

STEEP ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY 2021

DRAFT

CHAIRMAN: Jim MacDonald

CLERK: Jenny Hollington

MINUTES OF THE STEEP ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY **TUESDAY, 4TH MAY 2021 AT 7.00 P.M. (VIA TEAMS)**

PRESENT:

Jim MacDonald (in the Chair)	Kate Ashfield	Terry Cook
Peter Cruttenden	Jeff Graham	Freddie Holmes
Nick Hurst	Jenny Martin	Jonathan Turk

IN ATTENDANCE: Nick Drew - District Councillor
Russell Oppenheimer – County Councillor
Jenny Hollington - Clerk

There were 3 members of the public present

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that due to the pandemic and social restrictions, it had been necessary to hold an on-line meeting this year.

APM21/01 **Minutes** – The Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on Tuesday, 7th May 2019 had been re-circulated prior to the meeting and were approved as an accurate record and will be signed accordingly. It had not been possible to hold an Annual Parish Assembly in 2020 because of the pandemic.

APM21/02 **Protecting Steep's Landscape** – Back in 2011 the Parish Plan highlighted the importance of the countryside network and since then the Parish Council has worked hard to maintain and improve local features for Steep residents.

Lutcombe Pond – The Chairman explained that for a good number of years there has been a leak at Lutcombe Pond causing the water to drain through the dam leaving the water level very low. In late summer when the leaves drop the result is a muddy mess which detracts from the beauty of the pond and impacts wildlife. With support from County Councillor, Russell Oppenheimer, discussions have been on-going between Hampshire Countryside Services, Steep P.C. and various contractors about how to resolve the problems - these have resulted in a number of quotes and options for repair from three different contractors, unfortunately, all with different views and widely differing costs. The project remains a key priority but now needs to be thought through properly and, whilst it is frustrating that no real progress has been made, it is essential that a common brief is prepared, and comparable bids sought. Cllr. Oppenheimer was thanked for his on-going support with this project.

Maintaining Steep's Footpath Network – Footpaths have never been more important than during the pandemic with more walkers than ever enjoying fresh air and exercise. During the early part of the summer, it had been decided to carry out a survey of the condition of Steep's 31 footpaths, 2 bridleways and 2 BOATs. Led by Cllr. Jenny Martin, several residents who had volunteered to help were armed with maps and feedback forms, and had covered the footpath network between them, reporting on surfacing, obstructions and structures (e.g. stiles). From this, 6 paths have been prioritised for repair work (centred around Steep Common and the Shoulder of Mutton) and contractors will now be asked to quote for the work required. It was noted that Hampshire Countryside Services have indicated a willingness to help with the Hangers Way Footpath and will be resurfacing the path at the bottom of the Common and investigating drainage issues on the path through the woods using volunteer labour and materials from the depot. In addition, grants will be sought from Countryside Services, County and District Councillor grant funding and SDNPA to help cover the cost of the work. Steep Parish Council is very grateful to Cllr. Martin and the volunteers for the time taken in compiling this very comprehensive study

APM/21/03 **Chairman's Report** – The Chairman read out his report to the meeting and this is appended to the Minutes. He said that the last year has presented challenges that no-one could have ever anticipated, and he was proud of the way Steep Parish Council and the community had risen to the challenge of a pandemic. Over 100 residents had put themselves forward to volunteer to support vulnerable members of the parish and Parish Councillors had overcome technical barriers to participate in meetings to ensure village life continued as near to normal as possible.

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Special thanks were extended to all the Parish Councillors and the Clerk for their help in their respective roles and to all the volunteers within the parish including the speedwatch volunteers who regularly monitor speed on the C18, Tony and Suzanne Knights for their loving care of the War Memorial, and Matt Potts (the Catering Manager at Bedales) who set up a service delivering supplies to those who were unable to leave their houses during the pandemic – as well as food, he provided a cheery greeting to elderly or isolating residents.

There have been several changes to the Parish Council over the past year – and it was with sadness that the resignation of two hard-working Councillors – Simon Bridger and Chris Laycock – had been received. Both had worked tirelessly for the Parish Council but recognised that they had to focus their energy on work and family. Two new Parish Councillors have been welcomed on board – Jonathan Turk and Freddie Holmes – and were thanked for putting themselves forward to support the community.

More recently, Kate Ashfield has advised the Parish Council of her intention to resign following this year's AGM – Kate has worked hard on behalf of the Parish Council whilst pregnant with her second child and, following the birth of her baby boy, has decided she needs to focus on family life.

The Chairman closed his report with very special thanks to Cllr. Peter Cruttenden who has announced he will also be stepping down after the AGM (which follows the APA). Peter has put in a supreme effort in his role as Vice Chair, Chair of the Finance Committee, Steep in Need liaison Councillor and especially on issues related to the village hall land over the years. Peter was wished well in the coming months – he will be sorely missed.

APM21/04 **County Councillor's Report** - Cllr. Oppenheimer said how proud he was of local communities and the way local councils had worked together during the past year. The cost of the pandemic is still being counted at Hampshire County Council and the precise amount not yet known. There will, of course, be less funding generally for Parish Councils in the immediate future, but he hoped finances would soon be on a more substantial footing. The County Council elections are due to be held shortly and Russell said he hoped, of course, to be back! The Chairman thanked Cllr. Oppenheimer for his help and support during the year.

Cllr. Oppenheimer's full report is appended to the Minutes.

APM21/05 **District Councillor's Report** – Cllr. Drew explained that the EHDC offices at Penns Place had been closed during the pandemic and officers have been working from home. However, they had worked hard to co-ordinate services across the district to support residents, communities, and businesses and to keep essential services going. EHDC's finances remain relatively strong, having invested in businesses and property, and maintained a strong financial budget - no services have had to be cut.

The Planning Department has been extremely busy as with more time spent at home many residents had contemplated home improvements. There had also been a large amount of compliance issues to deal with and Cllr. Drew confirmed that officers are now back on site and any concerns will be addressed.

The notable increase in visitors to the area during lockdown had unfortunately brought with it an unwanted increase in litter – EHDC litter officers are back on the streets and more serious problems should be reported to EHDC.

Cllr. Drew said he looked forward to working with Steep residents and the Parish Council in the coming year and was thanked for his regular help and support.

APM21/06 **Finance Report** - A summary of the accounts for the year ended 31.3.21 had been circulated prior to the meeting and is attached to the Minutes. The Clerk reported that as mentioned previously 2020-21 had been an unusual year for the Council. As well as the pandemic Steep PC has had to deal urgently with the implications of ash die back disease on Steep Common. The Council's effectiveness has also been somewhat impacted by the amount of time and the costs that have been absorbed by the on-going dialogues about the land in Church Road. Nevertheless, in financial terms, the net surplus has ended up very close to the planned out-turn for the year and work on all key projects has continued to advance. Steep P.C. ended the financial year comfortably with £14,395 being retained in the deposit account and £14,060 in the current account.

APM21/07 **Public Forum** – Members of the public were invited to raise any issues:

- The owner of Restalls thanked members of the Parish Council for their hard work over the year. She explained that Restalls is sited on a dangerous corner of Church Road and the footpath through the

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property hadn't previously been very well maintained before they arrived. During lockdown, they have created a permissive footpath around the perimeter of the property, and this had proved very popular with walkers, enabling them to get off the narrow lane without having to pass close to the front door of the property and providing safe access from Church Road to the Harrow. She enquired how she could access the footpath review and whether the P.C. would support them making the permissive path permanent? Cllr. Martin said she would be happy to share the results of the footpath review and would also pass on contact details for Elliott Rowe at HCC Countryside Services who would be able to advise on the legal process for changing the route of the footpath. She could see no reason why the P.C. would not support the new path, but would need to discuss with the P.C. before formal approval.

The meeting closed at 8.01 p.m.