

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PARISH MEETING HELD
IN THE HALL OF ST. JAMES C. E. (V. C.) SCHOOL, LONGDON, ON
TUESDAY, MAY 17TH, 2011

Present: Cllr. Mrs. G. D. Duckett (Chairman of the Parish Council, who took the chair); Cllr. B. J. Butler; Cllr. and Mrs. R. A. G. Clarke; Cllr. and Mrs. A. J. Juxon; Cllr. Mrs. H. A. Meere; Cllr. M. J. Nash; Cllr. and Mrs. K. C. Taylor; Cllr. S. K. Welch; The Clerk; Cllr. and Mrs. N. J. Roberts; Mrs Diane Howells; Mr. Kevin Morgan; Mrs. Gwynneth Nichols; Mrs. Margaret Woollard; Mrs. Monique Worth; Mr. Neil Vyse; and PC Andy Brown, Community Beat Officer.

1. APOLOGIES

Mrs. Lindsay Hulme (Chair, St. James School PTFA); Mr. J. A. Nichols; Mr. Gary Powis (Chairman, Cannock Wood & Gentleshaw Village Hall Management Committee); and Mrs. Sue Swinson (Head Teacher, Gentleshaw Primary School)

2. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chairman opened proceedings by welcoming everyone to the meeting. She extended a particularly warm welcome to Mr. Kevin Morgan, a new parishioner, who had recently moved into Longdon.

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman then presented her annual report.

Since the last Annual Assembly, there had been an election at which all current Councillors who had expressed a wish to remain on the Council had stood unopposed and therefore still held their positions. However, John Andrews and Nigel Bird had not wished to stand again, and she extended the Council's grateful thanks for the service which they had given to the Parish.

This meant that their positions were now available for co-option, and if there were any parishioners who would like to stand for the Council, they should not hesitate to contact the Clerk, who would talk them through the procedure. New blood and ideas were always welcome.

She thanked all her fellow Councillors for their work and support throughout the year and the Clerk for his patience and reliability when anything was required of him.

The Parish Council had continued to meet monthly; meetings were advertised on the parish notice-boards and on the web-site and were open to all parishioners, the first fifteen minutes being set aside for any parishioner to raise any issues of concern or to make any points regarding the work being undertaken by the Parish Council.

The Council's three Committees – Finance & General Purposes, Greens & Open Spaces, and Highways & Footpaths – also held regular meetings in which the same format applied.

During the year, the Highways & Footpaths Committee had continued with the usual annual maintenance programme. Members of the Council and some parishioners had walked all of the footpaths during the year, checking the miles of rights of way that crossed our Parish and ensuring that they were fit for purpose.

In particular, the Chairman wished to mention Will Rose, who, as a co-opted member of the Highways & Footpaths Committee, had contributed greatly in keeping the records up-to-date, and to thank him for his sterling efforts throughout the year checking any areas that were raised by walkers as not up to standard and reporting them to the Committee or directly to County Council's Rights of Way Department.

Last year, she had mentioned that the Highways & Footpaths Committee had plans to update and re-print leaflets for the four walks around Longdon and two new walks around Gentleshaw. The Committee had now completely re-designed and re-written the walks, making five around Longdon. Each of these walks would have clearly-described routes, a map showing the area covered, photographs of interest along the way, and way-markers in situ clearly defining the route.

The Chairman concluded this section of her talk by thanking everyone who had helped in the development of these walks, including those who have tested the walks on our behalf, especially Jenny Vyse and Bryn Arnold.

The Parish Council had continued to support financially local organisations such as Longdon Pre-School, both churches, Longdon Cricket Club, Longdon Brownies and both village halls, as the Council could see that they were an asset to the community as a whole. Small grants were available to local organisations (though not to businesses) by completing the grant application form available on the website and giving it to the Clerk.

At last year's Annual Assembly, she had expressed her wish to make the Parish Council more accessible and to raise its profile so that all parishioners were aware of what it did, and to that end the Council had appointed Cllr. Clarke as its Communications Officer. He has been putting together updates on the notice-boards informing the community of what the Parish Council was doing and, through the good offices of Jane Russell, using the columns of "The Lichfield Mercury", as well as "Longdon Life". The aim was to bring information that was felt would interest parishioners on what was happening in their Parish, but, in turn, Councillors needed to know what parishioners wanted from them. The Council was there to serve the Parish but could do so more effectively unless parishioners communicated with it.

The telephone numbers of all the Councillors were available on the parish website and were also displayed on the parish notice-boards.

There had been a village party held on the day of Prince William and Catherine's wedding which was attended by 180 parishioners, and an excellent time was had by one and all. The organisers of the event should be proud of what they had achieved, and the Parish Council congratulated them not only for a day for which everyone would have happy memories but for showing what could be achieved by team effort and, more importantly, that this village had a community spirit to be proud of.

With this in mind, we needed to reflect on the Government's Localism Bill. It was designed for neighbourhood planning, which was in the process of involving local communities to invest in their area, and as there would no doubt be outside pressure brought to bear, we needed to be prepared; we needed to look to the future and to have a plan for what we wanted for our village. We needed to consider amongst many other issues local housing for local people and the sustainability of the local schools, churches, and village organisations and service.

This was an important issue and not one that we could shirk from, but which must be addressed in the coming years.

4. PRESENTATION OF FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2011

The Clerk presented the financial statement for the year ended 31st March 2011, a copy of which was included in the folders of reports made available to every member of the public attending the meeting.

It showed a drop in receipts from £16479.59 the previous year to £15415. 48, while payments fell from £19984. 62 to £18518. 82.

Payments made under Parks & Open Spaces rose slightly from £3848. 60 to £4075. 92, but payments made under General Administration were virtually unchanged at £5750. 51. Payments made under Community Halls fell from £3000. 00 to £1200. 00 and under Churchyards they fell from £3652. 45 to £111. 45.

However, payments under Highways and Footpaths rose from £325. 00 to £4414. 80, largely because of the cost of refurbishing the bridge across the ford and levelling the footpath between Ford Lane and the bridge (£2220. 75).

Fewer payments were also made under Section 137.

Time was allowed to study the figures, but there were no questions from the floor.

5. FORMAL ACCEPTANCE OF REPORTS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

The Clerk reported that he had received written reports from the following organisations:

The Parish Church of St. James the Great, Longdon
The Parish Church of Christ Church, Gentleshaw
St. James School PTFA
Gentleshaw Primary School
Longdon Village Hall Management Committee
Cannock Wood & Gentleshaw Village Hall Management Committee
Longdon Club & Institute
Longdon Women's Institute
Gentleshaw Women's Institute
Longdon Brownies
Longdon Cricket Club
Longdon Old People's Welfare Committee, incorporating Longdon Over 60
Cannock Wood & Gentleshaw Evergreens
Cannock Wood & Gentleshaw Welfare
Longdon Friends of St. Giles Hospice
Royal British Legion (Longdon Branch)
Longdon Model Flying Club

The Chairman thanked all those who had submitted reports on behalf of their organisations.

6. OPEN FORUM ON LOCAL ISSUES

The Chairman asked if anyone wished to raise any issues of local concern.

Cllr. Taylor said that he had been asked by a local resident whether a sign could be provided on the A51 indicating the direction of St. James School similar to those indicating the way to Longdon Church, "The Swan with Two Necks" and Longdon Post Office.

The Chairman asked Cllr. Taylor to raise this request at the next meeting of the Parish Council.

7. RESOLUTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

No resolutions were proposed.

8. PRESENTATION BY CLLR. CLARKE

The Chairman next invited Cllr. Clarke to make a presentation on the computer course which he was preparing to set up and which the Parish Council was prepared to sponsor.

Cllr. Clarke said that, when this proposal was first made to the Council, the first step was to establish the need for such a course.

He listed some of the reasons for offering such a course: computers were now part of modern society; they enabled families to keep in touch; they were a means of accessing information; they allowed users to obtain discounts on their purchases; and a simple, basic course would banish computer-fear.

Local support had been canvassed, and six or seven people had expressed an interest.

The course being proposed would, above all, be relaxed; the groups would be small and the participants would be amongst friends. There would be no reason to feel embarrassed – and there would be no exams!

The course would be geared to absolute beginners; it would be held in a village environment, there would be no pressure and it would be paced to suit the student.

Each class would consist of no more than five or six people, and it would be conducted by a qualified teacher. The equipment would be provided, and a follow-up would be provided at no cost, if desired.

Cllr. Clarke said that he had considered three alternative options: Lichfield University charged £61.00 per student, required classes of at least ten pupils, and the course, which lasted five weeks, took place in the evenings; Staffordshire Library Service offered free tuition, but followed a set syllabus, took place in an open training area, and was not intended for beginners.

While neither of these options fulfilled the requirements, AgeUK did deal with novice beginners, for whom courses were tailor-made. Classes were limited to no more than six and lasted two hours over a period of six weeks. Equipment was provided, and while 'buddy' courses were not provided, one-to-one tuition could be booked at any local library.

It was proposed that the first course should start in July and already as many twelve people were prepared to sign up.

The W. I. Hall had been approved by AgeUK as a suitable environment, and the Parish Council had already agreed to pay the hire charges.

The Chairman thanked Cllr. Clarke not only for his presentation but for his hard work in setting up this course. It was satisfying that support had been found for it within the local community.

9. TALK BY CLLR. WELCH

The Chairman then invited Cllr. Welch to give a talk on the work of the Greens and Open Spaces Committee.

Cllr. Welch said that a lot of projects outstanding from last year had been brought to a conclusion.

For example, the bluebells planted alongside the brook close to the ford were beginning to show, although it would take two or three years for them to establish themselves, and they were not being helped by the present dry spell.

He hoped that, eventually, the pupils of the local school would become involved, and he envisaged an interpretation board being set up in the near future close to the stream identifying the various features of flora and fauna which they could observe.

A major project brought to completion had been the establishment of a public area on Gentleshaw Green; this had already enjoyed a positive feedback from several local residents and increased the chances of Cannock Wood and Gentleshaw performing well in the Best Kept Village Competition!

It was planned to engage the interest of the pupils of the local school in the Green by planting a wild flower meadow and possibly a community orchard, and by hanging nesting boxes in the trees.

It was also planned to improve the appearance of the Green by screening the breeze-block wall at the rear of the Green with suitable greenery.

Cllr. Welch was pleased to have noticed that the benches erected at the side of the A51 were now being used.

He concluded his talk by saying that the Committee was always looking for new ideas to increase the visual amenity of the area without sanitising it. The Council was aware of the need that was felt for a playing-field but had, to date, been unable to identify a suitable site which it could acquire.

10. TALK BY PC BROWN

The Chairman thanked Cllr. Welch for his talk and then invited PC Brown to address the meeting.

PC Brown said that, in total, there had been 266 incident in Gentleshaw and Chorley over the past twelve months, but not all of them had been crimes, and only twenty-seven had affected people in the area of Gentleshaw and Chorley, which in terms of policing were inseparable and included Longdon.

There had been eight reported thefts and six burglaries, most attributable to one culprit.

There had been three thefts from cars and one car stolen. That Sunday night, yellow paint had been poured over a car parked at a residence in Brook End, and, while a suspect had been interviewed, no-one had been charged.

The Police Service in the Lichfield District was being re-structured. He himself was based at Armitage, where the station had moved from Armitage-Shanks to a room in the Village Hall.

Eventually, the station at Lichfield would be demolished, and personnel would move to Chasetown.

Asked about the number of scrap merchants operating in the district, PC Brown said that all of them appeared to have a licence to collect and to be road-insured, and were therefore trading legally, but there was evidence to suggest that some were also stealing from front gardens, and anyone suspicious of the activities of one or other of these scrap merchants should note his registration number and report it to the police, who would then check to see whether he was operating legally.

11. CHAIRMAN'S CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Chairman thanked PC Brown for attending the meeting and giving his talk. She also thanked all those who had attended the Assembly, and, in particular, thanked Mrs Diane Howells and Mrs. Margaret Woollard for providing the refreshments.