

Minutes of a meeting of the Ashwell Parish Council held on Wednesday 6th February 2013 in the Parish Room at 8.00pm

Present: Councillors Peter Long (Chairman), Mike Berry, Jane Buxton, John Connolly, Martin Hoffman, Bridget Macey, Daniel Mathews, Christine Schwick, Mark White.

The Clerk was also in attendance.

Members of the public: Four representatives of various parties re item 111.5.

County Councillor Tony Hunter re item 110.1.

Fifteen parishioners.

107. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Councillor David Cook (away on holiday).

108. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING 6th January 2013

It was *resolved* that these be approved and signed.

109. MATTERS OF REPORT

109.1 (January Council 98.2) Village sign. Cllr Christine Schwick reported that the supplier was putting the finishing touches to the new sign. It was agreed that a formal unveiling ceremony would be organised, ideally to coincide with Ashwell at Home on May 12th. **CVS**

109.2 (December Council 88.8) Ashwell Post Office. Following the Parish Council's letter to Oliver Heald, MP, requesting his input, further information had been received. Post Office Ltd are introducing new type branch models, "Main" and "Local". "Local" branches would offer reduced counter services but with more flexible opening hours and updated premises. The Ashwell sub-postmistress does not wish to convert to the new style and Post Office Ltd are therefore seeking to find an alternative outlet in the village. Concerns had been expressed that in the event that no such alternative could be found, the village would lose the service. It was understood that personnel from Post Office Ltd had visited the village and made contact with owners of various premises in order to progress the matter. The Parish Council agreed that it was imperative that the service be maintained and would continue to monitor the situation.

110. OTHER CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

110.1 Cutting of the 202 Taxibus service and changes to the 90/91 bus service. The Chairman reported that the Parish Council had only become aware of this last week; the situation had been confirmed by Herts County Council. Cllr Daniel Mathews reported that the 202 service would cease completely from April 1st when the current contract ended. The new timetable for the 90/91 service would be amended to add the main services used by commuters to access the station but the service to Royston would cease. Concerns had been received from parishioners who would be very adversely affected by this cancellation. Access to workplaces, shopping facilities, doctors and hospital appointments, education, caring responsibilities for relatives, etc would be severely impacted. It was also noted that the proposed timetable changes would also be an adverse effect on those travelling to Baldock, including pupils attending Knights Templar School.

It was *resolved* that Standing Orders be suspended for this item

County Councillor Tony Hunter reported that he too had only just become aware of the changes. He had determined that the County Council's policy was to allow a particular service to be subsidised only to a certain level and that the low numbers of passengers, and hence the low revenue, on these services meant that they would have to be cut. Cllr Hunter quoted examples of very low usage figures that had been used to justify the cuts. These were vehemently disputed by members of the public present who maintained that their personal usage alone amounted to more than the figures quoted. Cllr Hunter requested that all usage details be forwarded to him so that he could dispute the official figures; Cllr Mathews agreed to co-ordinate this. He also agreed to co-ordinate representations on timetable issues. Cllr Hunter was requested to pass on the complaints of both the Parish Council and parishioners as to why there had been no publicity and no earlier warning of the changes. **DMM**

110.2 Agenda for North Herts Association of Parish, Town and Community Councils meeting Wednesday February 13th 7.30pm Mrs Howard Hall, Letchworth.

110.3 Email from District Councillor Andrew Young with information re a group 'to promote further the rural broadband issue'.

110.4 Email from the supplier appointed by the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to review how tourism is managed in Hertfordshire and prepare a new Destination Management and Action Plan. Cllr Schwick had responded to the consultation.

110.5 Email from Central Bedfordshire giving information on consultations re Local Plan. See www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/strategic-planning

110.6 Email from HCC giving information on consultation re school planning proposals to changes to the Primary Support Base located at Garden City Academy, Letchworth.

110.7 Email from Anglian Water re public consultation 'to ask our customers about their priorities for the future of water services'. Details on www.discoverdiscussdecide.co.uk until 10th March.

111. REPORT FROM PLANNING COMMITTEE

(next meeting scheduled for Saturday 9th February, 8.30am)

111.1 Notifications from NHDC as Planning Authority

111.1.1 Application no. 12/02221/1. 6 Kingsland Way.

Full Planning Permission: Conversion of dwelling into two separate dwellings.

Standard Conditional Permission.

111.1.2 Application 12/02645/1HH. 2 Foresters Cottages, 16 High Street. Full permission householder: Retaining wall, raised planter, trellis and arbour rail and gate to rear garden.

Standard Conditional Permission.

111.1.3 Application 12/02742/1TPO. 62 Back Street.

Reduce one Copper Beech tree by 20% all over. Conditional Consent.

111.1.4 Application no. 12/02741/1TCA 1 Fordham Close. Remove one Norway Maple tree. Reduce one Norway Maple tree by 15% all over. No objection.

111.1.5 Application no. 12/02740/1TCA Digswell Manor, 74 High Street. Remove one Robinia tree. No objection.

111.1.6 Application 12/02665/1TCA. The Springs. For Ashwell Parish Council.

Pollard Ash tree to previous point (35a on plan), remove any overhanging branches of 3 Ash trees (36,37 and 38 on plan) and remove some small self-sown saplings (A), remove multiple stemmed Sycamore tree (B), coppice Prunus and Hazel (C), and Ash tree (F). Cut Prunus (E) down to hedge height and incorporate back into hedge. Coppice four stems at front overhanging road of one multi stemmed Goat Willow (19, 20 and 21 on plan) (D).

No objection.

111.2 (January Council 100.3) Development at 35 High Street and Whitby Farm.

It was reported that only one minor complaint had been received from a parishioner and noted that the build seemed to be progressing well.

111.2.1 Application no 12/02609/1DOC For Logan Homes Ltd Condition 19 - Remediation strategy.

Approval of details.

111.2.2 Application no 12/02612/1DOC For Logan Homes Ltd Condition 22 - Surface water drainage.

Approval of details.

111.2.3 Application no 12/02613/1DOC For Logan Homes Ltd Condition 24 – Surface water strategy/flood risk assessment

Approval of details.

111.2.4 Application no 12/02688/1DOC For Mr D Button

Details reserved by condition 12 (construction phasing and environmental management programme for development of the site) of planning permission ref no. 12/00812/1 granted on 31 May 2012.

Approval of details.

111.3 (January Council 100.5) Land adjacent to 92 Ashwell Street/response from Kevin Thompson, Chief Executive of North Herts Homes. It was noted, as had been assumed, that North Herts Homes considered the profit from the sale of the land was of greater value than the addition of one affordable home in Ashwell. Parish councillors again expressed their disagreement with this. It was also noted that the response contained several factual errors. It had claimed that the Parish Council had voted against the planning application for a bungalow that would have been suitable for an elderly or disabled person. This was not the case. The Parish Council had voted in favour of the application and in doing so had overridden the objections made by neighbours who had concerns mainly with increased parking. The response from North Herts Homes had also included a comment on the views of the village on affordable social housing

'...opportunities for the development of more large-scale affordable social housing in Ashwell are extremely limited (and possibly not welcome)...'

The statement was strongly refuted by parish councillors who expressed their concerns at its inaccuracy and inappropriateness. It was noted that the Parish Council had been making serious efforts over some considerable period of time to progress the development of further social housing in the village with the

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Chairman's signature Date

emphasis on homes for those with local connections. It had been working closely with Howard Cottage Housing Association on this. It was understood that the Planning Authority were minded to approve the proposed development at 61 Station Road that would include some affordable and some social units; this had been fully supported by the Parish Council. The Parish Council had also been involved with proposals for a significant extension to Walkdens and had now been asked for a pre-application view on this (see 111.5 below).

It was **resolved** to write back to North Herts Homes to correct the inaccuracies and express the Parish Council's views. **Clerk**

111.4 NHDC briefing meeting and consultation on Housing Options and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Cllr Christine Schwick reported that she and the Chairman had attended, and that information had been provided on future housing targets and potential sites together with proposed arrangements for the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy. Full details were available on the NHDC website and the public consultation exercise would be open until March 31st.

It was **resolved** that i) a notice be placed in Ashwell News encouraging parishioners to take part in the consultation process. ii) The Parish Council would form a collective view at its March meeting. iii) This view would be presented at the Parish Meeting on March 20th with a further request for individual parishioners to contribute to the consultation process. **CVS**

Meanwhile it was noted that if the present proposals on the CIL were confirmed, in order for the Parish to fully benefit from them, an approved Neighbourhood Plan would be required. It was agreed a working party be set up at the March meeting to progress this and that volunteers to participate be identified. Cllr Schwick also pointed out that significant expense might be necessary, not least because an approved Neighbourhood Plan would require the consent of a public referendum.

It was noted that there had been no firm information forthcoming on existing funds held by NHDC under section 106 agreements or provisions for same on interim applications granted; the Chairman agreed to pursue this. **WPL**

111.5 (January Council 100.7) Origin Housing Association proposal for a new development on land adjacent to Walkdens.

It was **resolved** that Standing Orders be suspended for this item

The Chairman wished it to be noted that no formal planning application had yet been made to the Planning Authority, NHDC, and reminded all parish councillors that any discussions at this 'pre-application' stage were subject to very strict rules designed to avoid any allegation of pre-determination or bias.

Mr Mike Dunkley of Origin Housing outlined the proposal for a development that would form an extension to Walkdens. He presented a draft sketch showing a possible layout of 17 units, all affordable and social housing, although he stressed that this was in no way fixed. Ms Lizzie Cullum of Savills, representing the landowner, reported that the precise dimensions of the land to be sold had yet to be finalised and could be adjusted to accommodate an agreed layout of the units required. The proportion of units for single people, couples and families would be led by the Housing Needs Survey. Although this had been undertaken some years ago there was no reason to suggest that the situation had changed. There were no plans for a repeat survey and the housing officer at NHDC had indicated that she was happy with this. Priority would be given to applicants with local connections using the established criteria; this had also been a stipulation of the landowner. For the affordable units, this stock would be preserved in perpetuity as a limit of 80% ownership applied to communities of less than 3000 people, ie private sale would never be allowed.

Questions put by parish councillors included control of the build process, the layout, adequacy of parking and treatment of existing trees and hedges.

The Parish Council felt that the proposal would be welcomed in principal, and asked the developer to note that there was a strong view that the housing stock should remain as social/affordable in perpetuity and that particular attention should be paid to the landscaping of the site as this had been a problem with the adjacent development.

112. REPORT FROM STREETS & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

(Committee Chairman Cllr Mike Berry)

112.1 (January Council 101.3) Footway Lighting/Herts Highways survey. Cllr Mark White reported that he had completed this.

112.2 NHDC Waste and recycling service for Sunnymead Orchard. Cllr Bridget Macey reported correspondence with NHDC with the objective of achieving a service that was more manageable for residents; a site meeting was scheduled for next week.

112.3 Herts Highways works in Station Road. Cllr Bridget Macey reported a positive response to the footway repairs and clearance between the chicane and Sunnymead Orchard.

113. REPORT FROM RECREATION & FACILITIES COMMITTEE

(Committee Chairman Cllr Daniel Mathews)

(draft minutes meeting Tuesday 15th January; next meeting scheduled for Monday 11th March)

113.1 Church clock chimes.

It was noted that the Parish Council was now in possession of evidence on the views of parishioners from three main sources (i) personal representations at Parish Council meetings, (ii) written representations, (iii) views expressed at the public consultation meeting on 19th January. From this evidence there was a clear indication that a majority of the parishioners who had expressed a view were in favour of maintaining the chimes as they were, ie striking on the hour and quarterly throughout the day and night. The views expressed had included fears of creeping urbanisation and loss of heritage. Also the value of hearing the chimes throughout the night, as opposed to merely being unbothered by them, was high and, if they were lost, the consequent negative impact would be significant. The views expressed in support of turning off the quarter chimes during the night were health related due to disturbed sleep.

It was reported that there seemed to have been no apparent reduction in noise levels since the installation of the anti-bird screening as described by the Parochial Church Council representative at the public meeting.

Cllr Martin Hoffman proposed that in view of the overwhelming support for the chimes to continue as they were, the Parish Council had no option but to support this. He reported that evidence to support the health argument required input from a suitably qualified authority. It was not just a matter of taking measurements; multiple factors would have to be assessed to reach a valid conclusion that could be acted upon. Clear evidence to support the allegation that the chimes were the cause of damage to parishioners' health was lacking. However it was essential, in his view, that were such evidence to be forthcoming the Parish Council should review this issue.

In view of the lack of such evidence and the value placed on the nightly chimes by the overwhelming majority of those parishioners consulted it was proposed that no further action be taken and this was *resolved*.

113.2 Allotments. Cllr Daniel Mathews reported that a tenant's meeting was to be scheduled for next month; it had been agreed to hold these every six months.

114. REPORT FROM CHARACTER AREAS COMMITTEE

(Committee Chairman Cllr Martin Hoffman)

114.1 Springs railings paint. Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that the Herts County Council officer had responded to the concerns re signs of wear. It was understood that the contractor was to return to repaint the railings when suitable weather conditions allowed.

114.2 Springs tree works. Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that the next phase of works in accordance with the agreed management plan would be progressed at the end of the month (see 111.1.6 above)

115. REPORT FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE

115.1 (January Council 101.3) Precept and council tax base/NHDC briefing and correspondence. The Chairman reported that he had attended the briefing meeting; he felt that it had been well-conducted and had been impressed by the standard. A revised figure for the Ashwell tax base and the workings for it had been received. The proposed precept of £49,000 for 2013/14 would show as a 0.03% increase. It was agreed that this was acceptable.

115.2 Approval of February Accounts and Bills for Payment (see Appendix 2).

It was *resolved* that these be approved and paid.

Clerk

116. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

116.1 Website Group Cllr Daniel Mathews reported that the new site was being progressed; notes of the last meeting had been distributed.

116.2 Yearbook Group Cllr Peter Long reported that delivery was scheduled for Friday 1st March; a delivery schedule would be circulated.

Clerk

116.3 Community Housing Group See 111.5 above.

116.4 Speeding Group Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that two dates for monitoring had been scheduled.

117. PARISH AFFAIRS, REPORTS FROM OTHER BODIES AND OPEN FORUM

It was ***resolved*** that Standing Orders be suspended for this item; taken at 8.30pm.

117.1 Police. Cllr Bridget Macey reported that, following her request, PCSO Chris Braybrook was to install additional Neighbourhood Watch signage on the Morden's road. Cllr Macey also reported that she had informed the local police of the Parish Council's intention to use cctv to gain evidence of vehicles mounting the pavement in the High Street; no objection had been received.

117.2 Dog fouling. Cllr Christine Schwick reported numerous complaints and an increasing problem; this was confirmed by parishioners present. She had commissioned some notices that would be positioned in known problem areas. Of particular concern was the frequency of reports of dogs being exercised on the Recreation Ground despite notices at both entrances prohibiting this. Photographic evidence had been obtained of one offence; this had been witnessed and a vehicle registration number obtained. It was proposed to hand the evidence to the police and to press for a prosecution. This would be publicised as a deterrent. A plea was made for parishioners to record other offences particularly at the Recreation Ground and at Small Gains. Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that dog fouling at the Springs had been notably reduced since the ban of dogs off-lead was introduced.

106.2 Museum. Cllr Martin Hoffman, reported that the AGM of the Trustees would take place on 14th March.

Meeting closed at 9.35pm

Appendix 1 – General material received

Hard copy – 'Items on the table'

1. North Herts District Council 'Members Information' w/e 11, 18, 25 January.

By Email

2. HAPTC Briefings and Bulletins. Information re training courses (Community Planning Wednesday 6th March 9.30 -3.00, Woolmer Green Village Hall).

3. *Rural News* from PC Marina.

4. *Clerks and Councils Direct* January 2013.

5. *The Clerk* January 2013.

6. *Wildlife Matters* January 2013.

