

SOBERTON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Soberton Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 12th April 2023 at the Soberton Village Hall commencing at 8.00pm

PRESENT: J Hyland (Chair of the meeting) and forty-three members of the public including District Councillors Wallace, Pearson and Weston.

01/23 INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting. He thanked the District Councillors for their attendance and noted all apologies

The Chairman introduced Dr Richard Osmond and Dr Kerry Sims. Richard and Kerry had been invited to speak about conservation matters within Soberton.

02/23 CONSERVATION MATTERS IN SOBERTON

Dr Richard Osmond provided a report on what is currently happening at Soberton Down. This is an area of “right to roam” land and is owned by Hampshire County Council. He also spoke . He spoke about the Sobernewts group who are assisting his efforts to preserve and enhance the area.

He highlighted successes such as the increased cover of orchids upon the down alongside the establishment of keystone species like Yellow Rattle. This is a parasitic plant that aids the development of wildflower meadows by inhibiting grass regeneration.

Dr Kerry Simms introduced herself as a senior advisor on chemicals surveillance working for the Environment Agency. She also volunteered for the Soberton and Newtown Community Group. The main topic of her talk focussed on water quality locally and efforts to improve this. She highlighted that drainage ditch management, septic tanks, surface run-off and community waste treatment plants all had an impact on the water quality in local streams and the River Meon.

03/23 SOBERTON PARISH COUNCIL WEBSITE

Mr Sam Marland and Mr Paul Henderson from the Parish Council spoke about the current website and their proposals to bring forward a new website. They said that this project would be complete by the autumn of 2023.

04/23 SOBERTON PARISH DESIGN STATEMENT

Mrs Vicki Weston and Mr Jonty Sherwill from the Parish Council spoke about the most recent work on the Parish Design Statement. A lively debate took place during which many people spoke about the process and its opportunities and challenges.

05/23 CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

Prepared by J. Hyland Chair Soberton Parish Council.

Soberton Parish Council (SPC) is apolitical and was formed by the Local Government Act 1894; the Parish of Soberton borders Hambledon to the East, Southwick and Boarhunt to the South, Swanmore and Droxford to the West, and Meonstoke and Corhampton to the North. The parish covers about 2,400ha (9 square miles) of countryside containing a mixture of agricultural land made up from, downland, forest and water meadow. There are three main settlements: Newtown, Soberton Heath and Soberton with a number of smaller settlements namely Brockbridge, Wallops Wood, Grenville Hall, Hoe Gate, Hundred Acres and Kingsmead. The parish council is elected through a local government election every four years, its officers and committees are elected by the parish council annually.

Members

Following the local election in May 2022 a new parish council (PC) was elected. Soberton Parish was an uncontested election in 2022, all nine of those nominated became councillors. SPC has an allocation of eleven parish councillors. In October 2022 the total of eleven Councillors was achieved though the co-option process. The PC have very recently advertised for a further councillor as one of our members has recently moved out of the area. Parish councillors represent the whole parish, not just the area in which they live.

Funding

The PC receive an annual income of £39,000 through the council tax precept paid by homes and business located in the parish. It also receives a grant for the Lengthsman service from HCC. Other income is the rental of the football pitch (which is minimal due to its current condition/lack of use).

Assets

The Parish Council's primary asset is Soberton Recreation Ground located on Heath Road. This was given to the Parish in 1867 for use as a recreation space for villagers of the Parish. The Children's Play area (CPA) is located on land rented from the Charity for the Labouring Poor. The maintenance of these facilities including the Pavilion is the PC's largest financial cost. The PC is currently considering upgrading the field of play as simply grass cutting is not enough to bring back a playable surface. This winter the trees around the Recreation Ground have been pruned and the ditches cleared. The CPA requires constant attention and is inspected regularly by third party inspectors.

Common Land and other open spaces with public access

There are a number of parcels of land around the parish which are registered as 'common land', these being: the chalk pit off Chalk Hill, Hoe Gate Common, the village pond on Chapel Road and the seasonal pond on the corner of Dradfield Land and Ingoldfield Lane. Other open spaces include public access land on Soberton Down, the Meon Valley Trail, Church Green (owned by St Peters Church PCC). Bere Forest (which is ancient woodland) has numerous bridlepaths and routes and is managed by the Forestry Commission. There are miles of Footpaths and Bridleways which cross the parish, many are historic routes, all should be

maintained by the landowner, this includes gates, stiles etc. The PC has no obligation to manage common land/other open spaces/footpath and bridleways but is able to direct actions to the appropriate authority.

Roads and Lanes

The parish is crossed by two classified roads, the A32 which runs North/South along its western edge following the River Meon (which is the parish boundary), and the B2150 Hambledon Road which crosses the North of the Parish at Brockbridge. There are miles of country lanes within the parish with numerous accesses to both dwellings and agricultural/forestry land. Many of these roads/lanes have suffered from the effects of winter and require repair. The Highway Authority, Hampshire County Council (HCC) have a dedicated webpage to report potholes, crumbling edges etc.

Traffic Safety

The PC has instigated the use of a speed indicator sign (SID) which has been deployed across the Parish with reasonable success in encouraging traffic to respect speed limits. The PC proposes to purchase a further unit having agreed additional locations with HCC around the parish. In addition, we understand that HCC are issuing a policy report on traffic speeds across the county this summer, this may result in a review of speed limits within villages.

Planning and Planning Enforcement

The PC are consulted on all planning applications in the parish, this applies to both areas within the Winchester City Council (WCC) jurisdiction and that of the South Downs National Park Authority. The PC generally do not support applications but either comment or object. For the parish to 'object' it is important to justify an objection on current planning grounds. Anyone can comment/object to any planning application, instructions can be found on WCC's Planning and the SDNPA websites, we can assist if this is not clear. The PC was pleased to receive planning inspectors' enforcement reports on 2 sites in the past year which supported our position with regard to change of use and removal of illegal residential uses.

Parish Design Statement (PDS)

This is progressing, a toolkit and questionnaire is being issued in April which we urge everyone to complete and return. This is an important document and will be used to inform both the planning authorities and land/home owners, potential land/home owners of what 'we' the people of the parish find acceptable in location and design. If you are not offered this toolkit/questionnaire please contact any PC member who can assist.

John Hyland
Chair Soberton Parish Council

The meeting closed at 9.00pm with the Chairman thanking everyone for attending.