

## **Future of Harrisons meeting March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005, 8pm at The Junction pub, Groombridge**

**Present:** Bob Moulton (chair), Martin Brice (secretary), approx 60 in the room  
Geoff Pearson (HRMG, BMC), Tim Skinner (HRMG, BMC, CC, MMC), Robin Mazinke (CC, BMC), Chris Boylan (TWMC, CC, BMC), Charlie Pickin (TWMC, CC), K Francis (BRMC) Tim Daniels (CC), John Galloway (CC), Rob Foster (TWMC, CC), Steve Durkin (CC, TWMC), Sarah Cullen (CC, SCC, BMC, HRMG), Robin Maynard (CMC), Robert Healey (Croydon MC), Macolm McPherson (South Downs Climbers), David Unwin (CC, TWMC), Oliver Hill (CC, TWMC), Anna Gregory (chair of L&SE BMC Area), Andrew McLellan (BMC), Andy Meyers, Tony Mayes (SCC), Paul Symes (SCC), Guy Stockwell (SCC), Frank Shannon, Nigel Head (HRMG), Joe Griffiths (Club Med), Chris Tullis (Soft Rock), Barney Lewis (SCC), Colin Whiddett, Graham Adcock (CC), Dave Randall (SCC), Steve Jackson (TWMC), Ute Wegerhoff (TWMC), Keith Stallan , Wayne Fuller, Dave Marshall, Liva Vatne, Tim Randall (SCC), Steve Rellos (MMC), Raz Parmar (MMC), Mark Hazell (TWMC), E Humphreys (Craggers), S Field (Craggers), Scott Evans (TWMC), Eve Smith , Mary-Anne Mellor (SCC), Ian Hicks (TWMC), Terry Tullis, Mike Vetterlein (CC), Paul Highams (TWMC), Lynda Myers (district councillor), Richard Parkins (LMC), Sally Slade (LMC), Adam Eyre-Walker (Brighton Explorers), Gary Shipp (Brighton Explorers), Nicola Brown, James Gregory, Kasim Bell, James Clarkson, AG Osrowica (East GrinsteadCC), Tony Boud (East GrinsteadCC), Phil Loasby (CC), Andrew Joad (TWMC), Rebecca Bull (TWMC), Dave Turnbull (BMC chief executive, CC)

1. Apologies for absence: Jules King, BMC L&SE Area secretary, Zoe Algar (Sport England)
2. Bob Moulton introduced Steve McCarthy (Forestry Commission), Barney Lewis (SS Club) , Anna Gregory (Chair of L&SE BMC Area) to the meeting.
3. Bob outlined the meeting plan. Idea was to provide BMC with very clear idea of what it should be looking for in its negotiations regarding the future of the Rocks.
4. Bob summed up so far: The envelope of land around the Rocks was bought by BMC in 1958. But BMC could not then own land and opted to pass ownership to CCPR. In early 1970s the land was transferred to SC, which also leased car park in 1974 on a 40 year-lease and built the toilet block. In 1991 SS club leased campsite and ran it. Until 1997 SC administered the Rocks. Then it contracted out all the site to BMC, which established HRMG. Over the years SE have been very supportive of Harrison's and put over £100,000 into the Rocks/car park, plus the annual grant for management of Rocks. Recently SE told BMC it wants to refocus. Since January SE & FC have met HRMG and BMC. SE wants to divest ownership of the Rocks; the BMC have expressed their wish to take on the Rocks but is not in the car park and toilet block management business. SE & FC have presented BMC with 5 options: 1 current arrangement, BMC managing the car park and toilets on a reduced grant but the BMC taking over the freehold of the Rocks. 2. FC to have car park lease and FC to manage it, and FC to have freehold of Rocks, which leased back to BMC. 3. Same as before but with BMC owning freehold of Rocks. 4. same as 2 but with plan for opening up Birchden Wood for recreation – nature trails, etc. This is in line with Sport England's idea of encouraging people to take more exercise. 5. same 4 but with freehold of the Rocks held by BMC. SE would like all agreed by March 31 this year. FC wants to hold freehold and then lease back Rocks to BMC, they will accommodate worries about climbing in perpetuity. Dave T said BMC policy was not to try to proactively own crags but it does own a few so there is a

precedent for so doing. The BMC is here to do what climbers around the country think it should be doing and he would back the decision of the meeting tonight. Tim Daniels of HRMG suggested the car park be dealt with in isolation. Birchden Wood was large, near a big town, giving access to an amenity – the Rocks. The FC would have to manage the car park in any case. Climbers have invested time and effort and money and treat the Rocks as if they were “their own”. Climbers have benefited from using the car park but so have others - dog walkers for instance. Harrison’s is one of the most important climbing venues nationally, very significant piece of rock. Thousands and thousands of climbers love it dearly. Covenants were fraught with pitfalls. Rocks are currently managed for climbers by climbers. He felt climbers should have the ownership back to manage it for climbers. Malcolm McPherson asked if the toilets were separated from the question, how much the Rocks cost to run. BM said Rocks could manage on £5,000 if more volunteer effort was put in. MM asked if SE would pay that, DT said SE would for the remainder of the lease (9 years). MM said BMC could get the freehold and SE would pay for them. BM asked Steve MaCarthy why the FC wanted the freehold, and Steve replied that its remit had changed over past 10 years and it was now skewed more to conservation and recreation rather than commercial. This was a chance to own a prime recreational asset, which the FC was well placed to manage. Robin Mazinke asked what the cost would be of the BMC leased the Rocks from the FC: BM said £1 per year. SM said FC was around to advise and assist BMC in managing the Rocks. FC would be able to access funding streams if it owned the freehold. MM said SM was a climber, one of us, but in 10 years time he may have moved and the FC may change its personnel and policy. Chris Boylan was in favour of keeping the freehold. DT said it would be difficult for SE to go against the opinion of the meeting. MB asked if there were costs in owning the freehold – Bob said yes, Sarah Cullen said volunteers would be available but JG said there was a big difference between an amateur pruning a shrub and a professional cementing in bolts. TD said if climbers did not own the freehold we might finish up with things we did not want - with a bridge on to Isolated Buttress, for example.. DT asked SM what help might come from the FC if the BMC had the freehold, SM said Birchden Wood might become marginalised if the FC owned the car park and the wood but not the Rocks , he had the impression that the FC would be far more ready to fund developments if the owned the freehold. BM was asked about legal responsibility for the Rocks . BM said it was a public liability issue. DT said the land would be dedicated by the BMC as access land under the CROW act and doing that would absolve owners of liability.

BM thanked Steve McCarthy for his contribution to the meeting.

## **Second part**

JG explained that FC wanted no part in management of the Rocks at all, which raised the question of why the FC wanted the freehold. He thought it was because the remit of the FC has changed to recreation from commerce. He thinks the FC wants to fulfill that. This could be a negotiating position. David Unwin said a lease could be written in terms that would vest protection as good as owning the freehold, it could be done but whether the FC would do that was open to question. BM said the lease could include provision for the BMC to retain part of the car park income. Also it could give the BMC some say in setting car park charges, which would otherwise be entirely in the hands of the FC. Chris Tullis said an influx of people would be to the detriment of the Rocks. Sarah Cullen & Joe said if the FC did not get the freehold, it seemed that Steve was saying the FC might lose interest, which would mean less chance of development. JG said the money to fund Harrisons was important – some expostulated that Eridge was run for nothing and Harrisons could be run for the same, but BM said that there was no comparison between Eridge and Harrison’s in terms of usage and work needed. BM said if we kept the freehold there would probably be less money to run the

Rocks. HRMG would be asking people in the meeting for ongoing volunteer work. MM said we should keep the Rocks in the family and retain the character of the Rocks. Chris said any damage that happened to the Rocks was irreparable. Geoff Pearson said it was a quirk that the CCPR owned the Rocks. The freehold was being bounced around and change would continue and if we allowed the freehold to go to FC, when policy changed, the freehold may be sold – JG told him the terms of the lease could prevent that. JG said the FC was waiting for us to decide what we wanted in the terms of the lease. We could retain control and have money as well from the FC. TD said the risks were too great not to take the opportunity to gain control of the Rocks and whatever the problems facing us in terms of funding we would always find a way round it. We would never regret the decision to take control of the Rocks. If we did not take control, in, say, 20 years time we would be faced with a dilemma: we would never know whether we took the right decision because so many things would change. Comment was made that if everyone in the room paid £100 we would find £5,000 to run the Rocks. Frank said we had let the Rocks go to government bodies but we should have the them back. SC asked if the decision made at the meeting would make a difference: BM and DT said SE would find it very difficult to pass the freehold to FC in such circumstances.

#### Vote

- negotiating for BMC to hold freehold: almost everyone in the room.
- JG's idea for very tight set of conditions – leasehold option – 3
- 2 abstentions