

## **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 18TH MARCH 2014 AT 7.15 P.M. AT NORTH WOOTTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

Present: Border; Cox; Kilham; Malik; Merrey and Milne;  
In attendance: Mrs. E. Wymer ( Clerk)

**1. Apologies** – Councillors Crome, Edwards, Nurse, Pulsford-Harris, Smith and Mr. N. Narborough, Chairman of Wootton Park Association.

### **2. Chairman's Report**

The chairman, Councillor J. Milne presented his report:

The last year has been one of comparative stability for the Parish Council, with progress on several fronts but limited innovation. I was disappointed that Councillor Nigel Armiger resigned as councillor and finance officer during the year, and I'd like to thank him for his significant contribution to the council during his membership. However, the Council is now at its full strength of twelve, thanks to new councillors Will Border (who joined in July 2013) and Bernie Smith (who joined in January this year). The chairman is still also acting as finance officer, as no councillor was prepared to do this after Councillor Armiger's resignation. This is not a sustainable arrangement. Hopefully, therefore, one of our councillors will consider taking on this role for 2014-15.

The Skip Hire business operating in Meadow Close continued to require attention, but I'm pleased to say that following an enforcement order issued by King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council, and an unsuccessful appeal by the proprietor to the planning inspectorate, the business is now formally banned from operating from Meadow Close. However, there have already been breaches of the enforcement order, which have been reported to the Borough Council. It is possible that further action will be required.

As in past years, the management of Wootton Park took up a considerable proportion of council time, and continued to generate controversy. The park committee is now fully established, with improved processes agreed by all parties, and Wendy Border has joined as parishioner representative for North Wootton. Efforts to find an external chairman have not been successful, and Mike Narborough continues to energetically chair the group. There have been some successes, for example:

- A formal set of criteria for hiring out the park for outside events has been agreed
- The football club have signed a formal contract for their use of the club, kindly drafted by Councillor Pulsford-Harris
- An issue around the chemicals used for white lining was resolved
- The car park was resurfaced, and the pavilion was reroofed, the latter being 100% externally funded
- The new skate ramp was installed and formally opened, and has proved very popular
- An apprentice was taken on to help with park maintenance, and is proving very productive

However, car parking during football matches remains a constant issue, along with the continued presence of the goal posts. We expect the latter to be shortly resolved, but a permanent solution to car parking is long overdue, and we will need to renew efforts this year to find and fund an appropriate approach, in partnership with South Wootton Parish Council. Councillor Crome has suggested that North Wootton school is approached regarding using their car park, and I hope that this initiative

proves successful, and removes or reduces the problem of irresponsible street parking for North and South Wootton residents.

We were all pleased that to celebrate the Queen's diamond jubilee, the park is now formally known as Queen Elizabeth II Fields in Trust Wootton Park, following the signature of Field in Trust documentation in April last year.

Councillor Pulsford-Harris continued to focus on working with our fellow parish councils to respond to development proposals with the aim of making them proportional in scale and location to our infrastructure, services and visual environment. There has been significant success, with the main development proposals being reduced in size. For example, the proposed number of dwellings in the land off Hall Lane has been reduced from 1,000 to 300. However, responding to development proposals will be a continuing challenge until the final Local Development Framework is agreed.

We were able to make some cosmetic improvements in the village during the year, including renovating and repainting the village sign, which I think now looks very attractive, and renovating the council notice boards

I'm pleased to say that the parish continues to enjoy a low level of crime, down 6% from last year. Although our nominated police representative, PC Heather Whitmore, has proved helpful and responsive, it is disappointing that we do not now have a dedicated PCSO due to lack of resources, with a PCSO being shared with Dersingham and Hunstanton. Speeding through the village continues to be a concern, and following a meeting I had with the one of the County Council's highway engineers, we have arranged to have SAMS – Speed Awareness Monitors, which display the speed at which a vehicle is travelling, installed in the village for a temporary period. This will enable us to collect data and assess the level of speeding, and then consider whether to install permanent SAMS.

We were pleased to welcome Lord Howard, our local Borough Councillor, to our October Parish Council meeting, though I was personally unable to attend. This gave parishioners the opportunity to raise any issues they wished with Lord Howard, though no significant problems or opportunities were identified. We were also grateful that our new County Councillor, Jason Law, was able to attend on more than one occasion.

On Remembrance Sunday, we repeated last year's arrangements of a combined council and church ceremony at the war memorial, followed by a church service. Both the war memorial and the church were very well attended, and I'm sure that this will now be an annual event.

I can't complete my report without mentioning the proposed waste incinerator at Saddlebow. Our joint submission with several other parish councils was put to the public enquiry last year, arguing against the proposal. There is, as yet, no conclusion on the future of this plan, with the County Council remaining adamant that it should go ahead, opponents putting forward lower cost alternatives that would in theory more than offset cancellation costs of the Cory Wheelabator contract, and as yet no announcement of the public enquiry's conclusion or the Secretary of State's decision. We await the outcome with interest.

Finally, thanks to my fellow councillors for their support during the year, and I look forward to the coming year when hopefully we can quickly resolve the remaining Wootton park issues, and focus our energies on other improvements to our parish.

That concludes my report.

### **3. Responsible Finance Officer's Report**

The Responsible Finance Officer, Councillor J. Milne gave his report:

Our net expenditure to the end of the financial year 2013-14 is estimated to be £28,100, versus a budget of £29,629 and a precept for the year of £30,000 including a Council Tax Support Grant of £880. In addition, we contributed a net £2,833 to the new skate ramp, which we had previously agreed would come from reserves. Because of the under-spend on routine costs versus our precept, and additional income from the interest payment on our reserve account, the net reduction in reserves was only £600 versus an original forecast of £3,000.

Most of our costs were as budgeted, though there were a few one-off exceptions. Wootton Park gross costs were significantly higher than last year due to the cost of the skate ramp, the need to clear the dyke of silt and debris, and basic resurfacing of the car park, with our share of these three costs coming to £3150. A new lighting column cost £1350, almost double our lighting maintenance budget. The cost of renovating the village sign and notice boards came to just over £1,000; and we paid £750 for planning consultants to help us respond to the excessive development proposals in the draft Local Development Framework. But these costs were offset by savings in other areas enabling us to meet our budget.

The council debated my recommendation to set the precept for 2014-15 at a level which would keep the band D charge unchanged from 2013-14 i.e. £29,434 plus a Council Tax Support Grant (CTSG) of £783, a total of £30,217. However, members felt that this was insufficient to meet increasing costs, and voted to increase the precept to £30,576, which together with the CTSG will take our income from the Borough Council to £31,359. However, it should be noted that this increase represents just 2.6p per week for a band D property, and is equivalent in total to the cost re replacing just one of our 161 ageing lighting columns.

We start the new financial year with reserves of £27.5 thousand pounds equivalent to 8 months of 2013-14 gross expenditure, at around the midpoint of the recommended normal range for a Parish Council of 3-12 months of gross expenditure

Our finances remain sound, and our reserves are sufficient to address any future unexpected or capital projects.

That concludes my report.

### **4. Wootton Park Association Report**

The chairman of Wootton Park Association, Mr. M. Narborough, had provided the Clerk with his report:

There is nothing controversial which is outstanding. As you know the Annual General Meeting for Wootton Park Association is on 28<sup>th</sup> March and Mr. L. Tite, chairman of the Football Club will attend and give an update with reference to the goalpost saga. Mr. Tite says that he has been touch with a football club at Wisbech St. Mary and they are going to look at some goalposts.

Wootton Park Association have, over the last year, completed the repairs to the pavilion and showers, the dykes have been cleared, the car park reshingled and the skate park installed but the parking outside the park is out of our hands and will go on until a suitable solution is found.

The trees will be looked after when needed, the 3 year agreement on grasscutting has been signed and there is nothing else outstanding.

That concludes my report.

## **5. Village Hall Report**

The Parish Council representative, Councillor Kilham, gave his report:

The Village Hall lost its very lucrative booking by the Lavendar Hill Mob at the end of June 2013 as they needed bigger premises in which to rehearse. The Gilbert & Sullivan Society continue to use the hall.

The Management Committee have several bookings by weekly classes for babies and small children but these are financially small earners. There are no other large hirers in the pipeline.

Income just about covers expenditure with a small amount in reserves which could last for three months.

A new University student was taken on as cleaner when the previous one left and is proving very thorough. The student's mother covers when away at university.

New heaters have been provided for the ladies cloakroom and committee room and small electrical work undertaken.

The old heaters in the hall have been repaired and three now working.

That concludes my report.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.31pm.

..... Chairman ..... Date