

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PARISH MEETING HELD
IN THE HALL OF ST. JAMES C. E. (V. C.) SCHOOL, LONGDON, ON
TUESDAY, APRIL 24TH, 2012

Present: Cllr. Mrs. Gina Duckett (Chairman of the Parish Council, who took the chair); Cllr. and Mrs. Richard Clarke; Cllr. Allen Juxon; Cllr. Mrs. Heather Meere; Cllr. K. C. Taylor; Cllr. Steve Welch; and the Clerk; Mrs Gladys Crowe; Mrs. Diane Howells; Mr. Richard Meere; Mr. Kevin Morgan; Mrs. Jean Parker; Mr. Ashley Townshend; Mr. Will Rose; Mr. Ellis Vyse; Mr. and Mrs. Neil Vyse; and PC Andy Brown, Community Beat Officer.

1. APOLOGIES

Cllr. Brian Butler; Cllr. Chris Cherry; Cllr. Phil Couchman; Cllr. Mike Nash; Cllr. C. J. Webb; The Rev. Martin Butt (Priest-in-Charge, Christ Church, Gentleshaw); Mrs. Annette Johnson (Cannock Wood & Gentleshaw Village Hall Management Committee); Mr. Hugh Reynolds (Longdon Village Hall Management Committee).

2. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chairman opened proceedings by welcoming everyone to the meeting.

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman then presented her annual report (*Appendix A*).

4. REPORT BY CLLR. WELCH

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

Cllr. Welch explained that the Committee's remit covered everything out-of-doors within the parish - village greens, open spaces and footpaths.

The Council had just published five new footpath leaflets as part of an ongoing project; in addition to directions, the leaflets also carried the Countryside Code, covering such issues as inappropriate behaviour, uncontrolled dogs and horses on footpaths.

The parish notice-boards also carried reminders to dog-owners that the legal obligation to clear up after their pets extended to all public places, including village greens and footpaths.

He paid tribute to Mr. Will Rose, who had forged very good relationships with the County Council's footpath officers and was passionate about keeping footpaths open for public use.

Another major project carried out by the Parish Council was the regeneration of Gentleshaw Green, an isolated area of Gentleshaw Common immediately opposite Gentleshaw School which the Parish Council had adopted and would manage with the support of the staff and pupils of the School.

The concrete base of the bus shelter which once stood on the Green had been removed and the area framed in wood and filled with gravel. Two triangular flower beds had been laid out, the notice-board retained and benches provided.

Inappropriate planting had been replaced by native species and the breeze-block wall separating the Green from an adjacent dwelling would be screened with hornbeams.

The bluebells planted at the side of the Shropshire Brook alongside the ford were now establishing themselves.

Cllr. Welch said that the Council was always looking for suggestions from the public, adding that the aim was not to create some sort of urban idyll, for which he blamed the baleful influence of the Best Kept Village Competition, but to allow for areas of wilderness.

He reminded the meeting that Upper Longdon and Gentleshaw were within the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which was the smallest mainland AONB in the UK. Longdon Parish Council, together with all those other parish councils on the fringes of the AONB, had a representative on the Advisory partnership, which had an input into the management of the Chase.

In response to the Chairman's invitation to the meeting to ask questions or make comments, Mr. Townshend said that, two years ago, he had approached both Lichfield District Council and Staffordshire County Council with a request that the footpath between Longdon and Lichfield be kept clear for cyclists, but had been told that the County Council, who was responsible for its maintenance, did not have the funds to meet this request.

However, it might be possible to apply for funding from Sustrans, since, at present, cyclists were obliged to use the main road, where, at best, they were separated from motor-vehicles only by a white line. The pathway was already laid with tarmac; all that was needed was to keep it clear, though its status would have to be changed from footpath to cycle path.

The Chairman agreed that the Council would pursue the matter with the County Highways Department and, at the same time, see if any other avenues were open.

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

The Clerk presented the financial statement for the year ended 31st March 2012 (*Appendix B*), a copy of which was included in the folders of reports made available to every member of the public attending the meeting.

He pointed out that, while there had been variations within the different categories of expenditure, the total expenditure at the end of the financial year had been very close to the figure budgeted by the Council.

6. 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
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 Model Flying Club

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

7. OPEN FORUM ON LOCAL ISSUES

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

Mrs. Howells began by thanking Will Rose for his work in waymarking parish footpaths and for displaying a poster reminding members of the public using footpaths about the restrictions which they should observe; dogs should be kept under control and not allowed to foul the footpath of adjacent land, and horses and cycles should not be ridden along them.

She then went on to highlight a particular problem which she and her husband were experiencing as the result of horse riders using the bridlepath running from Ford Lane alongside the Shropshire Brook which merged with a footpath.

At this point, marked by a kissing-gate, riders were forcing their way through a hole in the hedge and crossing the field, where there was no right of way, before re-joining the bridleway.

Mr. Howells intended to close this gap with fencing, not as a hostile act directed against the horse-riding community but so that the field could be used for grazing cattle.

The Chairman said that an application had been made to Staffordshire County Council to change the status of the footpath to that of bridleway, but it would be some years before the application was considered.

It was also pointed out that, while Ford Lane was an adopted road with a tarmac surface, the tarmac did not reach as far as the kerb, which, as a result, was being encroached upon by weeds.

The Chairman agreed to ask the County Highways Department to fill in the gaps when next they were in the area filling pot-holes.

Mr. Meere reminded the meeting that there was a number which members of the public could ring if they wanted to inform the County Highway Department of the existence of a pot-hole.

Mr. Vyse said that there was an issue regarding the future of Longdon Village Hall if St. James School went ahead with its proposal for a nursery class, since this could adversely affect Longdon Pre-School, whose renting of the Hall contributed a substantial part of the Hall's income.

He asked for the support of all those present when responding to the consultation.

In addition, "The Swan with Two Necks" had launched a weekly activity session for pre-school children which was already in conflict with the Pre-School.

The Chairman said that she believed that the School and the Pre-School were in discussion and that the Pre-School would submit a bid for the contract if the School went ahead with the project.

Mr. Vyse then asked whether the amount of signage could be reduced, either by removal or by multiple use of existing posts.

The Chairman said that the County Highways Department was always hesitant to introduce new signs and needed to be satisfied of their necessity. Mr. Vyse's concerns could, however, be communicated to the Department.

8. RESOLUTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

No resolutions were proposed.

9. TALK BY PC BROWN

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

PC Brown gave the meeting the statistics for crime in the parish over the past twelve months.

Four houses had been broken into, compared with six the previous year, but three vehicles had been stolen, compared with only one the previous year, though there had been wanton damage to two vehicles parked at "The Swan with Two Necks" and one outside Longdon Post Office.

Of particular concern was the theft of metal field gates and catalytic converters from 4X4s and mobile homes.

Generally, the pattern of crime throughout the District had shown a reduction in most categories.

He reminded the meeting that the new non-emergency number was 101 for the whole country.

The next police surgery would take place at Longdon Village Hall on Saturday, May 19th.

Asked by Mrs. Vyse about the legal position of casual callers who offered domestic items for sale, PC Brown said that such callers should have a pedlar's licence issued by their local District Council and should be asked to produce it.

If they were unable to produce one, they should be asked to leave the premises and the police informed.

Cllr. Taylor added that this problem had recently been highlighted in a Neighbourhood Watch report, in which it had been stressed that it was an offence not to leave when asked.

PC Brown ended his report by informing the meeting that, as he would have completed thirty years' service in November, he would be taking enforced retirement, so this would be his last Annual Assembly. He thanked everyone for their support and, in turn, was thanked by the Chairman, who wished him well on his retirement, adding that he had been a constant help and a perfect example of good liaison between the police and a village community.

10. TALK BY MICHAEL STREET, OBE, DL, CHAIRMAN OF THE FRIENDS OF BEAUDESERT

Mr. Street then gave an illustrated talk on "Beaudesert Hall", beginning with William Paget, the first Baron Paget of Beaudesert, and tracing a career which saw him as a diplomat in the service of Henry VIII, secretary to Queen Anne of Cleves, member of the Privy Council, member of Parliament and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, then committed to the Tower of London upon the fall from grace of his patron, the Duke of Somerset, and then finally returned to favour in the reign of Edward VI.

Amongst his illustrious descendants was Henry, 1st Marquess of Anglesey, known as 'Old One Leg' since he lost a leg while at Wellington's side at the Battle of Waterloo.

Mr. Street showed how the rise of the family was reflected in the development of Beaudesert Hall from its origins as a medieval bishop's palace to an Elizabethan mansion with later extensions until its demolition in the 1920s, when the family retired to Plas Newydd Hall, on the Isle of Anglesey.

At its conclusion, the Chairman thanked Mr. Street for giving what, it was unanimously agreed, was an informative and absorbing talk.

11. CHAIRMAN'S CONCLUDING REMARKS

Bringing the meeting to a close, 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. Jean Parker for providing the refreshments.