

# Hever Residents Association

## *Annual General Meeting*

***Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2007***

Present:- Alan Townsend (Chairman), Jan Ryan (Secretary and Treasurer)  
Committee Members Andy Barnett, Katherine Storey, Gerry Ryan, Ellie Heard.  
The meeting was attended by a further 23 members and Guests.

### **1) Chairman's welcome and introduction to Councilor Peter Fleming, Leader of Sevenoaks District Council.**

The Chairman began by welcoming all present and thanking the guest speaker for agreeing to attend the meeting and give a short talk. He gave a brief résumé of Cllr Fleming's background, and stressed that Cllr Fleming is an elected Member of the Council, not an Officer.

Cllr Fleming began by complimenting HRA on its Web Site. He said it was the best Village site he had ever seen, and found the content fascinating!  
He then went on to explain that although Council Tax is collected by SDC, only 12% is retained by SDC to administer the District.

The problem with aircraft noise was mentioned, and Cllr Fleming said that SDC took this seriously and was doing all in its power to produce action by the DfT to alleviate the problem.

Green Belt land and the importance of protecting it was his next topic. He said that 93% of land in the District was in the Green Belt, and SDC was committed to preserving it. Despite this, the District had already exceeded Government guidelines on new housing. He mentioned SDC's own Interim Planning Policy, and the later publication of the Barker Report. Housing in the District is the most expensive in the region, with average values exceeding £300,000. This discriminates against core workers.

Cllr Fleming deplored the practice of building new housing without allowing for adequate infrastructure provision. He cited the German example, where full infrastructure is implemented first, and housing built only when this is in place.

Re. The required provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers, Cllr Fleming said SDC had fulfilled its obligations and was 3<sup>rd</sup> out of 14 Councils in the region.

Questions were then invited from the floor.

On questions regarding the safety of the Green Belt, Cllr Fleming said that the current essentially urban Government poorly understood countryside issues. However, within the District there are small areas which do not deserve the designation and could be rationalized. Less than 1% (of the GB) had been lost in the District and SDC remains committed to its preservation, despite the threat from Westminster

On water shortages and flooding, Cllr Fleming said this is again due to irresponsible development, preventing ground water from soaking in and filling the aquifers. The problem will get worse.

On rural migration and Central Government funding, he said the south east has more immigration than emigration, but special funding money continues to flow north. What little does flow south is often already proscribed for Government schemes.

With E.U. directives and unelected Regional offices, district councils are under threat.

In other European countries there is a much greater local representation at E.U. level.

In answer to questions on the performance of the SDC Planning Department, Cllr Fleming said there is a shortage of senior planning officers in the public sector generally. The few there are, are overstretched and overstressed. More than 500 planning applications are received monthly, dealt with by 20 officers. Some of these officers are from agencies with little, or no local knowledge, and cost far more than permanent staff. Nonetheless, the Department should be performing better than it is and re-organization is planned.

The unsatisfactory 3 year planning consent for the travellers at 7 Acre Farm was blamed on a traveller friendly Government, but for more detailed information Cllr Fleming referred the questioner to Simon Avis, the SDC gypsy liaison officer.

At this point, the Chairman thanked Cllr Fleming for his presentation, patience and valuable information and moved the meeting on.

## **2) Apologies for absence**

These had been received from Committee Members Jeanette Fahlbusch, Adrian Maurice and John Scott, and a further 7 members.

## **3) Minutes of the 2006 AGM**

Copies of these had been distributed in advance of the meeting and were accepted without amendment. Proposed: Andy Barnett, Seconded: Rosemary Bayford.

## **4) Matters Arising**

At the 2006 AGM, a member had proposed that drinks should be provided for members and guests at AGMs and paid for out of HRA funds. The Chairman called for a vote on this. On a show of hands, there were 6 votes in favour and 14 votes against. The proposal was thus lost, and members will be invited to make (optional) donations, as before.

## **5) Chairman's Report**

The Chairman opened by explaining that Adrian Maurice who had been elected Chairman at the 2006 AGM, had been unable to continue due to pressure of work, and had resigned from the post during the year. Committee had unanimously voted for Alan to take over the role, which he had been happy to do.

He went on to thank Gill Ford and Jeanette Fahlbusch (in their absence) for organizing the very successful Summer Party with a Ceilidh Band, held in September at the Village Hall.

The Chairman also congratulated all concerned with the fireworks display in November, which year on year gets better and better and attracts bigger and bigger audiences. He said one complaint had been received, but as the complainant had said the noise went on late into the night, it seemed unlikely that HRA's display was to blame.

Problems with excessive aircraft noise were due in part to incoming aircraft not adhering to the industry's own rules. The Chairman thanked David Baron for his hard work on this, saying that progress, though slow, was being made.

The Travellers living on the 7 Acre site had won their appeal, and had been granted consent to remain on the site for 3 years. HRA and SDC had fought vigorously against this, but sadly had not been adequately supported by the other authorities involved.

In How Green, a landowner had submitted an agricultural notification to SDC for a complex of barns, which appeared more elaborate than functional. Thanks, the Chairman said, were due to the District Councillor for an early alert on this. HRA had consulted with local residents, and was able to present SDC with a robust case for rejection, which was subsequently implemented.

Other land in How Green had seen a footpath disappear under the plough. HRA had reported this to the Public Rights of Way Office, and it will be re-instated in the spring.

Work at the bus shelter had transformed what had been an eyesore into an attractive greensward planted up with spring bulbs, and framed with a neatly laid hedge. HRA's contractor, had himself contributed the turf and bulbs, and other financial help had been received from the Parish Council, and an anonymous donor. HRA intends to install two heavy timber benches on the Parish Field, with ongoing support from the Parish Council.

After lengthy negotiations with Shepherd Neame, HRA have at last persuaded them to take responsibility for the broken fence between the field and the 'Henry' car park, and this will be mended in the near future. The Village Notice Board, originally made and installed by HRA is now in need of some severe attention. Committee Member John Scott, who made it, will take it away for renovation.

The Chairman concluded by saying it had been a busy year, and 2007 is going to be even busier.

#### **6) Treasurers Report**

The Treasurer said she, too, had taken over the role mid year, when Amy Davies had had to retire from the Committee due to family commitments. The treasurer apologized for not providing comparison figures from 2005, as the accounts she had received (and that Amy had received), had been in broad terms and not sufficiently detailed. Expenditure on the Parish Hut was artificially high as the sum included electricity bills going back 18 months.

Both reports were adopted, proposed by Andy Barnett and seconded by Rosemary Bayford.

#### **7) Election of Officers and Committee**

The Chairman, Alan Townsend, and the Secretary/Treasurer, Jan Ryan, were elected on a unanimous show of hands.

During the year, Amy Davies and Gill Ford had resigned from the Committee and new Committee Member Ellie Heard had been co-opted.

All other Committee Members were willing to stand for re-election and they and Ellie were elected on a unanimous show of hands. The elections were proposed by Una Higgs and seconded by Mavis Seal.

#### **8) Any other business**

Fireworks – There was some discussion on the noise they produce, and it was agreed that at the last display there was one pyro. which was particularly loud, and would be avoided in future.

Footpath by the School – it was reported that the path had been used for horse riding although it is not a Bridle Path. It was agreed to report this and request better signage

The Fingerpost – at the Chid. end of Rectory lane is broken; John Scott is aware of this and will mend it in due course.

Car Parking at Hever Station – The dramatic increase in car parking (due to Southern's excellent train service) was raised, and it was clarified that DPL (the owners) do have their own reserved parking, and do not exceed their quota.

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting and invited all present to partake of the food and drink on offer at the back of the Hall.

Finger foods are provided by Committee Members, each of whom contributes a dish. Each year the 'Most Popular Platter' is recorded and for 2007 (and for the second year running), the honours go to Alan Townsend for his chicken dip.