

HARTLEBURY PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 3rd March 2015

Present: Cllrs P. Holden (Chairman), R. Kirby (Vice-Chairman), Mrs C. Boughton-Thomas, Mrs L. Brookes, Mrs J. Jones, A. Cupper, A. Bishop, G. Howard, A. Jones.

In Attendance: Brian Gale (Clerk) and 11 members of the public.
The meeting opened at 19.02 p.m.

- 1. Apologies:** Apologies were received from Cllrs D. Stocker, H. J. Webb and N. Dowty.
- 2. Minutes:** Acceptance of the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 4th March 2015 was proposed by Cllr Kirby, seconded by Cllr Mrs Boughton-Thomas and agreed.
- 3. Address by Chairman:** Cllr Peter Holden welcomed everyone to the meeting and delivered his annual report for Hartlebury Parish.

“Good evening ladies, gentlemen; welcome to the Hartlebury Annual Parish Meeting. Here is my annual report for 2014 – 15 for the Hartlebury Parish here in north Worcestershire.

In my report this time last year I stressed what a busy year 2013 -2014 was. Well, this last year, too, has been a very full one in the life of this parish and I will take a short time to outline some of the many issues the Council has dealt with and the tasks it has continued to undertake.

In September our previous Clerk, Angela Preece announced her decision to resign after just twelve months. We were sad Angela felt she needed to move on. She made clear that while she enjoyed the role of Clerk she was not enjoying working for this Council. She did not wish to work in an atmosphere where she faced and witnessed such a degree of personal criticism and hostility. I would want to place on record my thanks, on the Council’s behalf for her very hard work, her excellent advice and her willingness to help by agreeing to work until the year-end.

For a third time the Council’s Staffing Committee took on the task of appointing a new Clerk. We interviewed four people and chose Brian Gale, who took up his post on 1st January. He has shown himself to be an able Clerk, demonstrating his clerking experience in these early weeks. I have personally been grateful for the speed with which he had taken up his tasks and ensured he advises and guides this Council’s business and decision-making from the outset.

The Council has, of course, conducted its usual business and attended to its legal obligations. However, business this year has been dominated, firstly by the continuing issues around the waste incinerator on the Trading Estate; and secondly, by further significant housing development planning applications requiring our time and attention.

The incinerator has moved into the construction phase and this Council has worked with its neighbours in Elmley and Ombersley parishes to engage with and set the parameters for the Community Liaison Group, initiated by Mercia, the operators. This has been a challenging task, but we have retained the initiative by making sure residents’ concerns are on the agenda and by taking on the role of Chair. The CLG meets every two months and this Council works closely with Ombersley to plan in advance of those meetings.

Key local concerns are: noise and light pollution, the contractors’ working hours, truck and other traffic to and from the site, and the matter of air quality monitoring. We shall continue to raise these and will be arranging a meeting regarding air quality monitoring in the coming weeks.

The two campaigning groups sought legal advice about whether a judicial review of the decision to go ahead with the plant was an option. In both instances the legal advice has not supported that course.

I would want to stress a further point. From the outset – back in January 2010 – there were potential risks for a small community in a long campaign. This is not a large village and its community spirit could be easily harmed. There are many examples of communities riven and damaged by continuing in-fighting, while those building the plant or the road or whatever was planned, get on with their task. I would seriously urge all those closely involved in the long campaigns to avoid running the risk of doing any long-term damage to community relations by

re-directing strong feelings about the project into perpetuating ill-feeling, personal animosity and rancour.

The Council's efforts, in this last year, in relation to the development of 92 houses on land in the centre of the village, have focused on the reserved matters stage – trying to secure sympathetic house designs and ameliorate the worst impacts of such a large development. Working with the most affected residents, the Council has made a case and, in late February, secured a deferment from Wychavon Planning Committee so that the developers have to come back with better plans. Watch this space.

An application for a 20+ housing development on land right next to the railway in Station Park has been turned down twice and is currently subject of an appeal by the owner and applicant. The Council has voiced its views and remains opposed to the plan.

The Council voiced its objection to the re-development plans for the Talbot Hotel and it remains most frustrating that so many months on the former pub is undeveloped. A very recent amending application might suggest progress will be made this year. The Council is most concerned about the problems likely to arise with traffic and parking and met with business owners, residents, our District Councillor and County Highways staff on site to try and find solutions to the problems of traffic and parking close by.

The Council adheres to its longstanding pattern of resisting applications to remove agricultural ties on residential properties and to oppose any developments within the Green Belt.

In relation to the work on a Parish Plan, this has had to take a back seat since September 2014, with other Council demands taking up time. In addition, having time and space to arrange public involvement has proved a task too far this autumn and winter. Picking up this baton will be a task for the community and its new Parish Council after the elections in May.

I would underline my view that in a time of great challenge and change in the village through housing developments and the growing presence of the incinerator, it is most important the community is enabled to focus on and develop its own plans for its social life – through the Parish Plan and developing the village hall and green as a social and recreational hub.

The Council's website remains a useful source of information for local people; do please visit the site at 'Hartlebury.org.uk'

The Council has continued to offer its support to the Castle Preservation Trust and we mark here the great news, in September last year, of the success of their bid for full funding from the Lottery. This enables the Trust to purchase the castle and its grounds and begin the development of an important historical and social site for the village, the county and the region. I would wish to record congratulations to the Trust's bid-team for all their immense hard work.

The Council has provided grants toward the cost of maintaining churchyards and to the gardening club. My thanks go to the gardening club for their efforts in keeping the planters around the village to such a standard and their contribution to the life of the community through the fine annual show.

It seems important in this context to mention the development of the Parish Hall in the past year and the several successful events which have made good use of the refurbished facilities. I note the efforts of the current Parish Hall Management Committee, working to a development plan for the hall and look forward to seeing the hall growing in use as a village resource. The Council has now established a process of working and liaising with the Parish Hall Management Committee Chair and it is to be hoped this will make it easier to improve the Hall and its environs so that parishioners have a social and community centre they feel proud of and keen to use. The Council has granted funding of over £8,000 this year to help the Management Committee take its plans forward and an application for £9,000 of New Homes Bonus has been submitted to help with the cost of building new changing rooms at the Hall.

Speeding and heavy traffic has remained an issue on roads in and around the village. The Council continues to operate a Vehicle Activated Speed sign at various points and our Clerk, with crucial assistance from our Lengthsman, has been accumulating speeding data to build our case with the Safer Roads Partnership, for more frequent enforcement. Residents rightly remain concerned about traffic and the Council will continue its efforts, liaising with businesses on the Trading Estate in an effort to avoid traffic using village routes and to highlight their employees speeding. Our Lengthsman, Barry Bennett continues to give us great service and is often to be

seen doing vital maintenance all around the paths and footways of the village. I would wish to publicly record my thanks to him for his hard work.

The Council maintains its links with the local police. We are mindful of the concerns of residents – in some areas of the parish particularly - who experience higher crime or who are fearful about it. While we recognise pressures upon police staff in the current national financial climate, the Council will continue to press for a good service from our local Community Officer, Paul Cound and his colleagues.

The Council continues to meet as part of the liaison group for the landfill sites with parishioners, representatives from Biffa, Wienerberger and the EA. We remain concerned about a number of aspects of the running and management of the sites and we raise issues at liaison meetings and in between times when required. I would urge residents to use contact details on the website if you have any concerns. The Council also continues with its obligations in meeting with Trading Estate management staff.

This year I would particularly like to draw attention to the sterling efforts of our Footpaths Officer, John Denby who has taken on the role with evident enthusiasm and energy this last twelve months. John organised the first 'Round the boundary' walk last May and I am pleased he has planned another this year on 13th June. This is a great chance to explore the parish and to ensure we enjoy our many footpaths. Our local volunteer tree wardens Sue Howarth, Phil Moseley and Carol Priest continue to serve us well, too; my thanks to you for your work over the past year.

This year the Council has re-vamped its contract with allotment-holders and the plots appear to be well-used and generally well-kept. This year the Council will need to resolve the matter maintenance and use of the accompanying field, in the absence of a current tenant.

The Council has also, I am pleased to say, revised arrangements for the Manninge charity fund distribution. For the first time this year the Council will work in tandem with the Church Wardens to distribute monies to one or two local people in financial need – through a process of application. This will be publicised soon and be open until the end of June.

I have said before and underline again, that striving to be a quality council with differing and strongly-held opinions, having to grapple with important issues and pressing matters facing our parish community makes demands on all of us. I am all too aware of the dissent, ill-feeling and rancour which have been present in recent weeks and months. Despite this, I trust your Council can work together for you as the community in the run up to the elections in May. I thank Councillors for their work on our important sub-committees and would urge my fellow Councillors to continue their efforts.

I would finally wish to put on record my thanks; firstly, to Nigel Dowty our District Councillor who is working very hard on our behalf, dealing with a variety of issues; to our County Councillor; and then to my four predecessors as Chairmen, who have provided support and advice this last year.

Thank you for coming this evening.

This is a meeting for residents. I am happy to facilitate any points you may wish to make.”

Please see notes appended at end of minutes

4. Manninge Charity Account: The Clerk advised that the latest financial data on the Trust's bank account, up to 14th December 2014; it was noted that plans to amalgamate this trust with a church trust to enable more meaningful grants to be made were ongoing.

5. Reports:

a) **Police:** No report.

b) **Footpaths:** No report.

c) **Tree Warden** – The Chairman read out the following report from Tree Warden Sue Howarth

“There have been no problems to report with the Hartlebury parish trees over the last year and no requests have been brought to my notice for permission to do any work on those trees with a TPO or within the conservation area.

I last volunteered at the Summerway orchard at the end of January 2014. At that stage the owner was almost ready to replant almost half the area with young fruit trees following a lot of hard work clearing the ground. He is choosing mainly a variety of Apple which can be used small scale cider production. I feel satisfied that the help of a small band of volunteers over 3 years has given the owner the motivation to do this restoration project and will need little further help from us.”

d) **County Councillor** – No report received

There being no other business, the Annual Parish Meeting was closed at 7.45pm.

The following issues were raised by residents:-

1. Concern over councillor commitment to the Parish Plan. It was pointed out that councillors already made a significant contribution to the village and that this was really a Community initiative.
2. The need for more councillor training.
3. Residents expressed an interest in supporting the council but felt that there was too little council engagement in land development and local businesses.
4. It was opined that while WAIL did not make an application for a judicial review, it did receive council funding to do so.