

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 22 APRIL 2005 AT 8PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL

There was an attendance of 29 including all the members of the Parish Council and County Councillor John Whitehead.

Apologies for absence were received from District Councillor Mrs S Schneider, George Allan, Alan Bywaters, Lyn Feaver, Anthea McCarthy, Julian McCarthy Tricia Ridgeway and Jeremy Schroeter.

1. MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 28 MAY 2004

These were read by the Clerk to the Council and there being no comments they were signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

2. FINANCE

The Clerk reported that the total balance in the Parish Council's accounts was £12,804.35, which included £8,095 in the new Community Project Account and £2,719 in the Building Society Account.

Income derived from the Precept on the rates and bank interest together with the sale of land to Mill Cottage totalled £15,484. Expenditure for the year totalled £11,390. This year has been exceptional in that a gratuity was paid to the retiring Clerk based on her 40 years service and a salary for the new Clerk for 3 months was paid in addition to the retiring Clerk's salary. £1,200 was paid in legal fees for the sale of the land; grass cutting costs totalled £640 - less than usual due to the dry summer. Subscriptions and audit fees came to £355 and the insurance premium rose to £712.

The Council has recently opened a savings account for the Clerk's gratuity in the future.

3. ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COUNCIL

The Chairman firstly welcomed the new Clerk to the Council and thanked John Whitehead, County Councillor and Sue Schneider, District Councillor for their sterling support during the year.

The Parish Council had had another busy year. There had been no progress on the 40 mph speed limit at the periphery of the village or the footpath through the centre of the village. The problem of the water on Howe Lane has been repaired twice and is now considerably better. However the Council continued to pursue these matters regularly.

Environmental damage by large trucks and tractors was of great concern but not illegal. This makes solving the problem difficult and despite the Council writing to all local farmers asking them and their staff to exercise care when driving their tractors in the village, the damage to the verges continues. Nuisance parking of vehicles on narrow sections of the roads does not help either.

On a positive note, the District Council asked for a list of maintenance and minor repair work needed to the village's roads to be submitted under the new Planned Parish Visits initiative. Much to our surprise within about 10 days of sending the list in, contractors were in the village carrying out these works in an extremely efficient manner. Well done to the Highways Department on that score.

The Review of the Rights of Way had involved considerable work by the Council and a plan of some 24 suggested alterations had been drawn and written up. However discussion with Fiona Taylor's replacement indicated that the cost of alteration of each path would be in the region of £1,000, far in excess of what the Council had been led to believe from Fiona Taylor. However, further discussion with the District Council (Maggie Cox) indicated that the cost would more likely be in the region of

£800 for each package of up to 4 alterations. While this was more achievable it was still in excess of the original indication the Parish Council had been given. However, the next stage for the Parish Council is to have a meeting with Gordon Hands, Chairman of the local Ramblers Association to establish any objections that might arise. The Parish Council will continue to pursue this matter.

The Chairman felt there was little to add regarding finance other than to say that the proceeds from the sale of the land had been put in a Community Project Account, which would be discussed later.

The East of England Plan had caused much concern within the Council and a strong letter of disapproval had been sent to the East of England Regional Assembly. It was felt that excess new housing was planned and there was no plan or budget for infrastructure to be put in place. Again the Council will continue to monitor this.

Use of the new Clerk's computer skills will enable computerisation of the accounting aspects of the Council. Brian Kitchen has started web site creation and a test site is available for perusal and feedback. Further assistance will be needed in due course with the maintenance of the site.

The Council is grateful to George Allan for taking on the role of Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator and thanks go to Don Feaver for his work in this post for 20 years.

Finally the Chairman thanked his fellow councillors for their support during the year. He felt they all worked well as a team, as was demonstrated at the retirement reception for Margaret Grimster in early April.

4. REPORT BY THE DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

The expansion of Stansted Airport continued to dominate the Council's agenda during the past year with a legal case being brought by Councils joining together against the Government. The result was that the Judge found against the Government in that there had not been an extensive enough consultation. The situation of more runways is by no means resolved, but the Government is required to undertake more consultation and investigation of possible sites for airport expansion. The District Council, along with other interested parties, continue to monitor developments.

During 2004 extensive internal re-structuring has been undertaken by the current Administration. The Head of Finance, John Dickson, and Head of Planning, Brian Perkins had retired. In their place Business Managers were appointed to take the Council forward and more Best Value Reviews have been carried out, particularly in relation to two services provided by the Council, that of the Planning Department and those for young people.

Recycling continues to increase towards set targets and the Council itself is reviewing its own purchasing with the view to saving money by buying more economically and using recycled items where possible. Uttlesford District Council has joined the Essex Marketplace, an organisation formed to put in place a bulk pricing structure. This enables the Council to benefit from better purchasing facilities.

The responsibility for a number of matters previously dealt with by the Police Authority or by County Council or Central Government have been devolved to the District Council and, in some cases, Parish Councils. Car parking is now regulated and enforced by the District Council. Another new area of responsibility for the District Council is licensing.

Mrs Schneider asked that everyone use their vote at the forthcoming General Election and County Council elections as it is very important.

Cllr John Whitehead has decided not to stand again for election and Mrs Schneider expressed her thanks to him for the advice and support he has given her during her time as District Councillor. It

had been a pleasure to work with him and wished him all the best for the future. She then thanked the Members of the Parish Council for the time and hard work they put in on behalf of the residents.

5. REPORT BY THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR

John Whitehead said he was sorry to say this was the last meeting he would attend in Hempstead due to his retirement. Simon Walsh was to stand for election in May in the Thaxted division; he is currently a County Councillor for the Bocking division but due to redistribution will lose his seat.

Two years ago Essex County Council commissioned MORI to canvas the Essex public as to what they felt should be the County Council's priorities. Not surprisingly, first was lowest possible council rates and second was more expenditure on highways.

To this end, this year the County Council is very proud to have introduced the lowest ever rate increase of just 2.9%, even below inflation. This has been done despite the grant from the Government being 6% as against 6.5% last year and with no cuts in services or increases in charges. Savings of 3.5% all round in all departments had been the reason for the low increase. It was hoped that further savings of 2.5% in all departments could be achieved.

With regard to highways, Essex County Council have put roads into three categories as follows: Green - no repairs needed - Amber - repairs needed within next 18-24 months to avoid moving into Red - repairs which need to be attended to immediately. The County Council has therefore pledged £45 million for each of the next three years on repairs of 'Amber' roads with a potential savings of £100 million over the three years. Within Uttlesford there is only 1 amber road, being the one from Takely through Hatfield Heath to Harlow. There are also 3 cluster amber areas, being Saffron Walden, Thaxted and Great Dunmow. The aim is that contractors will come and attend to all highways work in one chunk in due course.

Mr Whitehead stressed the importance of keeping in close touch with both District and County Councillors on all highways matters, as any scheme to be approved by the County Council needs support from Paul Hardy (West Area Highway Manager) and the County Councillor. Mr Whitehead was sorry that in the 15 years he had served this Parish the footpath scheme had not made significant progress due to not yet becoming priority. With regard to traffic calming he suggested that the parish reconsider a scheme similar to that in Radwinter - where they think it has been moderately successful.

In recognition of the growing importance of parish councils, Essex County Council had sent all Essex parishes £1,000 to help primarily with IT expenditure. Hempstead's letter of thanks was gratefully appreciated.

The West Area Forum was a further opportunity for local opinions to be aired and the ECC had asked the Forum for opinions on proposed development at Stansted and within the M11 corridor. The Forum's conclusion was that Essex should stand firm against the excessive development proposed, particularly in view of the lack of infrastructure expenditure.

Finally, Mr Whitehead finished by commenting on the handsome farewell reception for Mrs Grimster - a doyen of clerks - which he considered was much deserved for her long and devoted service to the parish.

Mr McCarthy thanked Mr Whitehead for his sterling service to the parish for 15 out of the last 20 years - he had been a great servant to Hempstead. This was endorsed by a round of applause from the floor. As a token of the Parish Council's appreciation Mr McCarthy presented Mr Whitehead with a bottle of port.

6. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Jim Rennie was disappointed that the work on the realignment of the rights of way appeared to have fallen at the first hurdle. Discussion ensued with the Council explaining the background to the current position and confirming that the matter would continue to be pursued but that it was inevitably a drawn out process.

Margaret Slee was grateful for what had been done so far and stated that we should be grateful for the number of rights of way the parish has - some neighbouring parishes have considerably fewer. Mrs Slee was concerned that paths were being removed. However Mr McCarthy stated that the plan was not to remove paths, in fact overall there would be 4/5 new paths. Mrs Slee also mentioned that horses were using some footpaths. Mr McCarthy said that the Council were aware and would once again write to the relevant residents to complain.

Nigel Smith was concerned that if the 30mph speed limit could not be enforced what the position would be if 40mph limits were instigated and asked how many speed traps there had been in the village recently. Mrs Midgley stated that enforcing of 40mph limits was not possible if no further policing was made available. Mr Thomas asked that any accident on the main roads be reported as all added up to increase the priority of schemes the parish wanted implemented.

Ross Midgley wondered what was going to be done to curtail verge damage. The Chairman reiterated that there was no formal recourse as the actions were not illegal. However the Council will continue to appeal for greater respect by those felt to be responsible and asked that cars not be parked in such a way as to make the roads narrower. Mr Whitehead commented that reflector strips could be requested of Paul Hardy if the residents were in agreement. Miss Frost felt that would detract from the rural feel of the village and that this was a community issue and we should all be more polite to each other. Mr Thomas said that excess speed and verge damage should be reported to Health and Safety.

A number of other highway points were raised from the floor as follows: John Cockman asked if there was any way that certain roads could be restricted for vehicles of smaller axle size, number etc thus forcing the larger vehicles away from the country roads and back on the main trunk roads; on the continent many roads off the main roads are similarly restricted. Sue Ray commented that her house creaked and "wobbled" when large trucks went by. Jan Rennie asked about the possibility of the white picket fences on entry to the village. A straw poll of the floor indicated approximately 50/50 agreement/disagreement. Mr McCarthy stated that the Council had looked at many ideas in the past but would continue to lobby for change and look into any other ways in which we could tackle this matter further as well as revisiting "old" ideas. Finally Jim Rennie thanked the council for achieving the improved signage on the B1054 near Bramley Hollow. Mr McCarthy said it was very frustrating to be dependent on others to take things on for us but the council will persevere.

Finally, Mr McCarthy thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting closed at 9.25pm.

Date:

Chairman: