

# WIDFORD

## ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH

### Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Widford Parish Tuesday 7 March 2017 at 7.15pm in the Village Hall

**PRESENT:** Parish councillors Jill Buck, Carol Blackett, Babs Edwards, Glen Parcell, Paul Riddle. County Cllr Roger Beeching, Police Sgt Duncan Wallace, Giles Ellerton (BT East of England Regional Partnership Director), and 14 other members of the public.

Cllr Jill Buck, being present and the Parish Council Chairman, chaired the meeting.

Minutes taken by Colin Marks, Clerk to the Parish Council.

**1** The Chairman welcomed everyone and opened the meeting at 7.20pm.

**2 Apologies for absence**

District Cllr R Brunton, Christopher Taylor-Young, James Downing, Carmel Holland

**3 Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Parish, 1 March 2016**

The Chairman noted that the Parish Council had agreed at its Meeting on 10th May 2016 that the Minutes were an accurate record. It was then agreed by those present that the Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Parish held on 1 March 2016 were a true and accurate record. The Chairman signed the Minutes.

**Presentation by Giles Ellerton, BT East of England Regional Partnership Director**

At 7.30pm the Chairman introduced Giles Ellerton, who had asked to be able to make a PowerPoint presentation to show what BT are doing across the region.

He said that BT are taking on 200 new graduates and apprentices in the coming year as they strive to play a key role in ensuring people can live and work in a rural environment. In this area, that ambition is being delivered through the Herts/Bucks "Connected Counties" scheme for superfast broadband and fibre. It is acknowledged that Gigaclear are offering a direct fibre network. Nationally, BT's aim is for 95% of UK premises to have superfast broadband access – ie 24mbs minimum.

East Herts has the least rolled-out contract so far, but that may be interpreted that it will therefore be the biggest beneficiary of BT's current efforts. The aim is for East Herts to have 98% coverage by the end of the current contract term. A new cabinet for the fibre connection is being located on Benningfield Green. The switch at the Puckeridge exchange has been completed and the fibre spine will be deployed from there to East Herts by the end of June 2017. Open Reach has two options: Fibre to cabinet (FTC) and fibre to premises (FTTP). FTTP goes to the underground box at the telephone pole nearest to the property. Properties more than 1,200 metres from a cabinet will not be able to achieve 24mbs. The Government's commitment is that everyone should be able to get, and has the right to ask for, a minimum speed of 10mbs. Work is anticipated to be completed in June, subject to any unforeseen installation problems. There will be traffic disruption and road closures as the main trenches and trenches to properties are dug, which will be additional to the normal rope and pipe work.

Fibre is an option additional to the present copper system. At some point in the future, ultrafast broadband is planned with speeds in excess of 100mbs as "bolt-on" technology that will boost the signal further and faster. Open Reach provides an open access network, but there are a number of other competitive service providers that are readily available. There was interaction and discussion with parishioners on various issues raised during the presentation.

The Chairman thanked Mr Ellerton, who then left the meeting at 7.55pm.

**4 Review of the year 2016/17 by Cllr Jill Buck, Chairman of the Parish Council**

Some of you may have read the article I wrote for the March edition of the Parish Magazine, pointing out how little has changed in the last eighty years for those of us who serve on a Parish Council. Sadly, much of what the present Council has been trying to accomplish will have a very familiar ring. With the support of our indefatigable Parish Clerk, Colin, we have attempted to get potholes repaired, pavements cleared, walls rebuilt and hedges cared for, often with little or no success. However, we have waged war with the District Council and won. The

original recommendation in the new District Plan was to make our village a Group 1 village; they have now agreed that we retain our Group 2 status. We are still maintaining a constant battle to try to preserve the integrity of the village when it comes to the increasing number of new housing developments. We accept implicitly that we need new housing, but we need social, affordable housing so that the children and grandchildren from the village can afford a decent home for their young families.

In April last year, the Parish Council funded the purchase and installation of the AED cabinet to house the defibrillator which had been donated to the village. We were given a grant of £450 from our County Councillor's Locality Budget and also received donations from individuals to defray the cost. We also received a grant of £398 from the Government's Transparency Fund to help offset the extra administration costs of complying with the Transparency Regulations that came into force under the Localism Act.

During the last year, we have had to undertake tasks that had been left unattended for too many years. Thanks to individual members from our small Council, literally ground breaking work in both the Allotments and the Closed Churchyard has been completed at some considerable cost. After completing Health and Safety Risk Assessments, all the trees in the churchyard have been thoroughly inspected and in several cases severely pruned and we are also taking advice about one of the leaning gravestones. To protect the safety of the Allotment plot holders we have had to erect two new fences to prevent straying horses and dogs. We are grateful to East Herts Council who gave us a grant of £875 towards the cost of one of the new fences. We have had three new dog refuse bins installed and pay for their regular cleaning and maintenance. On two occasions we have taken legal advice concerning our relationship to both the Playing Field and the Village Hall Committees, and thanks to the generosity of the Smith Family, we are now the proud custodians of the Widford Archives, which is a duty we hope to follow up more thoroughly in the coming year.

Lastly, can I thank you for your continued support as a village. We appreciate the fact that you are now regularly contacting us not only by phone or letter, but also via our website, which goes from strength to strength. Personally, I should like to end by thanking my fellow Councillors and our Clerk for all their help and support and the many hours that they devote to the village.

## 5 Parish group reports

- **Village Archive.** The Chairman reported that the Archive Room in the school will remain, but that more space is required. The feasibility of whether this can be accommodated in the Village Hall has been considered, as has the possibility of an extension being built to house it.
- **Police.** Sgt Duncan Wallace reported on the Parish crime statistics of the past year which, in summary, revealed that a total of 12 crimes were recorded since April 2016. However, 2 of those were subsequently retracted or dismissed and therefore the final number recorded was 10. Broken down, these identified that 3 were thefts from motor vehicles, 1 a theft from a shed, 1 burglary, 1 assault and 4 in other categories. This compares with 23 recorded crimes in the same period 2015/16.

Sgt Wallace noted that ongoing development in the East Herts Rural Area puts an increasing strain on all services and infrastructure, including policing. Hertfordshire's new Chief Constable, Charlie Hall, has a firm understanding of the issues of rural policing, having previously served in Norfolk. Rural areas remain vulnerable to roaming crime, which is a particular problem for East Herts which shares a lot of its borders with other counties. Out-of-control dogs and other dog issues have accounted for the biggest single workload increase, mainly due to legislation and crime recording changes last year.

The ongoing problems related to parking that have been regularly reported in Benningfield Road, for example, can never be satisfactorily dealt with by the police for two simple reasons: 1) The Rural Police Team simply does not have the manpower available, and 2) There are no alternative convenient parking places to which cars can be directed.

Traffic speed is another ongoing issue, although the perception of speed, particularly that of HGVs in the close confines of a village street, is usually greater than the actual speed of the vehicle. Having said that, Sgt Wallace admitted that 30mph is probably still too fast for large vehicles passing through the village.

There was some interaction and discussion with parishioners during the report.

The Chairman thanked Sgt Wallace, who then left the meeting at 8.25pm.

## 6 Finance

Because the meeting had over-run its time, the Parish Clerk gave a brief overview of the Parish Council's finances for the 11 months to 28th February, and a projection to the year-end at 31st March. In summary, in its budget for 2016/17, the Parish Council projected a total end-of-year balance of £6,202, including ringfenced monies. With

one month to go, the total year-end balance is anticipated to be £5,414. Reclaimed VAT will be approximately £695. Taking into account the unexpected financing of safety work that had to be undertaken on the closed churchyard trees, totalling some £1,686, allotments fencing at £1,677, and the installation of another three dog waste bins for £500, the Parish Council will have done remarkably well to end the year with such a balance of funds. This has been helped by the successful application for grants. Although the balance will still be below the recommended contingency level, a platform is established that can be built upon during the next fiscal year.

Financial reports are published in the Minutes of every Ordinary Parish Council Meeting.

**7 County and District Councillors' reports:**

**Report from County Councillor Roger Beeching MBE JP**

Referring to Giles Ellerton's earlier BT report and regarding the comments it drew about the digging up of roads and footways, Cllr Beeching remarked that BT and other contractors must submit road closure requests 90 days in advance. If their work is not completed within the allocated timeframe, all disruption to roads and pavements must be reinstated before a new TRO application can be made. Therefore, wise contractors allow a wide window of opportunity for their work to be completed. There is no process by which road surfacing work and utilities groundwork is co-ordinated.

During the year, Cllr Beeching said he had made 12 donations totalling £11,500 from his Members' Locality Budget, and spent the £90,000 of his Highways Locality Budget. On average, he has spent 35 hours a week on County Council business. He confirmed that he will not be standing for re-election in May and at the present time could not say who might be selected to stand in his place. He said he intended to attend the Parish Council Meeting in May, but would not be presenting a report due to the purdah rules that would then be operating.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Beeching for his years of dedicated work as the parish's County Councillor and wished him well for the future.

**No report was received from District Councillor Robert Brunton**

**8 Neighbourhood Plan**

Further to the public meeting on 12th January which was addressed by Laura Pattison of East Herts Council, the next public meeting will be on 6th April and will be addressed by independent planning consultant Lorraine Hart. Details are on the website and notices will be distributed throughout the parish in advance of the meeting.

**9 Open Forum**

In view of the number of exchanges that had taken place during the meeting and because it had considerably over-run its allotted time, the Chairman proposed that there be no further questions or discussion.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.40pm. She announced there would be 5 minutes for refreshments before the commencement of the March Parish Council Meeting.

**Signed.....Dated.....**