

Minutes
of the Annual Parish Meeting
held on Wednesday the 20 March 2024, 7pm at the school (Big Hall)

The 2024 edition of the Ashwell Yearbook, including reports referenced, is available on the website at https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/downloads/yearbook/2024/yearbook_2024_copy_for_website.pdf

The Chair of the Parish Council (and taking the Chair for the meeting), Graham Lee, welcomed all. He noted apologies had been received from seven parishioners, parish councillors Vinny Hall and David Sims, and County Councillor Steve Jarvis (due to an NHC meeting commitment). He reported that the Parish Council had now appointed a new Deputy Clerk, Nicky Forrester, and hoped to appoint a new Clerk shortly.

Present were: Forty-two parishioners; five parish councillors (Chris Button, Ian Duffy, Martin Hoffman, Graham Lee and Norton Mahy); the Acting Parish Clerk (Jane Porter) and Deputy Clerk (Nicky Forrester). Also in attendance were District Councillor Tom Tyson, PCSO Chris Brabrook and PC Tom Woollard from the Royston Police Neighbourhood Team (see item 6.2), and two representatives of Urban & Civic (see item 6.1).

- 1 **To approve the minutes of the 2023 Parish Meeting.** A proposal that these be agreed and signed was accepted.
- 2 **Matters of report from the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting.** None.
- 3 **Chairman's Report.** The report in the Yearbook was noted.
- 4 **Financial Statement.** The report in the Yearbook was noted. *See also website* <https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/parish-council/budgets-and-audits/>
https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/downloads/budgets-and-audits/budget_2024-25/budget_for_2024-25_and_our_parish_precept.pdf

Parish councillor Vice-chair Norton Mahy reported that the budget setting process for the financial year 2024-25 had commenced the previous October. Parish councillors had agreed that a budget be set to maintain the services provided for the village; the costs of this had increased. The increase in the precept for 2024-25 would amount to an additional £17 per annum for a Band D house. A parishioner commented that staff costs were a major part of the budget; this was agreed.

- 5 **Reports from the Parish Council including working groups.** The reports in the Yearbook were noted.
- 6 **Reports from others.**
 - 6.1 Presentation by Urban & Civic the master developer for the north of Baldock development. <https://growingbaldock.co.uk/>

As part of the Local Plan 3,000 homes would be provided by developers in a staged process over a 10-15 year build programme on land to the north of Baldock. It was stated that the intention of Urban & Civic was to provide the infrastructure before and alongside the housing development and not afterwards. The planned infrastructure included two new primary schools and provision for increased secondary school capacity; the details of the latter was yet to be decided. There was also provision for new local roads that would affect the route from Ashwell to Baldock; the existing road from Bygrave would become a green route. It was confirmed that previous proposals to include a bypass were now no longer included. Concerns were raised in relation to the existing traffic congestion in Baldock - how would the impact of the additional housing be addressed? What would be the impact on the use of local shops and businesses particularly during the build period? It was responded that there would be changes to the existing road layout with enhanced provision for cycling and walking. Concerns were expressed at the reality of cycling from Ashwell for many people. Also of concern was parking provision at Baldock station, again, particularly during the build period. The claim that there was not an existing capacity issue was challenged. The impact on car parking at Ashwell station both during construction and long term, where parking on roads was already an issue, was raised as a concern. *See also 7.1 below.*

Urban and Civic encouraged residents to communicate and reported that they would be coming back to Ashwell later in 2024. Emails could be sent via the Parish Council or direct. *See website <https://growingbaldock.co.uk/>*

- 6.2 Report from our local police, PCSO Chris Brabrook and PC Tom Woollard from the Royston Police Neighbourhood Team.

<https://www.herts.police.uk/area/your-area/hertfordshire/north-herts/royston-and-royston-rural/on-the-team/our-priorities>

PCSO Chris Brabrook reported that a community engagement event was scheduled for the morning of Saturday 23 March on the green opposite the Museum. They had also attended the At Home, met with local organisations, and had given a session on scam safety at Wolverley House. They worked with the school on road safety and cycling, and the speeding poster project to promote 20's Plenty. Speeding enforcement patrols were being carried out in the village. The DriveSafe volunteer scheme could be re-established if there were sufficient volunteers. PC Tom Woollard reported that the village was a very safe place and emphasized the value of information from local residents. The main crime was thefts from outbuildings; he urged residents not to leave out tools to facilitate break ins or to leave cars unlocked. Illegal parking outside the school remained an issue. All were encouraged to sign up to the online Neighbourhood Watch/OWL scheme and to use the 101 service to report anything; this was preferable to using email.

- 6.3 Report from our District Councillor Tom Tyson.

He noted the several planning applications refused by NHC that might have affected open spaces in the village. The forthcoming Boundary Commission changes would remove part of Arbury Ward; the part of Bygrave affected by the new development would become part of a Baldock ward. There would be another District Council election in May due to the change to all 51 wards having elections at the same time. The NHC decision on the Bygrave solar farm application had been delayed but was likely to be decided in June. NHC were currently conducting a trial in Knebworth for recycling of soft plastics as part of the routine recycling collection. This trial was to be expanded and may involve Ashwell and Bygrave.

He responded to questions on the new NHC waste contract; various ways to gain savings were to be included. The successful bidder was to be agreed sometime in May.

- 6.4 Report from our County Councillor Steve Jarvis. As he was unable to attend, the Chair, Graham Lee, read out the report submitted in addition to that in the Yearbook. *See appendix below.*
- 6.5 Zero Carbon Ashwell group. It was noted that an information handout had been circulated. The Chair, Graham Lee, reported that the group had started with two parish councillors but had now been expanded as a community wide initiative and included members of the village Greening Ashwell group. He encouraged others to get involved. The Parish Council had become a member of Community Energy England; this could enable grant funding for a feasibility study on the energy needs of the community. In response to a question on solar panels in the conservation area it was noted that the NHC Duty Planning Officer was always available to give advice for a specific property. The lighting of the Church tower was questioned; it was reported that St Mary's was aware of the issue and looking at more energy efficient options.
- 6.6 Ashwell Community Land Trust/AGM and launch to members on Tuesday 26 March, 7pm in the Parish Room. *See website <https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/ashwell/ashwell-community-land-trust-ltd/>*

The Chair, Graham Lee, reported that this was about providing or protecting assets that the village felt were important. It was wider than just the building of houses and could be shops, pubs, green spaces, or retirement homes. It had been set up by the Parish Council with funding to activate it and would then become its own project. It needed people with appropriate expertise and he encouraged anyone to get in touch. A suggestion was made that the pavilion was a community asset and the upgrade project could be taken on by the CLT; it was noted that this would still require funding. *See 7.2 below for further re the pavilion.*

7 Parish affairs- to include reports/updates and requests for feedback on:

- 7.1 Access to Ashwell & Morden station/the proposals for improvements to the footway/cycleway and car parking provision.

Parishioner Guy Reed, who had led on behalf of the Parish Council re the footway/cycleway improvements, reported that the outcome of meetings with the landowners implied that this aspect could be solved. The Local Cycling and Walking Initiative (LCWIP) led by NHC had designated Ashwell for primary funding but the towns took precedence. The Parish Council had engaged with Urban & Civic re expansion of parking provision at the station; the current inadequate provision would be exacerbated during the 10-15 years during the build process of the Baldock development. A parishioner present reported his view that an evidence base was needed, a proposal for land capture agreed, and support from the local authority to prioritise it as part of a section 106 agreement. It was noted that there had been no section 106 contribution from the new Station Road development.

- 7.2 Pavilion upgrade/'Renovation or replacement?' The proposals by the previous working group and the funding situation. *See website <https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/news2/the-pavilion--renova/>*

The Chair, Graham Lee, reported that the survey by an architect had concluded that the current building was not fit for purpose and the structure was rotting. Quotes for either a replacement or renovation to bring it up to standard were about the same and whilst there was some funding already available this was nowhere near enough. Gifts, grants and other funding had been explored and also what other local parish councils in similar circumstances, such as Pirton, had done. Adding to the precept had been suggested as an option and estimates suggested c£30 per household per annum over a 10 year period would be needed. Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that Hinxworth had successfully done this. It was emphasized

that views on this option were being sought both tonight and there would also be a village wide consultation. Views were expressed that without further details on the plans being proposed no commitment on the proposals for funding via the precept could be made. Consultation and an agreement on the design, and the facilities provided, was needed first. Should just the current sports use be included or should additional features be added? The impact of the latter on other village facilities would need to be considered. A view was expressed that the contribution made by the current users should be considered; they might not be paying their fair share.

- 7.3 Playground facilities at the Rec/enhancing the provision for older children and the funding situation. It was noted that previous proposals based on an earlier consultation needed updating; input was requested.

See website <https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/news2/playground-improveme/>

- 7.4 Outreach Post Office in the Parish Room/the recently reduced number of sessions. See website <https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/news2/survey-re-ashwell-ou/>

The input from parishioner Nikki da Costa and Sir Oliver Heald, MP, was noted; commitment from the Post Office had been gained that this would be reviewed if demand justified it. A request was made for any concerns to be reported to the Parish Council.

- 7.5 Litter bins 'Right bin, right place'/the proposals for review. See website <https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/news2/consultation-on-our/>

It was noted that the village litter pick was scheduled for Saturday 20 April.

- 7.6 Affordable Housing Survey/'If you live, work or have strong connections with Ashwell we need to hear from you'. See website <https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/news2/affordable-housing-s/>

A request was made to complete the survey and to encourage others to do so. It was noted that the last survey was very out of date. Without an update any planning applications to NHC for multiple new housing would take into account the needs of the district as opposed to those specific to Ashwell. The needs and demography of Ashwell was very different to those of the district as a whole.

- 7.7 Any other matters raised.

7.7.1 War Memorial. Parishioner Jill Powell reported on behalf of the Ashwell British Legion. The new paved area in front of the memorial had proved very successful. The Parish Council's Deputy Clerk had been in contact with County Councillor Steve Jarvis and Herts Highways re the issue of vehicles driving over the area and a proposal for the installation of bollards to resolve this was being pursued. Herts Highways were still investigating solutions to rectify the drainage issue.

7.7.2 Parking at the junction of West End and Colbron Close. A parishioner raised concerns that this was a safety issue and suggested that yellow lines be considered. It was agreed that the matter be taken up with County Councillor Steve Jarvis and Herts Highways.

7.7.3 A505 safety concerns. A parishioner reported that another serious accident had just occurred and traffic was being diverted through the village. It was noted that this was an item discussed at every Highways Liaison meeting with Parish Council representatives and County Councillor Steve Jarvis and the Highways Officer. Changes to address the issue had been implemented where possible including speed

reductions and works at the Litlington junction but no single cause had been identified and multiple junctions were affected. The cost of a new roundabout at the Odsey junction was very high and unlikely to be funded.

7.7.4 Junction of the Dovecote with Back Street. A parishioner raised safety concerns re issues with poor sight lines. It was agreed that the matter be taken up with County Councillor Steve Jarvis and Herts Highways.

7.7.5 Yearbook. A parishioner wished to note the significant input by parish councillor Norton Mahy in producing the latest edition. He was thanked for this.

Meeting closed 9.10 pm

Jane Porter, Acting Clerk, Ashwell Parish Council. 21 March 2024

Appendix: Report County Councillor Steve Jarvis (re item 6.4).

I am sorry that I am unable to attend this evening's Parish Meeting. Unfortunately, there is a meeting of the North Herts Environment Panel of which I am chair, which I must attend.

There are a number of updates to my report that has been published in the Yearbook.

In particular the County Council has agreed that where it does not clean roadside drainage gullies because it is believed that traffic management is necessary these will now be dealt with as part of a separate programme, closing roads if necessary. Quite why it is now necessary to close roads where the gullies have been cleaned with no problem for many years is an interesting question, but at least they are now being cleaned.

Following requests from residents I have had some speed measurements done in Springhead, which is one of the few roads in the village where this has never been done. The results show good compliance with the 20mph speed limit, with average speeds of around 19mph and not a single vehicle travelling at more than 30mph for the whole seven days of the survey.

How speeds in other areas, particularly Lucas Lane and Newnham Way is still something that requires further investigation but is unlikely to be achieved without physical measures (probably humps) which may not be universally popular.

There is likely to be some further work on the vegetation on the central reservation of the A505 later this year. Essentially nothing has been done for many years and there is now a programme of managing the vegetation (which should have been done all along) which will involve removal of some trees and planting and maintenance of others and hedges. As with any work of this sort, the results may look a little stark to begin with, but those managing the works seem to have a plan that will improve the biodiversity of the area in the longer term.

Following the petition about lowering the A505 speed limit past the Odsey and Slip End junctions I am still trying to arrange for the additional speed surveys that the Highway & Transport Panel wanted before any further consideration of this.

If people have questions or issue that they want to raise, then my contact details are as in the Year Book.