

Draft minutes

Weston under Wetherley Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting

Wednesday 28th May 2014

Weston under Wetherley Village Hall 7 pm

Present: Cllr Miss B Roberts(Chairman)

Cllr Mr P Haine

Cllr Mrs B Boardman

Mrs M Norman (Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer)

Also present: Cllr Norman Pratt, Cllr John Hammon and 31 members of the public

1	Welcome from the Chairman The Chairman of Weston Parish Council, Cllr Beth Roberts, welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2	Apologies Apologies were received from Cllr Sue Chambers and Cllr Wallace Redford.
3	Approval of the minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting 21st May 2013 The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting were unanimously agreed as an accurate record of the proceedings and were signed by the Chairman.
4	Chairman's summary of the year. The Chairman expressed her hope that attendees were enjoying the displays created to remind everyone of the activities which had taken place throughout the year. She gave especial thanks to Jane Jones for her superb photographs, many of which were included in the display. She also welcomed Cllr Brenda Boardman, who joined the Parish Council in April, following the resignation of Cllr Tracey McAllan. The Chairman then made the following statement:
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6	"The Council has been working throughout the year with the District Council to ensure proper maintenance of streetlights, road, pavements and verges. We are trying to achieve the right balance between keeping areas safe and tidy, whilst also maintaining wildlife. Please contact any of your Councillors if there are any maintenance issues you would like to draw to our attention.

Electronic speed signs were eventually fitted in the village some months ago. We are hoping these will prove effective in persuading drivers to slow down before they approach the tight bend. A grant has also been obtained towards the cost of installing Welcome signs on the outskirts of the village, urging drivers to slow down. These measures should improve road safety as well as enhancing the appearance of the village.

In June 2013 the Parish Council received and adopted the Parish Plan. In less than a year many of the measures in the Plan have already been implemented, and we are most grateful to all those involved for all their hard work. Mr Stephen Evans will give you more information on the progress of the Parish Plan later in the meeting.

The website is up and running and you will gradually see improvements and extensions to it in the coming months. Information about local events is posted on the website. Our agendas and minutes are also available to view, together with relevant reports and documents. Please do use the resource and inform any members of the team if there is anything you would like included on the site.

The National Gardens Scheme Open Gardens event was held in June last year. It was a great success with more than 1000 people attending, and £3000 was donated to the Church. The event was so popular it will be repeated in June 2015. We are also looking forward to the Village Fete to be held next month. Cllr Boardman will give us more details about this later on.

HS2 has been closely monitored by the Council throughout the year. We hosted a public meeting in January which was attended by our MP Jeremy Wright and representatives from Stop HS2 action group. Over 100 people attended this meeting and demonstrated a clear opposition to the proposed route. We received pledges of money to support our Fighting Fund and joined with Cubbington and Offchurch in presenting our petition against the Hybrid Bill. Cllr Haine has worked closely with the other organisations and will speak on this shortly. A copy of the petition is available on a table at the back of the hall, together with a plan of the proposed route and our explanation in pictures of the necessity of changing the route.

The Jubilee Bench was installed in October last year, and the copse of trees was planted at the same time. These are looking very healthy, are being watered when necessary and we are grateful to the Wildlife Conservation Group for keeping the area weeded and trimmed. More recently we have seen some additional trees planted around the village, made possible by the Central Warwickshire Leaders Programme Get Growing project. Cllr Chambers and Cllr Haine have done a lot of work with the Wildlife Group and we will hear more on this from Cllr Haine later.

At the last Annual Parish Meeting, some of you voiced your concerns about the imposition of a restriction on Offchurch's playing field, a concern which was shared by the Council. I am pleased to be able to inform you that the restriction was lifted in October last year at no cost to the Council, and a letter of apology was written to Offchurch.

A number of residents have recently expressed their concerns about dog fouling in the village. We are in liaison with the Dog Warden and are awaiting new multipurpose bins. We will be keeping an eye on the situation, and will consider if further actions are needed in due course.

The achievements of the Parish Council have to some extent been overshadowed by the behaviour of two Councillors, who have been sanctioned by the Standards Committee of

Warwick District Council for bullying and intimidatory behaviour towards the Clerk. Full details of this are available on the District Council's website. The Parish Council deplores this behaviour; the District Council has imposed all the sanctions that are within its power and the Parish Council is taking the necessary actions to ensure this does not continue. The actions of these Councillors have been a great drain on us all, particularly the Clerk, who has constantly had to defend herself against their bullying. I hope that in the future the electorate chooses a team that is all facing in the same direction and working towards common goals on behalf of the entire village.

The finances of the Council are in good shape. The precept for the next financial year is again around £7,000, a significant decrease compared to two years ago. Total payments for the year 2013/2014 are 23% lower than the previous year, even though we also spent funds on some additional items in the year. The cash position remains healthy, as we build up our reserves fund for future costs, such as the election next year.

We incurred a new annual expense of £300 for the website maintenance; £419 was spent on new grit bins and litter bin; no legal costs were incurred this year; we saved £100 on the Parish Council insurance; £484 was spent on the Jubilee bench and trees; £212 went towards our efforts on HS2; no major repair work was needed and the grant towards the churchyard maintenance was increased from £400 to £550."

The Chairman concluded by expressing her thanks to the Clerk, and to the Councillors who volunteer their time, resources and ideas to make the Council work for the benefit of all.

Report from District Council

Cllr John Hammon:

Cllr Hammon congratulated the village for all the initiatives that had been successfully implemented in spite of the difficulties involved. He reminded the meeting that the District Council had opposed HS2 from the beginning and contributed £150,000 towards the cost of fighting this in the courts. In spite of having lost the court battles, he was hopeful that the Parliamentary Petition process would have some effect and informed the meeting that the number of petitions presented in opposition meant that the process of hearing them would take at least two years. He congratulated the village on their staunch opposition to the project.

The Gateway project was passed by the Planning Committee last year. Cllr Hammon was personally opposed to the development and expressed his admiration for the villages who had mounted their own campaigns in opposition to the scheme, particularly given the lack of financial and legal resources available to them. The appeal against the planning decision will be heard in December and Cllr Hammon expressed his hope that the Minister would overrule the decision.

The Council had been informed of a perceived need for 12,800 new homes in the area. A Local Plan had to be implemented to accommodate these houses, as without it developers would have been free to build where they wished. The Local Plan has restricted development within the green belt as far as possible, with 150 new houses being built in Cubbington. There is no planned development for Weston.

Thirty one pitches for gypsies and travellers must be found within the next five years. The nearest proposed site to Weston is beside the wood yard although Cllr Hammon thought it unlikely that this would be chosen.

No application has been received from Clough Industries for a licence for Underground Coal Gasification and the company has confirmed that it does not intend to apply for one. Any UCG activities will take place at sea.

The District Council is considering moving its offices from Riverside House as the premises are too large. A possible location for the new offices is next to the Spa Centre in Leamington. The move would save the Council around £400,000.

Cllr Norman Pratt:

Cllr Pratt offered his congratulations to the Parish Council in general and the Chairman, Beth Roberts, in particular, for a successful year. He also spoke of his role as Chairman of the Standards Committee of the District Council and expressed his frustration at changes to legislation which had resulted in the removal of powers from Standards Committees, leaving them unable to enforce any sanctions they imposed. The Committee was lobbying the Minister in an effort to have their powers increased.

Cllr Pratt also announced that after twelve years in office, the forthcoming year would be his last as Ward Councillor for Weston. He offered his best wishes to the Council. The Chairman thanked him for the support and encouragement he had given the Council during his time in office.

Parish Plan update:

Mr Evans said that the work achieved on the Parish Plan had been very rewarding and had revealed hidden talents amongst the residents. 240 questionnaires had been delivered in the village and there had been a most gratifying response. Sadly, not all the plans have yet come to fruition. The proposed site for the all weather playing field had proved unsuitable, so an alternative site on the existing playing field is being discussed with representatives from the District Council. Estimated costs are in the region of £40,000. Grants are available to help with this but as the District Council owns the freehold, it will need to consider its position before committing itself to the site. He expressed his thanks to his fellow committee members for their hard work, especially Cllrs Sue Chambers and Peter Haine. As two of the original members of the team have since resigned, Mr Evans hoped that more volunteers would come forward to offer their assistance, particularly some of the younger residents of the village.

Footpaths Group:

Mrs Keffler said that the Footpath Group had investigated the possibility of creating new footpaths within the village, but the process was so complicated the Group thought it wisest to concentrate their attention on improving the current footpaths. The landowners had been very helpful when approached for their assistance. Cllr Hammon had cut back the hedges along the footpath in his land. The Parish Council had also written on behalf of the Footpath Group to other landowners in the area, informing them of the help offered by the County Council Rights of Way group in providing material to improve the paths.

The resources offered by the County Council Rights of Way group means that only volunteer labour is necessary to carry out the necessary work. Mrs Keffler reported that the Footpath Group intended to carry out signage along the footpath routes, although this would be a long term project.

She asked that residents inform the team of any problems they may encounter along the footpaths, and urged that people controlled their dogs and ensured there was no fouling.

Village Fete:

Cllr Boardman said that the Fete planned for the 21st June was intended to encompass all age groups and provide entertainment for all. There would be sports activities, children's Fancy Dress competition and a Home and Garden section. There would also be a silent auction with prizes, a disco and barbecue in the hall. Proceeds from the Fete would be donated to St. Michael's Church.

Website:

Cllr Haine expressed his thanks to the web team and asked that the village support the website with their ideas.

Weston Wildlife Conservation Group:

Cllr Haine spoke of the activities of the Weston Wildlife Conservation Group which had resulted in wild flowers being planted in the village to help save our native species. The bank beside the Church had been particularly successful. Cllr Haine was conscious of the differing views of residents concerning the appearance of the village, but hoped that the display to be organised at the Fete would enlighten visitors as to the importance of maintaining wildlife. He hoped to obtain the support of residents in negotiating a different mowing schedule with the Highways Team, who were very supportive of the desire to promote wildlife.

A grant had been obtained from WRECF to improve the signs which will be set against the new entrance gates and plant troughs on the outskirts of the village.

He also requested volunteers to help with the Parish Plan review.

St. Michael's Church:

Mr Evans said that the Church Council continued with its efforts to maintain the fabric of the church. Thanks to the efforts of Friends of St. Michael's and the funds gratefully received from the National Open Gardens event, they had been able to repair some of the stonework of the Church. Mains water has now been installed, the first in 800 years. Part of the grant received from the Parish Council has gone towards removing ivy from the trees in the churchyard. Future activities for fundraising include a jazz concert to be held in the Church later in the year.

The vicar will retire in February next year, but so far there is no news about his replacement. Mrs Valerie Evans retired as Churchwarden after twelve years of service. Mr Andrew McGregor has replaced her and Mrs Christine Kirkwood continues in post.

Open Forum:

A resident raised his concern about the waste on Mr Moreton's land and his understanding that a waste licence was needed in order to remove it. He asked the Parish Council to contact the Environmental Agency to see if anything could be done about this. Cllr Haine replied that he had been informed by the District Council that the offending waste would be removed in three weeks' time.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm