

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 19 MAY 2017 AT 8PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL

21 members of the public attended as well as Parish Councillors Sean McCarthy, 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 Parish Councillor John Sladen, Eileen Shimmin, Zoe Hoar, Julian McCarthy, Daniela Karsten, Ross and Anna Midgely.

1. MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY MAY 20 2016

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 14 2016 where there were 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 accounts for the Parish Council for the year ended 31 March 2017 were reviewed by those present and the Clerk reported that the total balance in the Parish Council's accounts was almost £12 000.

The Clerk explained that the biggest issue this year had been the decision to change from Barclays Bank, who were not giving the standard of service required, with many mistakes and difficulties in communication. The new bank chosen was Unity Trust Bank which specialises in public sector, local council and charity banking. So far, the change has seemed very much for the better, this was further underlined by the difficulties experienced in getting Barclays to actually close the parish accounts.

In summary, the Clerk reported that the finances were sound and he thanked Mr John Cockman for his usual diligence and support as internal auditor. He informed the meeting that Mr Cockman had indicated that this would be his last year as internal auditor. The clerk thanked him for his support and friendship over the last seven years.

The Chairman added his thanks to Mr Cockman.

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 completion of the footway through the village, despite the difficulties caused by the poor signage creating traffic problems and damage to surrounding minor roads, was a significant event. Residents can now enjoy a much safer passage through the village.

The celebration opening was well attended and it was good to see County Councillor Simon Walsh who pushed through the final stages of the scheme and Alistair Waters who was instrumental in the instigation of the project. Sadly, Mr Waters passed away quite suddenly two weeks later.

Highway repairs are robustly chased by David Drane, though it is a frustrating process, some success is achieved.

The Council is still pursuing road safety issues such as a 40mph buffer zone towards Boytons, and speed reduction and a lorry ban on Anso Road. Again, this is a tortuous process with criteria seeming to change all the time.

Tricia Ridgway very diligently keeps the Speed Watch group together though it is short of participants and any further volunteers would be welcome.

The pond refurbishment was completed with the provision of a life belt, safety signs and the return of the bench.

Mr Sladen has worked hard to make sure ECC is aware of our issues and was successful in getting some jetting done to clear drains. The Chairman reminded the meeting that it is everyone's job to keep streams and ditches clear or report problems.

The Parish Council had carried out a tree survey and some dangerous trees on Council owned land had been felled.

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

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

4. REPORT BY THE DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

District Councillor Howells congratulated the village on its usual high attendance.

He explained that the District Council was halfway through its four years budgetary cycle, Things were tighter than ever with reduced grants from central government. However, Uttlesford still managed to have the lowest council tax in Essex with only a 1.9% rise.

There is a rolling programme to replace the recycling vehicles. Although the district achieves a creditable 54.4% recycling rate it still represents half a ton a year per household of non-recyclable waste.

Uttlesford is one of the few councils committed to still building council houses. Of the 554 new houses built 115 were affordable homes and 43 were council houses. The council is equally committed to maintaining sheltered housing. Provision of universal broadband is still problematic but Uttlesford District Council is working with BT to improve the situation so that at least village centres have adequate coverage.

To replace income, that is diminishing with the lack of funding, Uttlesford had decided to adopt a more commercial approach to raising funds. It is investing in the Little Chesterford Research Park in partnership with Aviva Pension Fund, There is an identified need for commercial and research space due to the proximity to the Cambridge area scientific and technological developments. There is some element of risk but the area is already established so it represents a sensible commercial opportunity rather than risky speculation.

Progress with the local plan is still frustrating as it needs agreement from 20 out of the 39 local councillors many of whom see their role as defending their local interests. A location for development is needed on the M11/A120 corridor but it is still proving difficult to reach an agreement that will be acceptable both to the inspector who vetoed the previous plan and local interests.

The Chairman thanked him for his interest and support over the year and said that there would be chance for questions to be asked later in the meeting.

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 welcomed the opportunity to address such a large turnout.

Cuts in Government support have meant hard choices but there has been a 3% uplift in the care element of the budget to cope with the ageing population.

Highways still remain a priority with a large capital programme to catch up on past under investment. Signage is a particular issue where a more standardised approach is needed. The Highways Panel has received a cut in funding though Essex and Uttlesford have attempted to top up the budget. There is a long list of proposed schemes from Local Councils but the panel hope to achieve about two thirds of these. There will be no future schemes as large as the footway project. There is an amount reserved for speeding checks that Hempstead could apply for.

Uttlesford is still one of the best areas for the recycling that goes to be processed in the Basildon plant. This lowers landfill costs.

The A120 still causes difficulties especially at the bottleneck near Freeport. There will be a consultation on a widening scheme. This is an important East-West route which will help the flow of traffic and contribute to the economic prospects of the region.

The Chairman thanked him for his report and support through the year,

6. GENERAL DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS

The chairman then opened up the meeting for questions from the public.

Miss Frost offered congratulations and thanks for the footway which had been a long struggle but worth it in the end.

Mrs Mc Neill raised the question of Secondary School Places in Saffron Walden which were no longer available to children from the surrounding villages. Families may move out because they are no longer in the catchment area and this will inevitably alter the balance of the village. Councillor Walsh said that work was continuing to provide places and reminded people that the schools were responsible for their own catchment decisions.

Mr Davies mentioned the fact that the Broadband fibre was behind the predicted schedule. This causes increasing difficulties as lots more people work from home.

Mention was made of the bin on the side of the bus shelter not being replaced and it was agreed that this might be a task for the Highway Rangers.

The issue of road signs being not cleaned and with poor visibility due to overgrowing hedges was raised. Again, it was suggested that the Highway Rangers could clean the signs but hedges were the responsibility of the adjoining landowners. The signs on the Hill Road approach were particularly bad and the Parish Council would write to the landowners concerned.

The next point to be discussed was the effect of the expansion of housing in Saffron Walden without the accompanying improvements in infrastructure. Traffic queues more frequent and services stretched. Councillor Howell agreed that is an issue that we continue to get wrong in this country. Permission is granted for houses which are built and though a by-pass may come in the future it may create its own problems.

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 9.07 pm.

Date:

Chairman

