

**Minutes of a meeting of the Ashwell Parish Council held on
Wednesday 2nd July 2014 in the Parish Room at 8.00pm**

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

The Clerk was also in attendance. Members of the public: Eighteen members of the public including Ms Maria Brown as representative of the Save the Church Chimes of Ashwell, Mr Wayne Francis of Clockwise Restorations, Mr Andy Godman Head of Housing and Public Protection NHDC, Mr Guy Reed as representative of the AshwellAdvocates, Mr David Richards as representative of St Mary's PCC.

The Chairman expressed his regret at the resignation of Cllr Jane Smith and thanked her for her contribution to the Parish Council. He was personally disgusted at the abuse that had led to this and wished it to be noted that his intention was to propose that an in camera meeting be held to discuss the Parish Council's response (see 31.1 below).

28. APOLOGIES None.

29. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING 4th June 2014

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

30. MATTERS OF REPORT FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS (Items not covered elsewhere)

30.1 (June Council 23.2) Parish clock.

The Chairman gave a brief update on the current situation. Works, as agreed by all parties, to install a timing device to silence the quarterly chimes, but not the hourly strike, overnight, were due to be completed this week. The agreed six-month trial period would then commence. This would prevent the serving of a Noise Abatement Notice by NHDC, allow time for those with different opinions to consider the position, and for other options to be pursued.

It was **resolved** to suspend Standing Orders

Ms Maria Brown on behalf of Save the Church Chimes of Ashwell introduced Mr Wayne Francis of Clockwise Restorations who gave a demonstration of the prototype quietening device and answered questions. It was explained that the device had been designed to reduce the volume of the clock chimes overnight. It would not affect the chimes during the day. The hours during which the chimes would sound more quietly could be controlled by a timer set to agreed hours. The exact volume could be adjusted to reduce it to a level that was compliant with regulations. The current proposal was to apply this only to the quarterly chimes but, if it was agreed, an additional mechanism could be installed to quieten the hourly strikes. The device was robust and required little maintenance. Unlike other devices that had been proposed it would continue to operate effectively in the long-term; minor adjustments could be made if required.

Mr Wayne Francis wished it to be noted that, at this stage, he was not prepared to reveal the precise details of the mechanism in order to protect his intellectual property rights.

Ms Maria Brown wished it to be noted that her group was continuing its fundraising efforts. Their view was that both sides, ie the Save the Chimes group and the AshwellAdvocates, should contribute financially to achieving a long-term solution.

Mr Andy Godman, Head of Housing and Public Protection at NHDC, expressed his support and reiterated his willingness to assist with volume measurements during the set-up period. He also noted that an offer to consider favourably a bid to NHDC for financial support had been made earlier.

Members of the AshwellAdvocates present voiced their support in principle for the proposal.

Mr Guy Reed, member of the AshwellAdvocates, expressed the view that he would be 'delighted' if the device worked. He proposed that if the mechanism was proven it should be applied to both the quarterly chimes and the hourly strikes. He wished it to be noted that the 51 hourly strikes overnight were non-compliant with the WHO guidelines. If complaints were made to NHDC and a Noise Abatement Notice was served, both the quarterly chimes and the hourly strike would need to comply with WHO night-time noise limits. Mr Andy Godman of NHDC confirmed that this was the case.

Parish councillors expressed their displeasure that this was 'going back on the original deal' and not in line with the compromise agreement that they had spent many months negotiating. This agreement had been that the hourly strikes would remain as they always had been.

The view was again expressed by members of the public present that the sound of the parish clock through the night was considered to be of great value by the majority of parishioners.

Standing Orders were reinstated

Parish councillors expressed their support in principle for the proposed volume reducing mechanism. It was reiterated that the Parish Council was not supportive of the expenditure of public funds on the matter but that community groups were eligible to apply to NHDC if they so wished.

It was proposed that

- (i) the Parish Council very much appreciated the presentation and was supportive in principle of the device,
- (ii) the Parish Council would now initiate the procedures for obtaining the required permission from the Diocese for the installation of the mechanism to reduce the volume of the quarterly chimes overnight.

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

Clerk

31. OTHER CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

(Items not covered elsewhere in agenda)

31.1 Letter of resignation from Cllr Jane Smith. The Chairman reported that Cllr Smith's resignation had been precipitated by offensive comments from a named individual on the eAshwell Facebook site. These related to the June Council meeting and included sexually offensive remarks about Cllr Jane Smith and Cllr Jane Buxton, allegations that Cllr Martin Hoffman had 'done his usual running down of Ashwell people' and Cllr Peter Long had made inaccurate statements. Cllr Hoffman reported he had received many messages and other contacts from people who said that such an allegation was totally false.

The Chairman reiterated his disgust; others concurred and expressed the view that they were both appalled and ashamed at the low standards of behaviour shown by some who lived in the village. It was noted that others, including the Reverend and the District Councillor, had also been subjected to personal abuse via emails and social media.

It was noted that such abuse was a criminal offence under the Malicious Communications Act 1988;

'Any person who ...'

'... a message which is indecent or grossly offensive...';

'...any other article which is, in whole or part, of an indecent or grossly offensive nature...'

'...guilty of an offence...'

It was **resolved** that the full facts be included in the minutes and published in the *Ashwell Village News*.

Clerk

It was **resolved** that, as there was potentially a legal matter involved, an *in camera* meeting be held to discuss and agree the Parish Council's response.

31.2 NHDC Electoral Services Notice of Vacancy. The Chairman reported that the deadline for 10 electors to claim an election was 15th July.

31.3 Letter from HCC re consultation on Draft Countywide Parish and Town Council Charter.

Online at: <https://consult.hertsdirect.org/parishandtowncouncilcharter> (to close on 15th August 2014).

Cllr Daniel Mathews expressed his serious concerns at the content and the worth of this; others concurred. It was noted that no details were yet available on the content of the appendix which was to form a significant part of the publication. The view was expressed that this represented clear evidence of the low worth of the County Council and supported the proposal for its closure and replacement by a unitary authority system. It was agreed that these views be conveyed to the County Council (copied to District Councillor Andrew Young and Oliver Heald, MP).

Clerk

31.4 Letter from HCC re consultation on 'changes being suggested to Hertfordshire's household waste recycling centres (commonly known as 'tips' or 'dumps')... from a seven day a week service to a five day a week service, with weekday closures'. Online at www.hertsdirect.org/wastechanges (to close on 3rd August 2014). It was agreed that this be publicised.

Clerk

31.5 Email from MCL Communications Ltd with information re the sale of .UK names by Nominet, the UK registration authority. Cllr Daniel Mathews reported that ashwell.uk was not available for sale.

32. REPORT RE PLANNING COMMITTEE

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

(If any objections are raised either by a parishioner or a parish councillor an on-site meeting of the Planning Committee is convened to consider those items; see notice board for agenda)

32.1.1 Case Ref No: 14/01304/1HH 38 Back Street

Householder: Rear conservatory following demolition of existing conservatory.

Cllr Mark White declared an interest (friend of applicants).

It was noted that the Parish Council was unaware of any objections from the public. There were no objections from parish councillors.

Response to NHDC: recommend acceptance.

Clerk

32.1.2 Case Ref No: 14/01449/1HH 103 High Street

Full Permission Householder: Erection of single garage/study in rear garden.

Cllr Daniel Mathews declared an interest (friend of applicants).

It was noted that the Parish Council was unaware of any objections from the public. There were no objections from parish councillors.

Response to NHDC: recommend acceptance.

Clerk

32.1.3 Case Ref No: 14/01511/1TCA The Old Rectory, Hodwell

Pollard Lime tree (T1) back to original pollard points, fell Beech tree (T2), reduce Sycamore tree (T3) by 30% and fell Ash tree (T4).

It was noted that concerns had been raised; it was therefore agreed that a meeting of the Planning Committee be held on Sunday 6th July at 9.00am.

Clerk

32.2 Correspondence re planning matters.

32.2.1 Case Ref no. 14/00336/1 Land adjacent to Walkdens, Station Road.

For Origin Housing. It was noted that this application had been recommended for refusal by the Parish Council. It was now to be considered by the NHDC Planning Control Committee at its meeting on Monday 14th July. It was agreed that Cllr Jane Buxton attend and speak on behalf of the Parish Council (see also 37.5 below).

Clerk

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

(draft minutes of meeting 30th June available; next meeting scheduled for Monday 8th September)

33.1 Herts Highways. Report of meeting with County Councillor Tony Hunter and his designated highways engineer. Cllr Mike Berry reported that various matters had been discussed including the HCC policy on 20mph speed limits, the agreed weed-killing by HCC, issues re lighting and blockage of the gully at Partridge Hill. Cllr Jane Buxton wished action to be taken to get Herts Highways to cut back overgrown vegetation in Station Road by the garage.

Cllr Mike Berry requested views on the proposal to install square rather than round litter bins in the future; there were no objections.

34. REPORT FROM RECREATION & FACILITIES COMMITTEE (Chairman Daniel Mathews)

(draft minutes of meeting 21st May available; date of next meeting Monday 4th August)

34.1 Recreation Ground. Cllr Daniel Mathews reported thanks to the Parish Council received from the school for the use of the Recreation Ground for their sports day. Also thanks to Cllr Peter Long and his assistant for marking out the white lines.

34.2 Public toilets. Cllr Peter Long reported that an NHDC officer had raised objections to the payment of the final instalment of the agreed sums; this had been on the grounds that the facility was not being kept to the required standard. It was agreed that the matter be taken up with District Councillor Andrew Young.

Clerk

35. REPORT FROM CHARACTER AREAS COMMITTEE (Chairman Martin Hoffman)

35.1 Springs. Cllr John Connolly reported that a representative of the cubs had approached him with concerns following comments made to her by an irate resident during a group visit to the Springs. Cllr Martin Hoffman expressed his regret that the cubs' leader had been abused in this way. He reported that an email had subsequently been received from the resident; he intended to respond emphasizing that the area was a public amenity space for the enjoyment of visitors as well as an area of natural value.

36. REPORT FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE

(draft minutes of meeting 28th April available; date of next meeting to be agreed)

36.1 Audit 2013-14. The following were noted (i) submission to the External Auditor for audit date of 30th June, (ii) publication of the annual report including the unaudited statement of accounts by 30th June, (iii) the publication by SLCC/NALC of a new edition of 'Governance and Accountability for Local Councils: A Practitioners' Guide (England)' relating to accounting periods beginning on or after 1 April 2014.

36.2 Approval of July Accounts and Bills for Payment.

It was *resolved* that these be approved and paid (see appendix).

Clerk

37. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

37.1 Neighbourhood Plan Group (leader Cllr Peter Long) Cllr Long reported that the NHDC proposals for housing allocation were still outstanding. The next group meeting would now be scheduled for September.

37.2 Website Group (leader Cllr Daniel Mathews) Cllr Mathews reported that work was still progressing.

37.3 Yearbook Group (meeting scheduled for Monday 7th July). Cllr Bridget Macey responded to the request for a new lead parish councillor.

37.4 Speeding Watch Group (leader Cllr Martin Hoffman) See 38.1 below.

37.5 Community Housing Group (leader Cllr Jane Buxton) Re 61 Station Road development; Cllr Buxton reported her understanding that, despite a further bid, Howard Cottage Housing Association had not been short-listed for the social housing element. It was agreed to convey the view that a locally based provider would be preferable. Re Walkdens; Cllr Buxton reported that Origin Housing Association had responded to the NHDC Housing Officer with assurances re outstanding repairs. (See also 32.2.1 above)

37.6 Church clock chimes law changing group (leader Cllr Graham Lee) Cllr Lee reported that he had initiated research into various aspects; he had identified other communities with similar issues, investigated processes for lobbying MPs and others, and determined alternative approaches. He would now progress with putting the working group together.

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

It was **resolved** to suspend Standing Orders for this item

38.1 Police matters. Cllr Bridget Macey reported that she had attended the meeting of the Hertfordshire Police & Crime Panel on 19th June (reports available on www.hertspcp.org.uk). The objective of the meeting had been for the commissioner, Mr David Lloyd, to 'account for his actions'. It had been reported that additional PCSO's were being sought. Members of Barley Parish Council and volunteers had reported problems with the Drivesafe scheme (previously called Speedwatch); there had apparently been one resignation because of this and a volunteer had been sacked. She was of the view that Cllr Martin Hoffman should be commended for his perseverance with the Ashwell group. Cllr Hoffman wished it to be noted that this further supported the decision to purchase equipment rather than borrowing it. Cllr Macey also reported that the latest Royston Rural News included an item commending Ashwell Postmistress Maureen Coston. Publicity for volunteers to work as police specials had been received.

38.2 Henry Colbron Trust. Cllr John Connolly reported a successful visit to the village by representatives of the trustees, the Merchant Taylors' Company. They had met with representatives of the school and youth groups. The outcome re their bids to the trust was awaited.

Meeting closed at 9.30 pm

Appendix 1 – General material received

- North Herts District Council -weekly 'Members Information'
- HAPTC -Briefings and Bulletins.
- SLCC -updates and newsletters.
- Police -Rural News.

Appendix 2