

Hassocks Amenity Association

maintaining an attractive rural environment in keeping with changing times

NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2016

A community organisation for Hassocks?

Six months ago, responding to the often expressed views of Hassocks residents, Hassocks Community Partnership and Hassocks Amenity Association began to meet together to discuss the possibility of merging to become one body. Both have similar aims: to enrich our community through improved facilities and services. Coming together would clear up much confusion as to 'who does what', whilst pooling resources would help sustain existing projects and initiate new ones whilst allowing more effective use of volunteers. Why then is it taking so long to produce an agreed way forward, especially when there is complete agreement on these aims?

The answer lies in the contrasting structures of HAA and HCP. HAA is a registered charity, a membership organisation with elected officers, accountable to its members. HCP is a company limited by guarantee with an unelected Board of Directors. Both sides agree that any new organisation should be a registered charity, but are not yet fully agreed as to its structure. What influence should the members be able to bring to bear on the proposed governing body – a Board of Directors? Should they elect the Board of Directors? Although a small minority of HAA's committee members feel that these issues should be resolved at this stage, the majority view is that as there is so much agreement between the two bodies that the merger talks should move forward. An Interim Board for the new organisation is to be formed with Fred Maillardet, Bob Kenhard and Jonathan Soper as the HAA representatives. The merger will be completed when the Interim Board's recommendations are approved by a two thirds majority of HAA members. However, our representatives would welcome your views now as they enter this challenging period in the life of HAA.

Annual General Meeting. This will be held on Tuesday, 5th July at 7.00 p.m. in the main hall, Downlands School. As this may be the last full AGM of the Association, we felt that it should be a very special one, and it would be appropriate to look towards the future rather than dwell on the past. Climate change, with its implications for short intense rainfalls and warmer summers, seemed an obvious choice. It is particularly appropriate because over the last year we have been increasingly involved in research into flood prevention in Hassocks through our work on the Herring stream. The result is an evening devoted to *Thinking Green About Flooding in Hassocks* within which our AGM forms a part. This means that we will hold our meeting in the front of the hall, whilst at the rear visitors will be free to browse a range of exhibition stands. We hope they will also be tempted to come and listen in to our discussion. They would be very welcome.

Our AGM will take its usual form, with the election of officers and three committee members. Paul Mercer and Georgia Cheshire are coming to the end of their three year term and are eligible for re-election. There is one vacancy. Bob Kenhard will present the annual accounts and there will be the usual review of the year's activities with an opportunity for open debate.

At 8 p.m. we will welcome our keynote speaker: Dusty Gedge, an internationally acclaimed TV urban ecologist, circus performer and green roof expert. During the afternoon he will have walked the fields and the feeder streams which are the subject of our Operation Watershed bid, exchanging his ideas on natural flood management techniques with Fred Maillardet and Peter King. Dusty is, however, keen to involve us all in ways by which we can help a local deluge in the village to drain away safely, from permeable paving, to 'living' shed roofs or just a simple water butt.

Dusty will be followed by four local people (see the notice on the back page). Of special interest to HAA members will be Fred's report on Operation Watershed. He is even bringing a video so that we can see the blockage in the Lodge Lane culvert. He will be followed by Peter King who will be bringing the Environment Agency's flood maps of Hassocks. Discussion and questions will take us up to 10 p.m. when refreshments will be served and there will be an opportunity to volunteer to take part in some of our projects.

Car Parking Were you one of the 770 residents who completed the Parish Council's car parking and traffic flow survey back in March 2013? The Council analysed your responses – a major job in itself – and on that basis, a year later presented a report with recommendations to West Sussex County Council. Many a meeting followed, but finally Hassocks & Keymer Traffic and Parking Scheme was included in the WSCC 2015-16 Infrastructure Programme. WSCC have now issued feasibility designs for six key areas in Hassocks, though before any work can start they need to know what you think of the proposals. Residents living in the six areas affected: Lodge Lane, (two areas), Wilmington Close/Dale Avenue, Grand Avenue, Chancellors Park/Downsview Road, Woodland Road, North Court/Stanford Avenue and Little Copse Road/Friars Oak Road, will already have received copies, but everyone is urged to study the maps either on line (www.hassockspc.net) or by picking up a copy at the Library or the Parish Office. There is also a drop-in session on Saturday 25th June between 9.00 and 12.30 in the Parish Centre. **The WSCC deadline for comments is Monday 18th July.** Expect work to start in the new financial year.

HAA does not need to look into its crystal ball to know that while some residents will be delighted, others will be disappointed. However, nothing is set in stone at this stage though the room to manoeuvre is very limited. There is no sign of the much-wanted mini-roundabout at the southern end of Grand Avenue, nor has Clayton Avenue had its parking problems addressed. If people feel strongly enough, perhaps a bit of 'give and take' will be the answer? Yellow lines are not a prominent feature in most of the plans, and those suggested only appear after much anxious discussion. Surprising though it is to a layman, yellow lines are a horrendously expensive option; WSCC cannot just go out and buy a can of yellow paint. However, compared to the rest of the County, Hassocks has scooped the financial jackpot, an outcome entirely due to your response and a massive amount of work put in by the Parish Council. HAA must also declare an interest. It was in 2011 that we did our own mini-surveys and were then told by the powers-that-be that nothing could be done, and please don't rock the boat. We're glad we did!

Operation Watershed Active Community Fund

Last Spring, with the help of our County Councillor, Andy Petch, we successfully applied for grants to investigate the causes of local flooding in two areas. As reported in our Spring Newsletter, £4,899 (plus VAT) was spent on a professional report on surface flooding in the Parklands Road area which can be found on our website. It is leading to some exciting developments which we hope to progress in the current year.

The Lodge Lane/Dale Avenue grant, approximately £11,000, has now also been spent. A CCTV investigation revealed that the culvert running under the junction was so heavily silted up that the camera could not penetrate the full length. The blockage had to be cleared manually and it took almost a week to remove about ten tons of rubble. Then, just as success was in sight, a vertical wooden post, about 4 to 6 inches square, was found to be wedged vertically inside the culvert, apparently supporting the roof. Work had to stop. We now await the verdict of the WSCC Structures Team as to the next move and are thankful that the County has agreed to meet any cost overrun. Although no cure has been achieved, it is evident that the flooding that has plagued Lodge Lane for years, is caused by the badly blocked culvert. We wait, with some impatience, for news that further clearance and reconstruction of the culvert will take place during the summer months when the stream level is relatively low.

Operation Watershed has proved to be such a successful scheme that West Sussex has now made an additional £500,000 available. We have therefore joined with the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust to apply for £8,000 to investigate a sustainable solution to the problems revealed in the Parklands Road report. This involves surveying the feeder streams which are upstream of Spitalford Bridge and creating three additional retention ponds in Butchers Wood in co-operation with the Woodland Trust. Further possible works are described in *Reducing Flood Risk in Hassocks* which can be found on our website.

Both Fred Maillardet and Peter King (OART) will be speaking at our AGM on Tuesday July 5th and will be able to give you the latest news.

The 'Green Group'. Spring and autumn are the times when the Green Group are most active, but it is now that we are beginning to see the result of their labours. 'Our' raised bed in front of the pet shop is transformed, and Georgia's design ideas are paying dividends. There is such an array of different plants – some bought, many donated and some the left-overs from plant sales, that most of us would be hard put to name them all. The new wall baskets have been installed at the entrance to Grand Avenue, and both sides of the road should boast an impressive floral display this summer, thanks to Mansell McTaggart, the Parish Council and HAA funds.

The banks of the Herring stream are now high on the agenda for a general tidy-up. Some of the many plants we put in last autumn have survived the winter flooding – top marks to the cowslips and daisies. With luck, there are more plants still to come through. Now the stream is low we will soon be able to do our summer project of creating gravel meanders and planting the bottom of the stream bank. **Would you like to help?** Our group is quite small, and when members are on holiday or away, some reserve helpers would be invaluable. Email us on: hassocksamenity@aol.com.

Pheasant Field and Lag and Butchers Wood.

HAA has had an almost proprietorial feeling about this area since those days when we almost bought the field and Lag wood. How thankful we are that we were unsuccessful! Sue and Paul's informed, painstaking and meticulous conservation work has been beyond our wildest dreams. That part of their philosophy is that the area should remain open to the public must make us one of the most fortunate villages in Sussex. Now HKD Transition are offering you a chance to appreciate more keenly the work to which Sue, Paul and the Woodland Trust, are dedicated.

You are invited to join a BioBlitz on 16-17 July! This is an opportunity to share in an intensive monitoring of species in a particular area over a 24 hour period. Local naturalists will be on hand to talk about the special wildlife of these ancient woods and the unique grassland. The programme includes a Saturday afternoon stream life survey and an evening bat walk. On Sunday morning there will be a chance to look at the moths trapped the night before and enjoy a tea and toast camp fire breakfast. All free and open to everyone, but booking is essential. More details: www.hkdtransition.org.uk

'Here's a state of things!' When spirits are at their lowest, it is always wise to turn to W S Gilbert. Not only could he sum up the condition of rail services in Hassocks in five words, but he also had a penalty for those responsible. 'Something lingering, with boiling oil in it'.

Since Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) obtained the franchise for our line less than two years ago, rail services in Hassocks have gone from bad to worse. Admittedly it was a poisoned chalice in view of the rebuilding of the London Bridge station hub, but for the Hassocks commuter it has been disastrous. The Rail Group has been able to do little except produce hard facts and make sure that the right people are aware of them. The evidence produced is eye-watering. Between January 1st and June 4th 1,236 trains were cancelled. On 3rd June, a particularly bad day though one not affected by industrial action, 23 trains which should have stopped at Hassocks were cancelled and a further 3, instead of stopping, went straight through. This 'skip stopping', where trains fail to stop at 'minor' stations in order to reach their destination station on time has always plagued Hassocks but it has now reached epidemic proportions. The galling fact is that it rarely achieves its aim – the train far from hurtling to its destination on time merely gets into a back logged queue. The Group produced figures to prove it and kept Nick Herbert, our MP, up to date with its research, including evidence of the many occasions when 'skip stopping' did not appear to be justified. One result was that our Sussex MPs pressed the Department for Transport to remove the GTR franchise, unless performance improved. The response of the Department was, in effect, to move the goal posts. In return for a 'remedial plan' the default performance level for train cancellations was raised by one third. This means that now GTR can cancel 32,000 trains a year (instead of 23,391) before being in breach of its franchise agreement. For details see https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/525767/govia-thameslink-remedial-plan.pdf - a very informative document. It includes long term improvements such as recruiting and training more drivers and introducing more reliable trains. No short term improvements are indicated and none have been experienced by commuters, whose travel experience has now been worsened by industrial action. Perhaps words would fail even W S Gilbert!

In April the Group met with Phil Hutchinson, Head of Time Table Planning and Jane Cobb from GTR. The meeting was called primarily to discuss Hassocks aspirations for the 2018 timetable, but inevitably the discussion first centred on deteriorating services. We were told that 60% of delays were caused by the infrastructure (Network Rail) and 40% by GTR. It was claimed that skip stopping was 'done in a controlled manner' a statement which was at odds with statistics produced by Peter Gibbons which indicated, he felt, that 'the control people were not in control'. Our evidence would, however, be studied by GTR and a response was promised within two weeks, but we are still waiting.

Catherine presented the following 'wish list' for the future:

A more frequent train service southbound to Brighton between 8.00 and 9.00 am

An additional train per hour off-peak to/from the West Coastway and London Victoria

Restoration of the London/Victoria service between 15.34 and 17.36

Good connections at Brighton with East and West Coastway trains

Later trains from Brighton and London, particularly on Fridays and Saturdays.

It was a long meeting and, in view of the strong feelings round the table, helpful and positive. No-one expects any sudden change, but points were made, evidence was produced. We felt that the traumas of Hassocks commuters were being taken seriously and would be, at least to some extent, addressed. And there was one bit of news to cheer our hearts: in 2018 we will be able to travel direct from Hassocks to Cambridge.

Complaints about ticket office closure continue unabated. On July 1st we are meeting with Paul Wyborn, Brighton Mainline group manager and Rebecca Atherton, the Haywards Heath station manager who is responsible for Hassocks. Brickbats and hopefully some bouquets to Catherine (it's difficult to fault our station staff) on rcass1dy@aol.com

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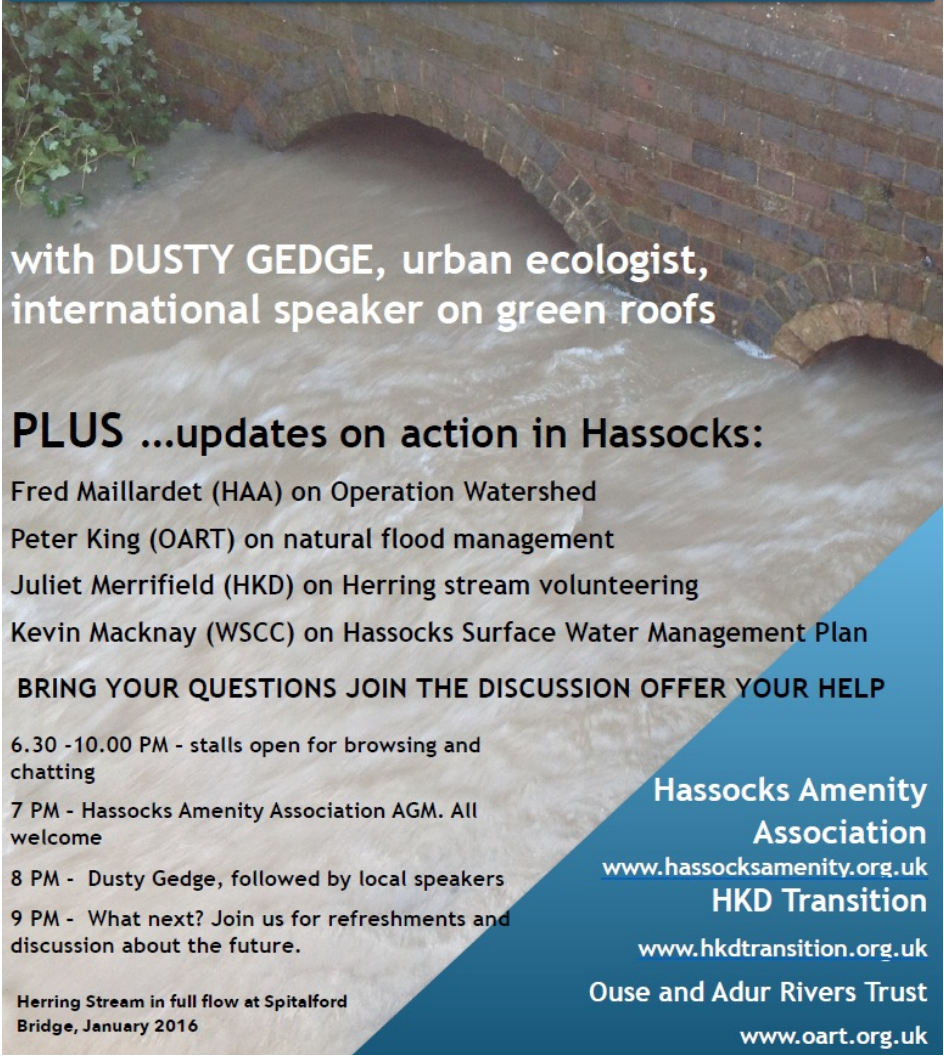
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THINKING GREEN ABOUT FLOODING IN HASSOCKS

DOWNLANDS SCHOOL HASSOCKS, JULY 5



with DUSTY GEDGE, urban ecologist,
international speaker on green roofs

PLUS ...updates on action in Hassocks:

Fred Maillardet (HAA) on Operation Watershed

Peter King (OART) on natural flood management

Juliet Merrifield (HKD) on Herring stream volunteering

Kevin Macknay (WSCC) on Hassocks Surface Water Management Plan

BRING YOUR QUESTIONS JOIN THE DISCUSSION OFFER YOUR HELP

6.30 - 10.00 PM - stalls open for browsing and
chatting

7 PM - Hassocks Amenity Association AGM. All
welcome

8 PM - Dusty Gedge, followed by local speakers

9 PM - What next? Join us for refreshments and
discussion about the future.

Herring Stream in full flow at Spitalford
Bridge, January 2016

Hassocks Amenity
Association

www.hassocksamenity.org.uk

HKD Transition

www.hkdtransition.org.uk

Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust

www.oart.org.uk