

Reports for Parish Council Meeting to be held on Wednesday 17th January 2024

Jeremy Rigby

The Leys Parking Project

The final parts of the Leys parking project are:

Rees Jeffreys Fund £21,000 grant closure. Although the payment has been made to the PC and the invoice with Landbuild settled, the outstanding elements that Singleton PC declared that it would be incorporating as part of the grant conditions are electrical vehicle charging and bike posts.

It feels that EV in the village is someway off given the capacity of the electricity network, particularly in The Leys area. The 4 x bike posts have been bought and delivered. They will be installed when the ground dries out a bit...on the grass on the parking side of the road opposite the village hall. A grant application has been submitted to Chichester District Council for some funds from the Rural Environment Prosperity Fund (Accessible travel) to cover 80% of the costs but we are yet to hear the outcome.

It is intended to contact the RJF once the bike posts are in place, including photos perhaps with the Lord Lieutenant (see below) and the RJF plaque reflecting their contribution (which has now been fitted to the information board supports) in the hope that this can close the issue off.

Tree Planting

A dozen cherry and crab apple trees have been planted around The Leys parking area. These were donated by SDNPA. Thank you to all of the volunteers who turned out to help with the planting. Fingers crossed that they all take and that we can enjoy their blossom in the spring...

Coronation Commemoration Tree. One of the trees donated is to commemorate King Charles III's Coronation and will be ceremonially planted by the King's Representative, the Lord Lieutenant of West Sussex, Lady Emma Barnard, on 16th February at 10am. I am liaising with their office and SDNPA. It is intended to 're-plant' the tree nearest the Information Board on the corner across from the village hall. All are welcome to attend, (including our friendly District and County Councillors). There will potentially be some media in attendance. Also attending are Jeff Travis, the SDNPA press officer, Sophie Ritson the Fund Raising manager for the South Downs Trust and the area ranger Dominic Sunderland. The school have been contacted to see if they would like some of their pupils to attend. An official plaque has been provided that the Parish have been asked to have mounted and will be re-imbursed.

School Parking

It remains the ambition to address the damage consistently done to the verge alongside the school by parking, particularly during school drop off/collection and other events. An indicative plan has been submitted to some WSCC approved contractors to get more detailed quotes. WSCC highways are supportive in principle but will need to approve the final design. Planning permission will also be needed. It is intended to run parallel to the road with a dropped kerb to ease access. The options of a grassed hardened area similar to The Leys or extending the existing lay-by have been submitted for costing comparison. Matt is going to arrange a meeting with the Head to keep her apprised of aspirations and take into account any observations she might offer. It will be best carried out during school holidays. The biggest challenge will be funding. We will likely need in the order of at least £40,000. The Clerk has submitted a bid to CDC for some support from the Prosperity Funds, but we will probably need to approach many many other benefactors to make this achievable. The Leys parking was commissioned at risk given the dependence on promised grants being forthcoming and the limited funds within reserves had they not come good.

Centurion Way

The Clerk and I attended a stakeholder and site visit event on on 29th November hosted by the project leads from the SDNPA. I have also since had an update from them:

West Dean link to Singleton Station. Progress on clearing the pavement between the end at West Dean and Singleton Station is hoped to be completed by Spring. The only delay would be if the progress that is being made to link the station platform area to the Scout Huts (thus reducing the transit alongside the road) requires contractor access via the station. Once this link is complete the section between the station and Cucumber Farm can be opened. There will be pedestrian access via the Hat Hill footpath.

Regarding a cycle friendly access to The Centurion Way at Hat Hill, the project team have engaged with the Landowners (West Dean Estate and National Trust) and identified a potential route from the cricket field side. In due course they will share the details and seek community / local resident support for the proposal. They indicate that they have set aside 'some' resource for this.

The route for the extension beyond Cucumber Farm through Wellhanger Copse is still to be confirmed. There are concerns, still to be resolved, about disruption of the bat colonies in the tunnels. SDNPA have recently discussed approaches taken by Wye Valley Greenway which achieved the transit of old rail tunnels with adaptations including low level lighting and false ceilings. However, any such ambition to transit the tunnels will take several years to achieve and require considerable local support. In the meantime they intend to proceed with a path through the copse. There is an approved original route (A) that has planning permission that drops down and skirts the edge of the copse to the east, rejoining just before the game keepers cottage. However, SDNPA now have a preferred alternative route (B) that continues in an almost straight line through the copse, avoiding losing height. This route is preferred by the user groups (cyclists) who they have engaged. Both paths will be 3m wide, hardened and fenced. Currently the copse is free to roam. The local tenants (Cucumber Farm and game keeper) are against the new route (B). They made their concerns very clear at the last Parish Council meeting. Since then I have walked the area with the tenants and they again articulated their concerns about the impact of the proposals on the ecology of the wood, bats and the unique wild flowers and ancient woodland, particularly noting the condition that the margins beside the path in the extension towards Cucumber farm have been left in, the disruption to walkers enjoyment of the woods and what they see as a heavy handed, pre-emptive approach by SDNPA. They have recently proposed a third route (dropping closer to the road) but SDNPA have made no commitment to consider that third route given the considerable costs that would be needed to repeat the viability work already undertaken for the other 2 routes. The local tenants, if they had to choose between routes A and B would prefer that SDNPA stuck to the original route A that has planning approval and is less intrusive. A key factor is that the landowner is the National Trust. I have tried to contact the local NT agent but have not yet received a reply. My understanding is that, at this stage the SDNPA continue to lean towards the new route B through the centre of the copse and may submit a pre planning application in February. This implies consent in principle from the landowner. The pre-planning application will elicit a formal view on the change proposed and include statutory consultation with Natural England and others. The Parish Council will be asked for a view. As well as the strongly held views of the local tenants I have canvassed the occasional walkers when visiting the copse. They indicate that they would not like to see a 3m wide fenced path cutting a swathe through the copse and feel that the original route would be less intrusive; a paraphrase of their comments would be "...if it [Route A] was good enough for the Centurion Way cycle groups before, then there is no need to change it and interfere with the enjoyment of the copse by those on foot..." and "...a 3m wide fenced roadway through the heart of the woodland...".

In my communication with the project leads in the SDNPA they did state:

“Please reassure everyone in Singleton we at the National Park remain committed to providing the local community with a high quality off road multiuser path and are determined to do so to the highest ecological standards.”

Sandbags

I was contacted by the Clerk on 12 December in response to a request by a resident in Charlton to access the stock of sand and sandbags to protect their absent neighbours house (at the foot of Knights Hill) which they deemed at risk of flooding. They were given access but asked to replace any used since residents are responsible for their own arrangements. The Clerk has also since renewed the padlock on the stock at the Partridge which had seized.

Finance support

During the Chair’s absence I have reviewed and approved the Clerk’s invoices and expenses on his behalf and assisted in the presentation of 24/25 budget.

Tony Marshall

Southern Water

The reason for the temporary pipe laid across the Leys meadow is that they have identified a fault in the pipe between the manhole by the bridge and the one in the middle of the field: the EA won’t allow them to pump into the river if it’s due to a fault. However, they still find the need to regularly use tankers to supplement this - which tends to prove that the problems continue in the other half of the meadow: when they could pump massive volumes into the river by the bridge, tankers weren’t needed, but as it’s only one pipe across the ground (effectively replicating the underground pipe), tankers are needed.

Added to this, they are having new problems this year at Bankside, with sewage regularly backing up in the manhole there and spilling onto the road. As this manhole drains into the manhole in the middle of the meadow, this appears to be further evidence of problems in the pipeline that runs west from there.

Since drafting the above, I’ve now learned that they are going to start over-pumping into the river again at Charlton – the SW email claims that the temporary pipeline is creating an ‘*artificial increase in flows*’ and that they need to relieve pressure on Singleton and further downstream. So I’ve penned a very strongly worded reply to Floyd Cooper, the Wastewater Networks Programme Manager, pointing out that there is nothing artificial about simply moving sewage from one manhole to the next, which is, after all the intended purpose of a sewage system. I’ve signalled that we’ve really had enough of their PR and their money-wasting tinkering with the system and that our next move will be to make as much noise as possible to get something done, including getting on to the BBC to flag up illegal pumping into the river at Charlton, unless he can now prove it’s not illegal.

Parish Design Statement

I haven’t taken the time to study in great detail the further comments received from SDNPA on this, but just reading these through, it seems clear that, with each change of personnel at their end, we get a different ‘take’ on what the PDS should be. Each person tries to push us in their preferred direction. This has tended to undermine my confidence in the whole process - and in the value of pursuing completion of the Design Statement. I’m not actually sure the SDNPA has a clear idea of the purpose of a Village Design Statement or sees much value in them.

We know for sure that Design Statements carry no weight at all in the planning process. We also know that, as a PC, we cannot ‘push through’ or ‘block’ any development. My inclination is, therefore, to publish on our website what we have, explaining that this document sums up what we believe to be the views of local people at this time and that it may be taken as a guide to the factors

we take into consideration when preparing our comments on planning applications. Or words to that effect. In other words, rather than keep trying to jump through ever higher hoops to please SDNPA – for which we will see no return anyway – we just do our own thing. I'd be interested in views on this.

SID Repair

The SID was malfunctioning when I moved it last, so I've contacted the supplier to get it fixed under warranty. Basically the 'Slow down' and 'Thank you' LEDs all lit up together when it was switched on, and stayed on, even when nothing was coming. It seems likely to be moisture getting in that's causing trouble. So it's currently out of action and we're awaiting collection by Westcotec.

Mat Chesshire Playground

See-Saw - I have spoken to a friend who is more adept at such things with respect to the seesaw. He seemed to think that it's integrity would never recover and so would be best to replace in the future.

Sam Cox Maintenance

Pavements. - I have reported the significant debris on the various A286 pavements to the council, with no response/acknowledgement. This has been done several times now. I have cleared most of the pavement North from the village from the A286 and will endeavour to finish this over the next weekend or so. I have also reached out to Chichester Volunteers, organised through the council, to ask whether the path from Town Lane along the A286 to the 30mph sign at West Dean is something that they could help with.

Maintenance Day - March 23rd, please keep the date free and also please let me (Sam Cox) know of any desired aspects of maintenance/clean up across the common areas of the villages. Tony to kindly help coordinate the Charlton requirements/volunteers.

- The grass area in front of the school has become even more churned up of late. Not only is this a rather unkept to look at, but mud is spread onto the road and the surface of the grassed area is becoming increasingly damaged. Now that the parking/drop off area in the Leys has been resolved, and there is parking in the layby by the school, I seek any feedback as to whether the grass between Charlton Lane and the school should be repaired and trees planted to stop inconsiderate parking/resultant damage, at the next maintenance day. Communication with the school is also needed, conscious that the cars will be driven from outside of our Parish.

EV Charging

Communications with Connected Kerb have gone quiet since November. I have followed up with them on several occasions and we await further contact re their assessment of suitability of the site.

Jo Ward

Weald and Downland Museum

I met with the museum director Simon Wardell on 5 January 2024. We spoke about various matters. The December Advent event had been successful and no impact on the village as parking arrangements were managed through Goodwood. This will be an annual event. No other large events are planned for 2024. The museum is supportive of the change to speed in the village and welcome improved access for walkers including both staff and visitors, to their site. Also would be supportive of projects in the villages. I raised a request for access to parking by villagers at the museum in the event of an emergency such as flood which in principle is supported. Can the Parish council confirm if this is wanted in order to proceed formally?

Henry Smith Charity

I am now a trustee of this charity.

Future Projects

Not yet ready with a questionnaire for residents.

Vulnerable List

This is in need of review for both the purpose and oversight. It is fully recognised how successful the approach was to support all residents during the COVID 19 pandemic lock down and therefore the value of being prepared for an emergency support going forward. The language of vulnerable and holding a list is not ideal in current times and may not capture the intentions. I would like to propose further discussion to consider options. One such option could be a list of neighbourhood volunteers who could be asked via Whatsapp group to knock on doors, in the event of agreed parameters such as flood alerts.

Vivien Nuttall – Clerk/RFO

Finance Report

Total in Current Account (12/01/24) – £9,220.45

Current Reserves (held in the Current Account) – Playground Repairs £1,982.00. General Maintenance £471.00

Balance in Savings Account – £7,071.92

Funds Received since 14/11/23

Interest on Savings Account - £24.54

Henry Potter

Singleton with Charlton PC meeting Monday 08/01/2024 District Councillors Report First of all I wish you all a happy and fortuitous New Year.

The recent reaction by National Highways with regard to the traffic impact of development in the south of the District on the A27 has at least allowed further progress towards submission of the District Local Plan for inspection by the Planning Inspectorate. This is most welcome news unlike a recommendation by the Cabinet, on January 9th, to full Council to increase Car Parking charges by 6.7% in line with a ONS September '23 inflation figure which we now know has fallen dramatically. Also, charging is recommended on Sunday's at the Council owned Rural Car Parks. Considering the current climate in our High Streets at present, I consider this to be a bad proposal. On my fairly frequent visits to East Pallant House, that Car Park is now so underused that increased charges will cause yet more folk to boycott the City. Also in the proposal is to extend the chargeable period from 6 pm til 8 pm in the evenings in Council owned car parks! Again a hit against the night time economy. The debate of these measures will be interesting at the Council Meeting as many of the current Members are very 'green' orientated and would like to see everybody riding bicycles and build houses on our car parks. Quite how maybe a 70 year old would manage their shopping bags on a bike is beyond me.

The next meeting, on 16th January, of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is promised the attendance of Katy Bourne the Sussex PCC to answer questions about her Police Force. Many questions have been tendered in advance but I hope there will be ample time to question her with impromptu questions. It is a fact, but we would all like to know 'where are our Policemen'. Cyber crime is said to occupy 30% of Police resources but surely there must be sufficient Officers for some presence on our streets.

The ongoing issue with sewage escaping from the system in The Valley seems to have worsened with tankers attending the inspection cover adjacent to Bankside. This is something new, I don't ever remember this being necessary in the past and the lack of relief measures in Charlton suggest that something must have changed. It is a confounded nuisance to residents and traffic.

Adrian Moss, the Leader of the Council had a meeting with senior Officers of Southern Water on Friday last week 12th and he asked all Members to highlight issues in our Wards. I trust you received copy of my response and I even sent him photos of all the situations in The Valley. Hopefully I may hear back from him before your Meeting and I'll report subsequently the reaction of SW.

I have enquired of John Cross the new CDC representative on the SDNPA about progress on the northward route of the Centurion Way through Cucumber Farm but he had no further news. The issue of passing West Dean Tunnel has still not even resolved, I spoke to Ian Graham the agent for West Dean estate recently and he is concerned that they may still try and utilise the footpath adjacent to the A286 from Motor Road to the biomass boiler yard opposite the College entrance gates! A most dangerous idea!

If I hear anything from Adrian Moss regarding the SW situation I will report verbally to your Meeting.