

Weston under Wetherley Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting

Wednesday 22nd May 2013

Weston under Wetherley Village Hall 7 pm

Present: Cllr Miss B Roberts(Chairman)

Cllr Mrs S Chambers

Cllr Mr P Haine

Cllr Mrs T McAllan

Mrs M Norman (Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer)

Also present: Cllr Wallace Redford and 22 members of the public

1	<p>Welcome from the Chairman</p> <p>The Chairman of Weston Parish Council, Cllr Beth Roberts, welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p>
2	<p>Apologies</p> <p>Apologies were received from Cllrs John Hammon and Norman Pratt</p>
3	<p>Approval of the minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting 23rd May 2012</p> <p>The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting were unanimously agreed as an accurate record of the proceedings and were signed by the Chairman.</p>
4	<p>Matters arising from the last meeting</p> <p>There were no matters arising.</p>
5	<p>Chairman's summary of the year.</p> <p>The Chairman said as follows: "This has been an interesting year for Weston Parish Council. As some of you may know, we began the year with only three councillors, including myself, who had only just recently joined the Council. In January this year we welcomed three new elected Councillors; Peter Haine, Sue Chambers and Tracy McAllan. All three have been</p>
6	<p>brilliant additions to the Council and I am personally grateful for their hard work to date.</p> <p>Regarding the Chairmanship of the Parish Council, this was vacant until I was elected Chairman in January. Previously Cllr Mobbs had been standing in on a meeting by meeting basis. The Council expresses its thanks to Cllr Mobbs. The Chairman is elected annually, usually in May, and I can report I was honoured to have been nominated as Chairman for another year last week; consequently I am delighted to give you this report.</p>

Maria Norman, the Council's clerk, joined us last year. She has been a fantastic asset to this council and we are so very grateful for all her efforts.

It is brilliant news to hear that in the space of a year the Parish Plan Committee have made so much progress and the committee should be congratulated on this achievement. I look forward to hearing the full update from Cllr Haine later on in the meeting.

The Parish Plan Committee and the Parish Council are now in a good position to liaise with each other in a constructive manner to ensure that the needs and wishes of residents are met, in so far as is possible.

Traffic calming measures have already been implemented with the views expressed in the Parish Plan Questionnaire being used in the discussions held with the County Council regarding the traffic calming plans. This resulted in improved road signage and no road narrowing chicane. The council are chasing up the promised electronic speed warning signs.

We are also actively encouraging natural habitats within the village, to promote wildlife and protect some of our native species. This work is being undertaken in conjunction with advice from the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and the County Council.

The Parish Council has also established links with the Warwick Rural East Community Forum, an organisation aimed at helping local communities to develop and prosper. We hope to have a speaker from the Forum at one of our next Parish Council meetings. She will be in a position to advise on funding opportunities available for groups.

It seems appropriate at this time to also mention the jubilee event that was held last year. This was an extremely successful event, enjoyed by many. Thanks go to the organisers for their efforts.

At the last Annual Parish Meeting there was some query at the level of the precept. I am pleased to say that the Parish Council has reduced the precept by a large proportion of £3,000 and hopes that this demonstrates our commitment to responding to the needs of the community. We hope to be able to remain at this reduced level in future years.

HS2 and the proposed development at Coventry Airport continue to be closely monitored. Cllr Haine will also be giving a full update later in the meeting.

A couple of final things to report is that a bench kindly donated by John Emery and a copse of trees will be sited in the autumn to mark the Jubilee. Grit bins have also been installed today.

My sincere final thanks are expressed to all parish councillors and clerk, district and county councillors who support us during the year. Special mention also goes to ex County Councillor Mike Doody for his support.

Financial report for the year 2012-2013

The Clerk presented the financial summary for the year – attached. She reported that the Council had ended the financial year with the sum of £11,000. The internal audit had confirmed that all balances were correct and the external audit would take place shortly.

A resident queried why the sum of £900 had been spent on legal fees. The clerk explained that these costs had been incurred through placing a unilateral restriction on the Land Registry in relation to Offchurch playing field. The view was expressed that this would merely create bad feeling towards the Joint Parish Council, with whom we had always enjoyed excellent relationships. Another resident pointed out that the Joint Parish Councils had contributed 20% of the cost of building Weston Village Hall and that placing a restriction on their use of land was inappropriate.

Cllr Haine, agreeing, said that the Parish Council had at their most recent meeting, asked the clerk to investigate whether such a restriction had in fact been placed, and if so, the costs of removing it. The Council confirmed that they were anxious to remain on good terms with the adjoining Parishes.

Report from District Council

There were no District Council reports.

Report from County Council

Cllr Redford reported that the County Council had met the previous day to draw up their future plans. The majority of the day had been taken up with signing in new members and drawing up committees. The Conservative party no longer had a majority in the Council; the Council now consisted of 26 Conservative, 22 Labour, 9 Liberal Democrats, 3 Independent and 2 Green Party Councillors. The Conservative and Labour councillors had reached an understanding and were prepared to suspend their ideology and work together for the benefit of the community. As yet it was too early to reach an agreement on policy issues, so the Conservative policy on vetoing wage increases may not now be achievable.

The Chairman of the County Council is a Conservative councillor, David Shilton, and the Vice Chairman is a Labour councillor. The role will rotate annually.

Cllr Haine asked whether the County Council was still opposed to HS2. Cllr Redford replied that historically the Conservatives were opposed to the scheme and Warwick District Council had committed more money to fund the opposition. However, it was impossible to predict the outcome. Although the Conservative councillors would continue to oppose the scheme, as would the Green Party, in his personal view he thought it likely that the scheme would go ahead, given that all three parties within the House of Commons were in favour.

Concluding his report, Cllr Redford urged the Council to take advantage of the grants available from Warwick Community Forum. £11,000 of last year's budget remained unspent and contributions of up to 50% could have been obtained for the bus shelter and playground equipment.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Redford for his report.

Issues of Particular Local Interest

i) Major Local Planning Issues

Cllr Haine reported as follows: "The Parish Council tries to keep in touch with major planning and infrastructure issues that may affect the village. Currently, the one with greatest

potential impact is the threat of High Speed 2 railway line being built. If it goes ahead, this will cause major disruption to our main route into Leamington Spa – the B4453 – for many months. Although you may think the decision has been made, and the major political parties are bent on going ahead with it – the project still hasn't formally got approval from government. You are probably aware, though, that it was announced in the Queen's speech to Parliament recently that the Hybrid Bill that will authorise the project will be published in this session – unexpectedly to cover both phases of the project. A Paving Bill will also be presented to Parliament - this is largely because HS2 Ltd has overspent its original budget, and has been committed to additional work due to the High Court upholding the Judicial Appeal against the Exceptional Hardship Scheme.

We have engaged with both the Cubbington and Offchurch sections of the Stop HS2 action group and with Cubbington and the Joint Parish Councils to act as a conduit to our local MP about issues we want addressed as the bill passes through Parliament. More urgently, we will be considering with them the recently published Environmental Statement. This is HS2 Ltd's effort to convince us that the route won't do major damage to our local landscape. It is a further opportunity to make representations about the wrecking of our ancient woodland and damage to prime agricultural land and I urge everyone to respond.

Everyone should know that during the passage of the enabling legislation through Parliament for HS1, significant changes were made to both the route and the configuration of embankments and cuttings. Major work was enforced to reduce the environmental damage of the work and a significant fund was established to help mitigate the worst impacts of the project. Hence you should be ready to make your own representations to our MP, Jeremy Wright, on issues that concern you once the bill is published in the autumn.

Stop HS2 will hold their second National Convention at the Staffordshire Showground on the 29th of June, clearly with a focus on the northern Y section, but it is worth noting that the whole route is available for challenge again in the current consultation.”

ii) Coventry Gateway Project

This project provides major warehousing units in the area around Coventry Airport. Recently, Coventry City Council's Director of Regeneration and Development confirmed that Coventry has given the developers the green light in so far as their portion of the land is concerned, and that they regard the project as an absolute priority with many jobs depending on it. The site is the only one in the West Midlands that can offer warehousing in excess of 1m sq.ft. for which there is a rapidly growing demand from the likes of Jaguar Landrover. The next nearest availability is Corby.

The planning hold ups concerning the London Road island underpass (which is key to the Gateway project) have now been overcome, and that project will commence in December. Everyone is recommended to find an alternative route into Coventry for the next three years. The Gateway project now awaits Warwick District Council's final decision – they have completed their further enquiries and will decide on June 14th whether planning consent will be granted.

A resident asked whether the development would entail more flights from Coventry airport. Cllr Haine said that increased flights were anticipated, but that they would be mainly freight. In response to a question about a second runway, Cllr Redford said that there was likely to be a second runway at Coventry airport, and there would be no restriction on 24 hour flying.

A resident said whilst he welcomed the new employment prospects the development would bring, he feared that there would be an increase in noise pollution over Weston as a result. Replying to a query about a possible increase in HGVs using the site, Cllr Redford said he did not anticipate this as a likelihood, given that two of the warehouses already in place were not being used.

iii) Parish Plan

Cllr Haine delivered the following report on behalf of Mr Stephen Evans:

“I am delighted to be able to report that, thanks to the enthusiastic support of many villagers, we now have a Parish Plan. It is with the printers and will be available for distribution in just over a week’s time. We will ensure that a copy is delivered to every home in the parish, to our Parish and District Councillors, to principal County and District Council Officers and to other key stakeholders or service providers who may be able to help with the implementation of the Plan.

Already a team of volunteers are working on the improvement of our footpath network and you will hear more about this from them shortly. Sue Chambers and Paddy Taylor are working with me to establish a village website in the near future. This will be a key vehicle, alongside the much loved newsletter, for exchanging information with everyone and will be used by the Parish Council and other local groups to keep you informed. I know that many will say it is long overdue! We are also seeking grant funding for improvements to the sports facilities on the playing field – a tennis court being the most requested. The Parish Council is reviewing the way that grassland verges and hedgerow areas in the village are managed to see whether we can do more to protect some areas for wildlife, whilst still ensuring a safe and attractive environment.

The Parish Plan is a living document and will be updated over time. However, when you see it, you will realise that there is already much to be done and we will be calling for volunteers to help turn the ideas and hopes expressed by many of you into a reality.”

A resident expressed her concern about the mowing of the grass verges, saying that her garden was already badly affected by dandelions blown in from the field opposite her house. Cllr Haine reassured her that the proposal was to manage some of the verges to reduce their fertility, and hence support native wild flowers, rather than invasive perennial weeds. Areas will still be cut, when necessary, for safety reasons. He said the purpose of the village walk through was to identify areas which could safely support wildlife and that all actions undertaken would be on the advice of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and the County Council.

iv) NGS Open Gardens

Mrs Brenda Boardman reported that eleven gardens would open as part of the National Garden Scheme for the first time on 8-9th June 2013. During the open gardens weekend, visitors would be able to view established gardens with rolling lawns, orchards, sheep and chickens; cottage gardens new and old; field views; artisan studio, pergolas and patios. Water features, lily ponds, vegetable gardens, raised beds and packed herbaceous borders; in fact, almost every style and size of garden to suit traditional, modern or contemporary tastes. St. Michael’s Church would also be open during the weekend.

Admission would be £3 per person, children free. There would also be refreshments including teas and homemade cakes for sale at the Village Hall; plant stall, second hand books stall and several craft stalls also at the Village Hall and a further two craft stalls at the Old Forge garden. There would be wheelchair access to the majority of gardens. The eleven gardens are 4, 7, 8, 10, 23 Alderman Way; 12 Simpkins Close; Glebe Cottage; Glebe House; The Old Forge and 5 and 13 Rugby Road.

The proceeds from garden entry fees will be donated to the NGS scheme, with money taken from plant sales, refreshments, etc. donated to help save the 12th century Weston Village Church building.

The NGS provide a tremendous amount of help and support both in providing stationery, literature, signage and badges, as well as national press coverage and publishing the Yellow Book featuring 4000 gardens. This is available through the NGS and good booksellers, with a Yellow Book supplement featuring Warwickshire Gardens 2013 available free through the NGS and local garden centres and nurseries.

In 2012, the NGS donated 2.6 million pounds to charity, thanks to the generosity and hard work of garden owners, volunteers and visitors.

v) St Michael's Church

The Clerk delivered the following report in the absence of Mr Stephen Evans, lay Chairman of the Parochial Council:

“The Church Council are extremely grateful to the Parish Council for their grant of £400 towards the cost of mowing the Churchyard last year. It is such a focal part of the village and important to keep looking attractive.

The Church income always struggles to keep up with the running costs, but we rely entirely on fund raising for repairs and maintenance of the Grade 1 listed building. Thanks to “Friends of St. Michael's “ and our many fund raising events, we were able to spend £1520 on roof repairs, £2024 on stonework pointing and £980 on electrical repairs. A section of the churchyard wall was also rebuilt for £950.”

Open Forum

During the open forum, thanks were expressed to the Parish Council for the installation of grit bins in the village. Suggestions were made about amenities which would benefit residents, such as an open air gym. The Council agreed to carefully consider all suggestions.

There was support for the installation of a second post box outside the village hall. Our MP had already supported the proposal but Royal Mail had refused the request on the grounds that there was insufficient demand. The Council asked the clerk to raise the matter again. The clerk also reported that the post box in St. Michael's Close was operative, in spite of the absence of the collection plate. Collection times were posted in the newsletter.

The Chairman thanked all those present for attending the meeting which closed at 8.10pm.

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