



Hassocks Amenity Association
maintaining an attractive rural environment in keeping with changing times

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2016

Hilaire Belloc had it wrong. It is not only the Midlands that are 'sodden and unkind'. Sussex can rival them! For months it has rarely stopped raining. The Herring stream frequently became a roaring torrent and we fear that much of our autumn planting may not have survived. The Parklands Road and Lodge Lane/Dale Avenue areas again experienced flooding. At the station, commuters daily contemplated the driving rain and wind whilst they waited for trains that were regularly cancelled.

Members will not be surprised therefore that this issue of the Newsletter has a distinctly damp theme and concentrates on our newest initiative: working together with HKD Transition and the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust on methods of flood prevention. This is new territory for us, and we are grateful for the expertise so generously given by OART and by the Sussex Wildlife Trust. We have also found that the County Council is working on a flood management plan for Hassocks, so that we now have voluntary and statutory groups working together, sharing skills, information and local knowledge. Recently at our suggestion, the Parish Council Environment Committee heard presentations by both OART and WSCC. With so many agencies on board, and talking together, expect some interesting developments.



Flooding near Woodbine Cottage. (Photo Peter King)

Membership. Enclosed with this Newsletter, you will find your membership card and a loyalty card which entitles you to a £1.00 voucher when you spend more than £10.00 at Tates Garden Centre (including South Downs Nurseries)

We are most grateful to members who have increased their annual subscription to £10.00. Most members find it is easiest to pay by standing order. Liz Mercer is happy to provide a form to be sent to your bank if you have not got round to doing this. It certainly helps our record-keeping!

Merger with Hassocks Community Partnership

A working group consisting of Jeremy Wakeham (HCP Chair) and Catherine Cassidy (HCP Director) has been meeting regularly with HAA representatives, Fred Maillardet and Erika Woodhurst-Trueman. Perhaps naively we had expected it to be a simple task to bring together two organisations whose activities had much in common. It was only as we came to know each other better that we began to realise that HAA's participatory membership structure was significantly different to that of the Partnership, which is essentially a vehicle for sustaining a number of flourishing projects. This does not mean that amalgamation is impossible, and we hope to identify a structure which can combine the strengths of both organisations so that together we can go forward to serve our community more effectively and efficiently.

Wednesday 20th April at 2.45 pm at Hassocks station

Join us to celebrate our awards

Including a National Rail Award, a Rail Business Award and an award by the Association of Community Rail Partnerships for the 'most enhanced station building'.

Refreshments - Everybody welcome

Green group. After a quiet winter, the green group will be swinging into action in March. Work in the autumn has paid dividends. The Girl Guides 'heather bed' has been really colourful and the slate chippings have reduced the weeds. The bulbs in the other raised beds are making a brave display despite wind and rain and Georgia's 'cottage garden' bed promises to lift our hearts as it becomes established. The fly in the ointment is the state of the brick walls. We have asked Mid Sussex District Council to have another look at them. Are they a danger to the public? In 2011 they were considered to be 'unsightly' but not dangerous. For around ten years we have been pressing the landlords to repair them and in 2014 succeeded in arranging a site visit. Since then: silence, whilst the cracks grow wider and the bricks fragment.

Up at the station, on the platform near the back of the cycle hire building, the group have dug and planted a large bed. Iris have struggled through the clay and are also doing their best to cheer up the circular bed around the oak in the station car park. Throughout the winter, the Aldingbourne Trust have managed to keep some colour in all the planters and they have great plans for the coming year. At long last, two hanging baskets, financed by the Parish Council, are arriving on the eastern wall of the entrance to Grand Avenue. They will match the ones supplied by Mansell McTaggart on the west side. Georgia has great plans for planting which will complement the Parish Council's colour scheme for their lamp post hanging baskets. This is but one advantage of having an HAA representative on the Parish Environment and Grounds Committee. We have ideas for more joint efforts up our sleeve.

Footpaths. There will be an official opening of the all-weather path through Parklands Copse on Saturday 16th April at 10.30 am. Congratulations to the Parish Council and the Monday Group! HAA made the first very tentative suggestion to the Council in April 2014, knowing it would be an expensive project. The result has exceeded our expectations. However, we are never satisfied – we would now love to see the creation of a Hassocks circular footpath on everyone's agenda.

A plea to dog owners. Dog mess is not just unsightly. It is poisonous to people and wildlife and toxic to the environment in general. Lag Wood and Pheasant field are part of an area of wildlife conservation. Please bag it up and dispose of it properly.

Flooding

It was a happy moment when our County Councillor Andy Petch asked HAA's help in making the best use possible of Operation Watershed money - WSCC funding earmarked for community groups willing to look at local flooding and drainage issues. With Fred Maillardet taking the lead, HAA found itself entering a new world. We had already linked up with HKD Transition on plans for planting the banks of the Herring stream and one Sunday afternoon, planting completed conversation turned to the Operation Watershed finance and the regular flooding of the Herring stream. We had just received the report we had commissioned from Archibald Shaw on surface flooding in the Parklands Road area. Their verdict was that there was a 'relatively high risk of the Herring stream breaking out of bank immediately upstream of Spitalford Bridge'. Consideration should be given to raising the banks of the stream to protect the houses in Parklands Road which regularly flooded. Whilst we speculated whether funding would ever be found for such an expensive option, Peter King, whom HKD Transition had invited to join us, suggested there were ways of reducing flooding which were not only economic financially but were also environmentally friendly. His organisation, the Ouse & Adur River Trust (OART) would be happy to be involved. We jumped at the offer it could not have been more timely, for after that, it rarely stopped raining!

As a result, a team of HAA and HKD volunteers have been working with OART on different aspects of water management throughout the winter. Testing the quality of the water in the Herring stream has begun and will continue for twelve months. So far the findings are encouraging, phosphate levels alone being problematic. A series of biological surveys, training provided through HKD, is already in hand and is now waiting for the warmer weather.

The problem, and the solution to our flooding problems, lies in the flow of water generated from the springs at the foot of the Downs plus surface water from the built-up area, all coming together through five channels into the Herring stream. Somehow that flow has to be reduced because it would be impossibly expensive to increase the capacity of Spitalford Bridge. In January this year the flow nearly overtopped the bridge.



Spitalford Bridge January 2016 (Photo Wayne Mills)

Reducing the flow – upstream

The first walkover survey took place in January with representatives from HAA, HKD, the Woodland Trust, Lag Wood owners and OART. More are planned. Tentative suggestions are emerging. In Butchers Wood, for example, the Woodland Trust has already excavated one pond, three more might be achieved with minimal clearance of vegetation. Additional

tree planting and hedgerow creation on the slopes to the west of Butchers Wood are possibilities, but all this is at the very earliest stages. There is much work still to be done, landowners consulted and finance obtained. Fred Maillardet (01273 842342) would welcome offers of help from members with relevant skills or experience. For details see: *Reducing Flood Risk in Hassocks. Upstream Flow Mitigation* on our website.

Reducing water runoff in Hassocks.

Not everyone has the physical ability or the knowledge needed to help with upstream surveys. Everyone, however, can help reduce surface water run-off on their own patch. The simplest way is to buy a rainwater-butt – or an additional one. Every little helps! Thinking about concreting over your front lawn to make space to park the car? Or installing a new driveway? It need not cost a fortune to choose a surfacing which allows rainwater to penetrate through to the soil beneath. A range of inter-locking plastic grids such as Eco grid can cost as little as £250 for 25 sq meters (100 tiles at £2.50 each plus fittings, delivery and VAT). More expensive systems include permeable pavers or resin bound gravel paving. Or if the garden is already paved, lifting a slab and planting a tree would help.

STOP PRESS

OART still need volunteers to help plant 5000 trees

On 23/24 March at

Twineham Place Farm, Twineham Lane, Twineham RH17 5NP

Contact peter.king@OART.org.uk for details

Station Concerns. The only positive thing the Rail Group can say is that by 2018 everything should be much better. But that is a long time to wait, even for our commuters, who are connoisseurs in waiting. The scale and knock-on effects on the Brighton Line of the London Bridge development project are immense. It will be another two years before we can expect normal train services.

In the meantime, commuters are frustrated and angry. This is no surprise when between 1st January and 29th February 260 trains were cancelled, whilst 108 trains ‘skipped’ our station – they failed to stop at Hassocks as scheduled because they were running late. Yet often this was a fruitless exercise. Our research shows that due to the tail back of trains further up the line, a ‘skipped’ train did not necessarily reach its destination any sooner. It might just as well have stopped to pick up Hassocks passengers. With our footfall figures for 2014/15 having risen to 1,344,382 we are not a little country station with only an insignificant number of passengers likely to be inconvenienced; the numbers are substantial.

It was these figures, carefully researched by Peter Gibbons, that our Chairman, Catherine Cassidy, brought to the attention of management at the February meeting of the Thameslink Programme Stakeholder Reference Group. Their response was that our findings would be passed on to the appropriate managers. They were aware that the present service was very poor and they ‘needed to do better’. We agree. Could not some of the difficulties be eased by better management? In February almost half the train cancellations were due to ‘planning errors’ or ‘issues with train crews’. No wonder 80% of passengers on our line were unhappy with the way delays were dealt with. (National Rail Passenger Survey. Autumn 2015)

Peter was able personally to pass on his latest findings to Alex Foulds Southern Rail Development Director at a meeting of the Southern/Gatwick Express Stakeholders meeting in March. The Director was presented with a 25 page print-out listing Hassocks train cancellations this year and has promised to ‘investigate this further’. Our findings have also been passed on to our MP, Nick Herbert when, with other Sussex MP’s, he met with the Minister for Transport and called for the Govia Thameslink Railway franchise to be revoked.

There is, however, some good news for those delayed passengers. The Government has agreed to lower the 30 minute compensation threshold to 15 minutes when trains run late. The Chancellor intends to issue details in the 'next few months' which will be widely publicised as it is estimated that only 12% of passengers eligible for compensation actually claim it.

Ticket Office closures. Regular readers of this newsletter will know that ever since our new station opened, the ticket office has closed with increasing frequency. We have constantly protested, been constantly reassured that things would improve, without any result. In December we finally achieved a meeting with our new Haywards Heath station manager, Rebecca Atherton, Graham Thrower, and Paul Wyborn, the Brighton Mainline group station manager. More reassurances! The office would be open weekdays and Saturdays from 6 am to 1 pm and on Sundays from 9am to 5 pm, though they could not quite guarantee it. Then in February we were astonished when Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) announced a station modernisation programme which would include Hassocks. From the first train to the last, there would be a human being on duty! Although the ticket office would only be open Mondays to Fridays from 7.00 to 10.00 and closed on Saturdays and Sunday, there would always be a 'station host' on duty, ready to issue tickets from a hand-held machine, answer enquiries and altogether be a friendly and reassuring presence.

Our response would have been more enthusiastic, if only our previous experience with GTR had not made us such sceptics. We would like to be reassured that before the new scheme is in place our two ticket machines will have been upgraded and will be easier to use, and that it will be easier to buy tickets on the internet. In addition, we need to be sure that the hosts will be able to sell virtually all types of tickets, including season tickets and be able to sort out complicated travel enquiries. Above all, will GTR be able to provide the station hosts for the much longer hours promised? Bitter experience makes us doubtful. But, given those assurances, the scheme has much to commend it. Time will tell, and fortunately Hassocks is in the third tranche of the programme so we should not be 'guinea pigs'. Despite the short consultation period, we managed to alert passengers by handing out sample letters that they might wish to use when commenting on the scheme. As a group, we have clearly expressed our feelings to GTR and also to Transport Focus (the national body representing rail users).

Paul Roberts sends news from Lag wood

The wood looks set to bloom. But not quite yet, although the unusual weather tempted a few of our dog violets and primroses into flowering in December. Our birds have enjoyed the unseasonal warmth, and their numbers have been swelled by the arrival of tiny gold crests, seen by us in numbers for the first time this year.

This year's coppicing is making good progress, despite the terrible weather. Our plan is to coppice about one quarter hectare per year, and this year we will include twelve of our hornbeams. This is an important experiment for us. Lag Wood's hornbeam groves are among the most beautiful and impressive sights in the wood. But they have not been coppiced for around 70 years and without some work the coppice stem will soon reach the end of their lives. Re-coppicing some of them soon will help to ensure the survival of hornbeam in Lag Wood for the next 70 years. We will be using a small area of temporary deer fence to give them the best possible chance of survival.

Our plans in the wood are all about maintaining the mix of trees and the biodiversity that goes with them. Look closely and you will notice that while we have nearly two hundred oaks, there are no oak seedlings or saplings. Nearly all our oaks are over 80 years old and many are truly venerable. Several young oaks have died due to overshading and the three 40 year old youngsters are now also in danger. We need to clear the canopy around them, so we will be felling two large oaks at the north-west tip of the wood to give the youngsters a chance.

The Lag Stream has been getting some much needed attention at last with visits from Natural England and the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust. And we are, of course, working now with HKD Transition and the HA/ to help design flood prevention measures, where we can, and restore this locally unique chalk stream for wildlife. There is no shortage of ideas and it looks like better times are ahead for both the Lag and Herrington streams.

Chairman and Editor: Margaret Ford, 40 Lodge Lane, Keymer, BN6 8LX (01273 845882)
margaret608ford@btinternet.com

Treasurer: Bob Kenhard, 7 Beaconhurst, Keymer, BN6 8RE (01273 844920)
bob.kenhard@btinternet.com

Membership Sec': Liz Mercer, 13 Church Mead, Hassocks, BN6 8BN (01273 846481)

haamembership@gmail.com

www.hassocksamenity.org.uk