** Draft MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting at Washington Village Hall on Friday 10th March 2023**

**Present:** Parish Cllrs S Buddell (SB), P Heeley (Chairman), T Keech (TK), A Lisher (AL), J Luckin (JL) and

J Thomas (JT)

**In attendance:** Cllr Paul Marshall (WSCC) (PL), Cllr Joan Grech (HDC) and Andrew Griffith MP (AG)

**Members of the Public**: 30 approx.

**Guest speakers**: Helen Twine (Washington Village Memorial Hall Trust) and Joel Beasley (PCSO)

**Also:** Clerk to the Council (Locum - G Burt)

**Apologies**: Cllrs Brendan Hanvey, James Wright (HDC) and Ray Dawe (HDC)

The Chairman opened the meeting at 7.30pm.

1. **Introduction and welcome**

Chairman of the Council, Cllr Patrick Heeley, welcomed everyone to the meeting, commenting that this was the first Parish Meeting in 4 years! It was a community meeting, the Parish Council merely hosted it. It was an opportunity to hear from County and District Councillors, the MP, Police and Village Hall Cttee. He confirmed housekeeping arrangements and that wine etc would be served afterwards.

1. **Chairman’s report and overview of the Parish Council’s main activities and achievements over the past period. Update on key planning local issues including Rampion 2 & Rock Common Quarry**

The Chairman reported that the Council had 11 members covering the two wards: Heath Common 6 and Washington 5. All Parish Councillors present introduced themselves incl. the Vice Chairman, Cllr S Buddell who was also on the platform. It was non-party political. They championed the parish’s cause to other statutory bodies such as the County and District Councils, plus the SDNPA. There were currently 4 vacancies on the Council so if anyone was interested in joining, please contact the Clerk or any Cllr.

The Council spent much time scrutinising planning applications affecting the parish. The new water neutrality demand from Natural England meant that developers had to demonstrate that new developments did not lead to an overall increase in water consumption. This had led to a reduction in the number of planning applications coming forward. HDC was still working on its new Local Plan.

Several big applications were currently occupying much of the Council’s time:

The Council is supportive of green energy to be generated by the **Rampion 2** offshore wind farm, but not Route B through the village once it comes ashore at Clymping. This was not the original, more preferable, Route A which seems to have been dropped. The developer’s route will add more traffic to the village via 3 entrances/exits to their proposed compound.

Quarrying at **Rock Common** has now finished. Wiston Park wants to develop an Eco Park with accommodation on the site. There will be some infill with inert material. Again lots of new traffic on the parish’s roads.

At **Clayton Kennels,** an application for a 60-bed carewhich had gone against the Neighbourhood Plan, was rejected by HDC.

The Chairman said that cumulatively, all these proposals would have added a tremendous amount of traffic to the parish. Washington Roundabout on the A24 was already operating beyond capacity. A Speed Indicator Device (SID) or equivalent had been approved for Rock Road following a traffic survey.

The Council funds dog waste and grit bins, bus shelters, Litter Warden, Vera’s Shelter & Garden, and supports the Recreation Ground Charity.

For the last 9-10 years, the Council’s precept had remained the same at £38.22 for a typical Band D property; no increase was planned for 23-24. The current budget was £45k and had good reserves. All the accounts would be on the website in June.

The Council receives 25% CIL from all new developments; the Vineyards development had generated lots of CIL and smaller sites had also contributed CIL.

The Council engages with the community via pages in the Sussex Local magazine every 3 months, 5 noticeboards and website. All are welcome to attend monthly Council meetings plus Cttee meetings in between.

1. **Guest Speaker: Andrew Griffith MP** (AG)

The MP thanked the Chairman for the kind invitation to attend, and paid tribute to Parish Councillors who do so much unpaid work for their communities.

He said the issues of Washington were common to most of the parishes in the constituency, ¾ of which was in the SDNP. His 5 priorities were:

1. Sustainable Development - Balancing protecting the environment v needs of people. He hoped the current Planning Reform Bill would reinforce this for the better.
2. Access to Healthcare – Clearly a priority for his constituents.
3. Rural Policing
4. Local Economy - Fast Broadband and supporting High Streets.
5. Safer & Better Roads – for cyclists and pedestrians. Speeding, congestion and heavy lorries were ongoing problems. He was tired of having conversations about accidents after a tragedy.

Many were coming to Sussex to often misuse attractive off-road routes such as the Downs Way.

He said he wanted planning policy to be community-led, and feared the constant top down approach, where local views (citing the Longbury Hill petition) were often overridden by government or inspectors put people off getting involved locally, such as standing as parish councillors, as they think their views don’t count.

As an MP he can get involved in large scale planning applications, or where there has been a failure of process. He hoped that the Planning Reform Bill will reinforce Neighbourhood Plans (NP) and lower national house building targets. He wants to see greater voice given to planning authorities and NPs. NPs will be in force for longer under the new proposals and also the *Duty to Cooperate* will be abolished. He is hopeful that Local Design Codes will end new houses looking the same across the country. He wants brownfield sites to be used before greenfield sites.

On the Rampion 2 scheme, he said he felt the behaviour of the developer was shocking. They thought that permission was a given, as they had not listened to local views. Whilst he recognised that engineers always veered towards resilience, this came at a high environmental price. He was against Route B as were many other parishes in his constituency; Washington was to be the most affected parish.

He was honoured to represent the constituency and then invited questions:

A resident said the Parish Council had spent many hours and resources fighting Rampion. The easements would be very wide, meaning little could be done over or either side of it. Locals had been ignored – lip service. What more could be done?

AG responded that he had no power to stop it. Rampion 1 was still a scar on the landscape. We need to get ready for when the formal consultation takes place which will be determined by an independent inspector. ‘They don’t always win!’

A resident said Rampion was very rude. Route A was much better – why was it dropped – less trees would be lost.

A resident said we need to campaign harder, before it reaches an inspector. Have we got our own experts on board / lined up?

The Council Chairman said the Council was taking legal advice.

AG said we ‘need to deny them the ability to represent us!’ The inspector will ask Rampion *how they consulted? How did they respond?*

A resident asked what was the view of the SDNPA? The plans destroy access points to the national park and will destroy/disturb archaeology. Does the Parish Council engage with the SDNPA?

AG said that the SDNPA has a different governance model to councils; they are strong on some things but we will need to fight this ourselves. Need strong voices!

A resident asked about the announced delay to the Arundel Bypass.

AG replied that he supported an Arundel Bypass as part of a south coast strategic link road. Finding the right route was not easy. The delay would be modest and was more to do with rearranging budgets. Pushing the route further south would mean it was on a flood plain and nearer communities. It was also important to help relieve communities such as Storrington and other settlements along the A283.

A resident said that AG said he doesn’t get involved in individual planning applications yet he (AG) spoke about a development in Parliament at / or affecting the Wiston Estate.

A resident said that AG seemed to have dual standards!

A resident said AG just sent standard replies to letters.

A resident said the proposed development at Rock Common, would affect the aquifer and cause leachates.

AG replied that often standard replies were sent when he received many similar letters; everyone received a response.

AG said he couldn’t get involved in in individual planning applications. Just because he was pictured supporting a local business, didn’t mean he was in bed with that business; it was his duty to support all local business.

A resident said they didn’t feel that AG supported them.

A resident said the Rock Common scheme would affect the healthcare of AG’s residents.

AG said that residents often thought he could override local planning authority decisions, but these were local matters that should be resolved locally. He assured residents that he saw and read all letters sent to him.

A resident asked about the pending Parliamentary Boundary Review.

AG explained that the first suggestion of the Boundary Commission (BC) was to put Washington in the Shoreham Constituency. The second suggestion is to leave as is. The third suggestion will be announced in June which will be final.

The Council Chairman said the Council did tell the BC that Washington had no affiliation to the coastal strip.

The Vice Chairman asked AG if he would come to a separate meeting, maybe in September to just discuss the quarry? AG said yes! **ACTION WPC**

A resident said that all parish councils and the SDNPA had objected to the quarry application.

1. **Report from the Horsham Neighbourhood Policing Team**

PCSO Joel Beasley said that he had reviewed calls received from parishioners and most related to road traffic, ASB and sheep in the road; there wasn’t a great deal going on. The roundabout on the A24 received lots of attention. They do try to visit often but they cover a very large area.

Several residents commented that impatient drivers on the A24 do a dangerous manoeuvre and try to dodge congestion by making an illegal turn in a bus only lane.

Police: yes we are aware of it but must witness it ourselves to take any action.

Residents suggested the police should install a camera or attend during rush hour.

Police: We will pass on the suggestion but they are short staffed.

Police reiterated that resource deployment is data-driven, so please report!

A resident asked if x2 police motorcyclists could attend the Aug BH m/c jamboree at the Frankland Arms in the village to keep order? Otherwise the m/c’s block the village and other trouble has been known.

Police: Yes we will pass on the request.

1. **County Council News**

Cllr Paul Marshall(PM)(WSCC) reported on the following:

At WSCC the budget in 23-24 is £1.8 billion + £100 million on capital projects. They raise £700 million from Council Tax, the rest coming from government. This coming year, WSCC Council Tax will rise by 2.99% and another 2% on the separate social care Council Tax. Spending on adult and children will rise from £255 million to just under £400 million.

Spending on highways will rise from £41 million this year to £47 million next year; there was another £48 million for capital expenditure on highways. Another £21 million had been added last year to be spent over 5 years. Good progress had been made by last summer on clearing the backlog of road repairs, but due to very hot weather, November and December rains, followed by a freezing January, meant that the backlog was starting to build up again. From Jan-March in 2022 they had filled 4.5k potholes. In this January, they filled 3k alone. They were also trying to tackle other expensive problems caused by flooding such as the landslip on the A29 at Pulborough. They had agreed another £4million be spent on highways maintenance this year, including increasing the frequency of gulley emptying.

The 2021 census had revealed that the population of WS had grown by 9.4%, East Sussex over 3% and Brighton & Hove, 1.4%. Horsham District alone had grown by 11%. There had been an increase of 30% in the over 65s in Horsham District, showing what a popular area it was to live.

Due to the moratorium imposed by Natural England on housebuilding because of water neutrality issues, 18k homes were being held up in Horsham District.

WSCC was very active on the climate change front: it already had many solar farms on council land and was working on battery storage facilities (?) It had a target of delivering 7k on-road Electric Vehicle Charing (EVC) points. It was working to decarbonise libraries.

Rock Common – WSCC was the relevant planning authority here. He his still uncommitted due to pre-determination.

A27 Arundel Bypass – it will help get rid of lorries of the A283. Work was still due to start in 2025 and he was meeting Highways England next week.

Rampion 2 – he agreed with all that had been said.

A24 – Washington roundabout – there were plans to improve capacity. He agreed with comments about misuse of bus only lane.

He said that WSCC had started to reduce the time roads were closed or dug-up, by altering the charging schedule to utilities for peak time road works.

Some of the most dangerous roads in West Sussex were in this area. He felt that the Sussex Road Safety Partnership was no longer effective – it was down to the police to enforce the law.

A resident commented on the very poor quality of temporary pothole repairs.

PM said that because such repairs were not supposed to be done in the wet, many didn’t last; the contractor doing the work was also the body certifying the work, so there was no additional cost to the Council if they had to be redone.

A resident commented on the litter alongside all roads. All agreed that this was a national and everyone’s problem.

A resident commented on the lack of progress on the Millennium Way, suggested in 2000.

1. **News and Information from Washington Village Hall Trustees**

Helen Twine (HT) reported that by August 2022, the use of the Hall was back to pre-Covid 19 levels. There were 19 customers using the hall for regular activities, contributing towards an anticipated 12% increase in income on the previous 2019-20 financial year (the year not financially affected by Covid).

Hire charges for the use of the hall had remained at 2019-20 levels and it was the Trustees’ aim that these remained competitive with other venues in the area. She thanked the Trustees, staff and volunteers who gave their time and expertise towards the repairs carried out on the roof and renewal of flooring. Other improvements included a number of ‘green’ energy projects including the installation of infrared heating in the small hall and conversion of lighting to LEDs. Looking ahead, the Trustees will be prioritising the building of reserves to fund a move to solar energy power, hopefully with help from outside sources. HT pointed out that the Village Hall is an attractive and well-used building, in a good location and which attracts users from a wide area. She reminded everyone that the future of the Village Hall depends on having trustees, volunteers and employees willing to give up their time its service. In the next eighteen months it was anticipated that one member of staff and Trustee would be retiring. HT appealed for their timely replacements if the Hall’s future is to be secured.

1. **Public Questions and Answers**

Questions were mostly covered during the meeting. The following further questions were raised:

A resident asked about CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) use in the parish.

The Council Chairman said that the Council’s CIL funds had to be kept ring-fenced in the accounts. A survey had been undertaken inviting suggestions for their use.

A resident asked if CIL funds could be put towards solar panels on the Village Hall roof?

The Council Chairman said he was sure that the Council would positively consider such a suggestion.

**ACTION: WPC**

The Chairman thanked all present and closed the meeting at 9.20pm

**Signed………………………………………….**

**Dated…………………………………………..**