Village Concerns’ AGM Minutes from October 22nd, 2020

Kathryn Richardson’s Introduction, as Chair of Village Concerns

4th AGM

Meeting Protocols on Zoom, not in person, recorded meeting, if not happy, you will have to leave the meeting

First AGM on Zoom and hopefully our last

Agenda on the screen

**Minutes of the previous AGM**

To approve, Tania Freezer proposes, and Andy Burns seconds this. Both from the Village Concerns Steering Committee. Show of hands to approve from the public. Andy Burns counts 13 people voted out of 22. Majority approved.

Thank you for your patience.

**Chair’s Report.**

**Wealden Local Plan**

We were relatively optimistic. But then there was a bombshell. The Inspector rejected the Plan on non-cooperation with neighbouring councils and lack of credible scientific evidence to support the Ashdown Forest issues. Very bad news, huge amount of time and money spent on this plan. Wealden decided not to contest this decision and withdrew the plan.

Wealden formulated a timetable to draw up a new plan. Call for potential new sites – SHELAA. WDC talking to Parish Councils and Town Councils. We are in a very vulnerable time because there will not be a new adopted plan until 2023.

Key point is that Wealden does not have a 5-year land supply and despite many requests for an update, we have not had one. The figure is always 3.67.

The Ashdown Forest is now a non-issue. They appear not to be doing much monitoring.

The number of houses that Wealden now need is now 1,200 per annum, up from 950 and they now may need to provide for Eastbourne between 300-400, though that is looking less likely. It is essentially open season for developers. Planning applications are being pushed through because of the lack of the 5-year housing land supply. Applications are being approved and genuine objections are being overruled. There are some further complications. There is a government White Paper on Planning. There is Covid. Wealden has declared a Climate Emergency though it is currently being ignored but maybe it will not be in the future.

Planning Committee Procedures. Virtual meetings. There is a big problem with this format as it does not allow public presence in the meeting. Video presentations have to be submitted which District Councillors look at outside the Planning Meetings. Technological challenge to get the videos made and submitted. Village Concerns have written several times to Wealden to complain about this. Other Councils have allowed objectors video presentations to be shown at the Planning Meetings which has a greater impact. We also have some concerns about how meetings are run for Councillors when connections are lost for them and the impact this would have on their voting rights.

Village Concerns have stepped up to the plate and have had virtual Steering Group meetings and worked very hard to make sure our Parish is represented.

**Current Planning Applications**

South Street 55 houses. Officer’s Recommendation for Approval, due to lack of 5-Year Land Supply. Thank you to Cllr Geoffrey Draper voiced his strong opposition. He is not allowed to vote in his own constituency. Councillors voted against 7 to 4. Village Concerns prepared video presentations. And this has now gone to Appeal.

Circle of Oaks. 26 houses. Live application expect that to come to the Committee soon.

Buttsfield Lane. 2 houses. It is a live application.

Hesmonds. A huge amount of work has been done on this. We have taken the advice of a Solicitor. Jonathan Walker put together a briefing pack which we hand delivered to all the District Councillors. Our Solicitors asked for it to be withdrawn but this was refused. But planning permission was given. How can 55 be refused and 205 be approved - if we go back to the voting pattern – Geoffrey Draper spoke very strongly against. The level of debate for such a large application was poor. There were a lot of inaccuracies about EH which were not challenged. What happens now?

Hesmond’s 106 Legal Agreements. Most of these are drawn up with the Developer and Wealden. The Parish Council has had limited discussions with Wealden about this. When these are made as legal agreements a formal Decision Notice is issued. Before this one can appeal to the Secretary of State to intervene. We did, but it was turned down. We are also making a complaint to the Local Ombudsman.

Our only avenue after this is to go down the Judicial Review route. They are staged processes. Expensive but we do not have to commit to all the processes.

This is only an outline planning application and if we do not succeed with the JR, we still need to be in control at the reserved matters stage where the in details are decided: the building, the design, the drainage, the sewage …. we need to be all over it, make sure everything is being done properly and delaying it as long as possible, to be honest.

In Halland, the Forge, 21 flats, the Appeal was dismissed. Bramblebank, 30 houses is a live Application. They put forward an amendment, to Passivhaus design. There is some concern in Halland about SHELAA sites adjacent to Bramblebank. Old Hartfield six, 2-bedroom houses.

The future for Village Concerns. Uncertain times in all sorts of ways, but we need to fight on. The SHELAA sites are now in and present a serious threat to the Villages but are not approved sites.

We need to work with engaging with the Government White Paper, Wealden’s emerging draft Local Plan, and the Parish Council’s Neighbourhood Plan.

Village Concerns is now a member of WASP which is the Wealden Alliance for Sustainable Planning. A ground swell of opinion of against what is happening.

We must keep on going to get the best for the Villages.

Thank you to all the Steering Group and all our Supporters. And we will end with our Mission Statement. (Up on the screen and on our website.)

**Treasurers Report**

Vote to accept the Treasurers Report. Hands up. 16. Carried.

**Neighbourhood Plan Update**

Over to Jonathan Walker. The NP came to a grinding halt when the Local Plan was withdrawn. Will get a steer from the District Council. And then Covid interfered. Had a meeting with WDC recently. And the NP can proceed. WDC gave the NP a half tick in the box, but it is still only progressing slowly. A draft NP will be attempted in months. The contents of the NP will be the difficulty as it has to fall back on the old Wealden policies which are out of date, including housing numbers which will have to be very general. It will however, enable us to get a greater share of the CIL money with a NP which is a drive to move the NP forward.

**SHELAA sites**

On the Village Concerns website. The new sites show complete devastation for EH and Halland. All of Hesmond Stud land. Crockstead Farm included. Jonathan describes the new SHELAA in detail in the AGM last year. This is for assessment, but it does not mean Wealden would deem it all suitable. Quite a lot of it is ancient woodland.

There is the government White Paper on planning just beginning its process through the parliament to become law, which will put housing planning into three areas. 1. Growth 2. Renewal 3. Protection

The decision about which land goes in which zone is taken at the Local Plan process. And the decision process for the public which exists now will not be the same case at all.

Village Concerns submitted a representation to the White Paper, largely critical. And we will get involved with the SHELAA feedback too.

Back to Kate Richardson.

Yes, it is a gloomy picture. But we have to keep hanging in there.

Can residents write in about the White Paper? Yes, by all means do and to your MP.

Minor changes to the Village Concerns Constitution. Shown. And a vote taken. 15 agreed and it is carried.

Kate is standing down as Chair and Gill Kennedy is taking over at the microphone.

Nominations for new Chairs. Tania Freezer and Katherine Gutkind.

Kate Richardson and Andy Burns, propose and seconded and Gill Kennedy asked if they were any other nominations? No.

A vote taken on this to approve the new chairs. 15 agreed and it is carried.

We need a vote for the re-election of the Steering Committee. The members of the Steering Committee are shown on the screen. 16 agreed and it is carried.

Over to Tania and Katherine.

Tania. Thank you to everyone who has pledged. We hope to be able to carry on. We will need help to deliver leaflets. Support to object to planning applications. Care about the Parish, and difficult times ahead.

Katherine. Any questions?

Pat Duke. Would it be a good idea to combine with WASP as there are other Villages in the same position? Do you think it is a good idea?

I think it is a good idea. Katherine

Tania is going to answer this and said she is on WASP and has been since the beginning.

Katherine. Any more questions? There were not.

Thanks to Kate and gifts to Kate were presented by her husband.

Passed back to Tania to do a brief summary of Village Concerns going forward.

Tania. Thank you again to Kate. Tana went over all the Planning Applications. The SHELAA. 454 acres of land on the SHELAA. Housing density of 20-30 dwellings per acre, Wealden’s definition. We need sustainable development. Our travails our going to continue. We need to insure there is going to be sustainable development within the Parish. We need to look at what local need is going to be. Need to protect the character of our Villages. Need to avoid the destruction of the landscape & wildlife. Thank you again for your support so far. It is real heartfelt thanks.

Katherine. The meeting has come to an end.

And thanks from some in the audience to Village Concerns.