

BARCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Planning and Community Services Committee held at the Sports Pavilion, Barcombe on Thursday 7th May 2009 at 7.10 p.m.

1147. Present: Councillors N C Lear, C M Arbenz, J O Cornwell, D J Lloyd, A J MacGillivray, D Skan and R Williams

1148. Apologies for absence: None were received

1149. Confirmation and Signature of the Minutes of the Last Meeting: The minutes of the meeting held on 5th March 2009 were approved at the Parish Council meeting on 26th March 2009.

1150. Declarations of Interest: Cllrs N C Lear and J O Cornwell re minute 1154; Cllrs N C Lear and D Skan re minute 1157; and Cllr R Williams re minute 1153.

1151. Urgent Business pursuant to Standing Order No. 16: A report from Cllr R Williams on a Crime Reduction Partnership meeting was noted

1152. Village Action Plan: Cllr A J MacGillivray reported that printing of the questionnaires was underway; distribution had been arranged via Barcombe News; collection arrangements were still to be defined; all possible avenues for publicity would be used to generate a good response.

1153. Barcombe School development plans: The minutes of the Sports Hall Management Committee meeting on 6th March 2009 were discussed. The parish council representatives felt the issue of replacing the floor had been thoroughly aired. The school had given assurances that the floor had in the region of fifteen years of life remaining. The parish council had done all it could to protect the interests of the community over this issue. Cllr A J MacGillivray pointed out that, whilst the minutes assumed a 60/40 split of costs of replacing the floor, under the terms of the current management agreement responsibility for replacing the floor is entirely down to the Management Committee

Cllr C M Arbenz will chase P Young of ESCC for the promised revised draft agreement.

The Clerk was asked to contact Mr C Hughes to ask that the parish council be made aware of any alterations to the development plans.

1154. Affordable housing: Cllr A J MacGillivray reported on the outcome of phone conversation with Sue Lawton of Hastoe Housing. It is planned that building work will start on 18 May.

However whilst PCs used to be consulted on new occupants on exception site schemes the new Choice-Based Lettings scheme seems to have allowed district councils to operate their lettings without any involvement with parish councils apart from any Section 106 Agreement protocols. This seems to be a change of policy about which the parish council has not been advised and is contrary to what has been expected throughout the entire project development.

District Councillor D Mitchell was also unaware of any changes to policy.

Hastoe believe that a case could be made for a “sensitive lettings policy” for the new Barcombe scheme on the grounds that

(1) mistakes have been made in the past in allocating people from outside Barcombe which might have been avoided with use of local knowledge.

(2) the proximity of the development to Bevern View whose residents need consideration in respect of the occupants of the new houses.

It was agreed that the Clerk will:

(i) write to John Crawford, Chief Executive of Lewes DC, to ascertain whether there has been a change of policy and if so why this was not communicated to the parish council

(ii) contact his counterparts in Newick, Rodmell and Ringmer parishes to see if they are aware of this policy change or whether they still have some involvement in verifying “local” status of applicants.

(iii) Depending on the answers to (i) and (ii) above, approach Hastoe for guidance on achieving a “sensitive lettings policy”

1155. Lewes District Council – planning policy: Concern had been expressed over a recent planning decision which was taken by officers under delegated powers when the policy of Lewes DC would indicate that if the parish council objects to an application then it ought, as a rule, go to committee. It was agreed that Cllr N C Lear and District Cllr D Mitchell would seek a meeting with the Chief Planning Officer to express the parish council’s concerns over an apparent failure to follow policy.

1156. Rural Voices, Rural Choices – the future: A detailed report on the background, current position and possible future options is attached as appendix 1. It was agreed that option 3 for the future was a preferred outcome. The next meeting of RVRC is on 8th June and it was agreed that Cllr N C Lear will attend and reflect the views of the parish council.

1157. New village hall: Cllr D Skan reported that the project manager was no longer involved and the architects would be arranging for costings from builders to allow concrete funding applications to be made. She has stood down as Chairman, and the new chairman designate is Mr N C Lear.

1158. Tree Warden: The Clerk reported that two definite applications had been received, plus one tentative expression of interest that had not turned into anything concrete. After discussing the candidates it was agreed to recommend to the full parish council meeting that Mr J Smith be appointed. Whilst the other candidate was well qualified in many regards there could be potential conflicts of interest going forward.

1159. Power of Wellbeing: An offer has been received from SALC to organise training for councillors. It was agreed that there was little benefit to Barcombe at present and the Clerk was asked to ensure the issue was reconsidered in a year’s time. Full details regarding POW can be found in the February 2009 Bulletin on the SALC website.

1160. Correspondence: (i) Lewes DC – Sustainable Communities Act 2007 – Leaflets have been provided enabling residents to “have your say” on three key issues – home life, working life and environment. Local panels have been established to evaluate suggestions. (ii) Norman Baker, M.P. – a request has been received to display a pamphlet explaining his role as an M.P. and how constituents can interact with him. It was agreed this might be seen as partisan and it was agreed the Clerk will retain the pamphlets in his office and provide to the public on request.

1161. Outstanding action points: These were covered in the items above and the Clerk will update the list.

1162. Close of meeting: There being no further business to discuss the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.40 p.m.

Appendix 1 – Planning and Community Services Committee – 7th May 2009 – The Future of Rural Voices, Rural Choices.

At the March meeting of RVRC it was reported that the withdrawal of “second-homes” council tax funds by the principal authorities would mean that it would not be possible to replace the Development Worker, Val Biggs, who had left earlier in the year. With no indication of alternative sources of funding being available the RVRC Chairman proposed that the future of the partnership be given prime consideration at the June meeting. Since the March meeting the secretary of RVRC, Diane Meadows, has been informed that due to the financial situation her contract will not be renewed with immediate effect.

Since BPC has regularly attended RVRC and received some benefit as a result, it is proposed that we give some consideration to the future of the partnership.

The background to RVRC and the unique structure of the Lewes LSP together with the reason whereby the majority of representatives on RVRC are from parish councils/meetings is given overleaf.

RVRC Positives: in addition to providing a forum for consideration of rural issues, RVRC has provided the following -
Transport. Lewes District Transport Group; Minibus Audit, SID Machine (Barcombe); Community Transport Scheme (Kingston)
Young People. Chailey School transport event; Barcombe Youth Shelter; Children’s Activities Mapping Exercise; South Heighton Consultation Exercise; Youth Awareness Events.
Environment. Funding for footpath Westmeston Sustainability Sub-Group
Housing. Barcombe’s introduction to CHASE pilot scheme for affordable housing.

RVRC Negatives. Current attendance largely PCs, Police and AirS. Others, e.g. F&RS, Small Business Group, withdrew sometime ago. PC attendance has dropped in recent months. Present Chairman (Melanie Cutress) regards her role as temporary.

Has RVRC in its present format reached the end of its life ?

We could consider a number of options or alternative structures for RVRC, e.g.

1. Funding by parish councils. RVRC is NOT a PC sector responsibility but that of Lewes DC. Ringmer PC has indicated that it would oppose any such a suggestion in the strongest possible way (statement at Ringmer 2009 APM).
2. Revert to a purely strategic role. AirS has always felt that RVRC should have been set up initially with representatives from various rural groups, e.g NFU, Faith organisations, WI, PCs (through LDALC), police etc.
3. Revert to 2. but add theme groups to follow specific issues, e.g. sustainability.
4. Merge with LDALC. This was suggested some years ago but was not acceptable to Lewes DC. LDALC also has the 5 TCs in membership who have their own town area partnerships under the Lewes LSP.
5. Informally SALC has pointed out that the PCs of the District (or a cluster) could combine to fund a Development Worker to work on specific identified needs

AJMacG

April 2009

RVRC

Background. By an Act of Parliament in 2000 a Duty of Care was conferred on the principal local authorities in relation to the social, economic and environmental welfare of their areas. The Duty was to be expressed in the form of a document called a “Community Strategy” to be prepared and updated by a body called a “Local Strategic Partnership” (LSP). Government gave no detailed directives as to the structure or composition of LSPs, nor did it provide additional finance for the District and County Councils to establish and run their LSPs.

There is substance to the theory behind LSPs and the potential they have in benefiting communities; *the problem lies in how the theory is applied and the potential realised in each District/County area.* At District level the advantages of LSPs appear to be –

- Provide discussion fora with other agencies
- Potential to obtain grants/run projects/have development workers for the benefit communities in an era where “partnerships” are favoured bodies for such purposes*
- Our District and County Associations of Local Councils do not necessarily have the capacity for such functions*
- Lewes DC’s intention to consult on its Local Development Framework (LDF) through its LSP and area partnerships

Lewes DC. In 2001 Lewes DC announced that its LSP would be in the form of a main LSP (or Board) and five area partnerships (Lewes, Newhaven, Seaford, Peacehaven/Telscombe, Rural (RVRC)). No prior consultation appears to have been carried out and the first indications received by LDALC were in a draft version of the 2000/01 DC Annual Performance Plan. The structure of the Lewes LSP is unique since the others we are aware of are theme-based (transport, environment, housing etc.).

Rural Voices Rural Choices. During 2002 in collaboration with AirS Lewes DC made attempts to publicise the partnership, viz three meetings (Barcombe, Ditchling, Kingston) but only the Ditchling event could be said to have produced significant interest and attendance. Finally, as part of this exercise in November 2002 a well publicised and attended meeting was held in Chailey School under the title of “Developing a Strategy for the Rural Areas of Lewes District”. Despite apparent interest in the proposed partnership there was a distinct reluctance by members of the various communities present to come forward to form the partnership; one comment was that this was the type of function parish councils did ! Cllr. S. James (Newick) emerged as the “champion” for the rural partnership, which had taken the name “Rural Voices Rural Choices” (RVRC), and under her chairmanship meetings at two monthly intervals started in 2003. At first several “community representatives” from the Chailey meeting attended but did not return after a few meetings. Parish councils were then approached to send representatives and again the response was so poor that in late 2003/early 2004

two seminar sessions were held by RVRC/LDALPC/AirS; the take-up of these by parish councils was at best mediocre. As a result and with additional lobbying of parish councils, by mid-2004 only about half of the possible 22 councils (17 parish councils; 5 parish meetings) had shown interest in RVRC in attending some of the two monthly meetings.

The establishment of RVRC has not been without comment and controversy. A number of PCs (particularly smaller ones) have difficulty finding representatives for both RVRC and LDALC and question why there are two such organisations in the District with apparently similar roles. Discussions between RVRC and LDALC took place during 2007/08 with a view to defining their respective roles. A Statement of Understanding was agreed and signed by both organisations in 2008; in brief, LDALC deals with local government and governance matters, RVRC with community development issues.