, but that apart from Bremont, who had eventually decided against the site, there had been no other commercial interest. AH had said that the family had done six years of marketing the site as a commercial one for use within the B1, B2 and D1 categories and there had been no demand. In answer to a question from the floor he said that the family had not really explored the idea of the commercial units being occupied by restaurants and/or shops. He had said that a veterinary practice had shown interest in one of the proposed commercial units. AH had added that car usage would be increased had the entire site been commercial and that any potential commercial tenants would be those that respected the locality and character of the area. Adam Architecture would be in charge of designing the development. He said that their niche was building in a way that was in line with local towns and communities and that they were good at making things look historic while being modern and environmentally friendly. The development would

comprise 40 units, in 30 buildings across five acres. The average home would be 1100 – 1200 square feet, homes that people could downsize to, or, for young families. Sixteen of the homes would be Affordable Housing. These homes would not be sold by the Hershams but by a registered provider such as SOHA. LR explained that Affordable Housing was Social Housing which would be let for up to 80% of the local market value. Some of the proposed Affordable Housing would be Shared Ownership. AH said that Shared Ownership would be a good way for people to get onto the 'Housing Ladder' because tenants could purchase a small part of the dwelling and increase their stake as and when they could.

Mary Turner (MT) Asked if there would be any benefit to the community other than the proposed green space at the heart of the development plans. AH said that his family would also invest in speed calming measures and they were committed to rebuilding the two bus stops on either side of the Reading Road just outside Wyevale.

KG questioned whether there would be a road crossing. AH had said that OCC Highways had approved the plans for the development in principle. He said that the family were committed to spending money on road signage, changing the surface texture of the road and other speed calming measures, and that the residents would be able to exit the development at the Bridle Path and cross the Reading Road at that point. They were against a Zebra Crossing on the Reading Road as it would urbanise the area. AH said that the family had committed funds for resurfacing the footpath with the permission of OCC and that the footpath would need to have an all-weather surface and proper drainage.

KG said that the entrance to the site wasn't particularly safe and asked AH whether he saw a case for a substantial safety measure such as a roundabout at the foot of Woodlands Road. AH stated that he did not think there was a safety problem but would be open to discussing the matter further. KG observed that AH had previously stated that he would like a roundabout at the entrance to Wyevale. AH replied that he would "have loved to have done that," but that one of the trees was protected. KG had said that it was farcical that one tree should prevent a safety measure when another two trees could be planted in its place. AH said that the family planned on planting many trees. SL asked AH where the proposed roundabout would have gone and he said that it would have been right outside the entrance.

OM added that speed on the Reading Road was a problem. AH said that the change in speed limit from 30 mph to 50 mph occurred fifty feet north of the site and the Hershams had an agreement to move it another fifty feet. MT thought that it was extraordinary that any developments had been allowed along the Reading Road which she considered a 'death-trap'. KG agreed and said that he had reminded Henley Town Council that more traffic on Reading Road would add to traffic congestion in Duke Street and increase the already high level of pollution in the air. The traffic system in Henley had failed and the only possible mitigation was to stop building in and around the town. SODC should put the case to central planners that Henley be allowed opt out of more development. KG said that the traffic consultants hired for the NP had said that Henley had more difficulty with traffic than any other town they had dealt with. There was no feasible way to ensure traffic flow through Henley.

OM said that it would have been better if a new town had been built. KG said that the road network in Oxfordshire would not be able to cope with any new town without massive investment in the roads. OM asked if Henley Town Council were having another traffic survey. KG the original consultants, Peter Brett of Reading, would be returning to update their figures.

MT said that there was nothing to be done and that 'Road Rage' would increase with the traffic. LR said there had been a lot of discussion about the Oxford Cambridge Expressway and Government Ministers were glibly talking about building a million new houses along that route. He also said that development "zealots" were speaking about the "Golden Triangle" (between elite London universities, Oxford and Cambridge) and saw it as a place to build. LR said that the difficulty that faced South Oxfordshire was trying to get a sensible plan in place and putting the focus on the things that needed to be addressed.

LR made the point that the 2014 Strategic Market Assessment said that housing should be 4+ bedrooms that his research showed that since the 2011 census extensions to existing properties was equal to the amount of housing needed. He said that if developments focused on one to three bedroom units plus Affordable Housing and Shared Ownership that would get to the root of the housing problem. LR expressed surprise that Planners did not keep statistics on extensions and their impact on housing stock in the district. He agreed with a statement from the floor that the need was for 'Starter Homes' rather than larger dwellings but this was impeded by the high value of building land. LR added that this was not something that would be solved locally and needed to be addressed at a national level.

KG said that people would applaud LR's concentrating on smaller houses.

With no further questions from the floor KG called the meeting to a close at 8.30pm and thanked everyone for attending.