

WOOLMER GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual Parish Meeting 17 April 2018

Present: Cllrs A Gribble (Chair), P Corke (Vice Chair) S Hall, J Hawkins, G Pinney & A White.

In attendance: J Pearce (Clerk); Herts County Councillor R Smith; Borough Cllr S Markiewicz; Head Teacher Jan Martin; Reverend Dominic Holroyd-Thomas; members of the public.

1. Opening of the meeting by the Chairman: The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Parish Councillors. He welcomed County Councillor Richard Smith and Borough Councillor Steve Markeiwicz. He thanked the Clerk for her dedication to the Parish Council.

The Chairman said that during the last year over £11,000 had been spent on new hall windows and £2,460 was spent on sandblasting and painting the spider climbing frame in the Garden Road playground. The Council was very grateful to Cllr Richard Smith for contributing half the cost of the repainting from his Locality Budget.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Tony White for his work on the rights of way in Woolmer Green by applying for a £1,000 PPP grant each year in order to keep them in good condition. The final two thirds of Bridger's Path were resurfaced last year rather than over two years as originally planned and the additional cost of £1,730 was shared between the Parish Council and the Rights of Way Officer.

A big issue has been the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan which proposes 150 houses to be built on the Green Belt which the Parish Council has opposed. Knebworth and Woolmer Green Parish Councils have employed the services of a planning consultant to represent them at the relevant hearings of the North Herts and Welwyn Hatfield Local Plans as development in both villages will impact on us all. The consultant spoke at Hearing 3 where employment in Woolmer Green was discussed. Hearing 4 will take place following a Green Belt Review and time will be allocated to discuss Woolmer Green.

2. Apologies for absence: Borough Cllr Roger Trigg.

3. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting 2017: The minutes of the 2017 Annual Parish Meeting were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. Head Teacher, Jan Martin, talks about St. Michael's School: Ms Martin says she had never met former Head Teacher Brendan Mallon and tomorrow will be the anniversary of his passing. The school will have collective worship taken by Reverend Holroyd-Thomas and the church will be open from 3.30pm for anyone who wants to remember him.

Ms. Martin had been Deputy Head at Cuffley School for many years and had a taster of headship in other schools including her time covering at St. Michael's. After Mr Mallon passed away she came back was appointed the new Head Teacher. She was very conscious of the sad time the school had gone through. She keeps residents up to date by writing a page for the Village News and talked about the charitable work the children had been involved with. The school had links with the local care homes and had sung carols and read poetry to their residents.

Budgets are tight and the school relies on the Friends to help fund projects and this has included a large mosaic area representing the school's values with commemorative benches in memory of Mr Mallon.

The children have also raised funds, including an onesie & slipper day that raised £300 which paid for new play equipment.

Fence repainting has been done and roof repairs and new tarmacking works are planned. Permission is being sought to extend the playground as it is inadequate at present. Funding bids and help from the Friends will be required as it is a big project.

5. Cllr Richard Smith talks about County Council matters: Cllr Smith opened by thanking village volunteer Reece Wood for re-painting three mile posts in Welwyn and one in Woolmer Green. He has done an excellent job and it shows what can be achieved with a small budget under the Highways Together scheme. He thanked the Clerk for organising the work.

Following a strongly supported and successful bid to the PCC Road Safety Fund in February 2017, Aecom had been commissioned to do a study of the B197. Cllr Smith had just received a copy of the report which has not yet been assessed or approved by Highways officers. It contained a detailed description of the B197 and its current function as the main diversion route for the A1(M).

The production of HCC's Local Transport Plan 4 and the Growth and Transport Plan are preparation for future large housing growth. Highways England will be introducing a smart motorway scheme on the A1(M) to alleviate congestion between junctions 6 and 8 and this has been approved for works commencing in 2019/20.

The report states that the smart motorway scheme could lead to the B197 being reassessed as less significant as the A1(M) diversion route and, if this is the case, the width of the B197 could be reduced. Walking and cycling routes could be improved between Stevenage and Welwyn and there would be the opportunity to introduce a reduced speed limit. The difficulties of crossing the road, parking and limited visibility at some points are highlighted and it states that the road is unsafe for children.

The report recommends the introduction of a controlled crossing outside St. Michael's school and upgrading the existing zebra crossing and bus stops.

There is the prospect of funding from the PCC Road Safety Fund which could pay for the introduction of short term measures. Larger scale changes may enable a 30mph speed limit to be introduced and this is the first time there has been a realistic opportunity to achieve this and has been the main goal for many years.

Response to resident's questions:

The PCC funding could see short term measures implemented fairly quickly, possibly six to twelve months, but larger schemes would take two or three years and following the introduction of the smart motorway which is a major scheme. We need to plan for it now.

There is likely to be a period, while the smart motorway is under construction, when the B197 would become particularly congested.

The Local Transport Plan 4 will prioritise pedestrians and cyclists over motor vehicles but the plan is still to be approved.

If there is enough in the PCC budget to pay for the controlled crossings they could be a priority.

Cllr Smith agreed to raise the issues of loose chippings on the footways following the road resurfacing and the repair of the damaged zebra crossing beacon.

6. Cllr Grant Pinney tells us about Wheels on Woolmer Green: Last year 164 cars attended the event, the oldest dating from 1919. £434 was raised and divided between Prostate Cancer UK and the Herts Air Ambulance. The event is now in its third year and will be held on Sunday 13th May, 10am – 4pm. Barnet Girls Football Team will be cooking breakfast and there will be prize giving between 3pm & 4pm. The Woolmer Green Band will be one of the bands performing at the event.

This year we asked residents which charity should be supported via the newsletter and a resident came forward to propose Space, a Hertfordshire based charity supporting parent/carers of children and young people on the Autistic Spectrum, with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or a related condition.

7. Questions from the public:

The Council stated that the Clerk and Cllr Hawkins had attended GDPR training and is preparing for its implementation. The ICO has informed NALC that they accept that Parish & Town Council will continue to work towards compliance.

The Council said that the swings in the Garden Road playground are being re-painted now but the weather has delayed the work. The resident thanked the Council for upgrading the playground.

A resident thanked the Parish, Borough and County Councillors for all the work they do on everyone's behalf.

8. Close of Meeting by the Chairman. The Chairman reminded everyone that Village Day is on Sunday 3rd June. He thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting.