

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 20 MAY 2016 AT 8PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL

26 members of the public attended as well as Parish Councillors Sean McCarthy, John Sladen, Alan Weedon, Sara Scott, David Drane, Nicola McNeill and Mark Welbourn, County Councillor Simon Walsh, District Councillor Simon Howell and the Clerk.

Apologies for absence were received, from Zoe Hoar, Diana Frost and Nigel Smith.

1. MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY MAY 15 2014tis

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited them to read the minutes from the previous Annual Parish Meeting. The minutes had been previously signed as a correct record at the Parish Council meeting of July 9, there being no objections or matters arising not being already dealt with. Copies were available for reading but there were no matters arising for discussion

2. FINANCE

The unaudited accounts for the Parish Council for the year ended 31 March 2016 were reviewed by those present and the Clerk reported that the total balance in the Parish Council's accounts was almost £12000. This represented a planned reduction from previous years to comply with guidelines that advise that the total reserves should not approach twice the precept. This year the precept and compensatory grant totalled £8500, the same figure as last year.

The reduction in reserves was achieved by the spending on the refurbishment of the pond and surrounding area. This was the only major area of expenditure. In addition, the VAT from this project and could not be claimed back before the end of the financial year which amounted to nearly £800. The council had applied for and received a grant to implement the new financial transparency arrangements. £909 was received which will pay for a dedicated laptop and other associated equipment as well as some staff time to collate the information and put it onto the website.

In summary, the Clerk reported that the finances were sound and he thanked Mr John Cockman for his diligence and support as internal auditor.

There were no questions or comments from the audience.

3. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COUNCIL

The Chairman ran through the salient points of the Annual report that had been previously circulated.

The dominant issue was the completion of the footway through the village. He reminded the audience that this had been held up by legal issues. Then the Local Highways Panel had run out of money to complete the scheme.

Fortunately Uttlesford was one of the few councils to enhance this year's reduced commitment from the county to the LHP. This enabled the panel to agree to the £70 000 costs of completion. However setting up the work required complicated agreements to organise the necessary road diversions. These would have to be phased in with the bridge work being organised in Finchingfield. Therefore no date had yet been fixed, though it was promised it would be completed in this financial year.

He commented that the village was very pleased to see the re-opening of the Bluebell Inn, and though work is still ongoing, it is already proving popular.

The Parish Council continues to vet planning applications and comment where appropriate. Mr Drane continues to pursue Highways and Footpath matters, though the lack of response is sometimes frustrating. Mr Sladen has had similar experiences in trying to get action on flooding issues.

The pond project went well in the end and the whole area looks much tidier. Mr Weedon had organised the entry for the 'Best Kept Village' competition and Hempstead was runner-up in the category that it entered.

The Chairman finished by thanking the District, County and Parish Councillors, Mr Cockman and the Clerk for their continued support.

He added that there would opportunity for questions and comments later.

4. REPORT BY THE DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

Simon Howell, District Councillor addressed the meeting and explained that after the last election he was now Cabinet Member for Finance at Uttlesford District Council. The District council had been able to operate at a surplus. However due to the way that central government has changed funding arrangements this will not continue. The new homes bonus would now be going to the County Council for social care. There may be a possibility of funding through business rates but this may have to be used to fund housing benefits. So money would have to be raised elsewhere. Councillor Howell remains determined to protect things that most directly serve the community.

Uttlesford continues to have good recycling rates, particularly Hempstead, and this saves on Landfill Tax. Uttlesford is one of the few councils building and maintaining a stock of council houses. However the government's 'Right to buy' proposals, though good in principle, are endangering the work done with housing associations and others to provide homes.

The rejected Local Plan will have to be amended by next year and will mean 5000 new homes will be needed across the District in the next few years. Hopefully this will be a single site enabling the necessary infrastructure to be provided more easily. There were no questions or matters arising. The Chairman thanked him for his interest and support over the year.

5. REPORT BY THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR

Simon Walsh, Essex County Councillor for Thaxted division had sent a report which will be on the website but was in attendance and outlined the main points. He started by congratulating the village on the usual good turnout. He outlined the main points of his report.

The County budget had to be increased with an ageing population making heavier demands on county services. The county had managed to save half a billion pound over the last 6 years but the funding gap is likely to increase. The split of business rates between County and District has not been resolved but would be necessary to protect priority areas such as Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Highways.

As previously discussed Uttlesford stepped in to enhance the Local Highways Panel budget so that it would total £460 000, but schemes submitted totalled £700 000. He regretted the delay on the footway project but was confident that this would be completed this financial year. There is as yet no clear timeline for completion due to the previously stated difficulties with Finchingfield Bridge.

Marking of potholes, orange for urgent and purple for less pressing, continues prior to repair. He asked to be informed of any poor repairs.

On the issue of flooding, a county wide survey had been carried out that indicated that there was double the amount of drainage infrastructure than was previously known. Poor maintenance patterns in the past had left little money to deal with the scale of the task. Problems have been exacerbated by poor attention to roadside ditches which are the responsibility of landowners.

The new waste plant at Basildon which will produce compost material was still undergoing trials but indications were that it would deal with more waste than had been anticipated.

The Saffron Walden Children's centre would close and clients would be expected to use the Dunmow family hub.

The Chairman thanked him for his report.

Next there were comments and questions for Mr Walsh from members of the public.

The view was expressed that there was little confidence in the ability of the County to deal with drainage problems. Councillor Walsh said that they were trying to chase down urgent problems robustly.

Mr Sladen raised the issue of the reporting of flooding and other issues. After issues were reported and issued an identification number then nothing happened for a year. There seemed to be no systematic plan for cleaning out gullies and jetting between drains which were simple remedies to many problems. He had walked the village with an engineer from County and discussed the problems, yet when the report came back that these issues were not contained in the report.

Mr Walsh said that the County Council were trying to build up a picture of the scale of the problems and plan the most efficient usage of the limited resources. He offered to chase up responses but added that there were many parishes across the county facing a similar situation, but he would try to organise a visit from a drainage engineer

The next issue was that of speed limits. There is a widespread view in the village that this is an increasing problem. This will only be exacerbated by further developments in adjacent villages increasing the volume of traffic. Recent accidents had underlined the unsuitability of roads for current traffic and the need for action on extending speed limits.

Mr Walsh agreed that the development of speed limits had proceeded haphazardly over the years and some rationalisation was needed. The problem of policing the limits with decreased police resources was acknowledged. A member of the public pointed out that the people adhering to the limits actually also had the effect of slowing others down which was beneficial.

6. GENERAL DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS

Most of the discussion centred on Highways issues. The poor condition of several sets of the railings in the village, including the damage at Pollards Cross, was discussed. Mr Drane said that he was actively pursuing these and other matters and would keep trying to get some action.

In reply to a query about the trimming of verges the Chairman replied that this should be imminent on the County programme.

Mr McCarthy closed the meeting by thanking everyone for coming and promised that council would do their best to pursue all the issues raised. He again thanked District and County councillors, his fellow Parish councillors and the clerk for their hard work over the year.

The meeting closed at 9.01 pm.

Date:

Chairman: