

ADVISOR OF THE WELCOME PACK

The Welcome Pack has been written following the Parish Plan Survey carried out by the Parish Council in 2009 and some of the priorities are now considered out of date and need amending. A date will be set for all groups to be invited to submit any amendments to the original

The ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH followed the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council in the Village Hall on Tuesday 4th March 2014 commencing at 8.00pm.

PRESENT

Chairman Mr Jill Buck, Vice Chair, Mrs Wendy Camp, Councillors Mrs Jenny Miller, Neil Rogers and Paul Riddle

Also attending District Councillor Mike Newman and 18 members of the public. Mike Carver will

The CHAIRMAN welcomed all present and commenced the meeting with her report of the years proceedings of the Parish Council as follows :-

Last year was a year of change for the Village, and it looks as if 2014 is going to be just as busy ! Contrary to the usual practice, I am going to start this summary with a list of thanks, for without the goodwill and support of several people in this village, the Committee facing you today would probably have been entirely different. I am sure you will have realised that the sudden retirement of our former Chairman came as a shock - not just to the village! I should like to thank Frances Luck for staying on the Committee, just a little bit longer, and Frank Parker for stepping into the "breach" so promptly allowing the rest of us to have time to sort ourselves out. As you can now see, we have been joined by two new faces, Neil Rogers who has lived in the village with his young family for several years, and Paul Riddle with his wife are comparative newcomers, having suffered the Widford effect for over a year. I believe they are both going to be a great asset to the Parish Council as they are not used to our ways and will therefore be full of questions and new ideas.

Thank you also to Roger Beeching and Mike Newman for attending our meetings so regularly and keeping s up to date on what is happening in the world outside Widford. Especial thanks go to Roger for the times he has contributed financially to many village activities. The building of the new Archive centre at the school for example.

In 2014 the residents and Parish Council are going to have to look very hard at what we want for Widford. East Herts District Plan shows Widford status changed from Category 2 (where little development other than infill is permitted) to Group 1 which indicates that Widford could be enlarged by as many as 18 dwellings. Ideally we do need more affordable accommodation and our school and village do need new young families. We shall be looking at what effect this may have on the village in detail during the twelve week consultation period. A Consultation Meeting in Hunsdon Village Hall will be addressed by Councillor Milke Carver, East Herts Planning Office on March 17th and I urge as many as possible of you to attend that meeting.

Money received by the Parish Council as part of a Government scheme for new build houses in the village is put into Capital Funds which benefit the whole community and recently we have been able to make a contribution to the school towards the new Archive Centre which will also house our Village Archives. Groundwork Hertfordshire work closely with us and carried out repairs to Lily Bridge and footpaths. The Highways Department have filled in various potholes and is dealing with the missing Village sign near the gateway to Widbury Farm, we are pleased that Jim Turner will continue grass cutting at Benningfield Road and the Busy Lizzies will continue to look after the Closed Churchyard again.

Thanks to Jenny Miller and Frank Parker we are now trying yet again to improve our allotment gardens, to Nigel English for grass cutting around the plot and to Lewis Hozier, working with Frank to keep down the brambles and tidy up the compost and bonfire area.

Finally, thanks to Jenny and Wendy who were always there for me, despite their illnesses and operations and last but by no means least I must thank our indefatigable Clerk.

REVISION OF THE WELCOME PACK

The Welcome Pack had been written following the Parish Plan Survey carried out by the Parish Council in 2009 and some of the entries are now considered out of date and need amending. A date will be decided for all groups to be invited to submit any amendments to their original entries, on receipt of which, the Parish Council will be able to update the Welcome Pack accordingly.

DISTRICT PLAN

The consultation period for the proposed District Plan which comes into force from 2016 to 2031 is open for comments until May 2014.

The meeting was advised that the East Herts Council Planning Officer Councillor Mike Carver will be speaking at a meeting in Hunsdon Village Hall on 17th March at 7.30pm.

The Chairman urged as many as possible to attend the meeting.

It was noted that the Plan sees a change to the Category 2 which included Widford and in which only infilling had been permitted, to Group 1 which enables a possible 10% increase in dwellings, possibly 18 units. As this does not come into force until 2016, it is understood that any current development will not be included in the number possible in the 10%.

REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR MIKE NEWMAN who was pleased to present his fourth report as our District Councillor.

The District Plan – he explained – has a legal responsibility to develop plans to provide housing for a growing population and if it doesn't do so using a process that central government confirms is 'sound' at each step, then it will be sent back until the centre is satisfied. For two and a half years, a team of planners has been developing the District Plan to address the provision of housing up to 2031. The Council will not build anything itself – that will be done by the private sector responding to supply and demand in the housing market, but what the Council can do is to set up constraints on developers so that future housing is where and of a type and quality that meets local needs. The new plan will replace that of 2007.

Developing the Plan is enormously complex – his opinion is that the East Herts team are doing the task very thoroughly, professionally and objectively – every conclusion is backed up by some evidence. In consequence of this and partly due to delays from receiving evidence from external sources, the original schedule fell behind. As a result, from April 2013 the National Planning Policy Framework took precedence over existing local plans where there was conflict between the two:

- a) The inability to demonstrate a 5 year supply of deliverable housing sites.
- b) The absence of a policy which clarifies the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

This created a danger that developers would see these opportunities to push through major schemes against local policies. This did happen in Buntingford.

When the plan has been amended in the light of the outcome of the Public Consultation, it then goes to Independent Examination to determine its 'soundness'. Meanwhile, this authority does not have a validated plan, leaving developers to exploit the situation.

Everyone should engage with the Consultation but to consider whether we are better overall to have a plan with some aspects we may not be happy with at all than to have no plan at all.

Two preferred Options are –

Villages – would grow by 10% - Widford has been identified as a Group 1 village, meaning it is one of the most sustainable locations and is encouraged to develop its own Neighbourhood Plan of where those additional homes should go.

Harlow North – proposition of a major development in the Gilston Area which remains in the plan. Because there is no immutable reason why it should not be – its exclusion from the plan might have found the plan to be unsound and therefore substantially delayed. However, its inclusion is on the proviso that much more work is undertaken to look at infrastructure deficiencies, meaning any development is very unlikely to happen until the second half of the 20 year period of the plan i.e well into the 2020s. That gives us breathing space to continue to fight against it.

Conservation Area Appraisal - Widford was the first village to be chosen for the appraisal and the outcome was significant. The appraisal has now been 'officially' adopted and becomes a material consideration in any local planning applications.

Waste Collection and Recycling - the new SPARC waste collection scheme has been in effect since November . Most residents seem happier that more materials can be recycled and this outweighs the penalty of having a third wheeled bin !

Community Grants for both revenue and capital uses continue to be available from East Herts Council .

East Herts Matters – (including Police) East Herts and Herts CC taxes continue to be frozen for the coming year, although residents may see a small change due to the increase in the Parish Precept.

In conclusion ,Councillor Newman said he had a 100% attendance record at all formal meetings he would have been expected to attend as well as being ` in attendance' at others, and also attended many other meetings in connection with role of District Councillor. He has received the standard allowances but claimed no other expenses.

Councillor Newman was thanked for his report.

REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR ROGER BEECHING.

The report opened with his thanks to all who voted for him in the County Council elections which gives him a further four years to serve the Sawbridgeworth 24 Division.

He serves on the following panels and committees – Health Scrutiny, Standards, Adult Health and Care and Princess Alexandra Trust, Harlow Gateway Transport Board and he attends as many meetings as possible as they arise, as well as most of the meetings of the Parish Councils of Eastwick and Gilston, Hunsdon, Widford, Wareside and Stanstead Abbots and Town Council of Sawbridgeworth. And finally East Herts Council meetings for which he is now Chairman.

The County Council has had a successful year, freezing Council Tax for the fifth year running. Due to Government cutbacks we need to save from the inflation depleted budget £144 million over the next three years. This will prove difficult but we are determined to succeed without cuts to front line services.

One of the biggest challenges at present are as ever potholes and road conditions , we seem to be getting to grips with repairs but not yet totally successful and more hard work by contractors is needed and we must continue our pressure on them.

Cars speeding through the villages is an ongoing problem –at which I pick away where possible by introducing speed awareness measures but finances and regulations limit what can be done.

School places can be short due to large increase in the population of school age children in the County. Mainly in the west at present but it will soon appear in East Herts. This is being tackled as best as we can and plans are being formulated now. The advent of another 17,000 houses in East Herts by 2031, an edict from Government, will further strain our already stretched infrastructure and resources. Recycling becomes more expensive, currently £82 per tonne for land fill, and there is in excess of 250,000 tonnes a year of this across the County. We are fortunate that East Herts has an efficient mixed recyclable collection service, this saves on landfill charges and brings in some income from the sale of recycled materials.

Another area of contention to deal with is perceived requirement for 20MPH limits areas in some towns. These are extremely complicated to administer and put into force and will have to be dealt with on an individual basis.

Those who have street lights should find they are switched off from 12.00midnight to 6.00am on side roads and non A roads. However the supplier of the sensors is having difficulty with their accuracy and they all, 110,00 of them having to be replaced, slowly. This is an expensive exercise, for the manufacturer and not County Council Tax Payer.

Finally, on a more local level I have my Highway Locality Budget, this amounts to £90,000 and is

used to rectify local highway faults. This year I have had carried out 20 different schemes, improving local roads. You can see where these are happening by going on the County Website and looking under my name for Highway Locality Budget. I take these in strict priority of disrepair and am making my list for the forthcoming year. So please let me know of areas you would like considered for improvement. Local knowledge is most important.

I also have the Locality Budget of £10,000 to spend on worthwhile community projects and have spent out on 15 such projects this year.

If you have any other request please let me know as soon as possible as this year's money will stop at the end of March.

The report concludes, hoping all have an indication of his activities and problems and the wish for a successful and peaceful 2014.

VICE-CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

Councillor Mrs Camp said, the Councillors would like to say a big Thank you to our Chairman on the excellent job she is doing after taking over from Dr Ian Brett, who at short notice decided to stand down from the Council, leaving her in the deep end with paper work etc:

Once again, Thank you very much Jill, you are doing a good job.

QUESTION TIME

Village Sign near Widbury Farm is missing presumed in hand with the Highway Authority as it had been reported when found damaged few weeks ago.

Dog Bins – a request for a bin in Abbots Lane at the entrance to Footpath 2 where dog walkers are still leaving used poop bags in the hedge. It is understood that East Herts Council arrange emptying at a cost of £150.00.

B.180 junction with B.1004. The need for 'STOP' replacing 'Give Way' was once again brought to the meeting. This concern has been drawn to the attention of police and the Highway Authority but it has not been found statistically necessary to make any change.

Telephone Kiosk – The telephone Kiosk bought by the Parish Council does not appear to be used for any purpose and it was suggested that it would be better for the village if it was returned to use as a telephone box since the network for mobile telephones was very poor.

It was explained that as a telephone box it had not been used sufficiently to warrant BT upkeep which is why it had, like many others in the Country, been sold. It is a listed building and BT are paying for the electricity used until April 2015 as part of the contract. The 240v light bulb has just been replaced in it. The kiosk had been used for a display of prints during the Art Festival in the village in September and at Christmas, it had housed a decorated Christmas Tree provided by the Friends of Widford Church.

More thought will be given for its use.

There were no further questions and the Chairman thanked all for attending and for their support.

The meeting closed at 9.05pm.

Chairman.....
Jill Buck

Date.....6th May..2014.....