**Hartfield Parish Council**

**Annual Parish Meeting**

**Monday 25th April 2022**

1. Attendance register - 18 people attended - 8 HPC and 10 members of the public.

Apologies for absence were received from Roger Eastwood, Nancy Holmes and Duncan Gunn.

1. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 1st April 2019 were approved. Councillor Charlotte Beare expressed her disappointment that Councillor Whetstone said they would follow up regarding reducing the speed limit by the Holtye Golf Club but this has not yet happened and there were concerns regarding safety.
2. Chairman’s report
3. Questions from Members of Public:
	1. Does the Parish Council have a policy on how to support Ukraine refugees that are staying here? Forest Row have a support group that is publicised on Facebook so are pointing people in that direction. Some Hartfield residents have offered accommodation but nobody has yet arrived here.
4. Presentation from James Alder – CEO Ashdown Forest. James reported that there was significant shortfall in funding for the forest, even with the introduction of car park charges. The forest attracts some 1.5 million visitors each year, which is considerably more than used to visit. This causes damage to the car parks and the landscape. They are aware the forest is not accessible to all. Cotchford Farm is hosting an open day to raise funds. Later this summer 41 of the 47 car parks will be chargeable. The Forest Centre wants to work more closely with the Parish Council. Currently there are many sheep grazing on the forest but cows are needed. A landscape recovery programme is being looked into. Farmers are reluctant to graze animals due to dog issues. They are looking at having a dog warden to remind people to keep dogs under control, however, it is a small minority that cause a problem.
5. Questions from Members of Public to James Alder (JA):
	1. The defecit of £120,000 was mentioned. Will this still be the case with parking charges? Yes
	2. Why is the defecit so much? JA explained that ESCC used to pay for any budgeted defecit on the Forest but this would no longer continue.
	3. How are visitor numbers monitored? Wealden DC survey visitor numbers to the Forest every 5 years. This is done via car park surveys and counts are made over 10 days.
	4. What will happen about people not paying for parking and parking on the road instead? Lots of people parked on the roads during the Pandemic but traffic still flowed. The plan is for a friendly message to be left on cars that park on the verges which should help. Otherwise parking restrictions will be looked at. Police will be visible and supporting the parking arrangements.
	5. Drivers often speed across the forest, and don’t stick to the 40 mph speed limit. Why not install speed cameras and gain income from that? Speeding is a Police issue and the Forest Centre would not be allowed to benefit from any money collected.
	6. If car parks are full, are there plans to expand car parks? It is not thought that the forest will see any further increase in visitor numbers. Car park expansion will not be permitted.
	7. The Forest Centre itself is dated. Are there any plans to change it? JA confirmed there were plans but no funding was available. It is acknowledged that the Centre is not open enough or at the right times. They are looking to improve this with staff and volunteers.
	8. Will there be any enforcement of car parking charges? JA confirmed an independent company was supplying wardens who will be around monitoring the car parks.
	9. What if the defecit runs up higher, say to £1 million? If they are not able to manage the Forest then it will go back to gorse which will result in the loss of wildlife, the SSI and protection that gives. A new set of agricultural schemes will be brought in in 2024 to help manage the forest.
	10. What improvement does conservation do to the forest? The reason the forest has deteriorated is due to loss of farmers and lack of grazing on the forest. The gorse is cleared mechanically and then grows back within 7 years. Other forests have significantly more funding. We need to increase grazing on the forest, encourage rabbits back and mechanically clear areas.
	11. Are there some households who had Commoners Rights but have lapsed? If so can they re-register? No they cannot re-register once lapsed. However, people can get involved in other ways such as volunteering, non-Commoners can join the Board, people can apply to cut firewood on a ticket rather than by Commoners Rights.
6. Report on Emergency Plan – This was published in March 2020 and proved very useful, particularly at the beginning of the Pandemic. The plan is to be reviewed every five years. Part of the plan was gathering data from local residents with details of any help/ facilities they could offer in the event of an emergency. Forms were available for people to take away to complete should they wish to be added to the plan.
7. Fun Run – John Smith confirmed the event will take place on Saturday 17th September 2022. The runs were being increased to include a half marathon. Volunteer marshals are required, so please contact Emma Fulham if able to volunteer.

Meeting closed at 8.50 pm.