

Highcliffe Residents' Association CIC

Quarterly Members' Meeting

10th September 2018 at 7.20pm at St Mark's Church Hall

MINUTES

1. Present:

- HRA CIC Chairman Ian Hartnell
- HRA CIC Directors Rob Austin, Sue Taylor, Jacqui Waddock and Richard Reader
- HRA Executive Committee members Ben Lock (Social Media), Willie McNeill (Planning), Mary Reader (Communications), and Paul Taylor (Treasurer)
- Councillors Sally Derham Wilkes, Nick Geary and John Lofts
- about 40 other HRA members and residents.

2. Apologies for absence

Councillors Lesley Dedman and Trish. Jamieson had sent apologies because of conflicting engagements, as had HRA Officers Andy Clayton (Website) and Guy Gillett (Membership), and several other HRA members

3. Community Governance Review

Ian invited Highcliffe resident Bob Hutchings (who has been closely involved with discussions on this issue) to update members on progress.

Bob said that the Borough Council had very recently agreed the recommendations of its Task and Finish Group to establish two Parish Councils to cover all of Christchurch (except for Burton and Hurn which already have Parish Councils). One of the two new Parish Councils would be called Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Council, and would cover the three electoral wards comprising Highcliffe and Walkford. The other would cover all the remainder of Christchurch Borough (excluding Burton and Hurn), and would be called Christchurch Town Council. These will be second tier authorities within the new Unitary Authority, as Christchurch Borough will no longer exist.

The Parish Councils will be statutory consultees on planning matters, and will also be consulted by the many other statutory undertakings working in the area. Their aim will be to listen to the concerns and ideas of residents, and to find ways to improve life in their areas.

They have a legal obligation to provide allotments in their area, and can be given statutory powers to operate a range of other activities (but excluding major items such as education or social care). The Task and Finish Group must now recommend to the Borough Council which powers should be delegated to the new Parish Councils, and to recommend the associated transfers of assets and funds.

The HRA has convened several meetings of interested residents to consider these matters, and a submission has been drafted for the T&F Group setting out its proposals. That draft will be finalised in the light of tonight's meeting, and then sent straight to the T&F Group, as timing is very tight for this process. We will be seeking a fair share of the Borough Council's assets and reserves to go with the powers delegated. Based on population numbers, we would expect Highcliffe and Walkford Council to receive about half of any amounts allocated to the new Christchurch Town Council.

We will also need to find 11 or more local people willing to stand as Parish Councillors in the elections to be held on 2 May 2019. Currently, our representatives are our 7 existing CBC Ward Councillors (and of course our DCC Councillor). These 7 Councillors will *ex officio* become our Parish Councillors for the period between the creation of the Council on 1st April and the elections on 2nd May.

In discussion, several points were made:

- it will be vital to keep existing allotment-holders happy, and to check on the special funding mechanism established some 30 years ago for the allotments.
- if there are slightly fewer than 11 candidates as Councillors, then they will all automatically be elected; the PC has powers subsequently to co-opt additional Councillors to fill any vacancies
- some Highcliffe assets – e.g. the Library and Nea Meadows – are understood to be owned in some way by Highcliffe residents: it will be vital to establish at an early stage the ownership of all the relevant land and assets
- some assets, such as The Old School, and Greystones, are owned by existing Community Interest Companies
- we need now strongly to encourage everyone interested in these matters to come forward and participate in the discussions – an HRA press release has been issued on this point, urging especially some younger people to step forward so that the new PC is more representative
- DCC has, and the new Unitary Authority will have, their own agendas, and will need careful watching.

Ian thanked Bob for his explanations, and said that we all look forward to the continuing discussions.

4. Update on Current Issues and Recent HRA Activities

4.1 Local Plan Consultation

Willie McNeill said that he had read the Local Plan, which is 211 pages long, and covers the period to 2036. He had also attended a meeting on it. Few people had commented on it, perhaps because of the length. He wondered where the figures for housing requirements came from – an assessment of local need, or central Government dictat (Councillors advised: the latter)

Cllr Derham Wilkes said that adoption of the Plan before CBC is abolished would be important, so that designated areas can be established, and we are not subject to arbitrary decisions by the new Unitary Authority.

Members said that we must be ready to challenge every planning application that is not in line with local needs, and not simply delegate most decisions to officers. However, some planning applications come with revenue implications, and these would need to be taken into consideration.

4.2 Jesmond Avenue development application

Rob said that there was no change in the situation, in that we were still waiting for the property developer to come forward with a lower-density planning application. However, residents had been upset by the retention of the green hoardings despite the refusal of the retrospective planning application for them. This has now gone to appeal, and we await the outcome. Willie said that there was no set timescale for this, but that he would keep asking.

A resident deplored the prospective loss of the green woodland in any development, but Rob explained that this was not among the valid criteria for objection. A resident said that there should be tree preservation orders on all the trees. Rob said that the whole site was covered by a TPO, but that the developer could nevertheless apply for some trees to be felled as part of an overall planning application.

4.3 Zig Zag Path

Bob Hutchings updated members on recent developments. Planning consent had been granted – there were 78 letters of support, and only one against. Tenders had been requested for the works, with a closing date of 11 September. CBC hoped to award the contract on 1 October, so that work could start on 1 November, with a re-opening of the Zig Zag path on or near 19 April 2019.

4.4 High Street Pavements

Mary said that this subject had been concerning many residents, and that she had again taken it up with County Councillor Lesley Dedman. Lesley had responded:

Dear Mary,

The pavements have been checked on the many occasions when I have put in specific complaints on areas of concern, and despite the understandable feelings of some elderly residents who find the uneven surface a problem, the reports to DCC from our experts have come back that the condition is 'acceptable'. One of the problems is that falls are not reported either to me or DCC. When we were discussing this at HRA some time ago, it was suggested that the whole area be tarmacked. I personally am not in favour of this as I feel the pavements give a specific look to the village and should be re-bedded.

As far as any money being specifically earmarked for Highcliffe, this is not usually the case as work is done county wide on a priority basis, and in this era of austerity would be carried out only in case of proven need; as I say, this is not agreed. I am sure the Unitary will have the same financial constraints and way of working. If a parish were formed this might be work they could carry out via a lengthsman. This could be a project to propose in a bid for funding from the Borough to the parish prior to dissolution.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful. I shall try to get along to the meeting to answer on this, but as I only return from a Mayoral function that evening this may not be possible.

with best wishes, and hoping to see you on Monday,
Lesley
Dorset County Councillor

Mary expressed her appreciation for Lesley's clear explanation, and would respond to urge at least some repairs of the worst areas. She hoped that the future Parish Council might have more weight in these discussions.

4.5 Involvement in Highcliffe Action Team

Mary reported on developments with the Highcliffe Action Team, about which Mandy Payne had spoken at the last QMM. Mandy had convened a further meeting of the team at Highcliffe Golf Club the previous week, attended also by many members of the HRA Executive, and by other residents, as well as by the businesses who formed the core of this economic regeneration exercise. There had been a positive atmosphere, and several proposed activities had been identified. Mary stressed the importance of supporting these projects, as well as continuing to support our village shops and businesses day by day.

Among the projects was a suggestion of entering Highcliffe into the RHS "Britain in Bloom" competition, and Susan Smith, a former "Britain in Bloom" judge, now a Highcliffe resident, had come along to talk about it.

4.6 Possible "Highcliffe in Bloom" activity

Susan said that a "village/town in bloom" activity could take place in any size of village or town from 150 inhabitants upwards. As a former judge, she was aware of the changing criteria, which now included pavements, litter, graffiti, and community involvement, on top of the basic assessment of flowers, verges, trees etc.

She felt, and knew that many fellow-residents agreed, that the High Street does not look cared-for, and proposed a meeting in the following week to bring volunteers together to get the activity moving, and to plan actions to smarten the street. She

said that Wimborne in Bloom works with 50 volunteers, and she felt sure that we could do much the same.

There was spontaneous applause, and many residents added their names to a sheet at the end of the meeting to express interest.

Sue Taylor urged that the two Schools be invited to take part, and would ensure that Rainbow Nursery School became involved. Mary said that Jane Dean of the “Love Highcliffe” campaign was keen to take part; and that she would see if the Horticultural Society would wish to assist. She would arrange a press release to publicise the activity once it had been launched.

Ian thanked Susan for her initiative, and urged everyone to get behind it.

4.7 Council Taxes following creation of unitary authority

Ian said that many people were upset at the prospect of continuing to pay higher Council taxes than Poole or Bournemouth residents (12% or 9% respectively) for several years after the creation of the Unitary Authority despite receiving the same services as those areas. In a sense, this implied that the wealthy people of Sandbanks would be subsidised by the OAPs of Highcliffe.

In discussion, members supported Ian’s view, and urged HRA to protest this issue. Councillors said that CBC had been contesting this all along, but that Bournemouth and Poole councillors did not agree – and had a majority.

Members noted that Christchurch has financial reserves whereas Bournemouth and Poole have debts: and urged that the money be committed to local projects before CBC is abolished. Bob Hutchings said that the T&F group on Parish Councils would be asked to transfer appropriate reserves to the new PC to match the responsibilities being delegated.

4.8 Beach Litter-pick

Ian said that he had been delighted to learn that a voluntary organisation exists to keep the coastline clean, and that they organise regular volunteer litter-picks at Highcliffe beach. HRA would aim to inform members of these events so that they can take part.

4.9 Public defibrillator

Willie McNeill said that Highcliffe Rotary Club has raised funds to install and maintain a public defibrillator, available 24/7, on the forecourt of the Methodist Hall. Rtn. John Zeale said that this would complement the existing 5 defibrillators in Highcliffe, which are either outside the town centre, or not available 24 hours a day. Instructions for use would be kept with the machine. A public meeting would be convened soon to

publicise and explain the facility. Members welcomed this news.

5. Questions from Members to HRA Officers and Borough/County Councillors

There were no questions.

6. Communications with Members

Ian said that HRA was seeking to collect email addresses from all members who had email and were happy to provide their address. This would greatly facilitate communications, but efforts would also be made to reach members without email. However, HRA could not afford to revive its former magazine.

Mary Reader would continue to write her column in “Highcliffe and Barton Eye”, which was now bi-monthly; the new enhanced HRA website would be kept up to date with news; and HRA Executive member Ben Lock would continue to develop HRA’s presence on Social Media. Mary said that in the months when the “Eye” does not appear, she would create a brief newsletter for emailing to members with email, and would place some printed copies in locations such as the Post Office. She had helped to update the website, and had sent out a press release asking for young people to come forward as potential Parish Councillors [articles based on this press release appeared in ‘Christchurch Times’ on 13 Sept. and ‘New Milton Advertiser’ on 14 Sept. – note by sec.].

In response to a question, Mary and Ian confirmed that members could forward HRA emails to their neighbours for information, and that this would not contravene data protection regulations. Mary said that any members not regularly receiving the ‘Eye’ should let her know so that she could advise the publishers.

7. Any other business

None.

8. Closure and Date of next Members’ Meeting

Closing the meeting at about 9.00pm, Ian thanked all present for their participation, and all the Councillors for their support.

He said that the next Members’ Meeting would take place at 7.00pm on 10 December, again in St. Mark’s Hall. Sally Derham Wilkes noted that she would have to offer apologies as she would be away then.