

**Minutes of the Ashwell Annual Parish Meeting
held on Wednesday 28th March 2018, 8pm at Ashwell School**

PRESENT: Thirty-four members of the public.

Parish Councillors Mark White (Parish Council Chairman), Martin Hoffman (Parish Council Vice-chairman), Graham Lee, Madeleine Legg, David Short, David Sims. Hertfordshire County Councillor Steve Jarvis and North Hertfordshire District Councillor Janine Paterson. Parish Clerk Jane Porter.

APOLOGIES: Received from Parish councillor Bridget Macey, Police Sgt Guy Westwood and fifteen parishioners.

The Chairman welcomed all to the Annual Parish Meeting and noted the agenda published in the 2018 edition of the *Ashwell Yearbook*.

1. Minutes of the last meeting (29th March 2017).

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

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

3. Parish Council Chairman's Report.

The Chairman thanked all the Yearbook team for another splendid production; he felt that again they had done a 'sterling job'. In addition to his report in the Yearbook, he wished to particularly commend the local Scout groups for their fundraising project that had enabled the purchase of the defibrillator housed in the old red telephone box in the High Street. This was now managed by the Parish Council. The recent training course led by the co-ordinating charity had been well received but he emphasized that no special training was required to use the device; very clear instructions for use would be given by the emergency services following a 999 call.

4. Parish Council Financial Report.

In addition to the piece in the Yearbook the Chairman reported that the Parish Pre-cept for 2018-19 was less than the previous year; there had been several large one-off expenditure items in 2017-18.

5. Reports from the Parish Council including working groups.

The following reports were made in addition to pieces in the Yearbook.

5.1 Neighbourhood Plan Working Group (Members: leader Cllr David Short, parish councillors Madeleine Legg and Graham Lee, and parishioners). Cllr David Short gave a brief update on the current status of the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan. The draft had now been approved by the Parish Council and a meeting had taken place that day with the relevant NHDC Strategic Planning Officer. Once the Plan was adopted it would become an important part of the planning decision process followed by NHDC and the Parish Council would adhere to its policies when responding to NHDC consultations. The parish-wide surveys carried out during the preparation of the draft had identified three areas that parishioners wished to see addressed, (i) the need for housing suitable for the elderly and those with mobility issues, (ii) problems of off-street parking, (iii) better sporting facilities. To that end the group had considered available and suitable sites to address these; the selection criteria had been those applied by NHDC plus some that were village-specific. The three sites put forward were land at Partridge Hall, the ID Products factory site at West End, and land behind and at Dixies Meadow; all the landowners had been spoken to. The latter site had been judged by the working group to be suitable for low-rise and sheltered accommodation. This proposal also included a village car park accessed off the High Street; this could be landscaped in a manner suitable for a rural area possibly combined with a village orchard. Parishioner Liz Moynihan reported that the land had once been an orchard.

Cllr Short reported that the next stages towards adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan were in line with the Localism Act 2011. There would be a six-week parish-wide consultation, then a public examination (as had just happened with the District Local Plan), followed by a referendum. It was hoped that the referendum could be held coincident with the May 2019 local elections; this would be the most cost effective timing. In response to a question from Parishioner Mark Eaton it was clarified that the District Local Plan followed national policy and the Neighbourhood Plan then followed on from the District.

5.1 Recreation Ground/Pavilion/Public toilets.

Cllr Madeleine Legg reported that there had been a water leak into the pavilion kitchen during the recent cold weather. Repairs were in hand but the facilities had been shut for two weeks. The claim

made to NHDC for Section 106/planning contributions funds to upgrade the toilets was still awaited (see also 5.2 below).

5.2 Section 106/planning contributions held by NHDC.

Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that claims on funds held by NHDC had to meet strict eligibility criteria. There had also been changes, nationally, to how the system worked. Precise details of the sums available had been requested but he was aware that there was insufficient to build a new pavilion for example (which he personally thought was essential). The Parish Council had made a claim for the public toilets in March last year; the outcome of this was still awaited.

5.3 Arbury Banks.

Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that the Parish Council was a supporter of 'Beacons of the Past -Hillforts in the Chilterns Landscape' that was to include Arbury Banks. The Ashwell Archaeology group had been kept informed.

5.4 Liaison re Hertfordshire Highways.

Cllr David Sims reported that Parish Council representatives met regularly with County Councillor Steve Jarvis. Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) had been installed in Station Road and Newnham Way, also wooden bollards to protect the grass verge outside the Cemetery; some resurfacing had also been carried out. Proposals had been made for, (i) safety measures in Station Road - additional footway to serve Walkdens and extension of the footway at the corner by the War Memorial, (ii) yellow lines at identified locations and restricted parking spaces at two locations in the High Street, (iii) 20mph speed limits, (iv) verge erosion/damage issues -including the pinch point in Silver Street. A cycle-way to the station and further safety measures for the A505 had also been raised.

Parishioners present raised the following issues:

- (i) Parishioner Fergus Moynihan – recurrent drainage problems in Northfields Road. Similar problems in Hinxworth Road were also reported.
- (ii) Parishioner Bridget Long - concerns about the enforcement of parking restrictions and any knock-on effects.
- (iii) Parishioner Simon Bettany – verge damage/erosion outside his house in the High Street and at several other locations around the village often associated with large vehicles and construction works.
- (iv) Parishioner Jackie Embury – obstruction caused by parking at the pinch point in Silver Street.
- (v) Parishioner Mark Eaton – planning authority enforcement on developers who caused damage to verges during construction works.
- (vi) Parishioner Andrew Gillborn - enforcement by the police through speed traps.
- (vii) Parishioner Connie Chambers – responsibility on those with off-street parking to use it for the benefit of the community and to recognise that some households had no other option.
- (viii) Parishioner Sam Wallace – habit of some residents to 'reserve' the space outside their properties for their own vehicles in preference to others.

The Chairman reported that it was the policy of the Parish Council when responding to NHDC planning consultations to recommend refusal if there was any loss of parking provision. He invited County Councillor Steve Jarvis to respond to parishioners' concerns (see item 6 below).

5.4 The Springs.

Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that the dead tree stump that had recently fallen into the water was scheduled to be removed. In response to a question from Parishioner Will Fletcher, he reported that the plastic confetti-like material that had been deposited by someone on the bank had been looked into. This type of behaviour was very anti-social.

5.5 Cemetery.

Cllr Madeleine Legg reported that the refurbishment of the Chapel of Rest by the tenant had now been completed; it looked 'beautiful'. The Chapel would be open during the At Home and she encouraged parishioners to visit.

6. Other authorities.

6.1 Report from the County Councillor and matters concerning HCC.

County Councillor Steve Jarvis was welcomed to the meeting and in addition to his piece in the Yearbook he reported on the following.

He prefaced his response to the parishioners' concerns and questions re Highways to emphasize that the County Council 'did a lot more than just roads'. The major responsibility and expenditure was on support for the elderly, vulnerable and children; these were an increasing financial challenge.

His Highways Locality Budget for the financial year about to commence had a list of actions and proposals; there were already items on the list for the following financial year. He was mindful to allocate expenditure fairly across all his areas of responsibility in accordance with need.

Proposals for waiting restrictions (yellow lines) where there were matters of highway safety were being progressed. The proposals for time restricted spaces outside retail outlets had to go to public consultation and any progress would be dependent on the response. To meet the criteria for 20mph limits, and for them to be installed without engineering measures such as humps, average speeds had to be less than 25mph. Locations for speed monitoring around the core of the village had been agreed and this would commence shortly. The next stage would be a public consultation, and if this found in favour the legal process of Traffic Regulation Orders would follow. He cautioned that it would be 2019-20 before any installation.

Safety improvements to the A505. Data were being assessed and proposals were expected shortly. The station junction remained the most problematic and he was aware of potential knock-on effects to Ashwell. Funding was a significant issue.

A new rail timetable was to commence from May and changes to the 202/Taxibus service to the station were being consulted on.

In response to parishioners' suggestions that an HGV ban be imposed to cover the village he cautioned that this was not a simple matter. Vehicles needing access would be exempt and enforcement very difficult. He was aware that use of number plate recognition had been discussed with the Home Office.

County Councillor Jarvis was thanked for his input.

6.2 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.

The Examination of the new District Local Plan had finished yesterday and from the responses made by the Inspector to the draft it was expected that some major changes were likely. These could result in a further enquiry but she was hopeful that it could be adopted by the end of the year.

In response to questions from parishioners District Councillor Paterson responded;

(i) Parishioner Sam Wallace - she clarified that although the plan was not yet adopted there was some protection as it was 'in the system'.

(ii) Parishioner Fergus Moynihan – the planning application for 2,800 houses between Baldock and Bygrave could not be considered by NHDC until the Local Plan was adopted as the land was currently designated as Green Belt. Other matters including significant archaeological finds and the Corn Bunting habitat had also to be addressed.

(iii) Parishioner Clive Godfrey – proposals included a new road to join the A507 and the A505 with a new bridge over the railway line; the view was held that this must not only provide access to the new houses but also relieve the pressure on the already congested access to the town centre.

In response to a question by Parishioner Liz Moynihan she agreed to investigate the concerns about a grant to the Ashwell Village Trust. It was reported that 2018 was the 50th anniversary of the Cottage Garden owned by the trust.

District Councillor Janine Paterson was thanked for her input.

7. Parish affairs.

The Chairman invited any representatives of groups to add to their reports in the Yearbook.

7.1 Crop marks of five ring ditches off Station Road. Cllr David Short reported that the application by Sarah Talks to have these scheduled as an ancient monument had been successful. This had followed on from the discovery of the henge during the Walkdens development. In response to a question by Parishioner Andrew Gillborn it was clarified that there was no public access; the land was in agricultural use.

7.2 Ashwell 1100. Cllr David Short reported that this had been very successful. To mark the celebrations it had been proposed to install new entrance signs to the village. Parish councillors had

considered various options including the word either ‘town’ or ‘settlement’; they had agreed to gauge the wider views of parishioners before making a decision. Whilst use of ‘town’ was factually accurate, the vote by a ‘show-of -hands’ was in favour of ‘Anglo-Saxon settlement’.

7.3 United Reformed Church. Elder Jackie Embury reported that the refurbishment works were going well. All concerned were thankful for the support received from village organisations and individuals.

7.4 Parish Clock. Parishioner Sylvia McBeal reported her concerns that the overnight chimes were not working correctly. The Chairman reported that her similar concerns had been investigated last month and no problems had been found. He reiterated that there was no issue with the bell-ringers; the device they used to isolate the clock would have affected the chimes night and day if that had been the cause. He agreed to look into the matter again.

7.5 Footway lighting. Parishioner Fergus Moynihan asked why there were a number of lights that were orange, not white, such as the one outside the URC hall. County Councillor Steve Jarvis responded that the Herts Highways programme to change all units to LEDs would result in all lights being white. This would be completed in the next year or so.

7.6 Volunteering. Cllr David Short reported his concerns, and that of other parish councillors, as to why those who volunteered for roles in the community, and attended meetings such as this, tended to be from an older generation. For example, at the last Parish Council election in 2015 only seven individuals had stood so there had been no poll and the Parish Council was functioning on seven rather than twelve co-councillors. The Parish Council had recently invited a group of younger parishioners to join a focus group with the remit of determining the reasons and possible solutions. Parishioner Margaret Budgen suggested the use of social media as the preferred method of communication. Parishioner Sam Wallace was of the view that the monthly ‘open forum’ sessions at Parish Council meetings gave regular opportunities for issues to be put to parish councillors, however this also meant that any concerns could be ‘handed’ to parish councillors rather than individuals dealing with matters themselves.

7.7 Street furniture/Litter bin in the High Street to Silver Street twitchel. Parishioner Michael Watridge introduced himself as representing his parents in relation to the complaint they had made to the Parish Council about the ‘colossal’ bin put outside their house. He wished to know when the matter was to be discussed again. The Chairman responded that the Parish Council had discussed and considered the matter fully at the December Council meeting. He referred all to the minutes of that meeting for full details; the matter had also been covered at subsequent Parish Council meetings. To inform those present the Chairman gave a brief summary of what had been agreed. Following the complaint, the Parish Council had agreed to monitor the bin regularly for any problems such as smell and capacity. This monitoring would continue over the summer period when there might be issues related to hot weather. No further action would be taken until the situation was reviewed later in the year. He reported that he was also not prepared to go into further details as formal complaints about the conduct of himself, the Vice-chairman Martin Hoffman, and the Clerk had been made to NHDC and this was currently in the hands of their legal department. Mr Watridge reiterated his request as to when the matter would be discussed further and expressed his concern that litter was blowing into their front garden from the bin. He also expressed concerns as to whether the monitoring being undertaken by the Parish Council was impartial and whether it was an appropriate authority to undertake this. The Chairman responded that the Parish Council was competent to do this.

7.8 New website. Cllr Graham Lee reported that this would give greater opportunity for providing information in a different format. The previous site had been intended to allow sign-up to receive email updates but had never worked as intended. The new website was to go live in the next few weeks and would be much more dynamic with blogs, news feeds, email sign-up, etc. It was hoped that this direct form of communication would encourage more young people to become involved.

7.9 Parishioner Fergus Moynihan wished to thank parish councillors for their work; there were only seven when there should be twelve. He also thanked the Clerk.

The Chairman thanked all for their attendance at the meeting.

Chairman's Signature..... Date.....
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