

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 13th MARCH 2012
AT 7.15P.M. IN NORTH WOOTTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL.**

Present: Councillors Armiger, Cox, Kerkham, Kilham, Malik, Milne, Morrison, Nurse, Pulsford-Harris and Towler.
In attendance: Mrs. E. Wymer (Clerk)

1. Apologies – None.

2. Chairman's Report –

Councillor Pulsford-Harris presented her report:

On the whole, we have had a good year with very little in the way of alarms and problems.

We still have ongoing problems with parking both at the school and Wootton Park and still some people are inconsiderate enough to block driveways and park on grass verges damaging them.

Outside the school, although the local PCSOs have monitored the problem from time to time, it does not seem to have improved to any great extent. People still park on both sides of the road narrowing what is already a narrow road and causing difficulties for traffic trying to get past. Parking continues down the road to the shops as well and I have noticed some cars parked less than 20 metres from the junction, which is in breach of the Highway Code and various traffic regulations.

Following the council elections last May, we welcomed Mr. Derek Cox onto the council and his support and enthusiasm have been very welcome.

The ongoing saga of the Incinerator is still with us and culminated in the disgraceful decision to award PFI funding despite the level of opposition in West Norfolk. Not only that, but 90% of Parish Councils in Norfolk also objected. The remaining District Councils, without ever consulting their residents voted in favour. A fine example of democracy in action and that decision has caused a lot of difficulties. It was good to see that Norwich City Council voted against the incinerator in West Norfolk.

Despite what he said at our open meeting, the leader of Norfolk County Council came out in favour of the Incinerator thus proving once and for all, that no politician can really be trusted. The Parish Council made representations to Caroline Spellman but obviously to no avail. The response was the usual civil service speak letter which said a lot but actually said nothing at all.

The village hall still has difficulties but appears to be getting more bookings which is good news. I am still doubtful as to whether it can continue in the long term as a viable option but we shall see. So much needs doing to it to bring it up to standard such as new heating, new kitchen, refurbish toilets, brick skin on the outer walls, false ceiling to prevent heat disappearing through the roof that costs would be over £100,000 although grants are available. The main problem is the lack of parking outside the hall and this was not addressed 20 years ago when the last refurbishment took place. We agreed to continue supporting the village hall until the end of the year, gave them a loan of £2000 and paid some of the bills for them.

The village is looking very attractive with the bulbs coming up on the greens. A tree on the green had to be cut down in the Autumn as it was diseased and would become unsafe. A new tree has been planted in its place and seems to be thriving. The oak trees down Manor Road are suffering with fungal infections and Country Grounds Maintenance who look after our trees, are dealing with this. Fortunately, it will not mean the chopping down of the trees as the damage can be repaired although the trees may have to be lopped. However, since writing this report we have found out that one tree does have to come down following an air spade root investigation.

Our finances remain in good shape thanks to the efforts of our Financial Officer Jim Milne ably assisted by Nigel Armiger.

The Picnic on the Park in June was very successful and according to the police estimate, over 4000 people attended. Parking was at the school and judging by the happy faces, everyone enjoyed themselves immensely. Thanks are due to Councillor Kerkham and his committee on Wootton Park Association for their very hard work in getting the Picnic under way. Of course, this year the Picnic will be very special as it is the Queen's Diamond Jubilee weekend and I am aware that planning for the Picnic has been under way since last year. I am sure it will be another highly successful day.

So far as law and order is concerned, we have had very little in the way of problems. We have had some petty damage and vandalism and children causing damage in Wootton Woods. The PCSOs agreed to step up patrols in the woods and the Howard Estate was informed.

Problems had been reported by Parishioners of difficulties with the mail deliveries which often did not appear for several days. This was taken up with Royal Mail who stated they would provide customers with one delivery a day but no guarantee of timing. But customers could sign up to Mail Collect and go to the local delivery office between 8.30 and closing time to collect their mail. The post box which was looking particularly shabby was repainted.

The Council also looked into the possibility of taking over the phone box by the green but that came to nothing due to the fact that the Borough Council would not give planning permission for change of use.

We then became aware in the late summer of proposals to site a Vodaphone mast outside the bungalow on St. Augustine's Way opposite the Tesco store. South Wootton was objecting to this and we did also. It would have been an eyesore and subject to vandalism. The police were also concerned and letters were written to the MP and the O2/Vodaphone consultants. Lord Howard was contacted and he agreed to try and find an alternative place for the mast so that it was not intrusive. He has come up with two suggestions, one down Gatehouse Lane and one in the woods at the bottom of Woodland Gardens. The council's preferred site would be Gatehouse Lane and Lord Howard was informed of that decision. He is now in negotiation with the mast consultants.

South Wootton Parish Council asked for our support to oppose a massive building project proposed for their parish. One area was just to the west of Hall Lane and the other at the top of Knights Hill which also then involved Castle Rising Parish Council. I attended a number of meetings at South Wootton, Castle Rising and at Lord Howard's where Bidwell's, the Land Agents were instructed to represent all 3 parish councils and prepare the submissions and objections in response. Those submissions were finalised in the autumn and sent to the Borough Council within the time limits. Bidwell's are now preparing the second load of responses on behalf of South Wootton Parish Council. We were then advised that 4 landowners down Gatehouse Lane had submitted representations to the Borough Council suggesting that they had 33 acres of land which could also be used for building houses. This was

immediately referred to Bidwell's and draft submissions sent to them together with an Archaeological report of the area prepared by John Smallwood. Lord Howard also sent a copy of a report by English Heritage. At the time of preparing this report, we still await to hear from Bidwell's. They have stated their intention to visit the area concerned. All of this is an ongoing saga and will doubtless occupy all 3 parish councils for many months to come if not longer.

Once again, we held our veterans lunch following the short service at the war memorial. This was well attended as usual but again numbers are dwindling at the lunch due to ill health and death amongst our veterans. It is very sad to see familiar faces missing each year. The Rector attended one our meetings and suggested that we should hold our service on the 11th November whenever that fell and otherwise attend the church service on the Sunday. This was put to our veterans and those who bring them along and overwhelmingly it was decided we should continue to hold our service at the war memorial on the Sunday. Many of the relatives work during the week and it would not have been possible for them to take a day off to bring their relatives along on a weekday.

It was decided by the council that as the Parish Plan was now 5 years old, the time had come to consider a fresh plan by consulting with all parishioners as to what they want from the village, create a living document which could be updated regularly and particularly, as circumstances changed. The consultation would be done on line as well as by paper going out with the newsletter.

Councillors Milne, Armiger and Towler have worked very hard on the questions and the questionnaire has now been distributed with a link to the online website.

We also supported South Wootton Parish Council and the Wootton Park Association in the bid for Wootton Park to be re designated a Queen Elizabeth 11 field. This is something dear to the Queen's heart and came originally from her. Consequently councils up and down the country are competing for the status of becoming such a field. Some money is available to help out.

In December Mrs. Angela Whiles gave a presentation on behalf of the Woottons Art Group which was struggling to find funds to continue to pay to use the Scout Hut for its meetings. The Council voted £100 towards their expenses. Mrs. Whiles indicated that the group would probably not meet during the extreme winter months but would hope to start again in April. Councillors felt this was a worthwhile cause to support. Councillor Milne proposed putting an advertisement on the council's website appealing for members for the Art Group. This was approved.

In January, the financial officer for the council reported on the budget figures for 2012/13 and recommendations for the forthcoming precept. After discussion, it was agreed that a 4% increase in the precept was the least we could do as costs generally had gone up and were continuing to rise. It was also agreed that as the Clerk had not received a pay rise in 2 years, there should be a 4% increase in her salary in recognition of all the hard work she does for the council.

Council also agreed to set aside a sum of money to cover our share of the costs of providing a skateboarding area in Wootton Park.

It was also decided that for the next few months, the council will meet at the school as the village hall is booked on a Tuesday evening. Meetings will commence at 7.15 instead of 7.30 as the caretaker needs to be away by 9 p.m.

Finally, Castle Rising is proposing a bonfire/beacon on the top of Knights Hill on Monday evening the 4th June. There will be fireworks and music and everyone is invited to come along and bring a picnic to help celebrate the Diamond Jubilee. This is only the second time in the history of our Islands that a monarch has achieved 60 years on the throne, the first being Queen Victoria, so it is a great cause for celebration and unlikely to be repeated in the next few lifetimes!

The beacon will be part of a chain to be lit across the country. I do hope everyone supporting the Picnic in the Park will also support the event on the 4th June. It will be a busy weekend for everyone but worth it.

Lastly, my thanks to all councillors for their continued support and to our clerk, without whom this council could not function as well as it does and to Dr. Rule for planting bulbs and flowers around the village.

That concludes my report.

3. Responsible Finance Officer's Report

Councillor Milne presented his report:

Our net expenditure to the end of the financial year 2011-12 is estimated to be £28,000, versus a budget of £26,040 and a precept for the year of £24,500. Spending in excess of the precept is being funded by a surplus of income over expenditure carried forward from previous years and investment income of £1042.

Our four main categories of expenditure are:

- Street Lighting energy and maintenance
- Wootton Park (shared with South Wootton Parish Council; we pay 37% of costs)
- Maintenance of our open spaces
- Administration costs, for our Parish Clerk, insurance and audit fees

Expenditure in excess of the budget was due to a 30% increase in energy costs for street lighting, the need to replace a lighting column at a cost of over £1500, and essential maintenance of trees. These excess costs were partially offset by zero expenditure on community support, for which £1750 was originally budgeted.

The Council had originally committed to financial support for the Village Hall until end of June 2011 but this was subsequently extended to the end of December, with financial support in the 2011-12 financial year in the form of a loan, repayable either from increased Village Hall income, or from winding up procedures should the hall be unable to continue. The amount spent on support for the hall was £1981. The Village Hall committee has informally indicated that this may be repaid over an extended period, which the Parish Council are happy to accept. However, the Council do not wish repayment of the loan to exacerbate any financial difficulties for the hall, and will be prepared to extend the period further if necessary.

Increased energy costs drove the need to raise the precept for 2012-13 to £25,500, though the budget for community support was reduced to enable the precept increase to be limited to 4%, recognising that

key community projects could be funded from reserves. The increase in energy costs alone was £1700, 7% of the 2011-12 precept.

Our reserves net of the loan to the Village Hall total £20,000, which is within the normal range for a Parish Council versus our annual expenditure, but towards the high end. A parishioner survey is seeking proposals for community investment which could provide value to the village at a time when development costs are relatively low.

In summary, our finances are sound, and our reserves continue to provide sufficient to address any future unexpected or capital projects.

That concludes my report.

4.Wootton Park Association Report

The Chairman of Wootton Park Recreational Association, Councillor W. Kerkham, gave his report:

The following represents the work we have done over the past year:-

We have agreed a new constitution to reflect the work that we currently undertake and have agreed the recreation park be called Queen Elizabeth II Wootton Park.

We have upgraded the small childrens' activity area significantly as well as adding adult keep-fit resources. A zip wire has been added to last year's equipment provision.

We have maintained the site, including removal of trees too close to houses and begun a programme of pond improvement. We are indebted to Ken Plummer, who is our Park Support Worker. The major tree removal and the mowing are undertaken by contractors.

The Committee is delighted that the childrens' activities are used by so many; the Football Club is a great success having about 150 young people playing on the site and the changing rooms are used to the full. Such success challenges our facilities and we have agreed to provide adequate car parking – in addition to the twenty spaces created during 2011.

In preparation for the Jubilee Picnic on the Park on June 2nd 2012, a sub-committee was set up to rehearse the Picnic on the Park for the Queen's Birthday in June 2011. Over 4,000 supported the event, the vast majority being local community members. As a dedicated committee we felt enthusiastically supported by local groups such as the WI, Scouts, Church, schools and local parishioners.

For future activities after June, the Lavender Hill Mob plan to put a large activity in the park in August and the Football Club usually have a fundraising weekend event.

The funds for the maintenance of the Park are met by the Parish Councils. The Woottons Football Committee pay annually and the Picnic made a profit. We are grateful to WRENS who subsidised the new equipment.

I would like to thank all members of the Management Committee for their commitment in caring for the Park. So many members have given so much time, that it would be wrong to select any names.

That concludes my report.

5.Trinity Hospital Report

The Trinity Hospital Representative, Councillor Kilham presented his report:

The almshouses were founded in the 16th century by Henry Howard to house the poor and needy ladies of Castle Rising, North Wootton and South Wootton.

There are two meetings per year, Founders Day in February and a summer meeting. The committee is overseeing the conversion of units at the present time to provide extra facilities for the ladies. This will mean that there will be 5 rooms rather than the previous 9. At the moment there are only three ladies in residence leaving two vacant and the committee is looking to secure new tenants to fill these rooms.

This year will be the 400th anniversary of the founding of the almshouses and it is hoped that a celebration will be held during the summer. An invite will be extended to the Queen when it is hoped she will be in residence at Sandringham.

The almshouses are open to the public if anyone wishes to look around.

That concludes my report.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 7.45 pm.

..... Chairman Date