

# Balcombe Parish Council

[www.balcombeparishcouncil.com](http://www.balcombeparishcouncil.com)

## Chairman:

Alison Stevenson

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## Clerk:

Rosemary Robertson

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Email: [parish.clerk@btconnect.com](mailto:parish.clerk@btconnect.com)

## Members as at 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015:

Kevin Bottomley	01444 811755	Peter Huxley	01444 819264
Katherine Daniel	01444 811368	Carol Jarvest	01444 811559
Alan Dearden	01444 811989	Rodney Saunders	01444 811598
Catherine Dennison	01444 919168	Mike Talman	01444 811230
Simon Greenwood	0207 370 6830	Robin Williamson	01444 811519

## Mid Sussex District Councillor:

Gary Marsh 01444 811320

## SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE PARISH CLERK

- Providing residents with access to planning applications and advising Mid Sussex District Council or West Sussex County Council as appropriate of the Parish Council's comments and recommendations.
- Administering subsidised rail cards and bus passes for the over 60s.
- Publishing Parish Council news in the Parish Magazine and the Mid Sussex Times, and on the Parish Council notice board and the Parish Council website.
- Acting as Executive Officer of the Parish Council and maintaining links with Mid Sussex District Council, West Sussex County Council and the Sussex Police.
- Taking bookings for pitch hire and use of the recreation ground, and making arrangements for the maintenance of the pavilion.
- Taking bookings, administering the running of Bramble Hall.
- Managing the contract for the provision of street and footpath lighting.
- Supervising and coordinating the duties of the Parish Ranger.

## Annual Parish Meeting

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2015

7.30 pm in Bramble Hall, Bramble Hill.

# Balcombe Parish Council



## Annual Report

2014 – 2015

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

### Last Stand

The current Parish Council is coming to the end of its four year tenure, and in May a new Council will be elected to serve the village until 2019. I must therefore start by saying **thank you** to all of the team, some of whom have been members of the Council for eight, twelve or even more years. They have been a fantastic team to work with!

Not only have we achieved a great deal during these four years, but we will leave behind us a good and established network of relationships with partner organisations, including the County and District Councils.

### Proud Achievements

I think we can be proud of our successes, several of which have come to fruition within the last few months; in some instances following years of frustrated negotiation. They include the implementation of a graduated speed limit on the B 2036 north of the village; parking restrictions on Newlands; a reduction in the charges for use of the station car park; a staggering of the times of trains heading north and south stopping at Balcombe; a snow plan that works; upgrading of all street lights; restoration of the Youth Club and the establishment of a new community hall. We have also helped WSCC and Network Rail establish a new footpath from the station to Kemps, a bridleway to Crawley, and a footbridge over the railway. Finally, of course, the publication of a draft Neighbourhood Plan that is intended to ensure the provision of lower cost housing in the decades ahead, parking in the village centre, a new graveyard and expanded commercial facilities. If you have ever been a Councillor you will realise quite what an achievement this list represents.

### Would you like to be a councillor?

Many current members of the Parish Council will not be standing for re-election in May. If you feel willing and able to bring something to the care and improvement of our village, and are not afraid of some hard work, why not consider standing for election as a Councillor. The Parish Clerk will be happy to give you a better idea of the commitment involved and show you how to apply.

### Web Site

Please visit the Parish Council's website [www.balcombeparishcouncil.com](http://www.balcombeparishcouncil.com) for news on village issues and information on our activities.

*Alison Stevenson*

## BRAMBLE HALL

Bramble Hall is becoming an established part of community life in Balcombe. Use of it has increased steadily, and income from hirers has increased from £3,570 in the first year to £5,877 in the second. These figures do not include its use by the Parish Council, estimated to be worth approximately £2,000 per annum. Despite understandable concerns, there is little evidence that its presence has proved to be a significant problem for the other community spaces in the village. Thanks are due to the Parish Clerk and the Parish Ranger who have taken on the responsibility for managing and maintaining the building.

31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 marks the end of the second of the three years of the Parish Council's lease of the building from the United Reformed Church Synod. The Council decided not to exercise the option to terminate this lease at the end of September 2014. The lease ends on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016. It will be a matter for the new Parish Council, which will be elected in May, to decide whether or not to approach the Synod with a view to negotiating a much longer lease that would make Bramble Hall available for use by the Balcombe community for many years to come.

*Rodney Saunders*

## NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Neighbourhood Planning group has been working hard to get our draft plan ready for formal consultation. We have identified possible sites for housing and commercial development, worked with the landowners to come up with outline plans for each site and then submitted these plans for consultation with village residents. We have also worked through the environmental impact of any possible development in the form of a Sustainability Appraisal. As well as development plans we have also worked up other policies to be included in the Plan, including the protection of our green spaces and community facilities, improvements to the village centre and a Design Guide to help anyone building or extending a property in the village.

A great deal of interest has been shown at the drop-in sessions, with lots of valuable and well considered feedback. As a result, at the end of February we were able to publish the draft Plan, complete with supporting documentation. Unfortunately it cannot go for formal consultation until after the election as there is an official period of 'purdah' commencing on 30<sup>th</sup> March, and the statutory consultation period is six weeks. In due course further drop-in sessions will be arranged so that everyone will have an opportunity to make further comments before the new Parish Council issues the final Plan for independent examination, followed by a referendum of village residents later in 2015. The draft Plan and the supporting documents can be inspected on the Parish Council's website.

*Katherine Daniel & Catherine Dennison*

## FACILITIES & AMENITIES

Once again this has been a busy year. We have signed a new contract for the maintenance of our street lighting, and all the bulbs have been replaced to bring the lighting up to the latest specification. We have continued to maintain and repair the Parish Council's buildings, signs and green spaces, including the replacement of the door and showers at the Pavilion. In the spring we will replace the crumbling post on the Balcombe sign on the Green opposite the School. Our notice boards continue to be well used by local groups, but please remove notices as soon as they are out of date. So far this year our plans for dealing with snow on the roads within the village have not needed to be activated. The group will continue to work to help to keep Balcombe a fantastic place in which to live. Do contact us if you see opportunities for improvements to be made.

*Catherine Dennison & Mike Talman*

## PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT

The most important planning matter during the past year has been the production and publication of our draft Neighbourhood Plan, details of which are given elsewhere in this Report. Alongside this we continue to monitor and comment on, usually to the District Council, applications for planning consent in and affecting the Parish. We have reviewed the draft District Plan and responded where we feel that there are omissions or policies that we cannot support. We lodged formal objection to the developer's appeal against the District Council's decision to refuse planning consent for the Penland Farm development. The urbanisation of the northern fringes of Haywards Heath, adjacent to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the consequent increase in the volume of traffic through Balcombe, were both matters of concern. The development has now been granted planning consent.

*Alison Stevenson*

## RAILWAY

The award of the new Thameslink and Southern franchises to a single operator, Govia, was greeted with cautious optimism in the hope that we may see an end to the confusion and buck-dodging that has existed while the routes were shared by Southern Railway and First Capital Connect. At present the new operation remains in a state of transition so it is not yet possible to determine how great any improvements will be.

The situation has been complicated by the major infrastructure improvement programme that has now commenced, especially the works being carried out at London Bridge station. These works and the associated re-scheduling of through services have caused considerable concern to commuters from Balcombe. While the commuters who travel in and out of London Bridge have received additional services, in reality these are often disrupted by the very fragile temporary arrangements while the additional tracks and platforms are being built. Commuters that used to enjoy the convenience of the trains passing through London via Blackfriars, City, Farringdon and St Pancras have been seriously affected and now have to change trains. We trust that these issues are only temporary and that when the infrastructure works are complete, the service will be a considerable improvement on that which existed previously. These works are said to be the largest investment in the London regional network since Victorian times – let's hope the pain is worth it.

It remains that the Balcombe ticket office is staffed for just a few hours in the mornings and that the ticket machine sometimes malfunctions. The modern, heated shelter on the northbound platform continues to have problems, most recently relating to the heating. We continue to lobby for improvements.

However, there has been one real success: the Parish Council was instrumental in negotiating a reduction in the charge to park in the station car park from £4 per day to £2.50 per day, and for parking to be free after 4 pm on weekdays and at all times on Saturdays and Sundays. This is intended to be part of our drive to persuade those commuters who currently park their cars on roads within the village – and on Newlands in particular – to use the station car park instead.

***Kevin Bottomley***

## SAFETY AND SECURITY

We have regularly represented Balcombe residents on the police authority's Neighbourhood Watch Panel, and modest financial support is provided to Balcombe's Neighbourhood Watch team.

Sadly our Speedwatch team has still not been resurrected as to date a new volunteer Team Leader has yet to be found. If you feel that this is a role that you would be willing and able to fulfil, please contact the Parish Clerk.

Police statistics for 2014 indicate that fewer criminal offences were committed in Balcombe than in other adjacent parishes.

Dangerous potholes in roads within the Parish have been identified and reported to the West Sussex County Council, which is responsible for road maintenance. By the time this report is published, Foxwells should have been completely resurfaced. It is hoped that by the end of May the whole of Bramble Hill and the Haywards Heath Road/Mill Lane junction will also have been similarly treated.

A Welcome Pack is delivered to each new resident of Balcombe and these are very well received. Please contact the Parish Clerk if you are new to the village and have not yet received one.

***Alan Dearden***

## OIL EXPLORATION MATTERS

Our objections to Cuadrilla's planning application to flow test the exploratory well at Lower Stumble did not prevent West Sussex County Council from granting planning consent in April 2014. However we were able to influence the imposition of the conditions applied to that consent, which we hope will provide additional protection to the residents of Balcombe should Cuadrilla pursue activities at the Lower Stumble Site. In order to activate the planning consent, Cuadrilla must formally engage with local residents, and further consideration will be given to the routing of HGV traffic. The Parish Council will be pushing for a circular route in order to halve the impact on Balcombe.

The Frack Free Balcombe Residents' Association (FFBRA) mounted a challenge to the planning decision in the High Court. I attended part of the proceedings and, while the granting of consent was upheld, Balcombe was yet again seen to be taking a stand in demanding that proper protective measures are in place and very careful consideration is given when considering each site for oil and/or gas exploration.

Otherwise, it has been a quieter year for the oil exploration group, while we wait to see if and when Cuadrilla will start addressing the conditions with which it has to comply before carrying out any further work on the Lower Stumble site. Very recently, Cuadrilla has applied to replace the anti-protest fencing which surrounds the site with normal site fencing, and it has told the Parish Council that it does not intend to start addressing the conditions of the planning consent in the near future.

We have observed with great interest the political developments over the last year. I attended a Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) workshop to consider the conflicts between trespass legislation and the terms of oil/gas exploration licences. There have been interesting international developments in relation to the fracking issue, with New York State and Scotland added to the regions that have banned the technique. The cross-party Environmental Audit Committee recommended that fracking be put on hold throughout the UK because of the uncertain risks to the environment and the UK's commitment to reducing climate changing emissions. It also criticised the Government for "rushing through" legislation, and called for a moratorium on all fracking and an outright ban on fracking in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which would include Balcombe, and in National Parks. The Government did not accept all the recommendations and, although the House of Commons initially agreed to ban fracking in AONB and in National Parks, the Government has decided that the decisions on fracking in such locations are to be left to the discretion of the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. The implication for Balcombe is that, while no consent to frack at Lower Stumble has been sought or granted, and Cuadrilla have expressly excluded fracking from their stated plans for the site, if use of the technique were not an option it would establish a certainty which does not at present exist.

We attended various events during the year at which we shared Balcombe's experiences with groups of residents, Parish Councils and West Sussex County Council.

***Kevin Bottomley***

## YOUNG PEOPLE

The Youth Club continues to go from strength to strength with a secure and stable team of youth workers and a varied list of activities. Funding comes exclusively from the Parish Council by way of an annual grant. Currently the Youth Club is in a healthy financial state, and the grant included in the Council's budget for 2015/16 will enable us to continue with two paid youth workers at the Club's weekly meetings.

The Youth Club meets in Bramble Hall each Monday evening during term time from 7.00 to 9.00 pm. Any young person of senior school age is welcome to attend.

In its draft Neighbourhood Plan, on which residents will be consulted further later in the year, the Parish Council has proposed provision for a skate park, and that land is set aside for this purpose. Allocating land is of course an incredibly important first step, but there will still be a lot of work to do to raise the funds necessary to construct the facility. The Club already has some £3,700 earmarked for this purpose and, hopefully, the next Parish Council will decide to allocate to this project some of the money that Balcombe will receive as a result of the Community Infrastructure Levy.

*Carol Jarvest*

## TRAFFIC MATTERS

The past year has seen the completion of two major projects, each of which the Parish Council initiated several years ago, and each of which required a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). A TRO is necessary for any measure that is to be legally enforceable.

The first TRO, implemented a few months ago, was the introduction of a gradual reduction in the speed limit on the B 2036 north of the village from the 60 mph national speed limit on a single carriageway road, to the 30 mph speed limit within the village. This is particularly important for vehicles leaving the M 23 at junction 10A.

Parking is a continual and insoluble problem. However the Parish Council decided that Newlands is a special case, and it has adopted a carrot and stick approach to resolve it. The carrot is the reduced (eliminated at certain times) charges for the use of the station car park. The stick is the second TRO: single yellow lines that are to be painted on both sides of Newlands from its junction with the London Road up to the point at which it becomes Oldlands Avenue, which is a private road. Other than in short sections without lines, all parking will be banned between 11.00 am and 12 noon from Monday to Friday, offenders will face a fine. This measure has been pursued with the support of a large majority of Newlands residents. In February the last administrative hurdle was overcome. The painting of the lines etc. is now in the hands of the West Sussex County Council Highways Department, and it is hoped that the work will be completed within the next two or three months.

*Rodney Saunders*

## FINANCE

The table on page 5 opposite sets out the budgeted and forecast actual financial performance of the Parish Council in the year ended 31 March 2015, and the budget for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016. At the date of publication of this report, the figures are provisional and subject to final approval by the full Parish Council.

In the table, 'Facilities' refers to expenditure in connection with the recreation ground, the pavilion, provision of a rubbish freighter and general maintenance.

We have maintained our Precept (that part of the Council Tax allocated to the Parish Council) at £60,000.

*Robin Williamson, Responsible Financial Officer*

	Budget 2014/15	Forecast 2014/15	Budget 2015/16	NOTES
<b>INCOME</b>				
Precept	60,000	60,000	60,000	
Recreation Ground	2,200	2,200	2,200	
Grants & Sundry Income	100	249	100	
Pavilion FC Usage	1,500	1,500	1,500	
Bank Interest	200	200	200	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>64,000</b>	<b>64,149</b>	<b>64,000</b>	
<b>ROUTINE PAYMENTS</b>				
Clerk Salary & Allowances	10,300	14,957	15,000	Salary increased in 2014
General Administration	6,250	6,455	6,800	
Public Lighting	6,500	7,039	6,900	
Facilities	3,450	4,209	4,500	Includes rubbish freighter
Snow Plan	2,500	500	2,500	
Ranger Services	3,800	3,800	4,000	
Election Expenses	0	0	2,000	PC election in May 2015
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32,800</b>	<b>36,960</b>	<b>41,700</b>	
<b>GRANTS</b>				
Community Bus Support	400	400	500	
Youth Club	2,500	2,500	2,500	
Victory Hall	4,500	4,500	4,500	
Other	1500	615	1,500	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,900</b>	<b>8,015</b>	<b>9,000</b>	
<b>PROJECTS</b>				
Oil Exploration Matters	5,000	152	5,000	Carried forward
Neighbourhood Plan	14,000	9,323	5,000	Carried forward
Other Projects	2,000	500	2,000	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21,000</b>	<b>9,975</b>	<b>12,000</b>	
<b>TRAFFIC MATTERS</b>				
Traffic Calming	1000	0	500	
Speedwatch	500	0	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,500</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>500</b>	
<b>BRAMBLE HALL</b>				
Lease	7,000	7,000	7,000	
Running Costs	2,295	2,295	2,300	
Non-recurring costs	0	276	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,295</b>	<b>9,571</b>	<b>9,300</b>	
Less Rental Income	4,400	5,877	6,000	
<b>NET</b>	<b>(4,895)</b>	<b>(3,694)</b>	<b>(3,300)</b>	Excluding value of BPC's own usage, estimated to be £2,000
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>68,400</b>	<b>70,026</b>	<b>70,000</b>	
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>73,495</b>	<b>64,521</b>	<b>72,500</b>	
<b>SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) excl VAT</b>	<b>(5,095)</b>	<b>5,505</b>	<b>(2,500)</b>	
VAT net	0	0	0	
<b>SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)</b>	<b>(5,095)</b>	<b>5,505</b>	<b>(2,500)</b>	
<b>RESERVES</b>				
At start of year	43,394	43,394	48,899	
Surplus/(Deficit) in year	(5,095)	5,505	(2,500)	
<b>At end of year</b>	<b>38,299</b>	<b>48,899</b>	<b>46,399</b>	