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2013 – 1

The Annual Open Meeting of the Wistow parish Council took place on Tuesday, 30th April 2013 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
- 1.1 Present: Mr Bucknell, Mr Carter, Mrs Coles(Clerk), Dr Farrar, Mr McInnes, Mr Pethard, Miss Robinson and Mr Williams, Mrs Bance and Mr Dransfield.
2. To approve and sign the minutes of the Annual Open Meeting held on 24th April, 2012.
 - 2.1 The Minutes had been circulated around the Councillors prior to this meeting and were available at the meeting. Mr Bucknell proposed and Dr Farrar seconded approval of the minutes, they were unanimously agreed.
3. Financial Statement
 - 3.1 A copy of Wistow Parish Council's Annual Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2013 were available for inspection. Dr Farrar invited comments on the Financial Statement.

The past financial year commenced with a balance of just over £18,000 and concluded with an additional surplus of £771 once all of the year's receipts and expenses had been accounted for.

In light of the facts that we managed to meet all of our costs with the current precept whilst retaining a moderate margin, and that we don't anticipate any significant increase in our running costs for the forthcoming year, we have decided to keep the precept for 2013/14 at £10,000. Compared to other council tax raises this means that the Wistow portion of the council tax bill has effectively reduced as a percentage of the overall tax bill for a second year.

Mrs Bance asked how many quotes are obtained when work is carried out in the Parish. Dr Farrar explained that wherever possible three quotes are obtained but that is not always possible as responses are not always received.

4. Chairman's Report

Last year the Precept was set at £10,000 to ensure that the village had sufficient funds to meet its annual expenditure. The annual cost of running the village for the forthcoming year is anticipated to be approximately £12,000. With a few additional funding sources, such as rents from the village allotments, the Parish council feel the current level of Precept is sufficient to comfortably meet our predicted expenditure for the coming financial year.

Last year was a very special year for the country; celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London 2012 Olympics. To celebrate the diamond jubilee a picnic in the local park was organised, which unfortunately was not very well attended, partly no doubt to the inclement British summertime weather.

To further mark this occasion our park has been registered as a Queen Elizabeth II Field, protecting this play space and a network of 2,011 similar outdoor recreational spaces in communities across the UK. This is now in the final stages of completion, with the official tripartite deed of dedication being reviewed by HDC's lawyers before being signed by Wistow parish council, HDC and the National Playing Fields Association.

Following a variety of unsuccessful attempts to consult with the village regarding updating the Parish Plan and priorities which the village feel the parish council should focus on, a sub committee was formed to generate some possible proposals. These are currently being finalised by the working group before being presented to the Parish council for consideration and subsequent dissemination to the village for consultation and discussion.

5. Playground Report

The playground will shortly be re-named as Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Park. This has been approved by all parties involved and we await the documents for signature.

Each month we carry out inspections and Parish Councillors complete a report in-line with our Insurance Policy requirement.

Each year we try to maintain the Park to a high standard, this financial year repairs to the aerial runway, including preserving the wood and bark area were carried out.

This coming year we are looking into removing the old tree stump in the middle of the park to give more playing area and we will look at preserving the new wooded frame area to avoid any future problems.

Mr Dransfield asked whether the playground continued to be a drain on resources and Dr Farrar responded that it is pretty much under control with the monthly and annual reports dictating the work required. Repairs are required to the path this coming year. Mrs Bance felt that the Parish Council spends a great deal of money on the playground and not all residents have children that use it, especially when our roads are full of potholes. Dr Farrar pointed out that only a small percentage, less than 10% of our precept, is actually spent on the Playground and the roads were outside our financial remit.

6. Allotment Report

Following the success of the serious trim to the upper hedge on the Raveley Road boundary with the allotments, the Parish council have performed the same remedial maintenance on the lower section of the hedge. Having completed this work, future maintenance of the hedges should be minimal, with a light trim being required only once or twice per season.

The first allotment plot to be cultivated as originally intended (for domestic horticultural purposes) continues to be a success despite recent drainage difficulties following an unseasonably wet year. To aid the drainage of the allotments the parish council intend to clear the ditch bordering the allotments and the Raveley Road following years of neglect and accumulated detritus.

Mr Dransfield commented that it is great to see an allotment being used as it should be. Dr Farrar responded that as tenancies are released similar use would be encouraged and in answer to Mrs Bance's question regarding qualification for allotments, the use for farming was historic and not something that could be changed, in the future it will be a requirement that the tenant is a resident of the village.

7. Highway Warden's Report

Back in June 2012 Deborah Robinson became Wistow's Highways Warden – following an induction meeting in August she gained an understanding of the requirements of the role and was introduced to a regular contact at Cambridgeshire County Councils Highways Department – Mr Tony King. The primary reason for the warden is to act as a link between Cambridgeshire County Council and Wistow Parish Council. This relationship has improved communications between the two parties to the overall benefit of Wistow village.

Throughout the course of the year there have been various highways related issues – most of which have been 'general maintenance' – i.e. pot-holes, blocked drains, salt bin refills, repairs to damage post on bridge, various patching / edge patching repairs to the road between Wistow and Broughton and at Wistow Toll etc.

However, there are some on-going issues which remain outstanding but are being progressed regularly to ensure they remain current to Cambridgeshire County Council. One such issue being the on-going drainage problem on the bridle way to Broughton on Mill Road – where there is a persistent problem with excess water from the pathway running into the road – a grave hazard during the recent bad weather. Both Highways and the Rights of Way team from Cambridgeshire County Council have visited the site and it was agreed that a trench should be dug as a temporary fix, which has now been completed. The drainage issue is still to be resolved.

Another live issue is regarding the debris on both sides of the verges on the way into Wistow – following a meeting with Tony King in March he advised that all debris must be removed from the verge to allow for grass-cutting – if the debris is not cleared in a timely manner it can be forcibly removed by Highways with the debris being put onto the field side of the verges. It has been confirmed that the debris near the allotments will be removed soon and the clearing required on the other side is still unresolved at the moment, but is being progressed.

It has been confirmed by Highways that at some time in 2013 they will be putting a surface dressing on the road between Wistow and Broughton – as yet specific dates are to be confirmed. This work was planned prior to the current budgetary constraints. Any future expenditure is likely to be limited due to the considerable constraints on CCC budgets. It is likely that any future requests for work to be carried out will be more protracted.

Any Highways related issues that occur or concerns raised by anyone in the village should be direct to Deborah Robinson, who will in turn pass them on to Highways for action and/or comment. Deborah's contact details are available on the village web-site.

Mr Dransfield commented on the condition of the Raveley Road being worse after the work was carried out.

8. Countryside Report

8.1. Wistow Public Footpath No.1

Problems with drainage related to the improved surface for Wistow FP No 1 have been encountered. Some work to address this has been undertaken but more will be necessary before a satisfactory solution is found.

8.2. Investigation of Potential Circular Walk

The circular route along the track running north from point 1175 to Bury could not be developed. Another possible route is being investigated towards Upwood in cooperation with Upwood Parish.

9. Village Hall Report

The Village Hall Committee are now assessing the viability of a new hall compared with the costs of refurbishment of the existing hall. This has been influenced by the availability of grant monies and the restrictions on what can be undertaken at the existing site. This will be dependant upon funding and suitable land being available. They have continued with fund raising with the addition of two very successful poker nights.

Mr Dransfield asked where a new village hall would be located, this is in the very early stages and possible locations would need to be identified.

10. Litter Report

Gordon McInnes took over the role of litter monitor in 2012/13, previously undertaken by Deborah who had established a good relationship with the Reporting Team at the district council. Gordon had to liaise with the team 5 times last year to arrange collection/retrieval of flytipping, 4 times on the Raveley bends and once on the Broughton road. Every time the matters were dealt with promptly and satisfactorily. One instance of two 1 tonne bags of garden spoil, deposited in the layby up Blackhurst lane, seem to have been dealt with by the Landowner.

General Litter within the village is picked by Gordon on a weekly basis whilst out with his son or dog. The Park is checked and picked most weekends.

Most of the general litter collected seems to be deposited by passing cars with bottles/cans and packaging just being tossed out of windows onto verges.

11. Parish Plan Report

A number of meetings have been held to develop proposals for an update to the Parish Plan since many issues from the existing plan had been realised. A proposal document is in the final stages of preparation and this will be circulated for consideration by the Parish. New issues for consideration include Fast Broadband, Starter Homes, High Tech and Light Business Units, Village Hall improvements/Replacement, and renewable energy considerations.

12. Any Other Business from the Parish

Mrs Bance is considering developing Top Yard and would like to work with the Parish Council and District Council to provide affordable housing. It was agreed to set up a preliminary meeting to discuss the possibilities. Mr Bucknell commented that there is a consultation open on the new Local Plan and there is nothing for Wistow in the plan.

13. Close of Meeting

Dr Farrar thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.20 pm.