

THE EAST GRINSTEAD SOCIETY

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www.eastgrinsteadsociety.org

NEWSLETTER

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New Members

Mike's words of encouragement to recruit new members has obviously borne fruit, as we are delighted to welcome seven new members; Helen Beale, Mary Lyons, Peter and Caroline Norman, Roger and Sue Sutcliffe and Robin Whalley.

Joan Roberts & Barbara Stovold

Open Forum

The Open Forum was well attended and gave many members the opportunity to raise a wide variety of topics for discussion.

Chairman, Nic Beale, welcomed everyone and then threw the meeting open to the floor.

The fate of the **old police station at East Court** was the first topic raised, now that the police had relocated to Chequer Mead Arts Centre. Margaret Collins confirmed that it was on the list of **West Sussex County Council buildings for disposal** but had no knowledge of what, if anything, would be built in its place.

The District Plan was causing concern as it undergoes its examination. Mid Sussex District Council and the Examiner are at odds; as the Council concedes that there may be scope for an **additional 800 houses per year to be built over the next 17 years, whereas the examiner feels that the number should be 1026 per year**. This would allow provision for the overspill from Crawley, as well as allowing 150 per year to accommodate the Brighton and Hove overspill.

The problem is in **identifying sufficient sites for development**, although plans have been put forward for 550 houses on Imberhorne Farm and 300 at Great Harwoods. The plans for Hill Place Farm are at present at appeal.

There appears to have been no recognition of the special circumstances with regard to the **proximity of the Ashdown Forest and the continuing serious traffic problems in the area**.

Concern was expressed as to the impact of the District Plan on the Neighbourhood Plan. In terms of timescale, it was felt the examination would take at least another month to conclude.

An interesting point was raised as to the development of a site near **Charters Village**, off the Lingfield Road. **The site is in Surrey and Tandridge is the Planning Authority**. Should this development go ahead, it would place considerable strain on the educational and medical facilities in East Grinstead but the **section 106 money paid by the developer for infrastructure support, would go to Surrey County Council not to West Sussex**. Nic has written to the Council for clarification on this point.

There was also a query as to whether these housing numbers would be set against the Mid Sussex or Tandridge allocation. There is, of course, a duty for the Tandridge and Mid Sussex District Councils to co-operate in these matters.

The sad state of the **Travel Lodge development** in the town was the next topic for discussion, as once again this area of the town is in a sorry state. The developer has gone into liquidation but it is still hoped that the project will be completed in early summer. (Which year was not specified !)

Nic felt that some **Society successes** should be highlighted – in particular that the **cinema** has been smartened up and the **Post Office** has dealt with the pipes, which were in danger of falling off the wall with the weight of plants growing from them!

The Society has also installed a **new seat adjacent to the McIndoe statue, in memory of our founder, Patrick Wood and the seat supplied by the Society to Chequer Mead, commemorating a former Chairman, Cedric Hartland**, has been repaired and cleaned.

Nic also noted that many of the small offices along **Institute Walk** had been converted to houses with the addition of some very unattractive bin stores, which resembled large sheds.

A comment was made that **the town needed to be tidied up before the visit of the 'Flying Scotsman' at Easter**, as it was looking rather dismal. It was noted that a team of people, including Society members, had carried out a **litter pick** in the centre of the town, which had resulted in the collection of twenty bags of rubbish. The Atrium area has apparently been cleaned up, together with the car park.

This led to a discussion of the problems of **houses being converted into flats**, where there is little space for **rubbish bins**. West Street was cited as an example, where rubbish was overflowing outside houses.

It was also felt that **West Street would benefit from a chicane, making clear the priorities for cars at the narrowest part of the road.**

The saga of the Society endeavouring to extend the safety handrail on the High Street Steps continues to run on. W.S.C.C. and M.S.D.C. both deny ownership and responsibility and at a recent C.L.C. (County Local Committee) meeting it was stated that nobody knows who owns this area. E.G.T.C. has obtained a quote for the handrail but there is apparently a query over public liability. Watch this space !

Finger posts in the High Street pointing in the wrong direction, also need attention.

The loss of offices in the town, with so many being converted into flats is causing concern. E.G.T.C. has been lobbying M.S.D.C. on this point and asking them to slow the process down but they are unsympathetic, as they say that only 11% of office space has been lost. It was pointed out that more money will be made converting buildings into flats but there is also no obligation to make them affordable.

Car Parking for the new Police Station at Chequer Mead was the next topic of concern, as it was noted that there are 3 spaces for police cars, 3 disabled spaces but no parking for the general public.

This led to a comment on the future of the **Wallis Centre site**. Margaret Collins confirmed that the site is owned by W.S.C.C. and that it is earmarked for housing.

Utility work is being carried out at the junction of **Blackwell Farm Road with Holtze Road**, which is another area earmarked for development. **Traffic congestion** is already bad in this area and a suggestion was made that the bridge over the railway line could be strengthened to take more traffic. However, the danger to Blackwell schoolchildren and the even worse congestion at Lingfield Road were felt to outweigh any advantages.

It is another case of the infrastructure of the town under severe pressure.

There is a priority to improve public transport and cycle ways.

The increase in **cars parking on pavements and on cycle lanes** is a further danger to the public.

The **Controlled Parking Zone** continues to cause concern. The consultation is over, the work has been put out to tender and should be going ahead this Spring. Another case of Watch this Space !

Nic highlighted one or two current **Planning applications**, including the new frontage for **West Street Baptist Church, and 17, Copthorne Road**; where a developer is endeavouring to build 26 houses on a former bungalow site, which could cause further traffic problems and pressure on school places at Felbridge school, which is already full. Once again the land in question is partly in Tandridge and partly in Mid Sussex.

On the Lewes Road, a bungalow has built an extension, with a boundary wall facing the main road, which is out of keeping with the area. Nic advised to take up this matter with the M.S.D.C. Planning Dept.

Nic closed the discussion and commented on the wide variety of topics covered and the keen participation by the members.

Joan Roberts

East Grinstead Food Bank

A talk by Tony Cox, Chair of the East Grinstead Food Bank

Tony began his talk by commenting that Food Banks were a Bad News/Good News story. The Bad news is that there is a need for Food Banks. The Good news is that so many people are willing to help run the Food bank and to donate food.

Food Banks began in the U.S. in the 1940's and 50's but the first one in this country was set up in Salisbury in 2000 by the Trussell Trust, which has now started over 400 food banks. Research on food poverty in the U.K. has discovered that 10 million people are below the poverty line.

In East Grinstead food poverty is largely hidden but the food bank, which was started 18 months ago, is here to stay, as there has been an increase in numbers of adults and children served, as well as an increase in breakfast clubs.

Food banks work by providing three days emergency food in a crisis. Agencies, such as Surgeries, CAB, Schools, and the Children and Family Centre, issue red vouchers to clients to collect parcels of non-perishable foods from the Food Bank.

The food is provided by generous donors and there are collecting boxes in Waitrose and Sainsburys, as well as local churches. Last year 14 metric tons of food were distributed.

There is a summer scheme to assist families, as there are no school meals in holiday time, which can cause particular difficulties. 135 bags with treats, such as chocolate biscuits and sweets were also made up and distributed at Christmas and a similar scheme will operate at Easter.

The Food Bank is situated at the Jubilee Community Church, where clients are welcomed and given the opportunity to chat over a cup of tea. The needs and size of the family are discussed and appropriate bags assembled. Local companies have been generous, with the Caravan Club donating 5000 carrier bags and Waitrose loaning crates and trollies. Many groups are interested in the scheme and visits have been made by schools, Beaver groups etc. The food bank is open on three days a week and staffed by volunteers.

Nationally 1.1 million food parcels have been distributed to half a million people. Many of those helped are in work but paid low wages and 3.8 million people are below the bread line.

For the foreseeable future the work of the Food banks will continue, as long as there are those in need of assistance.

Nic thanked Tony for a revealing glimpse into the work of so many local volunteers, working hard to keep the Food Bank going.

Joan Roberts

Changes at Chequer Mead

As most of you will know, it was proposed by the Trustees in May 2016 to lease the Alfred Wagg Studio for a period of 21 years to the Police. This has now become a reality. The building work required for the change of use has been completed and the new Police Station, with offices, was signed off on 6 March 2017. Signage has yet to be put up and I understand there will be an official opening sometime in May. This releases the old Police Station at East Court to be redeveloped. At this stage I am unaware if there are any proposals from developers or other interested parties in the pipeline.

The building, as a Police Station, is open from 10 am to 2 pm on weekdays. Outside these hours there is a yellow telephone in the lobby which connects to Head Office at Lewes. There are three allotted parking spaces for police cars, the rest of the car park is for the use of those working at the theatre.

The Chequer Mead Costume Store, which exists to raise money for the Chequer Mead Community Arts Centre and averages an income of over £5000 a year (gross) previously used a part of the Studio. It also occupied the original portacabin adjoining the studio at the rear. This had been offered to the builders as a site office, leaving us with one portacabin and very cramped conditions. We could no longer have our Friday meetings to maintain the costumes in good order, and our reception was in the cafe area.

The builders P D Harris (Henfield) Ltd, when they no longer had a need for a site office, agreed to move it across the lawn next to the other portacabin, and I understand they also agreed to refelt the roof. We extend to them our grateful thanks

The Costume Team organised a working party to clean and renovate the portacabin. A new carpet was installed, we found a desk, and obtained chairs and shelving from Threadneedles. We are now reorganising the space we have, and despite having to dispose of over half our stock to others, also involved in costumes, we can now continue to provide the unique personal service so much appreciated by our customers

We are working well with the Theatre Management and with their support and our renewed enthusiasm we aim to create the best Costume Hire Facility in the local area and to carry on raising funds for Chequer Mead.

Barbara Stovold

News from East Grinstead Museum

I would like to introduce myself, my name is Lucy Bailey and I have recently joined the East Grinstead Museum team as the **Learning and Community Engagement Officer**. My role involves developing activities, education sessions and events which further explore the story of McIndoe and the Guinea Pig Club and engage as many people in the East Grinstead area as possible.

We are introducing some new initiatives, here at the museum, including free 30-minute museum tours on the first Friday of every month, beginning in May.

The tour will bring to life the story of pioneering surgeon Sir Archibald McIndoe, his work at Queen Victoria Hospital, as well as highlighting important objects and significant events in the development of burns treatment and plastic surgery. Over the coming months, I will also begin to deliver talks on McIndoe and the Guinea Pig Club, to local community groups off-site and lead tours here at the museum. All of these will be free as they are generously funded through a Heritage Lottery Grant.

We will also be running ‘Coffee, Cake and the Collection,’ every first Monday of the month. Visitors can enjoy a visit to the museum, a cup of tea and slice of cake and share their memories of East Grinstead. Each month I will bring out a selection of objects and photographs from our collection store to handle. These coffee mornings are free, or voluntary donation.

I am also looking to build a team of volunteers to assist with hosting events, marketing museum activities to local groups and around the town, leading museum tours, running the coffee mornings, creating educational resources and leading sessions, as well as helping us to record and transcribe talks and tours to produce permanent museum resources. If you would like to volunteer, do get in touch.

There will be lots of new events taking place over the coming year, I suggest keeping an eye on the East Grinstead Museum website to keep up to date with activities taking place.

If you know a community group who would appreciate a talk or visit to the museum, would like to volunteer or have any questions or suggestions, do feel free to send me an email:

Lucy Bailey Lucy@eastgrinsteadmuseum.org.uk

Mid Sussex District Plan Update

Once it passes a **public examination** by a Government Inspector, the new District Plan [DP] will be important for East Grinstead’s future because it will set **the general planning policies that MSDC planning committees must follow**, alongside the recently adopted East Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan [EGNP], for all development applications in the town.

So how far has the new District Plan got?

The Mid Sussex Local Plan of 2004 has a whole chapter on East Grinstead. This recognises two major constraints on development at East Grinstead, the environment and the lack of essential infrastructure - especially the poor road network.

The District Council's failure to produce a new plan means that developers are able to get around the 2004 MSLP rules by calling it '*out-of-date*' since the Council has been '*unable to show a 5-year housing supply*'. This lets developers successfully argue that the Government's '*presumption in favour of sustainable development*', introduced in 2012 must be applied and so, applications must be permitted '*come what may*'.

A quick trip around East Grinstead reveals the amount of unplanned, speculative or '*windfall*' development, unsupported by necessary infrastructure, that this has led to.

Why is the District Plan so late?

The replacement for the MSLP 2004 has had a very troubled history. The original version, called the '*Core Strategy*', collapsed when it became clear that, not only was the 2,500 houses proposed for Imberhorne and Hill Place Farm vigorously opposed by the majority of the Town's residents, but also it could not be delivered sustainably.

Next came the first draft District Plan in 2013. This was thrown out by an Inspector after just 1 day of Examination, because he found that the Council had failed to show that it had met the '*duty to cooperate*' with neighbouring authorities.

The latest draft District Plan has been in front of an Inspector since last summer. This plan is in trouble because the Inspector says that MSDC have not calculated the right housebuilding target and so the plan isn't for enough homes. This means that it too might be thrown out. Things are in the balance.

Housing Numbers

In 2012 the Government scrapped the Labour Government's '*South East Plan*' which imposed housebuilding targets for each district - in the case of Mid Sussex, 855 DPA (dwellings per annum). the current Government also imposes housing numbers, by requiring councils to use a specific government calculation to work out the '*objectively assessed need*' or OAN. Additionally, each Council must consult with its neighbours and if they are unable to meet their own OAN, the neighbours must try to help out with any shortfall. Crawley can't meet all of its future need because it is now almost built up to its borders. Horsham is helping by taking around 150 DPA.

MSDC originally proposed a figure of 650 DPA for the District Plan, but when the developers argued that the figure should be in excess of 1000 DPA, the Council increased their number to 800 DPA. This plan was submitted summer 2016. The Examination has spent 10 days discussing the numbers, back and forth. Finally, at the end of February 2017, the Inspector wrote to MSDC telling them he calculated the number at 1026 DPA, made up of 876 DPA for Mid Sussex's housing need and an allowance for '*unmet need*' for Crawley of 150 DPA, the same as Horsham is taking.

The Inspector has been critical of the quality of MSDC's evidence. He is concerned that the Council might not have collected the evidence and then seen where that led the strategy, but rather might have come up with an answer first and then looked for evidence to bolster that figure.

He thinks the Council have been applying different standards when assessing different strategic options. For example, the Council has consistently obstructed consideration of a site at Crabbet Park on the eastern edge of Crawley, that could accommodate up to 2,500 houses. The Landowners have written to the Inspector, saying they are ready to develop the site. Crabbet Park could accommodate the unmet need for Crawley.

How much of a threat is this delayed plan to East Grinstead?

Developers are already pushing for the development of sites at East Grinstead including Imberhorne, Hill Place and Great Harwood Farms. MSDC have told the Inspector that they are working with developers Wellbeck to bring forward Imberhorne Farm, initially for 500-650 homes.

Linden Homes are already trying to develop a first phase on Hill Place Farm through an application currently under appeal and state that their development can be accommodated by implementing the 'Atkins' junction improvements along the A22, but the Council has already allowed more houses than the junction improvements can offset.

East Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan

The new District Plan does not deal with the planning detail at town level, referring to the severe traffic problems as East Grinstead with just a cursory sentence.

Fortunately, the Town Council has developed a town-wide Neighbourhood Plan that came into force last November after a Town referendum. This does have policies that reflect the major constraints the Town faces and also includes in its evidence base the series of Jubb transport reports that have been commissioned by a local resident at significant personal expense.

The reports by traffic consultants Jubb are based on extensive surveys over 10 days spread across two years, and demonstrate the severe congestion along the A22/A264 corridor. Jubb concludes with advice that until further work to resolve this severe congestion across the Town is successfully completed, the District Council must restrict development at East Grinstead.

The East Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan must be taken into account when MSDC are deciding planning applications in the town. It fully recognises the traffic issues identified by Jubb in Policy EG11.

However, the absence of an '*up-to-date*' District wide plan allows developers to try to challenge its policies. It will require steely determination from the Town Council to ensure that MSDC apply the EGNP policies properly. This underlines the need for the District Plan to be adopted as soon as possible.

New evidence of Atmospheric Pollution on Ashdown Forest

One further important planning factor the District Council must consider is the Ashdown Forest, which comprises a very rare north European heathland habitat.

The Forest is designated a Special Area of Conservation [SAC] and a Special Protection Area [SPA] under the EU Habitats Directive (incorporated into UK law under the Habitats Regulations). Planning authorities must ensure that they don't allow development that would significantly damage the SPA and SAC sites.

Ashdown Forest lies in Wealden District and the Council there has carried out extensive studies measuring air quality across the forest. These reveal that the rare heathland is already subject to dangerous levels of nitrogen oxide pollution. This is mainly due to traffic across the forest. As a result Wealden introduced a more rigorous approach for assessing planning applications in March 2017. They say that until they can introduce '*compensatory measures*' they will have to restrict all development close to Ashdown Forest that will cause any net increase in traffic across the forest. Hitherto, MSDC have taken the view that there is no need to worry about the effect of traffic on the forest.

A recent High Court decision ruling in favour of Wealden's approach means that MSDC will have to change their own approach. The East Grinstead PRC has suggested to the Inspector, that the Mid Sussex District Plan should copy the stronger policies adopted by WDC. If he agrees, this will limit development around East Grinstead because the Town is so close to the Forest edge.

The outcome of the Inspector's decision, along with the outcome of the appeal by Linden Homes to build 200 homes on Hill Place Farm, that is currently being considered by the Secretary of State, will have a major impact on whether development at East Grinstead is sustainable, as set out in the Neighbourhood Plan or whether developers will continue their unrestrained building '*free-for-all*' leaving the Town's infrastructure struggling to take the strain.

Richard Barnby

MEETINGS 7.30pm, Main Hall, East Court - £1.00/member, £3.00/non-member

Friday 19th May 2017 My Farming Life, a talk by David Tas about his career in Agriculture and his time as Farm Manager at Standen.

Friday 16th June 2017 So you want to be a Bookseller? John Pye on 30 years of Adventures in bookselling in East Grinstead.

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EXTRA COPIES : Newsletter back issues may be ordered for £1.00 each from Mr J.W. Bridle, 7, Dexter Drive, East Grinstead, RH19 4SU

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