

**Minutes of a meeting of the Ashwell Parish Council held on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2014 in the Parish Room at 8.00pm**

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

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

**111. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** Cllr Graham Lee (work commitment), Cllr Jane Smith (work commitment).

**112. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING 5<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

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

**113. MATTERS OF REPORT FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

**113.1** Information from central government on the 'Can Do' guide for organisers of voluntary and community events. Available on [www.gov.uk/government/publications/can-do-guide-for-organisers-of-voluntary-events](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/can-do-guide-for-organisers-of-voluntary-events). It was agreed to forward this to other village organisations. **Clerk**

**114. OTHER CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED** (items not covered elsewhere in agenda)

**114.1** Letter from NHDC re changes to legislation affecting trade waste. Users of the NHDC service would now be required to pay the full costs of their waste disposal; until now only the costs of collection had been passed on. It was agreed that the Streets & Environment Committee look into the implications of this. **S&E**

**115. REPORT RE PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**115.1** Items considered at the Planning Committee meeting Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March were noted.

Case Ref No: 14/00599/1 Land East of 35, Ashwell Street.

Outline Planning Permission: Erection of 1 detached dwelling with detached garage (all matters reserved). Response to NHDC: recommend refusal.

Case Ref No: 14/00574/1 Stable Buildings at The Mill, Mill Street.

Full Planning Permission: Conversion of existing stable building into one 5 bed dwelling and two rear gable end extensions. Response to NHDC: recommend acceptance.

**115.2** 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)*

**115.2.1** Case Ref No: 14/00275/1HH, 1 Colbron Close.

Full Permission Householder: Side conservatory.

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.

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

**115.3.1** Case Ref No: 14/00173/1HH 37 Silver Street.

Full Permission Householder: Single storey front extension, new slate roof over inner hall and toilet and single storey side bay extension.

NHDC decision: Standard Conditional Permission.

**115.3.2** Case Ref No: 14/00513/1PUD 24 Dixies Close.

Certificate of proposed lawful use or development: Single storey rear extension.

NHDC decision: General Permitted Development.

**115.4** Correspondence re planning matters.

**115.4.1** Email from Andrew Gillborn re proposals for a new Rectory. Invitation to parish councillors to view the proposed planning application. The Chairman reported that he had responded; advice taken was that it would not be appropriate for the Chairman, or any parish councillors, to accept the invitation.

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

**115.4.2** Email from NHDC Planning Officer re Tree Preservation Order Land between Ducklake House and 19 Springhead. It was noted that only a limited number of trees in the village were covered by preservation orders. It was agreed to identify and recruit a suitably skilled parishioner who would be prepared to undertake a comprehensive review and produce a report. **EJB**

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

(draft minutes of meeting 19<sup>th</sup> February available; next meeting scheduled for Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> April)

**116.1** Public litter bins. It was noted that concerns had been reported to the Annual Parish Meeting by Parishioner David Short. It was noted that the NHDC contractor, Veolia, emptied the street bins on a four-weekly cycle; bins on parish land were emptied by the Parish Council. Last summer the Parish Council had brought to the attention of NHDC that their emptying frequency was inadequate. Also that there were problems with inappropriate dumping of waste in litter bins following the introduction of the new recycling system. NHDC had agreed that the situation be monitored. It was agreed that the Streets & Environment Committee review the situation. **S&E**

**116.2** Herts Highways. Cllr Mike Berry reported that committee representatives would attend the North Herts Liaison group meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> April.

**116.3** Herts Highways/concerns re safety of junction Ashwell Street and Kingsland Way. It was noted that concerns had been reported to the Annual Parish Meeting by Parishioner David Short; he had subsequently written to County Councillor Tony Hunter giving full details (copy to Parish Council). As part of the new housing development at 40 Kingsland Way the layout of the access road to the site had been changed. Whereas previously traffic at the junction had been able to utilise the entrance drive to the bungalow, this had now been closed off and a new entrance made further along. Installation of a new section of pavement at this point had narrowed the carriageway even further. It was noted that the Parish Council had in the past expressed concerns at the safety of this junction and most recently had reiterated this view in its response to a nearby planning application in Ashwell Street. It was agreed to write to the Highways authority expressing the Parish Council's serious concerns re this junction which it considered to be hazardous and to request a formal safety audit. **Clerk**

**117. REPORT FROM RECREATION & FACILITIES COMMITTEE** (Chairman Jane Buxton)  
(draft minutes of meeting 24<sup>th</sup> March available)

**118.1** Parish Clock.

**118.1.1** (March Council 2014, minute 106.1 and Annual Parish Meeting 2014, draft minute 15.1)

The Chairman gave a brief update on the current situation. The Parish Council had proposed a compromise which, he believed, had been supported by the majority at the Annual Parish Meeting. This was to install a timing device to silence the quarterly chimes, but not the hourly strike, between the hours of 11pm and 6am. This was dependant on gaining permission from the Diocese and the donation of funds to cover the cost. This would then allow a trial period for all parties to consider the situation and, most importantly, stop the serving of a Noise Abatement Notice (NAN) by NHDC environmental health. The latter had said that they are broadly comfortable with this approach. If such a compromise was not achieved and a NAN was served by NHDC the only option would be to appeal against it. The Parish Council considered that the likelihood of winning an appeal was remote, it would almost certainly lose. It would also risk a significant amount of public money. It would also risk losing the hourly strike as well as the quarter chimes. If the quarter chimes were silenced for a trial period by the Parish Council, it would be able to maintain some control of the situation, ie it would at any point be able to turn the chimes back on again. However, once a NAN had been served this would be impossible to do. During a trial period the Save the Chimes group could continue to establish a legal case to turn the chimes back on and to keep them exactly as they always had been in the longer term.

The Chairman reiterated that none of the parish councillors wished to turn off the chimes but with the threat of a NAN a compromise had been agreed as the only option to maintain any control in the current situation.

Cllr Martin Hoffman also reiterated that parish councillors did not want the chimes to stop but the Parish Council had been put 'between a rock and a hard place' and wished to avoid losing the night-time hourly strike. He reiterated his personal view that this had been a major problem for the village that required urgent, decisive action. He wished it to be noted that at the Annual Parish Meeting a representative of the Save the Chimes group had stated that they would not support a compromise.

The Chairman reported that an email had been received from a representative of the complainants with a letter attached signed from 'The Ashwell Advocates'. The email had included a request for anonymity of the complainant but with no objection to the contents of the letter being discussed in an open meeting.

The letter had stated

- (i) '...we are extremely keen to find a swift and peaceful resolution to avoid a NAN being served – which would be costly to the village, both financially and politically...'
- (ii) 'We pledge the entire outstanding amount needed to complete the funding of the trial... from money donated by this group and 10+ other households affected by the bells who – understandably

– wish to remain anonymous... we do not require the money to be refunded in the event that the trial is not successful.’

- (iii) ‘As regards the times of the switch-off for the trial, we would like to offer the following compromise, so that the weekday chimes restart earlier than our original compromise suggestion... Cessation of the quarterly chimes from 22.25 – 06.25 Mon-Fri and from 23.05 – 07.05 Sat-Sun’.

It was **resolved** to suspend Standing Orders for members of the public to speak.

Parishioners present disputed the Chairman’s claim that a compromise had been supported by the majority at the Annual Parish Meeting.

Parishioner Martin McBeal cited a case where noise had been muffled and deflected to reduce the level and questioned whether such options had been adequately explored. The Chairman responded that the current belief was that no technical solution was viable. It was noted that noise recordings had indicated that if the Ashwell chimes were muffled to bring the levels within the WHO night-time guidelines, the day-time background noise from the village was such that they would be inaudible to most of the village during the day. However, if a compromise was agreed and a trial period undertaken, such options could continue to be explored.

Parishioner Martin McBeal reiterated his statement made at the Annual Parish Meeting that should the Parish Council turn off the chimes he would take legal action against them; if NHDC served a NAN he would take action against them. In response to a question he wished it to be noted that he was not acting as a spokesperson for the Save the Chimes group but as a private individual.

Standing Orders were reinstated.

Following discussion it was proposed that the previously agreed times for a trial be amended. The quarterly chimes would be silenced between 11pm and 6am Monday to Friday and between 11pm and 7am at weekends. The trial period would ideally be for six months. This would, as previously agreed, be dependent on receipt of permission from the Diocese and the raising of funds.

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

The Chairman made a proposal that he attend the next meeting of the Save the Chimes group, scheduled for 24<sup>th</sup> April, to explain the Parish Council’s position.

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

**WPL**

A proposal was made that the complainants’ representative and NHDC continue to be kept informed.

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

**Clerk**

**118.2 Recreation Ground.** Cllr Peter Long reported that grass works were scheduled for this week.

**119. REPORT FROM CHARACTER AREAS COMMITTEE** (Chairman Martin Hoffman)

**119.1 The Springs.** Cllr Martin Hoffman reported, further to his comment last month that flow rates had been ‘exceptional’, that the latest figures were even higher.

**119.2 Right of Way at Partridge Hill.** Cllr Martin Hoffman reported correspondence re the HCC proposals to address the poor state of the footpath; their Countryside Access Officer was in communication with the landowner. He also reported his increasing concerns at the damage done by motor-bikers in the vicinity and proposed that the police be requested to take action.

**120. REPORT FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE**

(draft minutes of meeting 24<sup>th</sup> February available; next meeting scheduled for Monday 28<sup>th</sup> April)

**120.1 Information from NHDC re Ashwell Council Tax Base for 2014-2015.** It was noted that this had been reported to the Annual Parish Meeting.

**120.2 Update on pension provision for clerk.** The Chairman reported that options were still being considered. A new contract for the clerk would be drafted to reflect agreed changes.

**WPL**

**120.3 Proposal for approval of April Accounts and Bills for Payment** (see appendix).

It was **resolved** that these be approved and paid; item 11 re donation to the trustees of the Village Hall, Cllrs Hoffman and Long declared a personal interest (trustee and clerk to the trustees respectively).

**Clerk**

**121. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS**

**121.1 Neighbourhood Plan Group.** Cllr Peter Long reported that confirmation of approval for the designated area, the parish of Ashwell, had been received from NHDC. However, as had been previously reported there were major delays anticipated with the District Local Plan. He proposed that the way forward be discussed further at the May AGM once individual responsibilities had been decided; this was agreed.

**121.2 Website Group.** Cllr Daniel Mathews reported that a meeting was to be scheduled.

**121.3** Yearbook Group. It was noted that further compliments on the 2014 edition had been received. It was agreed that thanks to the group and the distribution volunteers be formally noted.

**121.4** Speed Watch Group. Cllr Martin Hoffman proposed that the Parish Council allocate funds for the purchase of its own speed monitoring equipment. There were ongoing problems with sharing equipment with other villages and if the Parish Council had its own there would be a better outcome. The cost would be c£4,000. Cllr Daniel Mathews expressed his concern that the Parish Council would be taking on a responsibility that should be undertaken by the police. He was concerned that this could spread to other police services (see also 122.1 below). The use of flashing signage to deter speeding was suggested as an alternative. Cllr Hoffman responded that this was much less flexible in where it was sited and connection costs were significant. It was agreed that the options for signage be considered further when the new HCC policy on 20mph speed limits was discussed.

It was **resolved** that the proposal to allocate funds for the purchase of speed monitoring equipment be accepted.

**121.5** Community Housing Group. Cllr Buxton reported. Further to discussion at the Annual Parish Meeting re the site at 61 Station Road that would include five social rented and two shared ownership houses (draft minute 11 and units 14.1), she proposed that meetings be scheduled with the NHDC Housing Officer, Howard Cottage Housing Association and Ashwell Housing Association. It was noted that the latter would be able to more effectively prioritise local people as they were not bound by the restrictive criteria that applied to other housing associations. Cllr John Connolly agreed to join the group.

**EJB/Clerk**

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

It was **resolved** to suspend Standing Orders for members of the public to speak.

**122.1** Police (see also 121.4 above) Parish councillors expressed their general concern at the level of policing that was allocated to the village. The PCSO was commended for his good work and it was noted that this concern in no way reflected on his personal performance; his efforts were considered to be of great value to the village. It was agreed that a meeting be arranged with PC Nic Musto. It was noted that the PCSO had informed of his intention to attend the next Parish Council meeting for which he was available.

**122.2** Annual Parish Meeting. The draft minutes were noted. Cllr Jane Buxton wished the positive contribution made by the North Herts District Member of Youth Parliament for Hertfordshire to be noted.

**122.3** The Chairman reminded parish councillors that next month's meeting on May 7<sup>th</sup> would be the Parish Council's AGM; elections would be held for Parish Council positions, and appointments and representatives agreed.

**Meeting closed at 9.35 pm**

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

Items forwarded by email

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

## Appendix 2