

**Minutes of a meeting of the Ashwell Parish Council held on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2013 in the Parish Room at 8.00pm**

**Present:** Councillors Peter Long (Chairman), Mike Berry, Jane Buxton, Graham Lee, Bridget Macey, Mark White.

The Clerk was also in attendance. Members of the public: Sixteen parishioners.

Mr Rob and Mrs Maureen Coston from Ashwell Post Office and Ms Debi Fane from Post Office Ltd.

**78. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** Cllr John Connolly (work commitment), Cllr Martin Hoffman (family medical issue), Cllr Daniel Mathews (work commitment), Cllr Jane Smith (work commitment).

**79. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING 6<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

It was *resolved* that the minutes be approved and signed.

**80. FUTURE OF ASHWELL'S POST OFFICE**

Ms Debi Fane from Post Office Ltd thanked the Parish Council for its invitation to attend and the opportunity to make clear Post Office Ltd's commitment to Network Transformation. She emphasized that this was not a closure programme. The objective was to modernise the network and make it profitable and more sustainable for the future. In the long-term there would be three categories of post office; Mains (c 3,000), Locals (c5,500) and Community (c3,500). It was envisaged that Ashwell would be in the Local category, ie consisting of a kiosk within another business. At the commencement of the Network Transformation programme all existing postmasters/mistresses were given various options; the Ashwell postmistress had indicated a desire to retire. Post Office Ltd would only accept this, and offer compensation, if a suitable alternative for the provision of a post office service in the village was established. No Local post office was a viable business in its own right; it would have to be alongside another business. Other retail outlets in Ashwell had been approached and any expressions of interest would be welcomed. Ms Fane explained that applicants had to complete a recruitment process and supply a business plan; there would also be a period of public consultation. Post Office Ltd's figures suggested that an existing retail outlet could expect a 10% increase in retail sales by adding a post office outlet. The cost of the kiosk, security etc to set up the facility would be borne by Post Office Ltd but not any alterations that might be required to the existing business. The requirement to provide disabled access had been raised as a potential problem in some instances but this was not insurmountable. Efforts to find a new outlet could continue in the short-term but if none was agreed, either of a Local or Community category, Post Office Ltd would probably define Ashwell as 'Parked'. Service obligations could be fulfilled through Outreach eg by a visiting van-based operation. Post masters/mistresses were employed on a contractual basis and could choose to leave with three months' notice at any time.

Ashwell Postmistress Mrs Maureen Coston thanked the Parish Council for the invitation to attend and provided a package of information for all parish councillors. She highlighted the problems caused by the decline in revenue due to withdrawal of services by Post Office Ltd over many years. Most recently the loss of Mailwork from Ashwell had resulted in a significant loss of income. She was very critical of the failure of central government to fulfil its promises to provide alternative income streams. Given this situation, and the reduced profitability of their shop due to changing customer habits and the recession, she and her husband had made the decision to retire. Their desire had originally been to sell the business as a viable commercial entity but they now no longer believed this was possible; they had taken professional advice that supported this view. She was also critical of Post Office Ltd and alleged that the second version of Network Transformation, only recently launched, would raise additional problems.

Parish councillors requested clarification and further detail over some points.

It was *resolved* that Standing Orders be suspended for members of the public present to contribute.

Members of the public present expressed their gratitude to Maureen and Rob Coston for the service that they provided to the village. The value of the current post office, not only for services provided, but also for its significant social and community role was emphasized. All expressed the view that every effort should be made to retain this current level of service and community benefit.

Parish councillors were of the view that the withdrawal of services from individual outlets by Post Office Ltd and the failure of central government to abide by its promises were not issues that a parish council could address. It was agreed that the government had failed to consider the needs of a rural community and the additional social and community benefits that a viable post office provided. It was **proposed** that a letter be sent to Oliver Heald, MP, with a copy to the Minister Mr Eric Pickles, expressing the view that (i) the Parish Council was very disturbed by the current situation, (ii) the government was not holding Post Office Ltd to its commitments, (iii) what was he personally doing about this?

It was **resolved** that the proposal be accepted.

**Clerk**

It was **proposed** that a working group be set up to attempt to identify and assess alternatives that would maintain a good service for the village. It was agreed that Cllr Bridget Macey would lead the group; parishioners wishing to join would be welcomed (contact via the Clerk or Cllr Macey).

It was **resolved** that the proposal be accepted.

## **81. MATTERS OF REPORT FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

**81.1** (November Council, 68.0) Parish Clock noise complaints. The Chairman noted the response from the NHDC officer with responsibility for environmental protection (letter dated 28th November 2013). '...point out that the Parish Council's stated approach does not necessarily eliminate the risks of future regulatory intervention by North Hertfordshire District Council or, indeed, private action by those adversely affected within the community. However, in the interests of good community relations I am prepared to suspend my statutory nuisance enquiries until the end of January 2014. This will afford the Parish Council with sufficient time to implement its resolution... and for the impact of the revised chimes to be considered.'

It was noted that three quotes were in hand for the installation of the timing device required to turn off the quarter chimes for a period overnight. It was **proposed** that the quote from Smith of Derby be accepted. It was noted that this was not the cheapest quote but preferred on the basis that the supplier had serviced the clock regularly for some years, was thus familiar with the location and mechanism, and would be in a position to progress speedily with works when requested.

It was **resolved** that the quote of £1,672 from Smith of Derby be accepted.

**Clerk**

The Chairman reported that, following the request to the Parochial Church Council as to the procedure required to obtain permission for the installation of a timing device, a response had been received from the Diocese. This had confirmed that a Faculty from the Chancellor of the Diocese of St Albans would be required, 'As the first stage in the process, I should be grateful if you could forward to me the detailed proposals for the work, e.g. a quotation from a clock firm. I will obtain the advice of the Diocesan Advisory Committee on the proposals before sending you the formal paperwork to make the application.'

It also informed that there would be an application fee of £235.

It was noted that the total costs would thus be £1,907, ie £1,627 for the supply and installation, and £235 for the Diocese permission. It was **proposed** that a public appeal be made to raise the funds for the cost. All contributions would be welcomed, either acknowledged or anonymous. It was noted that the NHDC Baldock & District Area Committee had indicated it would look favourably on an application to its discretionary fund.

It was **resolved** that the proposal be accepted.

Re the agreement to undertake a quantified and detailed survey of parishioners' views; it was noted that a draft had been produced. Concerns were expressed as to the best time for such a questionnaire to be sent out and whether it should be combined with the Neighbourhood Plan consultation. Parish councillors expressed the following views (i) results could influence any potential action by NHDC when their declared deadline of the end of January was reached and would influence how any action taken by them was judged; it should thus be progressed as soon as possible, (ii) NHDC officers were already aware that a majority of parishioners had expressed a view in favour of retaining the chimes, (iii) to distribute it before Christmas when people had many other priorities would not achieve a good response; this had been evidenced in the past, (iv) combining it with the Neighbourhood Plan survey would avoid a 'confetti' of requests and was likely to result in a better response, (v) the clock noise complaints should be seen as part of a number of issues affecting the parish.

A **proposal** was made to postpone the survey until the new year, to consider the content and to combine it with the Neighbourhood Plan consultation. It was noted that it had already been agreed that parishioners' views would be heard at the Annual Parish Meeting in March and decisions made following that.

It was **resolved** that the proposal be accepted. It was noted that not all parish councillors were in favour (three for the proposal and two against).

It was noted that the Sustainable Communities Act had been suggested as a possible route to enforce the consideration of other factors in such cases, eg was there was a local service function, an established history, etc. It was agreed that this should be explored and proposals drafted. (See 82.1 below)

**WPL**

**81.2** (November Council, 70.6) Invitation from HCC leader Robert Gordon to 'Meeting Hertfordshire's challenges', an event for Hertfordshire's community leaders. It was noted that Cllr John Connolly had attended and had circulated a report. There had been a presentation on the 'Budget Consultation Process'

and the 'transformation programme'. Also a question and answer session asking for further cost saving ideas; each parish council was requested to take away '4 specific questions' to answer and return.

## **82. OTHER CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED**

**82.1** Email from Oliver Heald, MP, forwarding information on the Sustainable Communities Act 'has set up a process where local people, together with their councils, can put forward proposals for specific action from government that would improve their local communities.' Details on <http://localworks.org/pages/councillors-landing-page> (see also 81.1 above)

**82.2** Letter from Central Bedfordshire Council re consultation on Arlesey Cross Master Plan. Details on [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/have-your-say/currentonline-consultations.aspx](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/have-your-say/currentonline-consultations.aspx)

**82.3** Letter from NHDC Democratic Services Manager re Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations. Details on

[http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/index/council\\_and\\_democracy/elections/electoralreview.htm](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/index/council_and_democracy/elections/electoralreview.htm)

Deadline for representations 16<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

**82.4** Volunteering consultation document from David Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire. 'Hertfordshire has a terrific record of residents giving up their time voluntarily to support the work of the police, the criminal justice system and partners, and I want to build on this.'

Deadline for response Monday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

**82.5** Various emails from Stansted related organisations; forwarded to Aircraft Noise Working Group.

**82.6** Several complaints re dog fouling. The NHDC Enforcement Officer had responded to requests and posted further notices in identified problem locations. Copies of the NHDC leaflet had been posted on notice boards.

**82.7** Various emails re lighting associated with the development at 40 Kingsland Way. The developer had been requested by Herts Highways to consult with the Parish Council on the specification for the two new columns required at the junction. Cllr Mark White reported that the documentation supplied had been reviewed. It had been reiterated that the columns should be of a swan-necked style, painted the correct shade of green, and light should be white. These requests did not appear to have been disputed. The height of the columns, however, gave some cause for concern and, despite challenge, Herts Highways had insisted that the columns must be 5 metres in height.

**82.8** Letter from a parishioner with a complaint re the permanent presence of multiple wheelie bins outside properties in Gardiners Lane; alleged to be both dangerous, forcing pedestrians into the path of vehicles coming around the corner, and unsightly. It was agreed that the Streets & Environment Committee consider what action could be taken.

**S&E**

## **83. REPORT RE PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**83.1** Consultations received (from NHDC as Planning Authority to Parish Council as consultee)

The agenda for the meeting on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December, 9.00am, was noted.

**83.2** Notifications of decisions made by NHDC as Planning Authority.

**83.2.1** Case ref. 13/02095/1HH 7 Swan Street.

Remove external plain tile hanging to front and render

NHDC decision: Standard Conditional Permission

**83.2.2** Case ref. 13/02233/1HH 14 Colbron Close.

Single storey rear extension following removal of existing conservatory.

NHDC decision: Standard Conditional Permission

**83.2.3** Case ref. 13/02269/1HH 9 John Sale Close.

Single storey front conservatory

NHDC decision: Refused.

**83.2.4** Case Ref No: 13/02403/1TCA 1 Foresters Cottages, High Street.

Raise canopy of one Sycamore tree to 5 metres and remove one Apple tree

NHDC Decision: No objection.

**83.2.5** Case Ref No: 13/02408/1TCA 21 Mill Street.

Reduce one Walnut tree by 25% and shape to balance.

NHDC Decision: No objection.

**83.3** Correspondence on planning matters.

**83.3.1** (November Council, 71.2.3) Agreement whereby the Parish Council is consulted on its view re Trees in Conservation Area applications prior to a decision notice. The NHDC Area Planning Officer had responded that all planning officers would be reminded of this agreement.

**83.3.2** (November Council, 71.3.2) Development adjacent to Moules Yard. NHDC officers had agreed to ensure that specifications were strictly adhered to in particular re the height of the new properties.

**84. REPORT FROM STREETS & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** (Chairman Mike Berry)

(draft minutes meeting 13<sup>th</sup> November available; next meeting scheduled for Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> February)

**84.1** Proposal for installation of bollards outside Foresters Cottages in the High Street. It was noted that residents were in communication with Herts Highways. Herts Highways had offered to install one bollard but some residents had felt that this was insufficient and negotiations were ongoing.

**84.2** Overflowing litter bins/problem of the inadequacy of the NHDC 4-weekly emptying cycle since the introduction of the new recycling system. Cllr Peter Long reported that he had raised this problem, as requested, at a meeting with District Councillor Andrew Young. NHDC was aware of the problem, shared by other areas, and had put forward options. It was agreed that these be discussed by the Streets & Environment Committee. **S&E**

**85. REPORT FROM RECREATION & FACILITIES COMMITTEE** (Chairman Jane Buxton)

(draft minutes meeting 14<sup>th</sup> October available; next meeting scheduled for Monday 17<sup>th</sup> February)

**85.1** Cllr Jane Buxton reported problems with dog fouling on the Accies football pitches at Small Gains. As in all such cases, photographic evidence to identify offenders would be useful.

**85.2** Small Gains Lane. A previous request from a parishioner re stones/logs on verges was restated; the Parish Council should insist that residents remove these to permit two lanes of vehicles and avoid queuing along Station Road at busy times when the Accies football club was playing. Cllr Jane Buxton responded that the stones and logs not only kept vehicles off the grass verge and prevented it from becoming rutted and unsightly, but also meant that pedestrians, many children, were separated from vehicles. Cllr Buxton reported that the contractor was scheduled to repair the worst of the potholes this Friday.

**85.3** Cemetery. Cllr Jane Buxton reported concerns re the boundary fence; these were being investigated.

**86. REPORT FROM CHARACTER AREAS COMMITTEE**

(draft minutes meeting 30<sup>th</sup> September available)

Nothing further to report.

**87. REPORT FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE**

(draft minutes meeting 21<sup>st</sup> October available; next meeting scheduled for Monday 24<sup>th</sup> February)

**87.1** (June Council, 33.0) Proposal, re current agreement that no Council meeting be held in January, for two signatories to approve the January accounts and sign cheques.

It was **resolved** that the proposal be accepted.

**87.2** Proposal for approval of December Accounts and Bills for Payment.

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

**Clerk**

**88. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS**

**88.1** Neighbourhood Plan Group. Cllr Graham Lee reported that the plan needed to be registered and accepted by NHDC; this was being progressed. Grants to cover costs were available and eligibility was being investigated.

**88.2** Website Group. Nothing to report.

**88.3** Yearbook Group. Cllr Peter Long reported good progress; notes of the last meeting, 26<sup>th</sup> November, were available.

**88.4** Speed Watch Group. A plea was made for more volunteers to increase the group's effectiveness.

**88.5** Community Housing Group. Cllr Jane Buxton reported that she and Cllr Peter Long had met with District Councillor Andrew Young and discussed both the social and planning issues highlighted by recent applications. Concerns that the allocation criteria for social housing were not satisfactory had been reiterated. Requests to address the problems for those with strong family connections in Ashwell who had been housed in Bedfordshire but wished to return to the village were made.

**88.6** Aircraft Noise Group. Report pending.

**89. PARISH AFFAIRS, REPORTS FROM OTHER BODIES AND OPEN FORUM**

**89.1** Cllr Mark White reported a complaint from a parishioner re the proliferation of sandwich boards outside businesses. It was agreed that the Streets & Environment Committee consider the matter. **S&E**

**89.2** Cllr Mark White reported a complaint from a parishioner re the blocking of the Partridge Hill BOAT by a bag of material intended for surface maintenance; it had been there some time. It was agreed that the Herts County Council officer be informed. **Clerk**

**89.3** A parishioner raised concerns re the hole dug by a utility company in the verge at the rear of the school meadow some time ago and now apparently abandoned. Cllr Mike Berry responded that this had been reported to Herts Highways some weeks ago; it would be re-investigated. **S&E**

**89.4** A parishioner reported street lights not working in Kingsland Way. **S&E**

**89.5** A parishioner reported her concern that potholes repaired only recently, but obviously inadequately, had reappeared.

Cllr Bridget Macey commended parishioners who had reported problems direct to other authorities; this was encouraged. It was noted that problems raised by parishioners often resulted in a more rapid response than if reported by the Parish Council. Contact details could be found on the website, on notice boards and in the Yearbook.

**89.6** A parishioner raised concerns re speeding in Claybush Road; he was encouraged to volunteer to join the Speedwatch group.

**89.7** A parishioner raised concerns re the adequacy of boundary fencing at the 40 Kingsland Way development. She felt that a vehicle sliding in icy weather could easily break through the barrier and fall over the steep drop. It was agreed that the matter be reported. **Clerk**

**Meeting closed at 10.00 pm**

## **Appendix 1 – General material received**

### **Items forwarded by email**

- North Herts District Council weekly ‘Members Information’
- HAPTC Briefings and Bulletins.
- *Rural News* from PC Nic Musto.
- CMS News Autumn 2013
- HCC Keep Warm, Stay Well campaign

## Appendix 2

ACCOUNTS AND BILLS FOR PAYMENT -December 2013				Date	4th December 2013	
Proposed (i) Cllr White (ii) Cllr Berry			£	£	£	£
<b>Receipts</b>			s 106	Grants	Precept	Total
75	Santander interest a/c	bank interest				2.51
76	Neville Funeral Service	chapel rent				68.75
77-97	various	donations Sunymead seat				387.50
<b>Total</b>				0.00	0.00	458.76
				<u>Committees</u>		
<b>Payments</b>		A&O	CA	S & E	R&F	VAT
<b>By Direct Debit</b>						
165	E.ON (01/11/13)	chapel electricity			11.00	
166	E.ON (31/10/13)	Pavilion electricity			23.45	1.17
167	BT (04/11/13)	office phone and broadband	109.40			21.88
<b>By Cheque</b>						
168	J C M Porter	Clerk's salary	1,102.12			
169	J C M Porter	reimbursement office expenses	13.52			0.78
170	M Barden	Environmental Cleansing		48.65	136.40	48.65
171	M Chandler	Duties at Pavilion and Rec			60.12	
172	Post Office	tax&NI to Inland Revenue	260.37		58.20	
173	K Clifford	Premises duties			30.00	
174	Ashwell St Mary's PCC	room hire	132.00			
175	Business Presentations	website editing 07/05 to 15/11	250.00			
176	The Liberty Corporation L	cleaning toilets 28/10 to 01/12			100.00	20.00
177	Good Directions Ltd	Sunnymead seat			681.00	136.20
178	Mr M Huggins	seat installation			80.00	
179	M Barden	reimbursements			14.06	
<b>Total</b>			1,867.41	48.65	969.66	273.22
<b>Outstanding Accounts</b>						
Yearbook 2013 adverts (x2)						250.00
Football Club						200.00
<b>Total</b>						450.00
<b>Money at bank</b>		Date	20th November			
Current Account					36,705.31	
Deposit Account					29,553.25	
<b>Total</b>						66,258.56
Cheques banked after/BACS transfers after						387.50
Cheques drawn but not cleared/DD's outstanding						420.00
<b>Total</b>						66,226.06
Total after paying this months cheques						62,887.09
Total in current a/c after paying this months cheques						33,333.84