

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 29 April 2008 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall Witcham

Present: Mr D A Bamforth
Mrs S J Bell – Clerk
27 members of the public

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Allistair Berry (Parish Councillor) and Mrs Sheila Saberton (Dominoes)

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 24 April 2007 were circulated. They were approved and signed by the Chairman. Proposed Mr Don Saberton, seconded Mr Nigel Pate and agreed unanimously.

Matters Arising

Droves. Alison Finn asked about the current rights of way status on Bury Road. The Chairman advised that the County Council had not wanted to amend the current 'byway' status to restrict use.

COMMUNITY POLICING

PC K Humble was not present and so this item was deferred. The Chairman moved to item 8, as below:

ANNUAL REPORTS FROM VILLAGE GROUPS

Dominoes. Mrs Saberton's report was read to the meeting by the Chairman. The Group met April to October and although attendance was good, numbers tended to decline. £200 had been donated to the Church for the heating fund.

Archive Group. Mr W Perry reported that the website was developing with local groups under sponsorship from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Cambridgeshire Libraries Archives and Information Service. Anyone in the village could apply to enter material. In June, the Mepal and Witcham Archive Groups worked together and took material into the Mepal and Witcham Primary School and the children followed up by producing pictures for the archives of present day village life. A £1700 grant from Communities and Voluntary Forum Eastern Region had enabled the group to buy a laptop, digital camera and recording equipment for use by the village and had been used by the Camera Club and the Cricket Club. Diane Scotting was collecting and collating material to put on the website, eg photographs or recorded stories of events or happenings in the village past or present. New material and new members always very welcome. www.ccan.co.uk

Cricket Club. Mr Nigel Pate reported on progress of the two teams and was pleased younger players were coming up. The cricket nets were well used and appreciated, however, in the last few days some youngsters had been seen climbing on the equipment and this caused concern.

Bowls Club. Mrs Sharon Richardson reported on the activities of the two teams which were well supported and she was pleased that youngsters were also joining.

Witcham Website. Mr John Wells reported that use of the website was increasing significantly and appealed for more content. Email addresses linked to the website were available. There had been enquiries from the USA regarding World Peashooting Championship entries and genealogy enquiries. Mrs Bryant thanked Mr Wells for the prompt response from queries she had raised via the website.

Neighbourhood Watch. Mrs Diane Scotting reported that crime included a couple of house burglaries and some vandalism over the year. Recently mud had been spread around the bus shelter walls and seat, which she had cleaned off earlier in the day. She urged people to report any suspicious vehicles or people directly to the police and recommended joining the e-Cops for information about what was happening in the area thus enabling people to be more vigilant and prepared.

Scallywags Playgroup. Mrs Catherine Hill advised that new people had taken on responsibility for running the group and attendance had been low but was picking up. The group hoped to sort out equipment to sell some and replace with newer up-to-date pieces, and to hold some funds so that when attendance dipped reserves would be available to cover running expenses to keep it going.

East Cambs District Council. Anna Bailey gave a report on activities she had been involved with since becoming District Councillor for the Downham Parishes in May last year:

Ely Master Plan – she urged everyone to complete the consultation questionnaire. East Cambridgeshire had to grow considerably to meet Government housing targets over the next 20 years; failure to meet the targets would

ANNUAL REPORTS FROM VILLAGE GROUPS (cont)

result in severe financial penalties. The Masterplan aimed to manage growth and provide guidance for sustainability, ie high quality housing and infrastructure, and economic and social development. Cambridgeshire Horizons had been awarded £685,000 to take planning process forward.

Neighbourhood Panels, an innovative approach, comprised all sorts of organisations and representatives from the Parish, District and County Council. It met 4 times a year to identify and prioritise issues of concern within an area, eg off-road vehicles cutting up byways, speeding through villages, anti-social behaviour.

Refuse Collections. Black bag collections to continue with weekly collection, and the fortnightly recycling collections extended to include kerbside plastics collection.

Mereham Development. The Public Inquiry had been completed and the Inspector was expected to now send in his report and recommendations to Hazel Blears, central Government, and her decision was expected in the Autumn. Great concern about road congestion and strong belief it would not deliver local jobs or affordable housing. It took away vast areas of prime agricultural land in an open and rural fen landscape.

Post Offices. Anna pledged to fight to keep local Post Offices open. However, she felt Post Offices would have to be creative about how and what services they wanted to offer.

The Maltings. Extensive repairs to roof and refurbishment were about to start. She said the Maltings had been given to the people of Ely by the brewery for use as a community facility by people across the District. New operators were sought and it should be kept for the benefit of the local community.

Leisure Facilities Study. Community Services Committee was examining needs of residents for new leisure facilities, eg Paradise pool looked tired and was too small. Professional study had been undertaken and larger facilities including new pool, indoor racket sports and gym facilities were needed. ECDC had purchased a large piece of land on Downham Road (EOSA site) where some sports were already played and it was hoped these newer facilities could be set up there too.

ADeC. It had been a very difficult decision but ECDC had had to cut the funding. However, ADeC had bounced back, and plans included the submission of a bid to run The Maltings, and convert the cottage next door to provide gallery space and a café which would open out on to Jubilee Gardens. The cinema would definitely continue to be run by ADeC. It would continue to help and advise local, often small, organisations to put on events etc.

Cambridgeshire County Council – Mr Philip Read reported that on re-election to the County Council last year he had been made Chairman of the County Development Control Committee again and also served on the Northstowe Development Joint Committee. He had attended courses on various environmental matters, including SUDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) and energy generation systems which link in with planning and development issues.

He was aware of concerns regarding traffic and HCVs but said it was difficult to resolve without moving the problem from one place to another, especially as the Government was making very little money available for major road programmes. Upgrading of A14 was top priority.

The Guided Bus was progressing. £5,000,000 or so had been included in the bid to cover the cost of initial work and planning, and the remainder would come from Government and developer contributions. He believed the cost should not fall on the ratepayer.

Highway Engineers now favour traffic lights responsive to vehicle movements as a solution for dangerous junctions. One was about to be installed at Goosetree junction near March and he had asked for Witcham Toll to be reviewed. He was still pressing for the cycleway/footpath link between Witcham Toll and Wentworth crossroads.

The Chairman thanked Mr Read who then left the meeting to attend the Annual Parish Meeting at Sutton.

East Cambs District Council. Mr Tony Goodge reported on his work since election last May. In addition to the issues outlined by his colleague, Anna Bailey, he served on the JAC and some Scrutiny Panels. As a member of the Environment and Transport Committee he had been involved in setting up the new parking arrangements in Ely which was proving to be successful. £1m had been borrowed for the scheme on a 25-year loan. The new waste contract was underway, however, due to the higher than expected volume of plastics waste there had been some problems in making all the collections on the due date but measures were to be implemented to resolve this problem.

CHAIRMANS REPORT

The Chairman reported that at the May elections only 3 members, David Saberton, Chris Watson and himself had been elected and for the first time in many years a by-election had been required. In spite of a low turnout the Council was pleased to welcome Allistair Berry, Karl Mackender and Jackie Anderson, a strong and well functioning team.

The new Groundsman had been appointed and the Council was very pleased with the work done around the village. The District Council would provide dog-waste bins and bag dispensers for the Parish Council. The replacement streetlight had been erected at the bottom of Headley's Lane.

The Council had supported the Cambridgeshire Youth Service for facilities for youngsters. Unfortunately in recent months there had been episodes of vandalism around the recreation ground. Witnesses were urged to contact the police direct. Progress continued on provision of additional car parking spaces at the village hall. The cemetery gates had been refurbished and were soon to be re-hung.

The Countryside Access Team at the County Council had been working on the droves to open them to all traffic. The work had been much more severe than Witcham Parish Council had wanted and now required further attention and careful management. The Blackthorn was growing back. There were fears that the damage caused was detrimental for wildlife and it certainly had not deterred damage by 4-wheel drive enthusiasts, although it was hoped that the newly installed winter season locked gate system would improve things.

The Council was still bidding for a scheme to complete the cycle way between Witcham Toll and Wentworth and a new lease was being negotiated at £50 per annum index linked for the electric sub-station on the recreation ground. A donation had been made to Citizen's Advice Bureau and it was noted that the District Council had cut their contribution.

A large part of the Council's work involved participation in the consultation processes with the District and County Councils and at national planning and Government levels. Allistair Berry represented the Council on the new Neighbourhood Panels as previously mentioned. The Heavy Commercial Vehicles group, which comprised local villages, including Sutton and Earith, had been reviewing problems to set up strategies to deal with HCV traffic currently using village roads as a route, eg gravel lorries. Planning applications had been submitted for a data centre at the Elean Business Park, and of particular concern was the proposal for the adjoining eco-village.

The Council had joined the Public Rights of Way (P3) scheme which offered local control to the parish to maintain the rights of way. The Council hoped to install more gates and stiles between The Slade and Park Lane, ie the dog walking area.

Alison Finn advised that not all landowners had been given keys to the gates to the droves. Chairman suggested she contacted County Councillor P Read. Mr R Finn advised that the County Council claimed to the MP that the Parish Council was now happy with the clearance of the droves. Chairman suggested this issue be reviewed at a meeting of the Parish Council and a joint meeting be convened between landowners, Parish and County Councillors. District Councillor T Goodge undertook to pursue enquiries.

The Chairman had received details of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biological Records Centre Pond Survey and asked for help to undertake a detailed summary of ponds in the parish.

The full Annual Report and summary of accounts would be circulated shortly.

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS 2007/8

The summary had been previously circulated and was explained by the Chairman. Total income including £9,000 precept, grants for Clerks training (£49), additional hours for the Quality Parish Council status (£189), and Parish Plan (final instalment £750) was £12,087. Total expenditure was £12,227 including Parish Plan (£2,095). Balance to carry forward was £26,296, which of course, included funds set aside over recent years for improvements at Witcham Village Hall and cemetery.

2008/9 PRECEPT

The precept had been increased to £10,000. This included £1,000 for Youth services and funding to carry out improvements identified in the Parish Plan.

ANY OTHER PARISH BUSINESS

Mrs C Bryant raised the issue of a constant humming noise which came from the Elean Business Park and was disruptive to people living at Westway Place. Other residents confirmed that they had heard the noise in other parts of the village, eg The Slade and High Street. Chairman said he would refer this to the Parish Council and it was a matter for ECDC Environmental Health Officers to investigate.

Mrs D Scotting reported overgrown Elder bushes by the interpretation and notice boards at the Crossroads.

Chairman reported complaints from Coveney/Wardy Hill regarding noise from model aeroplanes and loudspeaker system at the rear of the village. No members present had concerns.

Mrs C Hill requested additional signs for the recreation ground to remind people not to take their dogs on to the field. There was also reports that from time to time horses were apparently still using the field on the dog walk route in the field between The Slade and Park Lane. The Council had investigated this previously.

There being no further business the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.50pm.

Chairman.....

Dated

Approved 14Apr09