

Weston under Wetherley Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting

Wednesday 11th May 2016

Weston under Wetherley Village Hall 7.15 pm

Present: Cllr Miss B Roberts

Cllr Mr P Haine

Cllr Mr S Richards

Cllr Miss R Tighe

Mrs M Norman (Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer)

Also present: Cllr Pam Redford, Cllr Nick Harrington, Cllr Wallace Redford and 25 members of the public

1 Welcome from the Chairman

The outgoing Chairman of Weston Parish Council, Cllr Beth Roberts, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 Approval of the minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting 29th April 2015

The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting were unanimously agreed as an accurate record of the proceedings and were signed by the Chairman.

3 Chairman's summary of the year.

The Chairman said as follows:

"I think the whole Parish Council would agree with me when I say that this has been a difficult year. As it currently stands the Council does not have an elected Chairman. At the Annual Meeting of the Council on Monday, there were no nominations for the office of Chairman. After nearly four years in office, I had decided not to stand this year. Before I go any further, I must also tell you that I have taken the decision to resign from the Council.

This is not a decision I have taken lightly. But after four years of continuous battling with two former councillors, I have had to say enough is enough. As a volunteer motivated by a desire to do my bit for the community, the constant questioning and criticism has been extremely draining. There have been times when we have struggled to focus our efforts on the projects we wanted to undertake for the village as we were forced to respond to yet more futile demands from them.

I am extremely sad to be leaving. It has never been plain sailing because of these two former councillors, but I do believe the time has come when me being on the council is not the best thing for me or for the village.

Their attacks have become very personal. They are aimed at us as individuals and they are using the Council to do so. You are all aware of the past history and you know the issues we had when they were Councillors. It is my opinion that because of this history, the attack on the Parish Council is being carried out because of the personal issues they have with some of us, particularly me. So much so, I have found it necessary to go to the police to complain of harassment in my personal life. It is the increasing impact on my personal life that has led me to take the decision to resign.

Unfortunately, I must also share the news that all other councillors and our dedicated clerk, Maria, have also resigned for similar reasons. I would like to share part of Maria's resignation letter with you. She says: "It was less than two months of becoming Clerk to the Parish Council before I became aware of the manipulative, unlawful and undemocratic behaviour of these two individuals. In spite of all their attempts to bully me into resigning, I remained in office, something which would have been impossible without your support and encouragement. You shared my commitment to ensuring that all Parish Council business was conducted properly, in due accordance with law and together we were able to lay the foundations for an open, transparent Council, responsive to the needs of parishioners. Thanks to you, Peter Haine and Sue Chambers, we were as a team able to withstand the ceaseless attacks directed against us, and work together in the best interests of the village.

Since neither of these two malcontents was ever once able to substantiate any of the wild, and occasionally hysterical, allegations they made, it was comparatively easy to dismiss their objections for what they were – the vindictive outbursts of petty individuals who lacked the ability to understand the constraints of law, or to appreciate any viewpoint other than their own. Whilst these two were still councillors, the attacks, though wearying, were containable.

What has perturbed me is that after they ceased to be Councillors, the challenges and attacks have continued unabated and are now being publicised more widely.

My concern now is the cost to the tax payer of this continued behaviour. Officers of public bodies are obliged to respond to queries raised by members of the public. The cost of any investigation is borne by the tax payer, no matter how spurious the query proves to be. It is too much to hope that their behaviour will change with my resignation, but at least one of the avenues through which public money is being wasted will be closed to them."

It is a huge shame that these two individuals should cause all this upset. We have all tried to carry on and to do what we could to discourage this behaviour, but sadly, there is nothing else left now.

I know the news of this mass resignation will come as a surprise to you all, and particularly to our Ward Councillors who have done so much to support us over the years, but we felt it important to inform you, the electorate, of our decision before anyone else. I hope our ward Councillors will be able to advise you of the procedures that will be put in place following our departure.

Despite all the trouble we have tried to continue with good projects within the village and to support local groups. The grant fund we set up last year has proved very successful. We

awarded £250 to the toddler group to help them with hire costs and money for new toys. We also gave £260 to the Film Club and £85 towards the cost of establishing the internet cafe in the church.

The Parish Plan Steering Committee has been continuing its work in the village and key achievements in the past year have been the installation of the village entrance gates and planters, now filled with their summer display, and continuing work by the Weston Wildlife Conservation Group which, with support from the Parish Council, will now play a key role in the Princethorpe Woodlands Living Landscape Project. The website continues to be updated and the Parish Council support it by paying the annual maintenance fee.

Projects that the Council has had in mind are an all weather sports pitch, and a footpath from Cubbington to Weston, as part of the HS2 mitigation fund. Only small progress has been made with these projects, given our time and effort constraints, but I hope in the future the village can find groups to take on these ideas.

You will be aware that the owners of the former Bull Inn site have had their planning application for three detached homes rejected by the Planning Committee, on the grounds that the development was on Green Belt land. We have been working with the owners to ensure that whatever they build is in keeping with the village. We do not know what their plans for the site are now, but hope that they will be able to act quickly as the site is in increasingly poor condition.

The annual Village Fete, ever popular, will be held on Saturday the 25th of June.

I hope the good work of people involved with these local groups and events continue. I would like to thank you all on behalf of the village for the time and efforts you put in. I would also like to thank Rob Atkinson for standing as a Councillor for part of the year and supporting where he could. My thanks also go to the District and County Councillors who support us at most of our meetings – Pam and Wally Redford, and Nick Harrington.

Some of my fellow councillors may wish to share their reasons for resigning with you, so before I hand over to them, I will give you a short summary of the Council's financial position.

The precept demand for the coming year is £7,031. This is a small increase of £120, 2% more than last year's precept of £6,911. Our expenditure for the year ended March was £7,898. This has decreased from the previous year by about £600, mainly due to us spending just over £1000 fighting HS2 last year. We awarded just over £600 in grants to three groups and our cash balance remains in a good position."

Cllr Richards read out his letter of resignation, saying as follows:

"Being relatively new as both a resident and Parish Councillor, I offered to take up the role to help maintain Weston to be a great place to live and to represent the views of residents.

However, I did not expect to be subject to harassment by two ex councillors holding a personal grudge resulting in a vendetta against the Council, Councillors and Clerk. There have been numerous Freedom of Information requests, letter and emails that contain accusations and untruths and now we have been notified of a possible second investigation by the Information Commissioner. Further, I cannot accept the intimidation of a device placed on a stand in front of the Councillors to record their meetings.

	<p>Under these circumstances I feel I cannot carry out the responsibilities of the role to my satisfaction. I would like to thank the Council for the great work achieved in the village and in particular the Chair and the Clerk who have been the target of much of the undeserved attention.”</p> <p>CLlr Haine added: “We are a small village, our Parish Council has a very modest budget and it should, in my view, be spent on funding practical steps to ensure we live in an attractive, rural landscape in which our children can grow up safely, our elderly are looked after and everyone feels it is a pleasant place to live.</p> <p>I joined the Parish Council, quite straightforwardly and selflessly, to try and contribute to these aims – not to take part in endless, petty squabbles and sometimes costly disputes, promoted by individuals who seem more bent on causing unpleasantness and turmoil, than furthering a pleasant village environment. It is a pattern of behaviour that I find unusual to say the least, and one I am unable to cope with. I am not surprised that former Councillors and Clerks left the Parish Council and I have concluded that regrettably, I must join them.”</p> <p>Following this, Mr Robert Birkmyre expressed his support for the Parish Council and proposed a vote of thanks to them all. This was warmly supported by all those present. He then addressed the meeting on Weston Cinema, and expressed his thanks to the Council and the Community Forum for sponsoring their project. Of the four films shown so far, three have been both popular and successful. At the last showing, a survey was conducted asking for suggestions for future films, a practice the club intends to continue. The next showing will be on Saturday 11th June.</p>	
4	<p>Mr Birkmyre also spoke of the village newsletter and the difficulties of obtaining funding. As there was wide support for hard copies of the newsletter, he hoped that those who were able would make contributions towards the printing costs. He expressed his thanks to Katie Alcock, the editor, and Moira Rawlings, in charge of advertising.</p> <p>Mrs Bren Boardman informed the meeting of the Fete to be held on the 25th June at 1pm. There will be more stalls this year, and plenty of fun based activities. Warwickshire Beekeepers Association will be in attendance; other attractions include a barbecue, a beer tent and a silent auction. The proceeds from the silent auction will go towards installing a lavatory in the Church.</p> <p>Reports from District and County Councillors:</p> <p>CLlr Pam Redford said that the Parish Council had served the village very well. They had been a very good Council and she was sad to see members go. She expressed her thanks to them all.</p> <p>CLlr Harrington informed the meeting Warwick District Council’s Headquarters were now moving from Riverside House to a new development at Covent Garden Car Park. This would result in a saving of £300k per annum, and is a result of a joint venture through an LLP with Public Sector plc. Riverside House would be redeveloped for local housing, including 40% affordable homes.</p> <p>The District Council had also spent £12million in upgrading two local leisure facilities at Newbold Common and St. Nicholas’ Park.</p>	

6

With regards to HS2, Debbie Prince continues to liaise with the County and HS2 on behalf of Warwick District Council. The District Council will become the Planning Authority for necessary consents for this work, and have asked that Parish Councils should be consulted before the consents are given.

The draft Local Plan has identified an obligation to help Coventry's unmet housing needs. 1,800 new houses are to be built at Kings Hill. The District Council will be involved in the planning application and will scrutinise the application carefully to assess issues such as infrastructure, roads, drains and facilities. 95 houses are to be built at Pinehurst and discussions are ongoing with the Area Engineer and Severn Trent with regards to drains.

With the support of other Parish Councils, Cllr Harrington intends to continue to oppose the South Whitley CCC/JLR application.

As from June 2016 Warwickshire District Council will be levying a charge for replacement or damaged recycling containers.

The Community Forum continues to work well, and all monies have been allocated up until April 2016 when fresh applications can be made.

Cllrs Redford and Harrington represent four Parish Councils; Weston under Wetherley, Baginton, Stoneleigh & Ashow and Cubbington. Their committee membership includes: the Finance and Audit Committee; the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; the Licensing and Regulatory Committee; the Health Sub Committee; WDC representative Coventry Airport Consultative Committee; WDC representative on Adult Social Care and WDC representative on South Warwickshire Foundation Trust.

Cllr Wallace Redford said the Local Government grant was being reduced year by year and the County Council is struggling to keep providing services, as they are obliged to fulfil their statutory obligations first. Despite all the opposition, the plans for HS2 continue. He commended all the action groups in Warwickshire for the sterling work they had done in opposing the scheme. He hoped that by October or November details of the HGV routes would be available. These would be scrutinised carefully, and feasibility studies carried out to ascertain whether it would be possible to provide HGV routes for non HS2 traffic. He too, was sad that the Parish Council had felt it necessary to resign.

Report on the Princethorpe Woodlands Project:

Cllr Haine said the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust had obtained a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. They conducted a survey in the village last year, and a copy of their findings can be found on the website. The Princethorpe Living Landscape project aims to restore ancient woodlands to make them accessible to all, and to provide a corridor for wildlife that will continue from Princethorpe through to Cubbington woods. Hedgerows and verges are crucial in maintaining biodiversity and the necessary habitats for wildlife. The Parish Council decided in principle to be a partner in this project. Subject to the agreement of residents, some areas of the village will be managed differently to encourage biodiversity. All residents will be consulted with regards to each area under consideration.

Report from St. Michael's Church Council:

Mr Stephen Evans said that St. Michael's was now into its eighteenth month of the interregnum. The parish of Weston would be amalgamated with those of Wappenbury, Eathorpe, Hunningham and Offchurch. The new vicar, when appointed, would be based in

Hunningham. Two church services are held every month in Weston, with a Communion Service every third Sunday.

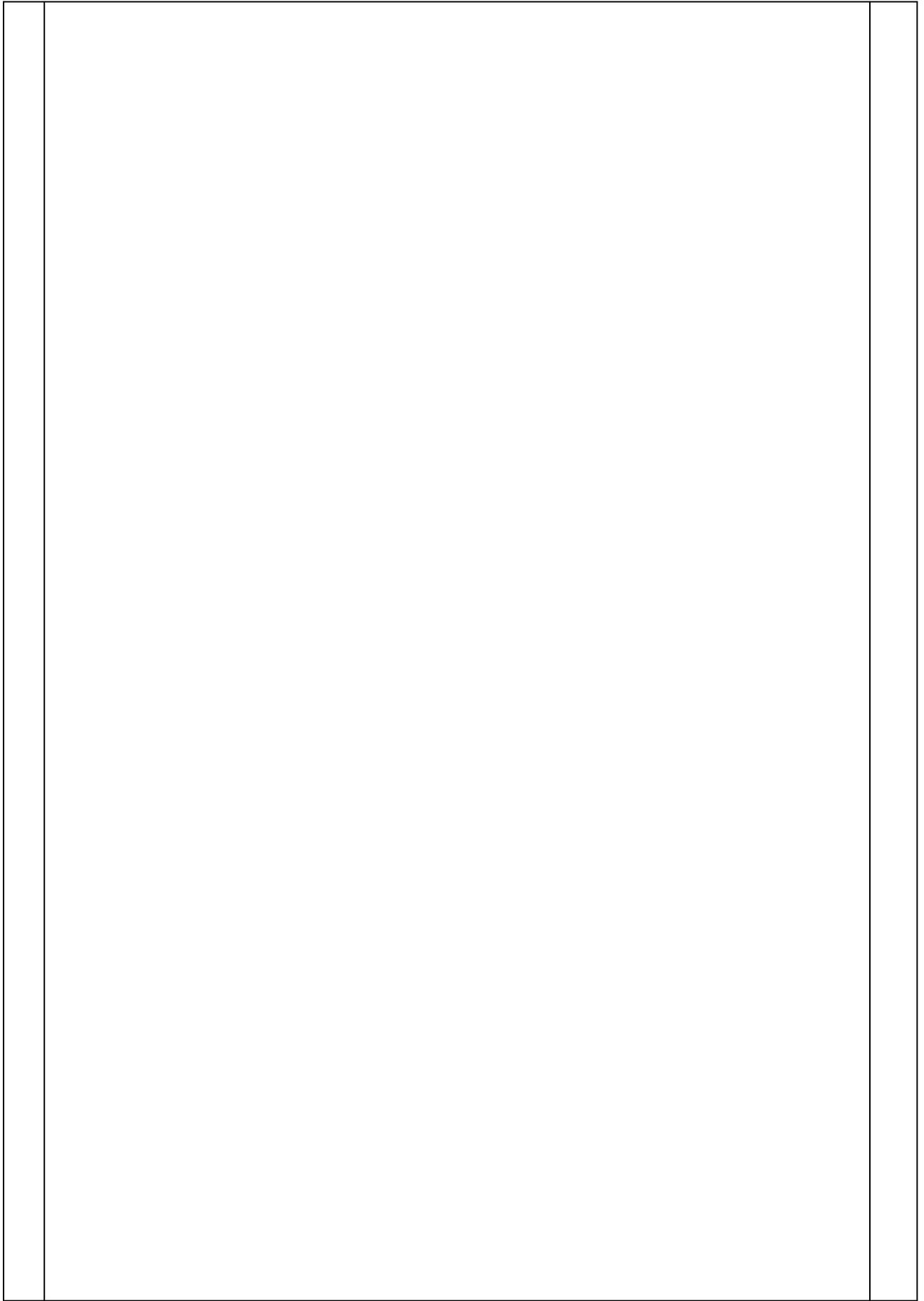
Two areas of the churchyard are given over to conservation. Mr Evans thanked the Parish Council for the annual grant they make to the Church. Members of the Parochial Council are trying to encourage use of the building, which now also serves as a library. A lavatory is being installed in the vestry, thanks to the contributions received from the Open Gardens and the Fete. Work on this should begin in the next two months. An internet cafe is held in the Church, thanks to a grant received from the Community Forum, as well as the Book Club.

Open Forum:

There was widespread support and sympathy for the Parish Council. A resident asked for an estimate of the costs involved in replying to the Freedom of Information requests. The clerk replied that she had spent at least seventy hours on the work so far. The level of information requested by the ICO was now such that professional legal advice would be needed to answer correctly. This would involve the Parish Council in yet more expense.

Great concern was expressed by villagers at the actions of former Parish Councillors that had proved so costly to the village, and especially that this had resulted in all of the current Councillors and the clerk standing down. There was warm support for a proposal by Ward Councillor Nick Harrington that a further public meeting should be held to explore options for the future. It was agreed that this should take place on Monday July 4th.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm.



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