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2012 – 1

The Annual Open Meeting of the Wistow parish Council took place on Tuesday, 24th April 2012 at 7.30 pm in the Village Hall with Dr Farrar in the Chair.

Dr Farrar opened the meeting and welcomed two members of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence: Mr Leigh and Miss Robinson
- 1.1 Present: Mrs Booth, Mr Bucknell, Mr Carter, Mrs Coles(Clerk), Dr Farrar, Mr Lucas, Mr McInnes, and Mr Ward, Mrs Bance and Mr Turner.
2. To approve and sign the minutes of the Annual Open Meeting held on 26th April, 2011.
 - 2.1 The Minutes had been circulated around the Councillors prior to this meeting and were available at the meeting, Mr Carter proposed and Mrs Booth seconded approval of them and this was unanimously agreed.
 - 2.2 Mrs Bance asked about the situation with providing a waste bin at the Bridge and the Clerk explained that the PC had requested a bin there and the situation was monitored by HDC but no bin installed. If it is not installed by HDC then it would not be emptied. It appeared that some bins are not being emptied regularly and this would be looked into.
3. Financial Statement
 - 3.1 A copy of Wistow Parish Council's Annual Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2012 were available for inspection. Dr Farrar invited comments on the Financial Statement. Mr Turner asked where funds were allocated to the repair of the Clock and the Clerk explained that they were covered in the outstanding invoices sum.

The past financial year commenced with a balance of approximately £16,000 and concluded with a balance of just over £18,000. The increase of £2,000 during the year was due to a combination of last year's precept increase from £6,500 to £10,000 and to careful control in expenditure.

Our costs were reduced where possible in an effort to combat the increased grass cutting costs and decreased income from the recycling bank and reduced council contributions to the grass cutting costs. This exercise was undertaken to ensure that we could comfortably cover the basic running costs of the village in an uncertain economic climate.

In light of the fact that we managed to meet all of our increased costs with our current precept level whilst retaining a reasonable margin, we have decided to keep the precept for 2012/13 to £10,000, which compared to the other council raises has meant that the Wistow portion of the council tax has effectively reduced in percentage levels of the overall tax bill.

4. Chairman's Report

Last year the Precept had been set at £10,000 to ensure the village had enough funds to cover its essential future outgoings, in the event of the precept being capped. The annual cost of running the village is approximately £11,000. The precepts haven't been capped as expected, but we have decided to keep the precept at £10,000 for the coming year in line with last year's plan.

This year we intend to continue our review of the Parish Plan, which is now likely to become a Neighbourhood Plan in-keeping with recent government changes and particularly the new localism bill. Where possible we intend to keep costs to a minimum by taking on work ourselves and presenting ideas and seeking input at village events. The localism aspect of this is still very new and we are working closely with the district council to determine how far reaching the effects on parish councils will be.

The Bridge project is now finally complete with the give way sign having been moved back by 5m as requested and the green between Manor Street and the Bridge has been reinstated following initial substandard landscaping. The extraneous Wistow sign post at the entrance to the village has also been removed.

This year is also a very special year for the country and to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee a picnic in the local park is being organized for Monday 04 June, details of which will be circulated to the village imminently. To mark this occasion our park has been officially registered as a Queen Elizabeth II Field, permanently protecting this space and a network of 2,012 similar outdoor recreational spaces in communities across the UK.

5. Playground Report

The following issues have affected the playground over the past year.

Seesaw

The ageing plywood sides of the Seesaw have now been replaced with new metal guards. This has reduced the possibility of the sides being removed causing a hazard.

Benches

New long-life benches have been installed in the playground to replace the wooden benches that had reached the very limit of their useful life.

Safety Inspection Report

A full safety inspection for the Playground has been undertaken. No significant hazards were identified. A number of minor observations were made and the Parish Council has placed these in priority order and work to resolve them within sensible timescales.

Playground Lease

We have a new 99 year lease on the playground which was arranged under the “Fields in Trust QEII Challenge”. This is an initiative that aims to preserve our green spaces for future generations. We will have a plaque on order which should be here in time for the Diamond Jubilee celebrations

6. Allotment Report

After many years of wrangling about the allotment contracts, last year the Parish Council voted to accept the status quo as any legal advice or action would prove costly, with little obvious benefit to the village. As the years pass and tenants change, new tenants have to sign our new contract, which will hopefully mean that in the not too distant future, this issue will be effectively resolved. Two new tenants have already signed this contract.

Following the success of the serious trim to the upper hedge on the Raveley Road boundary with the allotments, the Parish council have decided to perform the same remedial maintenance on the lower section of the hedge. This was supposed to have been completed prior to the nesting season, but we were let down by our contractor, so this is now hoped to be completed after the nesting season later in the year.

The first allotment plot to be used as originally intended for a very long time (being cultivated for domestic use as a vegetable plot by a villager) seems to have been a success in its first year, despite the difficulties encountered, particularly without an adequate water source. However, this success has sparked further interest in the allotments for similar cultivation should any space become available.

Mrs Bance asked what the criteria were to rent an allotment. Dr Farrar explained that an allotment holder should be a resident of the village, but there must be land available. Historically the allotments have been rented to farmers and it would be extremely costly to reclaim the land.

7. Traffic and Road Issues Report

Excess vehicle speed in rural areas is a significant factor in relation to accident frequency and has been accepted as having an adverse effect on the quality of life for residents, pedestrians and other road users. It is essential to preserve the quality of life for Wistow residents, pedestrians, the disabled and cyclists, so that they are not adversely affected by high volumes of traffic travelling at inappropriate speeds or rat-runs. The latter due to congestion on local roads B1040/A141 or journeys onwards to the A1M & A14.

'Enforcement' of speed restrictions has been introduced at the two entrance roads into the village. The warning signage at Bridge Street notifies that it has been reduced to single lane traffic as a result of the bridge refurbishment. Approaching Mill Road from Kings Ripton the road surface has a “Banner of Dragons” which, together with signage, gives drivers a clear impression of a narrower road.

Commercial vehicles or HCG's cause problems using unsuitable routes through the Village (probably due to following Sat Nav's). One company "Refrigeration Vehicle"- has been contacted with regard to the weight limit restriction.

To reduce vehicle speeds to the target of 20mph in residential areas, unfortunately cannot be enforced on an unrestrained length of road without a School!

Mr Lucas suggested that we could request that Speedwatch carry out a speed check in the village but Mr Bucknell suggested that he could ask Sgt Savill to ask for a police vehicle to carry out speed checks in the village and would do so as soon as possible.

8. Countryside Report

The following issues have affected the footpath network in and around Wistow over the past year.

Wistow Public Footpath No.1

Work has now been completed to improve the surface of a section of Wistow Footpath No 1 recently added to the network under s53 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. This change has significantly improved access to the Wistow Footpath network from Mill Road.

Investigation of Potential Circular Walk

The Parish has begun to investigate the possibility of another circular route along the track running north from point 1175 to Bury. The proposed route would then follow the parish boundary to rejoin the existing footpath network at point 0896. The Rights of Way and Access Team have been consulted but further investigation will be needed. It was hoped that routing the path along Parish Boundaries would make negotiations with Landowners easier but this is unlikely to be the case.

Parish Paths Partnership (P3)

The Parish Council is a member of P3. Membership has proved extremely valuable enabling access to advice and visibility of the kind of projects that we could run in the future. Fears last year that funding restrictions would impact on the activities of P3 appear to be unfounded and their support has been better than ever this year with many training opportunities on offer covering legal issues, communications and mediation. We have attended a number of events and have found them to be extremely useful not the least for networking opportunities.

Mrs Bance asked where the new circular walk would be and Mr Carter explained that it would start in Harris Lane and return via the Bridge but that it requires crossing the brook. There is a demand for a longer circular walk, it was in the Parish Plan, but it will take some work to set up.

9. Village Hall Report

Plans are continuing for the improvements to the Village hall, there have been some setbacks with the Planning Department but they have now been resolved. Funding remains a concern, and it is hoped to do some fundraising events in the village to help towards the costs. Music night, sports day, cricket match and plant sale are all planned.

Mr Turner asked how much funding is needed to carry out the work on the hall and Mr Bucknell suggested that it would run into six figures. He reported that he had set up a meeting with the Planning Dept and Village Hall Committee and that internal insulation would not be possible as it could harm the fabric of the building. A rough estimate would be in the order of £200,000. Planning permission is necessary prior to applying for funding. The comment was made that lots of local halls are struggling for bookings and there is plenty of competition.

10. Bridge Report

In the winter of 2008/2009 the bridge in Wistow was subject to a series of vehicle collisions resulting in substantial damage.

Work has been completed and this year has consisted of various 'snagging' projects to bring the bridge in line with expectation. These include moving the stop lines on the Toll side of the bridge back by some distance to ensure there is correct space for passing vehicles and removing excess signs and poles that were felt to be not required. As with all areas of the village the Bridge will need to be maintained and kept in good order and any comments on this are welcomed.

Mr MacInnes commented that the old give way lines are still obvious and should be removed. The Clerk would liaise with Highways.

11. Litter Report

Litter is not the most glamorous of subject to be responsible for on the Parish Council but it is something that can cause great negative impact on our environment for all in the community. As resident we are hopefully proud of our surroundings and want to keep it rubbish free and I'm personally angered and annoyed when others dispose of rubbish irresponsibly. Luckily 2011/2012 has been a relatively uneventful year for Wistow with regard to rubbish. There have been the usual fly-tipping hot spots and on the whole these have been reported and subsequently cleared by HDC. I would request that if anyone notices any fly tipping or unexplained rubbish they report it to the Parish Council - so that it can be reported to and investigated by the PC/HDC. As individual members of the PC we are not always aware of particular instances so it's always worth reporting any occurrences, information and feedback from others is always welcome. All reported instances of tipping are fully investigated

by HDC and they will use any contact detail information found to try and pursue criminal prosecutions

12. Grants Report

This year the Parish Council has received the sum of £128.11 from the recycling glass bins in the village. This stream of funding has now ceased. The Parish Council obtained a grant of £590 from the Red Tile Wind Farm Trust, this enabled us to buy new picnic tables for the playing field.

13. Neighbourhood Plan Report

Our first meeting took place on Tuesday 13th March 2012, (Dr Richard Farrar, Ms Deborah Robinson, Cllr Peter Bucknell). Neighbourhood Plans are a way for local people to get together and set out a vision for their area, supported by their local authority

Neighbourhood planning is a new right for communities introduced through the Localism Act 2011, for the first time, local people will have a major statutory say in helping to shape development in the areas in which they live.

Neighbourhood planning empowers communities to shape the development and growth of a local area through the production of a neighbourhood development plan, a neighbourhood development order or a Community Right to Build Order.

Neighbourhood development plans will become part of the local statutory development plan and will form the basis for determining planning applications in that area. A neighbourhood development order enables the community to grant planning permission for the development it wishes to see.

Our Proposed Project items are:

Hi-Tech Small Business Units within the village - To help Local ultra-busy entrepreneur stand back for a moment from immediate problems and opportunities. It identifies the key issues that can determine the success or failure of small and medium-sized enterprises.

A few Starter Homes - Providing housing choices that meet the needs and aspirations of Wistow residents

Improve the Village Hall, for more social events - The Wistow Village Hall Project aims to develop the existing hall whilst preserving the character of the original building. The project aims to modernise, improve and update facilities, including new side/rear building as required, for the benefit of the village and its community. This will require considerable fundraising support from the village and grant bodies

Better Broadband Service - Campaigning for better Connectivity and Universal Broadband Access!

Healthy Living more walks etc. – Provide more walking routes, free and one of the easiest ways to get more active, lose weight and become healthier. It's underrated as a form of exercise but walking is ideal for people of all ages and fitness levels who want to be more active. Regular walking has been shown to reduce the risk of chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma, stroke and some cancers.

Renewable Energy - Generating your own energy can be good for the environment and good for your pocket too. Low-carbon technologies such as solar panels and wood fuel boilers use renewable sources of energy, so you use less fossil fuel, which reduces your carbon footprint as well as your fuel bills. What's more, with government financial incentives available, it's never been a better time to install.

Mr Turner asked where in Oaklands Avenue it would be possible to fit in the starter homes. Mr Bucknell replied that there is land still owned by District by the garages. Mr Turner commented how successful Broughton and Wennington have been with their small business units.

14. Jubilee Report

In line with the national celebration and Public Bank Holiday to mark the Queens Jubilee the Parish Council are looking to plan and execute a village event on Monday 4th of June 2012 on the Playground area. Mr MacInnes has kindly offered to organise a PA system so music will be provided, likewise a number of other activities are being looked into. We welcome anyone to place the date in their diary and also welcome any ideas and volunteers to help with the event.

15. Any Other Business from the Parish

Mr Ward gave the following report from Huntingdon District Council:

The Composition of the Council

Huntingdonshire District Council has 52 elected members, 41 Conservatives, 8 Liberal Democrats, 1 Independent and 1 UKIP. The Leader of the Council for the last 6 years, Cllr Ian Bates, resigned as Leader last May and was replaced by Cllr Jason Ablewhite from St Ives. The new Cabinet has only 6 members, down from the previous 9.

Council Tax and financial situation

This year the Council has set a tax increase of 3.5%. The Cabinet decided not to accept the 'Pickles offer' of a one-year 2.5% grant in return for a CT freeze. HDC has gone some way towards addressing its major funding problems: it has significantly reduced its senior staff and many others have accepted a voluntary redundancy package. The staff have agreed a pay freeze for the coming year as a way

of helping save jobs but further re-structuring will be necessary over the next twelve months and will almost certainly lead to further staff reductions. The Council has been relying on the reserves it accumulated from the sale of the council houses ten years ago and these are now running out. The Huntingdonshire Council Tax is the 20th lowest out of 238 Shire Districts in the Country. HDC provisionally plans to increase Council Tax by 3.5% in the each of the forthcoming four years. It is also relying heavily on using the 'New Homes Bonus' although some of this is supposed to be used in the areas where the new homes are being developed. This is a matter of some debate and disagreement in the Council. The programme of cuts and service reductions has been hotly debated. Refuse collection and disabled facilities grants are unaffected. The proposed intention to reduce investment in the voluntary sector by 80% over the next two years has been mitigated to a 28% reduction. Small reductions in service have been spread across service areas, e.g. reduced access to customer services, reduced spending on leisure facilities and parks maintenance. The Council is also hoping to increase income from car park charges and Leisure Centres.

Huntingdon Town Centre, Alconbury Airfield and other developments.

HDC is pinning its hopes on increased economic activity arising from the development of Huntingdon Town Centre, which is just in the process of starting with the construction of a multi-storey car park on the ring road near Sainsbury's. Subsequently there will be a major re-configuration of the Chequers Court area with Sainsbury's moving out to the West development and other businesses moving into the town centre area.

The development of Alconbury Airfield as a mixed-use development (industry, commerce, housing and leisure), is now taking shape with its designation as a Local Enterprise Zone. With 7,500 new jobs and 5,000 houses, this is the biggest development in the district for many years and has significant implications for traffic, education, medical services, commerce and property availability. The consultation process conducted so far by Urban and Civic has been well regarded.

Other developments – in St Neots, Brampton, Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey – are taking up a great deal of time and attention from Members and officers. Huntingdonshire is undoubtedly a growth area, with all the implications for good and bad.

Other Trends

The Localism Bill has worked its way through Parliament and will, over time, change the role of the local community in deciding development priorities. The links and relations between the Parish Council, District and County Council will probably change and this is a trend which Parish Councillors need to be aware of.

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The District Council now operates differently in order to encourage greater public interest and involvement. Council meetings are now held in the evenings and there is a slot for the public to ask questions. Each Council meeting opens with a debate which has often proved to be of value and interest, but public attendance is still low. Neighbourhood Forums on topics wider than policing are getting established. The public attendances are not high but have been better when controversial topics have been on the agenda.

Mr Lucas gave the following report on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council

CCC set a precept rise of 2.95%, they too rejected the 'Pickles offer'. They have a reduction in budget of 11% due to a reduction in the grant they received from the Government. This will mean a reduction in bus subsidies, school transport and road maintenance. Adult social services form for the biggest part of the budget and this cannot be reduced.

On the positive side, the guided bus is in service and CCC are planning to extend the route to start from Ramsey. The bus will stop at the top of the Hill and end at Addenbrookes. County are working with District on the Alconbury Enterprise Zone and this has led to the availability of £60m to improve broadband service in order to attract more business.

It is a disappointment that plans to improve the A14 have been shelved but other options are being explored.

Mrs Bance asked if the bin under the notice board could be relocated. This had been looked at before but had been discounted due to the high cost. It will be looked into again. She also requested that the potholes between Wistow and the Broughton crossroads be reported.

Mr Turner had a query concerning the costs of running the village and the cost of our street lighting. This was explained.

16. Close of Meeting

Mr Turner thanked the Parish Council for its efforts in running the village.

Dr Farrar thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.30 pm.