‘The Road Not Taken’ is a phrase that resonates with HAA at this time of impending change. In his poem, Robert Frost expresses the dilemma most of us face when we make life choices. Two similar paths ‘diverged in a yellow wood’. The poet chose the slightly more attractive one. He would ‘keep the first for another day’, though doubting if he ‘should ever come back’. In later life, he found himself recalling that decision ‘with a sigh’ – would his life have been different if he had made a different choice?

For forty seven years the Association has worked independently, aiming to preserve and improve the amenities of Hassocks, Clayton and Keymer. But times have changed and that path is no longer viable. At our AGM in July HAA members chose a new way forward – the road that was not taken in the past. There was a unanimous vote to begin merger talks with other village organisations. A progress summary is overleaf. At the same time, the focus of the Association slightly shifted to concentrate on specifically ‘green’ issues. The completion of the restoration of Spitalford Bridge had led to work on the Herring stream and the first steps in making it ‘the green heart of Hassocks’. Then, almost by accident, we found ourselves involved in local flooding issues. Now we are asking ourselves what role HAA could play in promoting sustainable drainage systems. Where would that road lead? To green roofs for garages, and less asphalt and more grass and flower beds in the village centre? Read on to find out more.

Of course, it could lead to a cul-de-sac if we cannot attract more volunteers. But retirement can be an opportunity to choose ‘the road not taken’ in the past. In the New Year we plan to regularly inform members of volunteering opportunities within HAA and the groups with whom we hope to be allied.

www.hassocksamenity.org.uk
**Stronger Together**

HAA has proposed a merger between HAA and the Hassocks Community Partnership (HCP) in order to create a single framework by which to support the Hassocks community’s aims and objectives for the village in a more and cohesive way.

Both the HAA and HCP have been successful in establishing and sustaining initiatives, but both are experiencing significant challenges recruiting members and volunteers to take on key roles. Pooling resources between the two organisations and their respective sub-groups – both in terms of active volunteers and essential support services and administration - could help sustain the viability of, and indeed inject great vitality to many projects which are important to the village.

A small working group has been established and is meeting regularly to develop a detailed proposal to be presented to both the key HAA and HCP committees before Christmas. Fred Maillardet and Erika Woodhurst represent the HAA and Catherine Cassidy and Jeremy Wakeham represent the HCP.

The proposal will set out the arguments for the merger, highlighting the likely benefits whilst acknowledging possible downsides and taking into account the feedback from open discussions held over the last two years. The proposal will also set out the financial and legal status of each body, their board structures, activities they currently support, sub groups and membership. It will then propose a preferred merged structure to be established including a timescale.

If you would like to feed your thoughts into the working group, please email Fred Maillardet on f.j.maillardet@brighton.ac.uk.

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**Our thanks and good wishes go to Judith Poncelet who has reluctantly resigned as membership secretary due to new work commitments and a difficult London commute. She has served nobly for fifteen years and has computerised and transformed our membership records. We are fortunate in being able to welcome Liz Mercer as her successor, another computer expert.**
Beat the January Blues!
Last year 332 people entered the Village Lottery and a total of £3000 was raised for village causes and £2243 distributed in prizes. Expenses totalled £350.

Despite our worst fears that a lack of helpers would make it impossible to hold the lottery at all this year, six HAA members have braced themselves and volunteered to take responsibility. Superhuman efforts have ensured that application forms are now ready. One is enclosed with this newsletter. This year the lottery will run for the full 12 months of 2016 rather than starting in December as in the past. This means the first draw will take place on January 22\textsuperscript{nd} when there will be a special one-off Beat the January Blues prize of £200. To avoid missing this golden opportunity join before January 8\textsuperscript{th}. £12 entitles you to enter every monthly draw for a year. Completed forms can be handed in at either Orion News or Proper Cycling & Coffee, or sent to 7 Beaconhurst. Hassocks BN6 8RE. Alternatively, you can download an application form from our website or sign-up on line if you use internet banking.

Over the last two years the lottery has raised over £6,000. Light Up Hassocks has always been a major recipient and this will continue. It has also helped local Scouts to attend the jamboree in Japan and is now meeting the cost of much needed repairs to the Scout hut. The Spitalford Bridge project and the current planting of the stream banks and flower displays in the village, as well as Jack and Jill Nursery have also benefited. Last year, each month two lucky people won around £113 and £75.

One criticism we often receive is that people are either not aware of the lottery or do not find the application form easy to complete. This year we have simplified the form, but raising the lottery’s profile is very difficult indeed. Can you help? If you belong to one of the many clubs and societies in Hassocks could you take along some forms to your next meeting? Better still, could you persuade the secretary to allow someone from the lottery group to come along and briefly explain what the lottery is all about? If so, Amy Tarrant (amytarrant25@yahoo.com) would be pleased to hear from you.
Spitalford Bridge and the Herring Stream

Laughter, tea and home-made cakes (baked by HAA members Amy and Erika and their husbands) marked the very informal ‘opening’ in July of the restored Spitalford Bridge and its new bus shelter. The sun shone and Gordon Marples, our District Councillor, thanked everyone who had been involved in the four year project and unveiled a plaque which simply stated **Spitalford Bridge. Restored 2015 by the people of Hassocks.** Ian Weir, Hassocks Parish Council, explained the Parish Council’s role in providing the bus shelter. Judging by the Council’s postbag it had been one of the most popular things they had ever done! Then Janet Sharman and Maureen Dewdney representing Friends and Neighbours, cut the ribbon and opened the shelter to hearty applause. It was a great moment for HAA and particularly for Bob Kenhard. For him it marked the happy conclusion of four years of endless paperwork and a hundred and one frustrations. A complex project had been completed – and everyone was delighted!

What next? We want to make the Herring stream the ‘green heart of Hassocks’. Can it be improved in an environmentally friendly way? We looked for help from people who have the expertise we lack, and in HKD Transition and, through them, the Ouse & Adur River Trust (OART) and Sussex Wildlife Trust, we found a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm.

First things first, we started by clearing an immense amount of rubbish. Then a series of water quality surveys began, followed by a survey of aquatic life. Both will continue throughout the coming year. The water quality surveys are being done by OART, but HAA and HKD Transition members have already had a first attempt with their fishing nets to see what they could catch (and put back) for the aquatic life survey. In various locations we found caddis fly larvae which our experts tell us are only found in very clean water, whilst bullhead fish were found hiding under stones near Spitalford Bridge. We soon found that, even with a magnifier, it is not easy to identify many of the minute wrigglers (aka invertebrates) that we caught. During the winter, HKD are hoping to arrange some training sessions.
Flowers galore!
Our Green Group has had a busy autumn with a new bed being prepared on the station platform alongside the cycle hire centre and two more planters being moved to Keymer Parade to brighten up that corner. The raised beds have been given a facelift with slate chippings, and new planting. Georgia’s ‘cottage garden’ design for the main bed is much admired. The autumn lady’s tresses orchids must have approved, for this year six spikes appeared – quite a record.

We now work closely with the Parish Council. The latest development means that the Council will provide iron baskets for the east entrance to Grand Avenue to match the ones provided by Mansell McTaggart on the west side. Georgia will be devising planting schemes for both. All ongoing costs are being met by a grant of £175 from the Parish Council which we are matching from our own funds.

Planting on the banks of the Herring stream by a combined group of HAA and HKD Transition members is almost complete. Fran Southgate from Sussex Wildlife Trust and Rachel from OART spent a Sunday afternoon advising us and lending a helping hand. Lengths of coir matting were fixed to the banks, mainly on the URC side. A large number of native wetland plants, donated by Sussex Wildlife through Wakeham Place, were then planted into gaps in the matting. In about two years the matting should have disintegrated, and a lovely display of flag iris, sedge, black knapweed, water mint and oxeye daisies will clothe and reinforce the bank. Higher up both banks, native wild daffodils, bluebells, snakehead fritillaries and wood anemones plus lots of cowslips were planted and should make a brave display next Spring. Again, the costs were met by a grant from the Parish Council, supplemented by contributions from HAA and HKD Transition. A generous £159 was also received from readers of Talk About. Ongoing work during the winter will mainly be concerned with keeping the stream rubbish-free, but the group has not yet run out of ideas of ways of making the stream ‘the green heart of Hassocks’.

STREAMS AND MORE. November 11th 7 p.m. Green Room, Adastra Hall. See enclosed flyer
Railway News

Yet another award for Hassocks station! In October, Catherine was invited to a prestigious award-giving assembly at Torquay organised by the Association of Community Rail Partnerships. Hassocks had come second in the class for ‘most enhanced station buildings’ and Catherine came home with another certificate to put on the station notice board.

The citation reads: "Over the last few years, a community station has been transformed through strong partnerships and an eagerness to make it a great environment for local passengers and for visitors to the town. A long term vision has come together to provide a coherent set of upgraded facilities for those who use Hassocks station, culminating in 2015 with a purpose-built, community run cycle hire hub to complement a new station building, new lifts and an abundance of locally tended flowers."

The Rail Group is delighted – but not complacent. The ‘environment for local passengers and visitors’ would be even more enhanced if the ticket office was open throughout the day. For months, now running into years, the Group has been told that improvements were imminent. We will be raising this yet again when we meet with our new station manager, Rebecca Atherton, and Paul Wyburn, the group station manager.

At the time of writing, the proposed new December time table has just been published. A major change is that most fast off-peak Victoria services will not stop at Burgess Hill, but will stop at Clapham Junction in both directions. Commuters to Brighton will notice that the 8.19 has been removed. There will be no service between 8.06 and 8.39 which is a large gap at that time of day.

We look in vain for a stop at Hassocks on the West Coastway service, a half-promised improvement which seems to fade further and further away. Nor is there any sign of help for the early morning commuters who before dawn are having to stand all the way to London Bridge. However, never despair, you can now have a day trip to Scotland. Catching the first train to Victoria, means you can arrive at Glasgow Central at 12:01 or Edinburgh Waverley at 12:12 just in time for an early lunch, spend about 5 hours there and still get back to Hassocks on the last train!
Rainfall and flooding
Over the years, HAA has turned its mind to many aspects of Hassocks life but we have never focussed on one aspect of living in a spring line village at the foot of the South Downs: flooding. Yet memories of the 1963 flooding at the junction of Grand Avenue and Keymer Road remain vivid, whilst regularly residents in Parklands Road and Lodge Lane have inundated gardens and sometimes flooded homes. Then suddenly we became involved when WSCC funding (Operation Watershed) became available to community groups willing to look at local flooding and drainage issues. We received £14,000. Fred Maillardet became honorary Project Manager to two sets of surveys. Blocked drains and culverts in the Lodge Lane/Dale Avenue area were revealed – so bad that the survey could not be completed, whilst contractors recommended that WSCC should consider raising the banks of the Herring stream to protect Parklands Road as well as discouraging any more surface water flow into the stream.

Recommendations do not necessarily result in implementation, though funds may be available next year – HAA will be taking a keen interest. But in conjunction with the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust we would like to look at various solutions to the regular flooding of the Herring stream. Would raising the banks in the Parklands Road area increase the flood risk further south? The capacity of Spitalford Bridge to take more water cannot easily be increased. Flooding is triggered by excessive rainfall plus surface water draining from our increasingly urbanised village. Are there environmental ways of reducing the surface water run off? Are there environmental ways of reducing the impact of rainfall? The answer to both questions is ’yes’. Solutions can be simple: green roofs, permeable pavements, rainwater harvesting (e.g. water butts). More complex solutions would need to involve landlords, perhaps by creating a wetland area, or by forming shales, channels which are sufficiently shallow to allow vegetation to grow but also conduct and retain water.

Is this a new path that we should follow? We are meeting with Peter King (OART) and Juliet Merrifield (HKD Transition) to find out more. There is some urgency: there are indications that the climate is getting wetter, short but intense rainfalls are becoming more frequent. Have you a special interest or expertise in the subject? Our lead, Fred Maillardet, (f.j.maillardet@brighton.ac.uk) would like to hear from you.
Members will remember the popular open day at the Turner’s farm that Diana Goodbourn organised. A high spot for the children was watching the cows being milked. Sadly, those days have gone. The herd has been sold. ‘A difficult decision in some respects’ writes Tom Turner, but looked at through a financial lens it was simple. The amount of money required for reinvestment in our facilities was a step too far while losing money on every litre of milk we produce.’ The farm is still committed to conservation and this year the wild birdfield has been full of colour. The yellow of the mustard persisted well into the summer, and was complemented eventually by the orange of the ripening quinoa. There is winter food a-plenty for the birds – at the moment look out for wagtails. Buzzards are seen regularly and whilst ploughing before seeding the wild bird mix, Tom saw five red kites.

In nearby Lag wood the March coppicing has encouraged large numbers of butterflies to return and promises an abundance of woodland flowers next Spring. ‘We hope soon to start coppicing twelve of our hornbeams.’ Write Robert and Sue. ‘We do not know if these venerable and beautiful trees have been neglected for too long and whether they will regrow. The only way to find out is to do it. We are admittedly nervous, and will be erecting a temporary deer fence around them to make sure they have the best chance possible. The meadow has benefited from the removal of a large number of thistles this year thanks in part to the volunteers from the South Downs National Park. Now we are eagerly awaiting the return of the sheep. Partly because we love them and partly because the last time they were here we installed a gate to allow users of the footpath to go through our electric fence. The fence was stowed away but the gate remained and has been the subject of much speculation. A gate in the middle of an empty field? So many people have had their photographs taken with it we feel it has become a star in its own right. We have no intention of taking it away!’

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