

Minutes of the Ashwell Annual Parish Meeting
held on Wednesday 25th March 2015 at 8pm in Ashwell School

PRESENT: Fifty-seven members of the public. In addition -
Parish Councillors Mark White (Parish Council Chairman), Jane Buxton, John Connolly, Martin Hoffman, Madeleine Legg, Bridget Macey, David Short, David Sims. North Hertfordshire District Councillor Andrew Young. Hertfordshire County Councillor Tony Hunter. Police Sgt Guy Westwood. Parish Clerk Jane Porter.

APOLOGIES: Received from -
Parish Councillors Mike Berry (long-term sickness dispensation), Graham Lee (work commitment), Daniel Mathews (work commitment). PCSO Chris Brabrook. Various parishioners also sent their apologies.

The Chairman wished to note the vacancy on the Parish Council due to the death of Cllr Peter Long. His input to the Parish Council and to the village as a whole had been much valued and he was much missed.

1. NOTICE OF ANNUAL ASSEMBLY The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and noted the agenda published in the 2015 edition of the *Ashwell Yearbook*.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (26th March 2014)

These were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. MATTERS OF REPORT FROM MINUTES ANNUAL MEETING 2014 None.

4. FINANCIAL REPORT There were no questions and nothing further to report.

5. REPORT FROM THE CHARACTER AREAS COMMITTEE

(Committee Chairman Martin Hoffman)

In addition to the report in the *Ashwell Yearbook*.

5.1 Arbury Banks. Cllr Martin Hoffman commended the landowner for his actions in getting the ‘sarcophagus’ (an anomalous concrete mound placed there some years ago by the previous landowner) removed.

5.2 The Springs. Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that a full professional tree survey had now been completed; the site would continue to be monitored for Ash die-back disease.

5.3 Churchyard. In response to a question from Parishioner Fergus Moynihan, Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that meetings had taken place with the St Mary’s Parochial Church Council (PCC) to agree the details of respective responsibilities. Ever since the Churchyard had been formally ‘closed’ to new burials, the Parish Council, as the local authority, had undertaken the routine grounds maintenance and employed a contractor to do this. The PCC remained responsible for the graves and memorials, and the general management of the area. Proposed tree works were discussed and agreed on an *ad hoc* basis; funds had been set aside for any tree-related emergencies that arose. Any other *ad hoc* items were also discussed and agreed between the two parties; the Finance Committee had recently considered proposals.

6. REPORT FROM THE STREETS AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

(Acting Committee Chairman Mark White)

In addition to the report in the *Ashwell Yearbook*.

6.1 Parking problems. Cllr Mark White reported that notices, designed to be placed on windscreens to deter anti-social parking, were now in use. These were endorsed by the police; Sgt Guy Westwood was thanked for his input on this. Supplies were available for use by parishioners; a caution was included with regard to personal safety. Sgt Westwood also cautioned against their ‘over-use’ as this would reduce their effectiveness.

6.2 Litter bins. Parishioner Maureen Willatts expressed her concern that some of the street litter bins were often overflowing. It was noted that the bins had been installed at the expense of the Parish Council but responsibility for their emptying was with the District Council. District Councillor Andrew Young responded that the contractor emptied the bins on a four-weekly cycle. He would investigate and question whether this was sufficient but cautioned that there were obviously cost considerations.

6.3 Street lighting. It was noted that this was a County Council responsibility. In response to a question from Parishioner Fergus Moynihan Cllr Mark White replied that he had recently completed an update of his previous surveys of all the street lights in the village. As before this had been requested by Herts Highways as they were unable to undertake this exercise or respond to problems without it. In the most recent survey he had paid particular attention to the colour of the light and the state of the columns. County Councillor Tony Hunter expressed his annoyance that having funded works to ensure that all bulbs were white, the contractor had been installing replacement bulbs that were orange. Parishioner Gordon Hill wished it to be noted that, despite numerous fault reports, the light in Kingsland Way had been 'out' for over a year; this was particularly unacceptable over the winter period and, as there was no pavement, put pedestrians at risk. County Councillor Tony Hunter responded that Herts Highways had no control over electrical faults; this was down to the power supplier. He reported that there was now an individual with responsibility for lighting matters who could be contacted; he would pursue the concerns raised.

7. REPORT FROM THE RECREATION AND FACILITIES COMMITTEE

(Committee Chairman Daniel Mathews)

In addition to the report in the *Ashwell Yearbook*.

5.1 Pavilion. Cllr Jane Buxton reported that the Parish Council had recently been alerted that two of the fire extinguishers had been emptied. There had been no evidence of this and no one from the user groups had reported anything. The Parish Council had expressed the view that not to report this had been very irresponsible.

5.2 War Memorial. In response to a question from Parishioner Andrew Gillborn it was clarified that the Parish Council was to put aside funds over the next couple of years to fund cleaning works prior to commemorations to mark the end of WWI in 2018. It was also reported that investigations were in hand to determine whether any names were missing from the inscriptions; authorisation for any proposed additions would have to be obtained.

5.3 Small Gains. In response to a question from parishioner John Yianni with concerns over resurfacing works to the lane, it was agreed that the committee would investigate.

6. REPORT FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN WORKING GROUP

(Group Leader David Short)

Cllr David Short reported on the public meeting held in January to discuss the NHDC Local Plan consultation. Oliver Heald MP, County Councillor Tony Hunter and relevant District Council members had attended to answer parishioners' questions and hear their views. The meeting had been very well attended by over 200 people and well received. District Councillor Andrew Young noted that more people had attended the Ashwell meeting than a similar meeting for Baldock despite the latter being a much larger community. He and his fellow district councillors had been impressed, not only by the turnout, but also by the quality of the views and questions put.

Cllr David Short reported that, since the public meeting, the working group had progressed with the gathering of information on the topics identified for inclusion in the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan. More work, including village surveys on some topics, eg housing, would take place over the coming months. Two items giving further information were distributed to all present; a workshop was to be held on Saturday 25th April.

Cllr David Short thanked both County and District Councillors for their grants (£1000 and £500 respectively) to support the printing and other admin costs of the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan.

7. REPORT FROM THE DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

In addition to his report in the *Ashwell Yearbook*.

District Councillor Andrew Young expressed his thanks to parish councillors and the clerk for all their hard work; communication between the parish and district was good.

He commended those involved with the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan. It was important to have a good neighbourhood plan to identify what the village would like and not what developers wanted to impose. The District Council was currently analysing the thousands of responses to the Local Plan consultation; this would take many months and would then proceed through the required stages including a public examination by the inspector. He emphasised the importance of having a plan in place. His own view,

and that of many at the District Council, was that to reject the current proposals in entirety and start the whole process again would only lead to further, and more significant, problems. Imposition into North Herts of large numbers of houses identified by neighbouring authorities such as Luton and Stevenage was a real threat.

Cllr Martin Hoffman wished it to be noted that Cllr Young would not be standing for re-election in May; he wished to thank him on behalf of the village for being ‘an absolutely great’ district councillor.

8. REPORT FROM THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR

In addition to his report in the *Ashwell Yearbook*.

County Councillor Tony Hunter echoed the comments made by District Councillor Andrew Young that had commended parish councillors. He had regular meetings with parish councillors to discuss items to be funded by his Highways Locality Budget; he felt that Ashwell ‘did well’ out of this. Significant funding had recently been made available to progress 20mph speed limits. This would have to be supported by the whole community; it would be discussed with the Parish Council in the first instance.

He reported that he had recently attended meetings with Steeple Morden Parish Council to discuss their concerns re the safety of the A505 junction at Odsey. He clarified that the approach road from the station was in Cambridgeshire but the junction was in Hertfordshire. He had agreed to fund some minor works from his budget; major works such as lighting were not affordable although bollards were a possibility. Parishioner Jill Powell expressed her concern at how dirty some of the signage was; he agreed to investigate this. It was noted that Cllr David Sims had represented Ashwell Parish Council at these meetings; the Parish Council had expressed its concerns at the safety of the junction over many years and would continue to fight for improvements.

In response to a question from Parishioner Liz Moynihan, he concurred that the amount of litter currently blighting the verges was not good. Although illegal, police enforcement was obviously difficult when items were thrown from passing vehicles. The problem could probably be addressed by specifying more collection visits in the contract but this ‘comes down to money’.

In response to a question from Parishioner Martin McBeal, he concurred that overgrown hedges were problematic and sometimes dangerous. Where hedges were a Highways responsibility action could be taken if specific locations were reported. Where hedges were a landowner responsibility requests for action were frequently ignored and enforcement difficult.

In response to a question from Parishioner Karen Mills, he wished it to be noted that with the latest highways contract monitoring had been significantly increased; financial penalties were imposed on the contractor for inadequate performance.

He agreed to investigate concerns raised by Parishioner John Yianni re overcrowding on the County Council school bus that took children to Knights Templar in Baldock.

He reassured Parishioner Connie Chambers that the evening taxibus service from the station would be retained; previous proposals to withdraw it had been reconsidered following protests. It was noted that Cllr Daniel Mathews had been leading on this matter and could be contacted for full information.

9. REPORT FROM POLICE SARGENT GUY WESTWOOD

Sgt Westwood reported that he had recently taken over as leader of the Royston Safer Neighbourhood team; this also included PC Mike Hardiman and PCSO Chris Brabrook who covered the Ashwell area.

He was aware that speeding was an issue in a lot of villages and many, including Ashwell, had formed volunteer groups that now came under the Police & Crime Commissioner’s Drivesafe initiative. Mindful of past problems his priority was to support these groups better in the future. There was an awareness week planned for May.

He was also aware of problems re parking (see 6.1 above).

He reported that there was now a rural mobile phone number; this was intended mainly for use with landowners. It was hoped to set up a text alert system for hare coursing, suspicious vehicles etc. For normal calls the 101 number was still the most appropriate.

10. REPORTS FROM VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS

The following reports were made in addition to items in the *Ashwell Yearbook*.

10.1 The Cottage Garden working group. Group leader Liz Moynihan reported that a coffee morning and plant sale would take place on Saturday 11th April at the Parish Room. Support of the group's activities was always welcome.

10.2 Moss Cottage Homes. Chairman of the trustees, Andrew Gillborn, reported that a new clerk had been appointed; details were in the *Ashwell Village News*.

10.3 Village Hall. Chairman of the trustees, Sam Wallace, reported that the hall was now debt free, the loan having been paid off. He thanked the Parish Council for its assistance in this. The hall was very well used with thirteen regular user groups and others on an *ad hoc* basis.

10.4 Ashwell Housing Association. Association Chairman Liz Fitzsimmons reported that plans were in hand to tidy up the front gardens of some of the Back Street properties.

10.5 Ashwell School Governing Body. Cllr David Short (also a school governor) reported that the current Head, Kate Oxley, was due to retire in August. A new head had been appointed and would take up the post on 1st September.

10.6 Ashwell Academicals Football Club. Club representative John Yianni reported that it continued to be successful with more teams. Finding sufficient pitch space for play was an increasing problem. The club was hopeful that it would be able to acquire additional land; ideally this would be close to the existing facilities at Small Gains. The club was in discussion with the Cycle Club and the Tennis Club re shared facilities such as a clubhouse at Small Gains.

10.7 Theatre Club. Club representative Connie Chambers reported that the tribute to the late Kathy Hull had been a sell-out. Many had wished to note her contribution to the club and the village.

10.8 Ashwell Show. Show Chairman Cllr John Connolly reported that following last year's washout the group faced financial difficulties. Over many years its profits had been used to support a wide range of local groups and charities. This year's show would definitely go ahead and ways of reducing the weather risk had been discussed. New helpers were always welcomed.

10.9 Ashwell Music Festival. Organiser Judy Banham reported that there was a full programme scheduled again this year. Tickets were available locally and could be booked via the website.

10.10 St Mary's Church. Parishioner Fergus Moynihan reported that the new Reverend and his wife had now moved into the village and he would formally take up office shortly. He expressed his disappointment that planning permission for a new rectory had been refused; a chart showing the contribution that St Mary's Church made to the village and the central role of the rectory, was on display. He was pleased that the Parish Room was to host the new outreach post office service (see 11.1 below).

11. PARISH AFFAIRS

11.1 Post office services. Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that the new outreach post office service was scheduled to commence on Wednesday 15th April in the Parish Room. It would be open three afternoons, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and would provide almost all the services provided previously. He thanked the St Mary's PCC for making the premises available and all their efforts in getting the practicalities sorted out. He expressed concern that the notice period for closure of the previous service had been so short. Although alternative plans had been progressed immediately there had been a gap of some weeks with no service whilst installation of a secure phone line was completed. In response to a question he reported his understanding that although there had been offers made to purchase the previous post office the sums involved had not been sufficient; it was not appropriate for the Parish Council to be involved in what were private, commercial negotiations.

11.2 Landowner at Arbury Banks, Mr Ashley Mack, expressed his concerns at potential pollution problems. He was fearful that irreparable damage might be done to The Springs, and its unique flatworms, if there were to be a spillage of any sort. He appealed to parishioners to report any problems.

11.3 Parishioner Stewart Reddaway reported that his previous request to the Parish Council that it host an election hustings had been refused. The Chairman reported that this was correct. The Parish Council had discussed his request to hold a meeting involving the candidates of the five main political parties (Conservative, Labour, LibDem, UKIP, Green) but in view of the policy to be non-party political all had been in agreement that they had no desire to associate the Parish Council in any way with party

politics. (see minutes January Council, 98.3). Churchwarden Sarah Talks expressed the view that she would be supportive of using Church premises to host a hustings meeting.

11.4 Henry Colbron Trust. Cllr John Connolly reported that the trustees, the Merchant Taylors' Company, would be visiting the village on Tuesday 31st March to discuss bids with interested youth groups.

11.5 Youth matters. Cllr John Connolly wished all to note that young parishioner Monica Yianni had been re-elected to the UK Youth Parliament; this was a great achievement. The Ashwell Show group had encouraged the involvement of younger parishioners and Monica had now joined. The Parish Council was to consider proposals for a Youth Council.

11.6 Parishioner Jill Powell wished to thank those responsible for yet another excellent edition of the *Ashwell Yearbook*.

11.7 The Parish Council elections on 7th May for twelve parish councillors was noted. The Chairman reported his understanding that some, but not all, of the existing parish councillors would be standing for re-election. He encouraged 'new faces' to stand.

The Chairman thanked all for their attendance at the meeting.

Meeting closed at 9.25pm