

# **WOOLMER GREEN PARISH COUNCIL**

## **Minutes of the twenty third Annual Parish Meeting 16 April 2024**

**Present:** Cllrs Andy Gribble (Chairman), Phil Corke (Vice Chairman), Tim Dix, Sarah Hall & Rob Horton.

**In attendance:** J Pearce (Clerk).

Herts County Councillor T Kingsbury, Borough Councillors T Mitchinson & R Trigg.  
Members of the public.

- 1. Apologies for absence:** Parish Cllr Grant Pinney & Borough Cllr Julie Cragg.
- 2. Chairman's introduction:** The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. The Parish Council is legally required to hold an Annual Parish Meeting where the public can meet its Parish Councillors and raise issues.  
Our County and Borough Cllrs were introduced and the Chairman thanked them for attending Parish Council meetings and is grateful for their support.  
Thanks were also given to Parish Cllrs and sincere thanks to the Clerk for her hard work.  
The Chairman acknowledged the work of volunteers; Chris Tyler for inspecting the playgrounds and doing odd jobs at no charge, Jenny Hawkins for tending the village planters and all the residents that distribute the newsletter. Staff Julie, Abdul and Peter were also thanked for looking after the village hall.  
The Annual Report summarises what the Council has been doing throughout the year. At last years meeting the issue of the closed off south access at the Chequers pub was raised as it was now being used as a layby, we are grateful to County Cllr Tony Kingsbury for allocating some of his Highway Locality Budget to have the kerb reinstated which resolved the problem. The Council was awarded a £15,000 grant from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund over three years resulting from WHBCs successful bid. £10,000 has been spent on refurbishing the hall's underfloor heating and the next allocation will pay for a new resin suffice under equipment in the Garden Road playground.  
£4,000 was spent on replacing the rotten wooden soffits on the hall guttering and two fire doors replaced at a cost of £6,800.  
Chris Tyler was a worthy winner of the Community Award for inspecting the playgrounds and carrying out odd jobs.  
In October the WHBC Local Plan was adopted which included the green belt site for 150 dwellings in Woolmer Green. An application has been submitted for outline planning permission and the Parish Council has objected on the grounds of access and flooding.  
The village hall is the Council's main source of income and hall hire rates have been increased. This allows the increase in the parish portion of the Council Tax to be restricted to 5% which is a few pounds a year for households. Residents can benefit from a discount on hire rates.
- 3. To approve minutes of Annual Parish Meeting 2023:** The minutes of the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.
- 4. To receive the Annual Report:** No questions were raised. The report is on the Council website.
- 5. To receive a report on the Church from Nigel Howes:** 20 to 30 people regularly attend Sunday Service. The church building is in a good state and the church can pay its way. Reverend Gilfeather is in her second year as principal priest and was ordained last year and also received her PhD. She has strong links with the school.  
Church attendance on Christmas Day is disappointing but our other Christmas Services are full. The Remembrance Service is well attended and the Brownies led the prayers.  
Last year Judith Watson organised an exhibition about Harry Macdonald, the woodcarver, which lots of people attended.  
The church meetings are held over lunch at the Red Lion and the pub has raised funds for the church.

We have an enthusiastic church band and small choir, led by Penny Howes, which enhance our worship.

We are grateful for the opportunity to serve the teas at Village Day which is a great fund raiser and also for the Parish Council donation for upkeep of the churchyard.

After many years of faithful service, Churchwarden, Sue Keach stepped down from the role this year. Sue was efficient, and her fundraising for the kitchen and toilet building extension is a monument to her dedication. As no one came forward to fill her role we are sharing out the churchwarden's tasks out among our congregation.

## **6. Events – Cllrs Corke:**

Wheels on Woolmer Green car show will be held again this year, organised by Cllr Pinney.

Donations will be collected for a young persons' homeless charity.

Village day is on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June and there will be local stalls and entertainment. We are hoping to have some outside dance troops. Cllr Corke said he had booked the sun again too.

Cllr Corke sits on the new WoollyFest committee and is helping to organise a non-profit music event in July. All profits will be distributed to local good causes; The Willow Foundation, Isabel Hospice, Knebworth Food Bank & Waste Not Want Not.

The Chairman stated that the hall grounds are being hired for WoollyFest but it is not a Parish Council event.

## **7. County Councillor Tony Kingsbury:**

Cllr Kingsbury said he has been our County Councillor for three years representing Woolmer Green, Digswell, Welwyn, the Ayots and parts of Welwyn Garden City. As a County Councillor he has two budgets; the Locality Budget of £5,000, reduced from £10,000 in previous years, for community groups and a Highways Locality Budget which was used to reinstate the kerb by the Chequers and further work is planned for Longmead. Residents can report highway faults online but if they are not resolved he can help.

An issue discussed last year was changes to the B197 which, although funding is not finalised, has moved forward and a consultation should take place later in the year.

The new Tewin Road recycling centre opened in May last year.

## **8. Questions from the Public:**

Resident: The issue of the B197 has been going on for years.

Cllr Kingsbury: It is a priority and is in hand, a consultation will take place this year and then it has to be implemented so progress is slow, but it is moving forward.

Resident: The A1(M) has been closed for works and traffic is diverted to the B197. It is very noisy, you can't sleep and the house shakes. I have asked Highways England if traffic can be slowed down but they are not interested. They said ask HCC for advice on where to divert traffic.

Cllr Kingsbury: This is worth bringing up in the forthcoming consultation but that is not going to help at the moment. I appreciate it is difficult but there is not an alternative diversion route to the B197.

Resident: The B197 has been discussed for the last 40 years and nothing has changed. Knebworth has a 30mph limit why can't we?

Cllr Kingsbury: This is being looked at and progress is being made but we haven't got the funding as yet. Following the consultation later this year, and assuming we get the funding, improvements could be made in 18 months to 2 years. It is something I am very keen to do.

Resident: When are we getting the puffin crossing by the shops?

Cllr Kingsbury: This is something the PC and I have been chasing. Everything has been approved by Highways and the issue is now being dealt with by planning enforcement at WHBC.

Clerk: We have been told the site owner has been advised they could submit a variation to the planning application. We don't know why or if they will do it, but this could take a couple of months. How long are enforcement prepared to wait until it takes further action?

Resident: presumably this is something the owner of Kellard House are bound to do as part of the planning application? Should we write to enforcement?

Clerk: Yes, we keep pushing and you can as well.

Cllr Mitchinson: If we all contact enforcement it might focus their minds.

Resident to Cllr Corke: By the time you sent out a letter to residents about WoollyFest everything had been organised and we couldn't object to it. It is good you want to do this but it finishes at 10.30pm and by the time it is cleared up it will be late. Why not have the festival during the day?

Cllr Corke: The license and acts had to be booked well in advance. If the licence was not granted, we wouldn't have been able to run the event. It was advertised last year. A lot of people will come for the last couple of hours when the bigger bands are performing. All equipment will be cleared away the following day.

Resident: What is happening to the field along London Road? A gate has been installed, all the signs are there that it is going to be built on.

Cllr Gribble: We have looked into why the gate was installed but it is not due to be developed.

Clerk: We asked Knebworth Estates about that, and the gate is to deter fly tipping. They cannot build on it, it is Green Belt.

Resident: I've seen it happen before, but you are not doing anything about it. I've lived here over 60 years and nothing is ever done, the village will become a town.

There were no further questions and the Chairman thanked everyone for coming.