

FAIRLIGHT PRESERVATION TRUST

(Registered Charity Number 1107169)

The Annual General Meeting of the Fairlight Preservation Trust was held on Sunday 17 November 2019 at 2.30pm at Fairlight Village Hall.

Present: David Shortman, Chairman (DS), Leslie Kosmin, Vice Chairman (LK), Dr Ruth Kosmin, Secretary (RK), Nick Booker, Treasurer (NB), Paul Capps (PC), Isabel Horsley (IH), Jill Lewing (JL), Keith Somerville (KS) and 34 other members including District Cllr Andrew Mier.

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chairman, DS, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence had been received from Carol Ardley, Stephen Leadbetter, Carol Shortman, Denise Lamb and Lyn Cooke.

2. Minutes of the 2018 Annual General Meeting

The Minutes of the last AGM were considered by the meeting. The Minutes were proposed and approved on a show of hands without debate and were signed by DS.

3. Chairman's report

DS reported that this last year had been another year of sustained progress in all areas of the work of the Trust. There had been two formal Committee meetings, and one Joint meeting with Rother District Council and East Kent Engineering Partnership (EKEP), who were advising Rother DC on coast protection matters. The Committee had kept in close contact by email on a regular basis throughout the year.

The main work of the Committee over the year had been to ensure that the sea defences were being properly maintained and monitoring expenditure in this regard. Essential repair work had been carried out, especially in relation to the Rockmead slopes. The Secretary, RK, had been involved on behalf of the Committee in the negotiations with Rother DC and EKEP to agree the maintenance programme for the berms and the monitoring of the expenditure involved. DS thanked RK for her work as Secretary over the past year and in particular for all her hard work in these discussions and the time that she had put into this. She would be reporting to the meeting on her dealings with Rother DC and the current work of the Trust

Monitoring remained the responsibility of Rother DC as coast protection authority. However, in addition, our Committee member IH had continued to collect the data on the functioning of the Rockmead wells and the Compressor House. This was vital work, carried out on a voluntary basis, that helped to safeguard the working of the system and the protection of residents. DS thanked IH for her efforts in this regard and as a Committee member. Thanks were also due to Laurie Beetham for all his work both in relation to the Rockmead wells and for his assistance and help to IH.

Living in a coastal village where there has always been a risk of coastal erosion meant that, even though the Trust has had considerable success in obtaining the three berms, there was no room for complacency in relation to the state of the cliffs and a need for constant vigilance.

Membership of the Trust is very important. DS thanked JL for her vital work as Membership Secretary in chasing up outstanding subscriptions, maintaining membership records and encouraging so many new members to join the Trust, several of whom were new residents. DS thanked NB for his continued work as Treasurer to the Trust. NB had made a very considerable contribution to the administration and working of the Committee over the past year. DS then thanked LK as Vice-Chairman, and KS and PC for their work on the Committee in the past year. Jenny Batchelor had decided not to continue on the Committee. DS thanked her for her contribution over many years.

DS thanked Cllrs Andrew Mier and Roger Bird for their support of the Trust over the last year.

Finally, DS noted that earlier in the year one of the Trust's longstanding members and a former member of the Committee of the FCPA, Frances Winch had died. Frances was a keen supporter of the Trust and would be greatly missed.

4. Report on the Fairlight Maintenance Programme

RK reported that 2019 had been a very successful year and one in which there had been a lot of activity. The Committee had worked well as a team and had developed a welcome co-operative approach with Rother DC and also with the Fairlight Parish Council. The Trust continued to work with EKEP and their contractors. The FPT was very grateful for the support and involvement of all the current members. New members were very welcome.

The priority over the last 12 months had been to undertake essential maintenance works and repairs to the systems in place. In the area of the Rockmead cliff slopes, the main carrier drain that took the surface water down to the sea had been leaking quite badly. A new SmartDitch, which will ensure no leaking takes place into the cliff surface, had now been installed. This had been a major construction project, requiring diggers and newly developed piping that is very robust and does not separate into sections. The work had been completed over the summer within the estimated budget of £22,000. Thanks were due to Laurie Beetham for watching over the work and advising where necessary.

The annual maintenance of the slopes had also been carried out, as well as a new laser survey by EKEP which provides useful data. Monitoring pins have been put into the ground to analyse the Rockmead slopes. The three rock berms had been inspected and were reported to be performing well.

On the formal side, new contracts have been awarded for the supervision, maintenance and improvements to the Compressor House and wells. The Trust had been closely involved in the process of finding new contractors to undertake this specialist work. Campbell Scientific had completed a service of the logger system, which is now operating without any faults, and KCAir has completed a major service of the compressors and dryers. Thanks were due to EKEP for setting up these new contractual arrangements. IH had continued to take on the responsibility for analysing and checking the outputs from the Compressor House and checking that the wells were working efficiently. IH was to be thanked for her efforts in this regard.

The Trust had persuaded Rother DC to buy an hydraulic manhole lifter and dip meters to make it easier to lift the covers on the wells to assist with their cleaning in the future. (A recent clean had resulted in the removal of large quantities of silt and mud from the wells, which had built up over time and had not previously been spotted.)

Flow meter that was removed
& cleaned

RK concluded by saying that all these measures had been designed to make sure that we reduce the amount of water in the cliff which would otherwise increase the danger of further cliff erosion. Erosion is an ever present risk. There remains a risk of further cliff falls, landslip and rising sea levels, and all residents need to be aware that areas close to the cliff edge are especially vulnerable.

DS thanked RK for her report and her considerable work for the FPT.

5. Impact of proposed building near to the cliff edge

LK addressed the meeting in relation to this topic. LK pointed out that the completion of the third berm to provide a continuous barrier of sea defences in 2016, which was a great achievement for the FPT, had unfortunately given rise in some quarters to a feeling of complacency as regards the risks of future erosion and landslip along the cliffs. In consequence some considerable time had been taken up in the last two years in dealing with planning applications that had been submitted to construct new dwellings along the cliff top. Such applications were misconceived and were made in ignorance of the true state of the cliffs.

Erosion and the risk of landslip remains a potential problem for homes near to the cliff edge. Along Sea Road the cliffs were in places at an acute angle which would change over time. A recent planning application had been backed up by an engineering report based on borehole evidence. This report had identified a large volume of groundwater at 3 to 4 metres below the surface which, if interfered with, could lead to a major collapse. The situation indicated that a substantial quantity of water coming from the Firehills was not being captured by the Rockmead wells but was continuing to flow down through the rocks to lower levels in the Cove. This was a major cause for concern.

The view of the Committee was that no new substantial building work should be carried out near to the cliff edge. Nothing must be done which would disturb the existing land. That included the construction of foundations for new buildings and enlarged homes. Fortunately, in early November 2019 the Inspector had approved Rother DC's Development and Site Allocations plan (DaSa) which would not permit soakaways for water within 50 metres of the cliff face and would impose more stringent planning control in a coastal buffer zone within 50 metres of the cliff edge. The FPT hoped to work with Cllr Andrew Mier to obtain from Rother DC an Article 4 Direction under the General Planning Order, removing the right to "permitted development" from properties in that area. Rother DC had declined to impose this in the past. Such a Direction would have the effect of extending planning controls to extensions to properties as well as entirely new buildings.

LK emphasised that there was no need for increased concern by local residents provided that the land was left alone and new development in these crucial areas did not take place. PC remarked that if there were to be damage to the cliffs by new building all the surrounding properties could be affected and it would cause harm to the village generally, including in relation to property prices. No one would want to see that.

A general discussion followed in which several members expressed the view that nothing should be done to encourage anyone from outside the village to think that they could build on the cliff top and certainly without expert advice showing no risk whatsoever to the cliffs. It was agreed that there was no room for complacency.

6. Treasurer's report and approval of the Accounts

NB presented the Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2019. The Accounts had been approved and signed on behalf of the Committee on 14 October 2019. Total funds were £33,067.

There were currently unrestricted funds totalling £21,576 in the bank accounts at Barclays and Nationwide. In addition there were restricted funds of £11,491 at HSBC which were designated for further coast protection works.

NB went through the accounts in detail, explaining each of the important items. Insurance cost £339. There had been a loss for the year of £92 which was regrettable. There had been a welcome saving of about £100 as a result of the hospitality shown by DS and Carol Shortman in arranging for Committee meetings to be held at their home.

NB reported that the FPT had 192 members, of whom 31 are yet to pay their membership subscriptions that were now due. There were 26 new members who had joined since last year. NB thanked JL and KS for their hard work in obtaining new members. The membership subscription remained at £10 for 3 years.

Michael Martin Partnership 2018 Ltd was thanked for their efforts in preparing the Accounts without charge.

Approval of the Accounts was proposed by Keith Jellicoe and seconded by Frank James. The Accounts were unanimously adopted.

6. Election of officers and members of the Executive Committee

LK proposed that DS be re-elected as Chairman and thanked him for his work for the FPT. This resolution was carried unanimously on a show of hands.

DS proposed LK as Vice-Chairman. This resolution was carried unanimously on a show of hands.

DS then proposed NB as Treasurer. This resolution was carried unanimously on a show of hands.

DS proposed RK as Secretary. This resolution was carried unanimously on a show of hands.

DS announced that there had been 4 nominations for members of the Committee – Jill Lewing (Membership secretary), Issy Horsley (Rockmead Road monitoring), Keith Summerville and Paul Capps. All were re-elected unopposed.

7. Any other business

Keith Jellicoe raised the issue of the membership subscription and the need to encourage more members among residents in the village. Several members expressed similar views and queried the size of the membership subscription, which they argued should be increased in order to boost the income of the Trust. It was noted that the subscription had remained unchanged for a number of years. PC stated that it was most important that the Trust did not lose members as a result of any increase in the subscription rate. Members were at liberty to make donations to the Trust to support its work and this would be welcomed.

NB replied that he would certainly re-consider the suggestion of an increase in the subscription rate, but noted that it was more important to keep a large membership as that gave the FPT more weight when dealing with Rother DC and other authorities.

The meeting closed at 3.30pm.