



Hassocks Amenity Association

*maintaining an attractive rural
environment in keeping with changing times*

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2014

Having survived the wettest winter since records began, we now know exactly what Cobbett meant when he described the countryside below the Downs as ‘the real Weald where the clay is bottomless’. The Lodge Lane footpath (K12), the subject of several recent newsletters, became virtually impassable. Dogs were seen to be carried. It seemed quite possible that history might repeat itself and the unfortunate man who braved the road between Burwash and Ticehurst in the early eighteenth century would have a 21st century counterpart in Keymer. We are indebted to a clergyman for an account of the incident. ‘A traveller noticed a hat on the road. He picked it up and found a man’s head underneath. Neighbours rescued not only the man but his horse who had fallen into the mire’. It is pleasing to think that the residents of Lodge Lane would have done no less today.

The news that WSCC had appointed contractors to resurface K12, and that work would be started after Easter, weather permitting, was therefore doubly welcome. It has been a long battle to get this approved and our County Councillor, Andy Petch, has been a stalwart and valuable ally when progress was bogged down in every sense. The lovely dry sunny weather we are enjoying at the time of writing gives us hope that indeed ‘weather will permit’ in the not too distant future.

<http://www.hassocksamenity.org.uk/>

Rail news. The great day is almost upon us! Friday, 2nd May is provisionally fixed for the formal opening of our new step-free railway station. The lifts will be working and accessible not only for passengers but also for members of the public who want to use them as a short cut. Video surveillance inside and out, alarm facilities and user friendly controls aim to keep everyone safe and reassured 24/7. With the same aim, the subway is being cleaned, sealed and painted, the stairwalls clad in gleaming white, and additional lighting installed. There is even every hope that subway flooding will become a thing of the past. Time will tell! Check our website for more details nearer the date.

It has been a long, hard slog to reach this stage. We have been so fortunate that Network Rail has bent over backwards to make things as smooth as possible, closing the subway for the very shortest periods, and also providing some extra

‘goodies’. The waiting areas on the Brighton side have been upgraded, with jolly bright yellow seats and extra protection from the weather. Soon, also, there will be new platform floral displays maintained by the Aldingbourne Trust. The Trust is a charity which provides opportunities for people with learning disabilities to develop their skills. Enterprisingly, it works in conjunction with local businesses, providing both employment and a community service. Check their website www.aldingbournetrust.co.uk for more details. Dennis South will be working with them on a range of displays including a superb new planter which the Monday Group are building and which will include some wood retrieved from the late lamented holm oak. On behalf of the community, Sian and Tony Phillips will continue to tend their unique separate garden, near the front of the station.

Station car parking. Have you noticed that one price has actually gone down? You can now leave your car in the station car park all day on Saturdays for £2.00. If this reduced charge is popular, Southern Rail will consider introducing a cheap rate for weekday parking after 4 p.m. HAA are pressing for this – anything that relieves car parking in the roads around the station is to be welcomed.

The new Saturday concession means that it is now possible to park over the weekend for £3.00 as the Sunday charge is only £1.00. The catch is that advance car park tickets can only be bought from the ticket office. But how to be certain that the ticket office is open? We have been assured by Eddie Toase, Station Manager, that unusual circumstances aside:

The ticket office is usually guaranteed to be open in the morning, but normally closes about 12.15 pm for the changeover shift at 1.15pm.

That’s a useful bit of information for anyone, but vital for people who dread using the automatic ticket vending machines when the ticket office is closed. Southern are very aware that many people are reluctant to use them. Why? Eddie Toase would like to know your specific problems. Can you read the display on a dull day, on a sunny day, are the instructions easy to follow, do you get confused by the various buttons, especially when there is a queue behind you? What is your precise problem? **Please let Catherine Cassidy know as soon as possible.** Southern need to understand exactly what it is that makes your heart sink and panic levels rise. Then their design experts are more likely to come up with something that is user-friendly for the machine-averse.

Car Parking in Hassocks

Four years ago we were unsuccessful in alerting the Parish and District Councils to members' reports of worsening car parking problems and our concern to establish the facts. So we did our own mini-surveys of the long stay car park and the roads around the station. It was obvious that there was a very real problem. Slowly the message got through, and in 2012 the Parish Council set up a car parking working group, on which HAA was represented. The result was the Parish Council's 2013 survey of parking which all householders and businesses received. Ian Weir's painstaking and revealing analysis of the response has now resulted in WSCC including the recommendations in their programme of future work, following a review by consultants who will draw up an action plan. This may not sound very exciting, but it is a real triumph to have secured this undertaking in competition with the claims of other hard-pressed areas in the County.

No gain without pain?

So will householders who have complained about commuter parking soon see a resolution to their problems? Restricted parking (eg a ban on parking between 11 am and 12 noon) would deter commuters but inconvenience residents. Residents' permits might solve the problem, but would hit householders' pockets. Compromises will be needed before solutions are found. However, the Parish Council has also come up with ingenious suggestions on ways to increase on-road short term parking and improve traffic flow in the village centre which should be less contentious. So although it may seem that nothing is being done, a lot has been going on. HAA will maintain a watching brief whilst options are explored and residents are consulted.

The Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan

The Localism Act, 2011 authorises the drafting of Neighbourhood Plans. These are intended to enable residents to have a greater say in the development of their local area. They are required to cover such key aspects as the location and type of new housing, (though not the number of houses), shop and office development, the infrastructure needed, as well as the conservation and development of those aspects of our environment which we cherish. When completed, inspected and approved by referendum (a long drawn-out process) Neighbourhood Plans will have the force of law. Hassocks Parish Council is responsible for our Neighbourhood Plan which will influence much of our lives until 2030.

The Act is clear that consultation with the community must be built in from the beginning. HAA therefore contacted the Parish Council twice last year offering its services, and was twice informed that consultation would not begin until 'the plan had been developed to a more advanced stage'. We therefore decided to

begin our own consultation and gathered together a small group of members who are expert in various areas of the Plan's remit. Finally, in January, we were invited to nominate two members to join the Parish Working Group - but only if a confidentiality agreement was signed. This we refused to do as we believe that transparency should be a hallmark of the consultation process. We now await another meeting which we hope will clear up misunderstandings and look forward to hearing details of the Council's consultation plans. We hope that the discussion at our AGM (see back page) will provide further food for thought for us all.

News from Lag Wood.

Paul Roberts and Sue Milnthorpe write: It's been a long wet and very windy few months but Lag Wood has survived unscathed. One or two branches brought down in the storms have given us the rare opportunity to find out what is growing in the canopy. It was good to see the Lag Stream in full flood once more. And we are impressed by regular walkers from Hassocks and Clayton who were undeterred by the quantities of mud. Signs of spring are everywhere, marsh marigolds are flowering in the stream, violets and wood anemones are appearing. Even in March butterflies and bees are already hard at work among the willow catkins in the meadow.

Our experiment with sheep has had to be postponed. Gates needed to be made to allow access through our electric fencing and by the time these arrived it was already too muddy for the sheep to have access to the stream. We are planning to get sheep back in the meadow this September.

Walkers may meet a man who, somewhat enigmatically, will be carrying a net and a cat litter tray. His name is Graeme, an invertebrates expert. He is carrying out a survey for us which will take around a year to complete. Lag stream will also be regularly monitored by the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust.

We are now working on our management plan. This is likely to propose some coppice management for the wood and some careful cutting back of the blackthorn, brambles and thistles along the margins of the meadow. The latter are important habitats for birds and butterflies and we're taking some time to consider how this should be approached.

But preserving the meadow is also a priority. And with that in mind we will be cutting back some part of the blackthorn and bramble where it is straying too far into the meadow. We're hoping to start on Sunday 30th March at 2.00pm weather permitting. You are very welcome to join us.

Bring own shears, secateurs or trimmers. Gardening gloves will be essential.

Making Hassocks greener

HAA struggles on! We have just allocated another £500 for *Trees for Hassocks*. This is a regular donation to support the group who, through West Sussex County Council and Hassocks Parish Council, are making such a difference to our roads.

The raised beds outside the pet shop still pose problems. There has been a magnificent display of daffodils on the corner bed owned by the Wilmington Close Residents Association. The spring bulbs planted in the other beds in past years have also made a difference. The smallest bed, planted by the Guide Companies with heathers, has flourished. It is such a pity that notice we placed there, acknowledging all the work that had been done, has mysteriously vanished.

The long term problem, however, remains. The brickwork is unsightly and crumbling, and as Spring turns into summer, the beds will look more and more unkempt. HAA, on behalf of the Parish Council and Wilmington Close residents, is still pressing the London-based landlords for a resolution. This area, attractively landscaped and planted, could transform the centre of the village.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Monday, 23rd June at 7.30 p.m.

YOUR VILLAGE, YOUR VISION, YOUR VIEWS

What kind of village do you want for your children, your grandchildren? We are offering you a two minute slot to share your ideas with an audience as committed as you are to the future welfare of the village. Joining us will be a group of key movers in village matters, who also want to hear and respond to your vision.

Fred Maillardet will be chairing the session. Let us know now by emailing hassocksamenity@aol.com or calling 01273 845882 if you would like to help set the debate going.

But we hope that everyone will feel free to join in throughout the evening because it is

YOUR VILLAGE, YOUR VISION, YOUR VIEWS

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