

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PARISH MEETING HELD IN THE SCHOOL HALL,
ST. JAMES C. E. (V. C.) PRIMARY SCHOOL, LONGDON, ON TUESDAY, APRIL 21ST, 2009

Present: Cllr. R. C. Hemmingsley (Chairman of the Parish Council, who chaired the meeting); Cllr. The Rev. J. R. Andrews; Cllr. N. J. Bird; Cllr. Mrs. G. D. Duckett; Cllr. A. J. Juxon; Cllr. Mrs. H. A. Meere; and Cllr. Mrs. J. A. Russell.

Also present were the Parish Clerk; PC Andy Brown, Community Beat Officer, and thirty-three parishioners.

1. APOLOGIES

Cllr. N. Stanfield; Cllr. S. K. Welch; Cllr. N. J. Roberts, of Lichfield District Council; County Councillor F. W. Lewis, MBE; Mr. and Mrs. John Beveridge; Mr. David La Trobe; and Mr. Gary Powis, Chairman of the Cannock Wood and Gentleshaw Village Hall Management Committee.

2. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

After welcoming all those present to the meeting, the Chairman opened proceedings by presenting his annual report.

To a certain extent, the past year had been one of consolidation following the outcome of the Council's initial procedural review, which had resulted in a committee structure representing the Council's principal activities.

Two of the Committees – Highways & Footpaths and Greens and Open Spaces – had been allocated budgets and, subject to statutory and financial regulations, had authority to approve expenditure, but, by definition of their activities, neither of the other two – Finance & General Purposes and Planning – required budgetary facilities.

Though newly formed, the Committees had been busy with routine and ongoing projects. Meetings were held regularly throughout the year, and dates and venues were displayed on the village notice-boards and the parish website www.longdon-staffs.info. All Committee meetings were open to the public, and participation time was allocated prior to commencement of business for questions to be asked, suggestions made or concerns expressed. Public involvement was an important and valued element in the Council's activities.

Again, it had been necessary for the Council to devote a considerable amount of time analysing the litany of new and amended legislation emanating from Central Government. The complexity of relevant sections had made it necessary to significantly amend the Council's Standing Orders, and the revised edition could be viewed on the Parish Website or inspected by appointment with the Parish Clerk.

The diligence of the Planning Committee had been exercised throughout the year, notwithstanding the increase in planning applications, and several large and, in some respects, contentious applications had been dealt with. The Council's ethos on all planning applications was to conscientiously apply the statutory policies and directives, having regard to the special nature of the area and development requirement.

The Chairman thanked all contributors in "Longdon Life" and especially the Editor, Cllr. Allen Juxon, for his dedicated commitment.

He congratulated all for the sterling effort in the Best Kept Village Competition. Longdon & Longdon Green and Upper Longdon had entered again this year, the former in the Large Village Section of the Lichfield & Cannock Chase District, the latter in the Small Village Section of the same District. With the residents' usual commitment and enthusiasm, it was hoped that the accolades would this year be returning to their rightful homes!

The Chairman concluded his report by thanking the Vice-Chairman, Cllr. Norman Stanfield, and the Clerk for their support during his term of office as Chairman.

3. PRESENTATION OF FINANCIAL REPORT BY CLERK

The Chairman then invited the Clerk to present the Financial Statement for the year ended 31st March 2009, copies of which were included in the dossier of annual reports made available at the meeting.

This showed income for the year had been £18623. 10, compared with £17207. 85 the previous year, while expenditure had been £19604. 12, compared with £12566. 78.

There had been increases in expenditure in all areas except Churchyards, the major increase being in Highways and Footpaths, owing to the cost of upgrading the footpath across the Glebe Field, for which grants had been received from both Staffordshire County Council and the Lichfield Diocesan Board of Finance.

Expenditure had fallen within budget in all areas save Parks & Open Spaces and Section 137; this had been comfortably absorbed from reserves, and the Council's finances remained robust.

In concluding his report, the Clerk reminded the meeting that Councillors' commitment was not limited to attending the monthly meetings of the Council; there were Committee meetings to attend, and much work went on in-between.

He paid especial tribute to Cllr. Stanfield, who, in particular, brought considerable expertise to his role as Chairman of the Planning Committee; Cllr. Juxon, who three times a year produced "Longdon life", the information-packed parish magazine, highly regarded both within and beyond the parish; and Cllr. Hemmingsley, a hard-working Chairman, who also took a close and well-informed interest in planning matters and who acted as web-master for the Parish Website.

4. FORMAL ACCEPTANCE OF WRITTEN REPORTS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

The Chairman thanked all those who had submitted written reports on behalf of local organisations:

The Parish Church of St. James the Great, Longdon;
Cannock Wood & Gentleshaw Village Hall Management Committee;
Longdon Club & Institute;
Longdon Women's Institute;
Gentleshaw Women's Institute;
Longdon Cricket Club;
Longdon Friends of St. Giles Hospice;
Longdon Dru Yoga;
Longdon Branch, Royal British Legion;
Longdon Old People's Welfare Committee;
Cannock Wood & Gentleshaw Welfare Committee;
Longdon Produce & Flower Show Committee;
Cannock Wood & Gentleshaw Flower Club;
Cannock Wood & Gentleshaw Gardening Club.

5. OPEN FORUM

The Chairman then opened the meeting to the floor.

Two issues of concern were raised – the need for a children's play area and problem of speeding traffic in Upper Longdon.

Speaking on behalf of a number of younger parishioners present at the meeting, James Derry called for the Parish Council to build a park for the children.

He pointed out that there were approximately 100 children in the village, who had nothing to do and nowhere to go. At the moment, playing in the car park of the village hall met with opposition, while the only other alternative, playing in the streets, put them in danger. The only play equipment available to them was the slide in the field behind the Memorial Hall.

What the children were calling for were a multi-sports frame with football goals and basket-ball hoops, a climbing frame for younger children and a ramp for cyclists.

While recognising that the money might not be available for both a children's park and a bowling green, James thought that most villagers would prefer it to be spent on the former.

Thanking James for his contribution, the Chairman pointed out, however, the land at the back of the Memorial Hall was owned by the Committee and members of the Club and Institute, and, as owners, it was their right to decide to what use it should be put.

The Parish Council was acutely aware of the need for a play area for the village children, but all the sites ever suggested were privately-owned.

Cllr. Juxon reminded the meeting that the Council had approached the Governors to see whether the School play area could be brought into public use in out-of-school hours, but their initial response had been negative.

The Council was then asked whether pressure could be brought on the Governors to take a more positive attitude, especially as the land was, after all, in public ownership.

However, the Clerk added that there was now a willingness on the part of the Governors at least to meet the Parish Council to explore the possibility, though they still had valid concerns over damage to School property and safety issues.

Mr. Richard Clarke, a member of the Club and Institute's Management Committee, thought that, even if the bowling green went ahead, there would sufficient space for a children's play area, though the Committee would need to know what was being proposed.

Cllr. Mrs. Duckett offered to meet the children to discuss with them what they would like to see in a children's play area, an offer which, it was agreed, should be accepted.

Ellis Vyse reported that the owner of a field off High Street had offered to allow children to play in it, and he agreed to find out more about this offer and any conditions which might be attached to its use.

Mr. Tom Badgery, a resident of Upper Longdon, said that, while he wholeheartedly supported any move to provide a play area in Longdon, he very much hoped that the Parish Council would continue to bear in mind that there was a need for a similar play area for the children living in Upper Longdon.

Turning to the second of these two issues, Mr. Badgery asked whether, in view of the continuing problem of speeding vehicles, a police speed check could be mounted in Upper Longdon.

PC Brown replied that, unfortunately, such checks had only limited effect, slowing motorists down only when the speed checks were in place. He pointed out that the police were required in law to advertise their presence, the principal aim of the exercise being to slow traffic down, not to catch and convict offenders. Moreover, it was common practice for many motorists, once they were aware of the presence of a speed check, to warn other motorists approaching from the opposite direction.

In his experience, the problem was far from being unique to Longdon, and he thought that the only answer to it was through education.

He would, however, see if it was possible to book the unit.

The meeting was reminded that an earlier proposal for a traffic-calming scheme had attracted more opposition than support, and even some of those who were in favour were not happy at the thought of having a speed hump outside their property!

Concern was also expressed at the number of heavy goods vehicles using Upper Way as a route from the A51 to Cannock and beyond.

PC Brown pointed out that, in all probability, the drivers were relying on satnavs to map out their most direct route; however, the Government was in discussion with companies marketing satnavs to see whether recommended routes could avoid narrow country lanes.

Mr. Philip Clee was concerned at the damage being caused to the embankment at the top of Shavers Lane by lorries turning into it from Upper Way.

He also reported that an uneven surface outside Russells Bank was causing empty trailers being towed past to rattle noisily.

On related police matters, PC Brown confirmed that incidents of criminal activity were low in the parish, the Chairman adding that only one incident had been recorded on the Neighbourhood Watch Crime Log in March - a burglary in Upper Longdon.

This and other information was available to parishioners on the Parish Website, which received 782 hits each day

6. CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

Before closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked all those present for attending.

He also thanked the two members of Longdon W. I., Mrs. Diane Howells and Mrs. Margaret Woollard, who had served the refreshments at the interval.