

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 17TH MARCH 2015 AT 7.15 PM AT NORTH WOOTTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Present: Councillors Border; Cox; Duval; Edwards; Malik; Merrey and Pulsford-Harris
In attendance: Mrs. E. Wymer (Clerk)

1. Apologies – Councillor Marshall-Grint.

2. Chairman's Report -

The Chairman, Councillor D. Pulsford-Harris started by presenting the previous chairman's report:

Ex-Chairman, Mr. J. Milne's Report:

The new Council year opened with a continuing focus on Wootton Park, and in particular the future arrangements for goal posts, which have stubbornly remained in place for many months despite in theory being removable. I was pleased that we were at last able to agree a solution and funding with South Wootton Parish Council and the Football Club. The old posts were removed and the holes filled in pending installation of replacement lockable inserts.

All councillors were concerned at the proposals to relocate the Post Office to Dawnay Avenue, and agreed that since the existing Post Office would certainly close, a better solution would be to relocate it to the Talking Heads shop. We submitted a feedback letter to the Post Office setting out our objections to their proposal, and delivered flyers to every house in the parish encouraging residents to respond, which many did. It was very satisfying to hear subsequently that Talking Heads would indeed be the new location, due, according to the Lynn News, to “people power”.

Due to relocation outside the parish, in May I had to resign as a chairman and as a councillor. I enjoyed my period on the parish council, as a council member, as responsible finance officer, and as chairman. I would like to think that I left the council in good shape, though there remain a number of continuing challenges – car parking in Wootton Park on football days; the resignation of Councillor Edwards, who will be a great loss to the council; continuing pressure to expand housing development; village hall funding; and upward pressure on costs. I wish my successor and the council well.

I cannot close without a public thank you to our excellent parish clerk, Elaine Wymer, whose hard work and great support have been of inestimable value. I wish Elaine all the best in her upcoming retirement.

Chairman, Councillor Pulsford-Harris' Report:

Firstly, my sincere thanks to ex Councillor Jim Milne for his hard work for the Parish Council. He has been a great asset not just as Chairman for nearly 18 months but also as Financial Officer and a Councillor. As he has moved out of the area, he could not continue as a parish councillor and he will be much missed. He resigned at the end of the May parish council meeting. Elections took place but the chair was left vacant and deferred to the next meeting. I agreed to

come back in as Chair from the June meeting with help from councillors as I have a very busy time ahead as I will be District Governor of Rotary District 1080 from 1st July 2015. The District covers almost the whole of East Anglia.

In June Lord Howard and I drove around the village to earmark some sites suitable for a cemetery. We found two. The Land Agent costed it out and it would be £8000 to purchase an acre which would last 90 years plus a premium as the land use would be changed from agricultural to effectively garden land. The premium we found would be in the region of £40,000 plus the cost of landscaping the ground which a ball park figure gave as £50,000. This is something the parish council simply cannot afford. Lord Howard suggested we approach the Rector again about re using old graves but that was turned down flat. South Wootton Parish Council kindly gave us a list of the Cemetery Fees charged there but they would nowhere near cover the costs involved. Regretfully we had to put the idea onto the back burner although I contacted the two Heritage Lottery Funds to see if they could assist with a grant but it was not the sort of thing they would support. We also considered reducing our requirement to half an acre but the costs involved were still out of our range.

We continued to have correspondence with the Ramblers Association who complained of locked gates and no access to “open land”. Lord Howard had already put a stile in place to allow access to the marshes. A lot of the problem which led to locked gates was irresponsible walkers leaving gates open and animals straying. In the winter shooting takes place over the estate and it is vital that walkers and others do not stray onto land which is being overshot.

Now the Association is trying to open a path which has not been in use for more than 40 years and Lord Howard is looking at a diversion of the old path which has long since fallen into the stream. This will be looked at in detail after the election in May.

We have had confirmation that Talking Heads will be the site of the new Post Office. I have been in correspondence with the landlords of the car park about the disgraceful state of it which came to a head when one of our parishioners tripped and fell and broke a bone in her foot. South Wootton PC have also lent their support. The landlords say they are waiting to appoint a contractor to do the work – this has been the excuse for some months. It is not rocket science and appointing a contractor surely cannot take that long. The Parish Council also wrote to the owner of Talking Heads to confirm our support.

We have had some vandalism in the village notably to one of our notice boards opposite the bus shelter. No doubt the vandals get some satisfaction from destroying other people’s property, overturning bins, taking tiles off the bus shelter roof, removing two litter bins and setting light to them. This all adds to the expense which the council has to pay for. We also had complaints of assault, an arrest for public disorder, damage to a vehicle, speeding, theft and reports of anti-social behaviour. Speeding in our village continues to be a problem. The entire village is 30mph limit and drivers should abide by it. After all, if a child runs out, a driver doing 30 plus has no chance of avoiding that child. Does anyone really want that on their conscience? Burglaries had taken place in the village over Christmas and New Year. Enquiries are still ongoing and no arrests made as yet.

The inconsiderate parking around our school continues to exercise the police and a joint plan was drawn up in June to deal with this. The traffic Wardens and police do patrol from time to time

and issue advice to drivers parked outside the school. Persistent cases are issued with a fine. Because of the problems with parking and some dangerous parking was reported to the police at Christmas, we asked the children at the school to design posters illustrating the problems. This has now been done and the council chose the two best ones at the March meeting. Because we were so impressed with the posters we decided to award book tokens of £10 each to the two best ones, and £5 each for the runners up. These will be presented at a future assembly.

The Headmaster has also offered the children's help as part of their community involvement with planting out bulbs in various places in the village. Formerly Dr. Rule did this but he has now retired. The council will obtain bulbs from the borough council and arrangements made for a working party with the children to clean up the previously planted areas and put in new bulbs.

Freebridge Housing contacted the Parish Council in July 2014 to inform us that 26 houses would be demolished in Priory Road, the residents moved and new properties including flats would eventually be built. This caused a lot of distress to the residents who had been visited by a member of staff from Freebridge. We contacted Freebridge to ask for an update of their plans and they promised to keep us informed. It is likely to take 18 months to 2 years before the new site is ready for occupation. We have now seen some of the plans and Freebridge are waiting for planning permission to get going.

In September our clerk Elaine advised the council she would be retiring at the end of March 2015. She had been clerk for 17 plus years and we could not have managed without her and she will be much missed. Wheels were set in motion to advertise for a new clerk. We had a number of applications and called 6 people for interview. All interviewees were of the highest calibre and we eventually appointed Mrs. Rachel Curtis who is also clerk to the North Runcton Parish Council. Very good references were received for her. She has been working with Elaine and will officially take over on the 1st April 2015.

There continued to be problems with Wootton Park and the Football club and several councillors attended a meeting. A number of suggestions were put forward for improving the finances of the Association. This is still ongoing but one of the proposals is for more events to take place on the park and for the football club to contribute towards the cost of the electricity and other utilities they use. There will be another Picnic on the Park in June 2015 to coincide with the football club's 30th anniversary.

The village hall continues to suffer from lack of bookings. It costs £7000 to run the hall each year and their income was only £3500. One of their biggest users has now moved on so they have lost what was a very regular source of income. The hall is available for children's parties, wedding receptions, birthdays etc. and can also be set up for quizzes, jumble sales etc. I would urge all parishioners to consider using the village hall. Without income, the village hall will close which will be a loss to the community as it has been in existence since 1937. Unfortunately, there is very little parking available which is one of the main causes of problems with bookings. But with parishioners using the hall, surely they do not need a car to get there?

We continue to monitor the lighting in the village with the help of Westcotec. Parishioners should continue to report problems to the Clerk who will arrange repairs or replacements with the company concerned.

The Remembrance Service was well attended in November and conducted by Rev. Nash both at the War Memorial and in the Church. Councillor Malik laid the wreath on behalf of the Parish Council. Thanks go to Councillor and Mrs. Border for cleaning up the area around the Pyramid and cleaning the Pyramid itself plus tidying up the area around the War Memorial. They also continue to distribute the parish newsletter to every house in the village and the council is very grateful to them for doing so.

We then received notification from the Borough Council that matters relating to building at Knights Hill and Hall Lane, South Wootton were once more on the council planning agenda. South Wootton PC arranged for the Land Agents, Bidwell's to update their earlier reports and submit them to the borough council. Effectively the land agents are saying that of the 42 hectares to the west of Hall Lane, only 21 hectares are appropriate for building as the extreme west of the area is liable to flood. In fact the whole area is the river flood plain. With regard to Knights Hill, yet again there is no suggestion of any infrastructure being put in place such as shops, doctors' surgery, school etc. Any entrance and exit would be directly onto Knights Hill itself which will cause endless problems with traffic. We await the response from the Borough Council.

The Community Rangers continue to visit the village and we advise them of any problems such as pot holes so they can arrange to get that sorted. If any parishioner notices a problem then please advise the clerk so it can be dealt with.

Council finances are healthy thanks to Councillor Border who oversees it all. The internal auditor approved the accounts and the external auditor confirmed that approval. We increased the precept by 2.6p per week for a Band D property to cover the year 2014/15. This together with the Council Tax Support Grant we receive which had in fact been reduced, the council had sufficient funds to continue to operate. Not many parishioners realise that all the street lights in the village are owned by the parish council and we pay for all repairs and replacements.

Now that spring is almost upon us the village is looking very well. The daffodils and snowdrops make a wonderful picture on the village green and tulips which Dr. Rule planted are now showing themselves. Parishioners are taking good care of gardens which all look so pretty with all the spring flowers coming up. We are fortunate to live in a beautiful village with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Woods all around us. We need to take care of our environment so that future generations can benefit from it and the lovely walks we all enjoy.

Finally, at the March Parish Council meeting, we presented our retiring Clerk Elaine with a set of 6 crystal champagne flutes plus a bottle of sparkling wine to go with them, a bouquet of flowers and a card. The last meeting Elaine will attend will be this one – the annual general meeting. We all wish her well in her retirement and sincere thanks go to her for all her work for the council over the last 17 or so years. We formally welcomed Rachel the new clerk to the meeting and she was introduced to everyone present. Her details for contact are on the web site and also in the newsletter. I am sure everyone will make her feel at home and I look forward to working with her in the future

That concludes my report.

3. Responsible Finance Officer's Report -

The Responsible Finance Officer, Councillor W. Border, presented his report:

Our net expenditure to the end of the financial year 2014-2015 is estimated to be £32083.59 versus a budget of £30,000. We set the precept for the year at £31,359 which included a Council Tax Grant of £783. So the expenditure is only £724.59 above the precept that was set. Therefore we have not had to use too much from our reserve.

Most of the costs were as budgeted, though there were few unexpected one off costs like a replacement lamp post that was replaced due to a car accident. Reconnection of the post came in at £1227.60. Wootton Park gross costs were higher than budgeted for, as there has been a significant amount of tree pruning & felling (WPA budgeted £2000 and the actual spend on this was £3050) Our contribution to the WPA for 2014-2015 was £5176.01

The Council debated the precept for 2015-16 and it was agreed that we should ask for a precept of £32,790 which includes a Council Tax Grant of £685. This was passed as acceptable due to the ongoing costs to replacing our ageing street lights and the associated costs that we receive from the Wootton Park Association

We start the new financial year with reserves of over £32,000 this is equivalent to 12 months of the 2014-15 gross expenditure. This is at the higher end point of the recommended normal range for a Parish Council Reserve (between 3-12 months gross expenditure)

I therefore conclude that our finances remain sound, and our reserves are sufficient to address any future unexpected or capital projects.

That concludes my report.

4. Wootton Park Report -

In the absence of the Chairman of Wootton Park Association, the Clerk read out notes taken at the Association's Annual General Meeting on 24th February 2015.

Both Park Support Workers have retired and the ex-apprentice (Ryan) appointed to work both Wootton Park and as South Wootton Parish Council's handyman. He will be on the park during afternoons.

Election of officers:

Chairman – Mr. M. Narborough (SWPC)

Vice-Chairman – Mr. W.Border (NWPC)

Treasurer – to be carried out by South Wootton Parish Council clerk as they hold the financial records

Secretary – Ms. S. Akred

Trustees:

Mr. M. Narborough and Mrs. T. Cornwell from SWPC
Mrs. D. Pulsford-Harris and Mr. W. Border from NWPC
There does not need to be a treasurer.

Trees:

Mr. Narborough will inspect any trees overhanging residents' gardens reported to him by Parish Councils. If required residents may do this themselves but failing that he will inform Wootton Park Association and the Parish Councils will decide if they wish to pay.

Play equipment inspection:

It was noted that the surface of bark under the monkey bars is at medium risk. To replace with safety grass would cost between £1950 - £2768 (3 quotes obtained). Agreed that as this is only medium risk the surface should be replaced with new bark.

Diana Gotts – Pond

Applying for grant from Norfolk Coastal Partnership to clear and 'mash' garden, trim trees, put up bird/bat boxes, octagonal picnic table with information panel (South Wootton Parish Council will pay for the panel). They will go into schools to talk to children.

Warning signs have gone up near dyke.

Football Club:

Celebrating 30 years and 'Picnic on Park' being organised. (It was thought to be a football festival and it had not been made clear to Wootton Park Association that it was to be such a big event and it is the week before South Wootton Fete but too late to do anything about it now). In future the Football Club should approach Wootton Park Association before undertaking such a big event. Mrs. B. Nurse and Mrs. A. Howard are acting as 'consultants' with contacts etc. but Football Club are running it. Proceeds will be split 50/50 between Football Club and Wootton Park Association.

Draft criteria for events on the park which North Wootton Parish Council's previous chairman had put together still hasn't been agreed by BC although the clerk has been chasing. Borough Councillor, Mrs. Elizabeth Nockolds will follow up. This really needs to be in place before Picnic.

Football Club have agreed to pay their share of running costs for water, electricity and will pay an extra £250 on top of the £950 as from this September making it £1,200.

Grant for rolling goalposts fell through. They will look at other means.

Next meeting Tuesday, 28th April at 7 pm.

That concludes this report.

5. Village Hall/Trinity Hospital Report -

In the absence of Councillor Kilham, the Village Hall/Trinity Hospital representative, the

Chairman gave a brief resume following on from her Chairman's report:

The village hall is only just keeping its head above water financially and serious consideration may have to be given to closing the hall due to lack of finances.

In the past North Wootton Parish Council had made them a loan which was repaid but in the event of closure the hall would be handed over to the Parish Council and sold.

Residents should support the village hall or they will lose it.

6. B.C., Lord G. Howard – Unfortunately, Lord Howard was unable to attend due to commitments at The House of Lords leading up to the General Election in May.

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

..... Chairman Date