

**Minutes of the Ashwell Annual Parish Meeting
held on Wednesday 29th March 2017 at 8pm in Ashwell School**

PRESENT: Forty-three members of the public. In addition -
Parish Councillors Mark White (Parish Council Chairman), Martin Hoffman (Parish Council Vice-chairman), Graham Lee, Madeleine Legg, Bridget Macey, David Short, David Sims.
County Councillor Tony Hunter and North Hertfordshire District Councillor Janine Paterson.
Parish Clerk Jane Porter.

APOLOGIES: Received from PCSO Chris Brabrook. Various parishioners also sent their apologies.

1. Notice of Annual Assembly The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and noted the agenda published in the 2017 edition of the *Ashwell Yearbook*.

2. Minutes of the last meeting (30th March 2016)

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

3. Matters of report from the last annual meeting There were no matters raised.

4. Parish Council Chairman's Report

The Chairman thanked all the Yearbook team for another splendid production; two particular individuals contributed a considerable amount of time and effort. Yet again the cost of production was supported by local business advertising.

The Chairman introduced Parishioner Annie Clifford who would be employed as the new Deputy Clerk from 1st April. The increase in the workload of the Parish Council and the reduced number of parish councillors had been the main driver for establishing this new role. The Parish Council had also agreed to share the Ashwell Housing Association office at Bear Farm and budget provision had been made for establishing and running this.

The Chairman drew attention to the advertisement for an Environmental Cleansing Officer following the resignation of the previous employee.

5. Parish Council Financial Report Clarification was requested, and given, with regard to the following.

5.1 Pension expenditure. Provision for the Clerk was a requirement but membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme had been pending clarification for some years; during this period sums had been set aside and these had now been paid into the scheme as a lump sum.

5.2 Grants by the Parish Council. In 2015-16 these had been to the Museum (£500), to St Marys PCC to support Ashwell News (£125), to the Museum for the funfair rent from the At Home (£100), for membership of Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust to support the quarry nature reserve (£40). The Cricket Club had also been supported in their project for a new specialist mower to cut the square. The club had raised funds and had obtained a grant from NHDC. This had been supplemented by a grant (£1500) from the Parish Council and a loan to be repaid over five years. A parishioner noted that it was good to see that grant money was no longer needed to support the Village Hall.

6. Neighbourhood Plan Working Group (Members: leader Cllr David Short, parish councillors Madeleine Legg and Graham Lee, and parishioners). Cllr David Short gave a brief background to Neighbourhood Plans and the formation of the group in Ashwell. Following the Localism Act in 2011 the Parish Council had set up a working group of parish councillors and parishioners to progress a plan for Ashwell. He had been the leader since October 2014; the group was now comprised of eleven people from all over the village. The process for creating a Neighbourhood Plan was laid down by central government and included surveys and consultations. Once the various stages had been completed it would be submitted to the Secretary of State; the appointed Inspector would then assess whether it had been properly researched and the views of parishioners taken into account. Approved Neighbourhood Plans could influence decisions on types of housing and their design although not necessarily where they were built. An update of the Ashwell Village Design Statement would be part of the plan.

7. Parish Council reports on areas of its responsibility including the Cemetery, the Springs, the Recreation Ground, Pavilion, Playground and Public Toilets, Small Gains Sports Field and Allotments, miscellaneous amenity areas, seats and street furniture, dog waste bins, the Lock Up, the War Memorial, the Parish Clock, and grounds maintenance at St Mary's Churchyard.

In addition to items in the Yearbook the following matters were reported.

7.1 The Springs. Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that flow rates, regularly provided by the Environment Agency and monitored by the Parish Council, had been down due to low rainfall at the beginning of the winter. Water suppliers did have extraction rights but these were subject to strict limitation criteria. The River Rhee further downstream from the Springs site was not the responsibility of the Parish Council but recent concerns that a local resident had built a dam across the river had been passed to the relevant authorities; they were investigating.

7.2 Recreation Ground. Cllr Madeleine Legg reported that the Parish Council had ordered two new storage containers to be located next to the pavilion; it was hoped that these would ease the storage problems encountered by the clubs that used the facility.

7.3 Public toilets at the Pavilion. Cllr Madeleine Legg reported that the Parish Council had submitted a claim to NHDC for the release of section 106 funds held for Ashwell to fund a major refurbishment and upgrade. Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that he had recently requested an up-to-date report from NHDC on the funds held by them.

7.4 Street furniture. Cllr Bridget Macey reported that NHDC were to remove a significant proportion of the dog waste bins that they provided in the towns and other areas in the district. This would not affect the ten dog waste bins in Ashwell that were provided and funded by the Parish Council. NHDC advice was, if no dog waste bin was available, that bagged dog waste could be placed in ordinary litter bins. Parishioners present expressed the view that use of dedicated dog waste bins was much the preferable option. It was reiterated that any overfull bins, litter or dog waste, should be reported in the first instance to the relevant contractor; details were on the 'green cards'.

7.5 Parish Clock. The Chairman, Cllr Mark White, reported that the delay in completing works to restore the clock chimes had been due to difficulty in sourcing a part for a clock that was over a hundred years old; the new part had been made by a company in France. In the next budget year provision had been made to restore the cams; this would improve the consistency of the chiming.

8. Report from the District Councillor and matters concerning NHDC.

District Councillor Janine Paterson was welcomed to the meeting. In addition to her piece in the Yearbook she reported on the following.

8.1 New Local Plan. Councillor Paterson gave an update on the status of this; the submission document would go to the Council meeting on 11th April for approval. All of the representations made in the recent consultation would be made available on the NHDC website. If the draft plan received approval it would be submitted to the Secretary of State and the examination process would follow.

8.2 Claybush Road site. Clarification was requested on this site that was included in the draft plan and had also been the subject of a planning application by a developer, Croudace Homes. Councillor Paterson responded that no date had yet been set by the NHDC Planning Control Committee to consider this application. It was noted that the developer had already applied to HCC/Herts Highways for permission to undertake various works.

8.4 Pre-application consultation for a site off Station Road. It was noted that further publicity had been carried out by Beck Developments with amended proposals. This had been circulated to parishioners who had responded to their previous public consultation; they were also to hold a small public exhibition in the Parish Room.

8.5 Parish Councillor Graham Lee reported that the Parish Council had submitted detailed proposals to NHDC for restricted parking spaces outside retail outlets in the High Street and Mill Street; these would limit parking times. Local business owners had requested this when responding to the Neighbourhood Plan survey; long-term parking outside premises was felt to be a key factor in limiting their trade.

Relevant businesses had been consulted on the proposals and had supported them. Support from District Councillor Janine Paterson was requested.

8.6 Bear House renovation/highway safety concerns. It was reported that the Parish Council had received a number of concerns from parishioners. The matter had been taken up with the NHDC Planning Officer and the local police with a request for urgent investigation.

8.7 Waste/recycling collections. Concerns were raised by parishioners that following emptying bins were left untidily by operatives and often blocking footways and access to driveways. Councillor Paterson agreed to pass on the concerns to relevant parties. It was questioned whether any monitoring of the contractor took place and what standards were applied; this was also a concern re road sweeping.

9. Report from the County Councillor and matters concerning HCC.

County Councillor Tony Hunter was welcomed to the meeting. In addition to his piece in the Yearbook he reported on the following.

9.1 LED streetlighting installation by Herts Highways. The villages were the 'last layer' in this county-wide project; works had been in progress since February and several units had been installed around the village. He had been in contact with relevant personnel and had received assurances that the 'heritage design' would be retained and any necessary changes would be 'sympathetic'.

9.2 Re-painting of the Springs railings. Funding for this was to be from County but works were to be carried out by the Parish Council's contractor as soon as weather conditions were suitable.

9.3 District Local Plan. HCC had made objections in relation to 'duty to cooperate' and 'soundness'.

9.4 Budgets. Central government had now recognised the demands of social care but savings had been required in other areas. These had a 'real impact' on highways expenditure and he continued to fight for increases. Waste costs were significant and proposals for a greater proportion to be used for energy production were being pursued.

9.5 Highways matters.

9.5.1 A505. Some safety improvements had been carried out and more were to follow. A feasibility study on traffic movements was ongoing and a proposal had been made for a new roundabout at the Slip End junction. A parishioner requested that the very short run-off at the Odsey junction be investigated.

9.5.2 Maintenance issues. Cllr Hunter reiterated that potholes etc should be reported; most were attended to correctly.

9.5.3 Concerns were raised at the size of vehicles using local roads. Cllr Hunter agreed that this was a problem in many rural areas; he had lobbied for tighter controls re sat-navs for lorries.

9.5.4 Concerns were raised re the new telegraph poles installed on the Newnham Road; there had been no prior notice to the landowner.

9.5.5 Yellow lines. Cllr Hunter reported that, following discussion with the Parish Council and a proposal from a local residents' group, three locations had been put forward (junction outside the school, junction of Silver Street and Kingsland Way, junction of Colbron Close and West End). An additional location (junction of High Street and Kingsland Way) had been proposed by the school bus operator. All four of these locations had been approved by the Highways Officer and would now be processed. This could not take place until after the May County Council elections; he warned that there would have to be local consultation and the process could be 'drawn out'.

9.5.6 Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs). Cllr Martin Hoffman questioned when the promised second device would be installed in Newnham Way; the need at this location was backed up by at least five years of data collected by the Speedwatch group. It was noted that the current system had two bases, one in Station Road and one at the bottom of Newnham Way, with one device that could be moved between the two bases. Cllr Hunter responded that the device had been placed in Station Road following the Parish Council's request for safety improvements at that location, particularly following the two new housing developments. To collect viable traffic data a device had to be in situ for at least six months. The County Council had imposed new regulations with regard to SIDs; these would be implemented following the May elections.

10. Reports from village organisations.

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

10.1 Ashwell Housing Association. Chairman Liz Fitsimmons reported that, following a recruitment drive, there were several new committee members.

10.2 The Cottage Garden working group (part of the Ashwell Village Trust). Leader Liz Moynihan reported that the group would be 50 years old in 2018; celebrations would include an exhibition at the Museum.

10.3 Ashwell Museum. Chairman of the trustees, Martin Hoffman, reported that works to solve issues with damp in the walls were ongoing; this would 'not be cheap'.

10.4 Ashwell School Governing Body. School governor David Short reported apologies from the Headteacher and the Chairman of the governors.

11. Parish affairs

11.1 Music Festival. All were encouraged to attend; a plea was made for any volunteers willing to assist the organisers.

11.2 Village Book Swap in the Parish Room. It was reported that this was 'going well' and the organisers were thanked.

11.3 Litter pick. Cllr Madeleine Legg reported that this year's event would take place on Saturday 22nd April meeting at the pavilion at 2pm.

11.4 Ashwell 1100 celebrations. Organiser Cliff Jenkinson reported that the list of events to take place throughout the year was increasing. Notifications would be published in the Ashwell Village News and posted on village notice boards.

11.5 Scouts project for a Public Access Defibrillator. It was noted that plans for installation in the old red telephone box in the High Street were being progressed. Once it was up and running public training sessions would be held.

11.6 Superfast Broadband. It was reported that householders in some parts of the village had been invited to apply.

11.7 Parish Council website. In response to a question from a parishioner it was reported that a new site with greater capabilities for communication was being progressed. It was hoped that it would be up and running within weeks. It was appreciated that there were problems with the old site; the new site was being designed to be managed in-house and updated more easily and frequently.

11.8 War Memorial. A parishioner wished it to be recorded how good the area around the memorial looked. The Chairman reported that this was due to the efforts of a local resident and agreed to pass on the compliments.

11.9 A parishioner wished to thank all members of the Parish Council for their much appreciated work; other parishioners present concurred.

The Chairman thanked all for their attendance at the meeting.

Meeting closed at 9.35pm