

West Beach Residents Association

Minutes of Annual General Meeting on 11 April 2013

Introduction and welcome by Chairman Chris Drew

Guest speakers from West Sussex County Council (WSCC)

Geoff Lowry, Chairman of Highways, and Barry Candy, Structural Engineer, answered the following questions previously submitted to them by the Residents Association.

Q1 There is a considerable amount of remedial drainage work to the north of the flood plain which appears to be improving the situation. What are the plans for the south of the flood plain? When does WSCC expect to start remedial work in the south of the flood plain?

A1. The work done in North Lancing was carried out by Southern Water, who is responsible for sewers. Adur District Council (ADC) is already carrying out works in South Lancing and these works are being funded by WSCC.

Q2. The sluice gates appear to be inadequate at the Shoreham outlet due to inadequate flow pressure because of the gradient of the land from the south. What is being done to improve this inadequacy? We are aware that the pumping exercise carried out by the fire brigade had no measurable impact for the North and South of the flood plain.

A2. The Environment Agency (EA) is responsible for the sluice gates near the Dogs Trust kennels. Water drains out from the ditches at low tide. The gates are protected by valves to stop water going back into the ditches at high tide. These valves tend to slow the rate of drainage out at low tide. However the Fire Brigade recently pumped water out for 6 hours continuously and made very little impact. This shows the high amount of ground water present.

Q3. Ground water is a major consideration and there is great concern regarding displacement caused by development which diverts continual ground water flows to surrounding areas. The ground water flows south to the sea. West Beach is directly in its path. Are WSCC aware of this phenomena and what solution are they pursuing to reduce risk of flooding?

A3. It is not possible to know until actual planning proposals are seen. Development may not cause any displacement if buildings are on piles, for example.

Q4. West Beach is surrounded by developers Taylor Wimpey and in particular Landstone Ltd who own the roads on West Beach and Old Salts Farm. What action will be taken by WSCC to enforce the Riparian Law requirement to clear the natural drainage system, which is static at the moment and averages 3 metres wide, and the blocked silt traps leading to the soakaways in the West Beach roads to ensure free passage of water which is also a covenant in Landstone Ltd.'s deeds? What powers of enforcement do WSCC have to ensure Riparian owners comply with the Riparian Laws if the developers default?

A4. WSCC does have power of enforcement. Development would not affect this power. However the Landstone covenant is a civil matter.

Q5. Will Operation Watershed be a long term project i.e. continual annual dredging of the flood plain? Answered after Question 7 below

Q6. Could WSCC advise on the possible impact of 3-400 houses being built on Old Salts Farm land which is 4.5 metres below sea level and the lowest point on the floodplain with groundwater levels consistently at high levels half a metre below the ground level ?

A6. The impact cannot be assessed until planning proposals are submitted, when all relevant agencies will be consulted. Adur District council will publish their preferred local plan later this year. Development may be possible without adverse effect on flooding. Next year a government appointed inspector will consider the plans, based on all available evidence. The inspector will need to be satisfied that the proposed development is viable.

Q7. The Christmas event on West beach was a near run thing for West Beach: the worst flooding in history on our roads. Will WSCC be monitoring for future events and provide the same support for West Beach as that provided for the North of the flood plain? We had no support whatsoever in spite of warning various Officers and Politicians of a flooding crisis by the Residents Association prior to Christmas. In fact Landstone withdrew their offer of support and denied there was a flooding problem.

A7. The flooding in North Lancing was more serious than at West Beach, because the sewers were overwhelmed with ground water and this resulted in a public health concern. The excess ground water was due to high rainfall. It was the wettest winter for 100 years.

Q5. Will Operation Watershed be a long term project i.e. continual annual dredging of the flood plain?

A5. WSCC have £8.25 million to use for sorting out flooding problems in West Sussex. A Surface Water Management Plan will be put in place during the next two years for the whole of North and South Lancing to look for a long-term solution. There will be an extensive study and report on the whole drainage system in the area. It cannot be a quick fix because we first need to establish the facts and technical details. Monitoring has to be done over at least a year to see the changes in the water table in different seasons. Ditches, drains under roads and river flood defences will all be looked at. The results will be made available to the public in due course.

A flood report for the whole of West Sussex was produced in June 2012. As a result of this a 10 to 15 year plan is already in place. Lancing will be ahead of the game when Operation Watershed begins to build on this.

Brian Morgan, WSCC Principal Community Officer, informed the meeting that £1.25 million pounds is available to help local communities across West Sussex. This money can be used to help communities who feel powerless because councils will not help them. It will help them to get the power back and get things started. Local residents should get together and think how we can best prepare ourselves and look for solutions that we, as a community, can put in place. The funds available are not intended to help with infrastructure, but could help towards any necessary training, equipment and public liability insurance etc.

Question and Answer session with WSCC representatives

Q8. Blocked drains contribute to the flooding problem at West Beach. Could WSCC clear the drains and send the bill to Landstone?

A8. Barry Candy replied that, although WSCC can insist on the clearance of drainage ditches, he is not sure if this power extends to drains in the roads. He will check the legal position. The county council does not have authority to spend money on private roads.

However, large amounts of money have been invested by WSCC in clearing drainage ditches and commissioning the Operation Watershed report. WSCC have also put pressure on the Environment Agency to improve the performance of the sluice gates.

Q9. Thank you to the Residents Association for inviting council representatives to the AGM. Will the soakaways in the Broadway be cleared?

A9. Yes. The Residents Association will clear them. However the first two drains, which have been blocked by debris from contractors' work recently, are the responsibility of Adur District Council.

Q10. Problems with the North Lancing sewers were treated as an emergency by WSCC. West Beach sewers have given problems in the past, but no emergency help was provided by WSCC. What constitutes an emergency?

A10. Southern Water is responsible for any problems with the sewers. Any delays in response should be reported to the Environmental Health Officer at Adur District Council.

Q11. Will the findings of the Operation Watershed study be considered before any planning proposals are agreed?

A11. It depends on the timing of the planning application. The study report will not be available for more than a year. However, the developers would need to provide evidence regarding flood risk in support of their application. The ADC planning office is aware of the ground water flooding problem in this area, and will consult the Environment Agency regarding the river defences.

Q12. The level of the land north of the railway line is being raised by developers in order to obtain planning permission. If this is done on the fields behind West Beach, what will be the effect on the flood risk to existing housing?

A12. Developers would have to provide evidence that the existing housing would not flood as a result of the new development.

Q13. What kind of monitoring will be done as part of Operation Watershed?

A13. It will be very sophisticated and carried out by experts. It will involve topographical surveys and various kinds of modelling.

Q14. What will happen if the survey shows that West Beach drains are inadequate?

A14. As discussed earlier, we will clarify the legal position of WSCC with regard to drains on private roads.

Q15. Is it really sensible to build on a flood plain?

A15. There are guidelines and Government laws in place. The onus is on the developer to prove that their development would not have an adverse effect. (It was pointed out from the floor that these safeguards had obviously not been adequate in other areas where new housing developments are suffering floods.)

Q16. Is there the political will to stand up to the developers?

A16. Many proposals are rejected if insufficient assurances are given to satisfy the District Council and the Environment Agency. Any damage to the ecology must be mitigated. For example some sand creatures have had to be relocated as a result of the building of the new

footbridge in Shoreham. Ecology reports are already available for the area around West Beach.

The WSCC representatives ended the session by inviting people to contact them with any further questions through Geoff Patmore. There was also an invitation for members to contact Brian Morgan to discuss any local community plans.

Questions to Residents Association Committee

Q17. Will the streets ever be repaired?

A17. Landstone will only repair the streets if planning permission is granted for their development. WSCC have the power to repair dangerous roads and send the bill to the owner.

Q18. How did Landstone manage to buy the land?

A18. They bought it from the official receiver after the previous owner, also a developer, went into administration.

The minutes of the last AGM were agreed

Achievements of the Residents Association in the past year – Chris Drew, Chairman

The Chairman thanked Geoff Patmore, Deputy Chairman, for all his tireless work, making contacts and connections with council, press and other residents associations in Lancing.

Other achievements, as listed in the spring newsletter, include Jubilee events, road signs, pot hole repairs, website, Christmas event, collection tin in the corner shop and obtaining a rebate for surface water charges from Southern Water for all residents of West Beach.

The Chairman advised that the Residents Association will keep in contact with residents by newsletters, the website and the new notice board. He appealed to members to keep in touch with the Association by sending their feedback to the website.

Future Events

Lynda McShane, Committee Member, informed the meeting that we will be holding another Over 70s party this summer. It will be held at 66 West Way on Sunday 7 July from 12 until 3pm. Admission will be charged at £2.50 per person and all profits will go to the charity Action on Elder Abuse. Any helpers will be welcome.

Lynda also outlined a plan to invite residents to hold yard sales in front gardens on the first Sunday of each month from May to October. This idea was approved by a show of hands. The first date will be Sunday 5 May. Any residents who wish to hold a sale on that day should inform the Committee through the website.

Appeal for new Committee members and Election of Officers

Geoff Patmore, Deputy Chairman, appealed for volunteers to join the Committee. Five people volunteered and were elected, along with the current members, to serve on the Committee with immediate effect.

Geoff also suggested a scheme along the lines of Checkatrade ("West Beach a Trade?") to let residents know about skilled tradesmen living in West Beach. Advertisements and information would be included on the website. This idea was agreed by a show of hands.

Treasurers Report

The accounts were not published in the meeting because there were guests present. However, the Chairman reported that the financial position of the Association has improved on last year. The collection tin in V&P stores has been a great benefit. The accounts will be published on the website.

Guest Speaker from Adur District Council Planning Department

James Appleton, Head of Planning and Regeneration for Adur and Worthing informed the meeting that he is closely involved with the Adur Local Plan. He explained that the Government has made changes to planning procedures. Each council has to show that it will be able to meet its housing needs. Councils can co-operate with neighbouring councils to provide the necessary housing. Every possible site for development has to be looked at.

The ADC's preferred option for the Local Plan will be announced later this year. Developers will need to provide evidence relating to the impact of their proposals on flooding and transport, etc. There are not enough brown field sites in the area to meet housing needs. When plans are submitted, the Council will consult with the Highways Agency and the Environment Agency. The Government appointed Inspector will need to obtain evidence from local residents as well as these agencies. If the Council refuse planning permission, the Government Inspector will have power to overturn the Council's decision if satisfied by evidence from the developers.

Adur District Council engineers are working with West Sussex County Council. The Councils employ experts, and so do the developers. Some green field sites will definitely have to be developed. If the coastal area is found not to be suitable, the only option would be to use land that is part of the South Downs National Park.

Question and Answer session with James Appleton of ADC Planning Department

Q19. The derelict cement works near Upper Beeding are an eyesore. Can the site be used for housing development?

A19. The site comes under the National Park planning authority and is owned by Hargreaves Development Company. It is most likely to be used for commercial development. ADC has been involved in discussions about the site.

Q20. There are 450 houses on West beach now with only one access road. Adding another 400 houses will double the volume of road traffic, which is already causing problems at busy times.

A20. The Highways Agency will look at and test different scenarios for the area when planning proposals are submitted. The developers will need to convince the Highways Agency that the plan is viable.

Q21. When considering planning proposals, does the council look at other infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools in the local area?

A21. The developers and the council would need to show that sufficient schools, community centres, etc. can be provided. However developers only have to provide improvements necessitated by the new development, not to solve any currently existing problems. The Community Infrastructure Levy ensures that a percentage of the money from development is spent on the local area.

Q22. What is the breakdown of housing needs in the social and private sectors?

A22. 30% of homes in any development would have to be affordable housing to be transferred to a Housing Association. 60% of this 30% would be for rent. The council would receive a New Homes Bonus grant from the Government.

Q23. How will the proximity of Shoreham Airport affect the council's consideration of planning proposals?

A23. The developers would need to show that they had addressed issues such as aircraft noise and safety issues

Summing up by Chairman Chris Drew

The Chairman expressed thanks to Ant, who designed the website for the Association. Residents were invited to share any old photos of the estate so that they can be added to the website.

Residents were advised to phone around to get the best deal on home insurance. Some companies quote a high premium because they only go on the post code, which shows as a flood risk area. However, others only need to know whether the property has previously been flooded. The Flood Forum can help with any home insurance issues.

The Chairman thanked the residents and the guest speakers for attending the meeting.

The meeting closed at 10.15pm.