

WOOLMER GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Parish Meeting 25 April 2017

Present: Cllrs A Gribble (Chair), P Corke (Vice Chair) J Hawkins, G Pinney & A White.

In attendance: J Pearce (Clerk); Herts County Councillor R Smith; Borough Cllrs S Marciewicz & R Trigg; members of the public.

1. Opening of the meeting by the Chairman: The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. He said that we are all shocked by the news that Mr Mallon, headteacher of St. Michaels School for 17 years had passed away on 18th April. The Chairman acknowledged Mr Mallon's work at the school and said how passionate and proud Mr Mallon was of the children's achievements. A one minute silence was observed to remember Mr Mallon.

2. Apologies for absence: Parish Councillor Sarah Hall, Borough Cllr Julie Cragg & resident Judith Watson.

3. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting 2016: The minutes of the 2016 Annual Parish Meeting were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. Parish Council Review of the Year: The Chairman said it had be a busy year and detailed all the work and improvements that has taken place in the hall and grounds. He acknowledged Sarah McGuinness who advised and supplied the defibrillator and gave a free training session to residents. Grant Pinney and Rob McGuinness were thanked for organising the Wheels on Woolmer Green car show that raised £667 that helped pay for the defibrillator. The Chairman thanked County Councillor, Richard Smith, for donating funds from his Locality Grant to pay for new curtain tracks in the hall and benches for the hall grounds. The Chairman said that the big planning issue of the year was the Draft Local Plan consultation which has been approved by the Borough with no amendments. The Chairman highlighted the environmental work of Cllr White who has successfully achieved TPOs on groups of trees and of the Parish Council in carrying our further investigations on the pond issues brought up at last year's Annual Parish Meeting. The Chairman acknowledged the work in establishing wild flowers in the orchard by Cllr Jenny Hawkins which led to the Parish Council winning a CPRE Mercury Rural Living Award and Jenny herself being awarded the Peterkin Award for her outstanding contribution to rural life. The major transport issue continues to be the speed of traffic on the B197 and hoped the bid made by Cllr Richard Smith to the PCC Road Safety is successful so it could pay for a feasibility study to be carried out. With regard to community events; Cllr Phil Corke was thanked for organising another successful Village Day and volunteer Paul Woodley was acknowledged for becoming an official Badminton Smash Up Activator and running the badminton sessions. The Chairman said finances are looking healthy as, despite predicting a small loss this year, the success of the hall had greatly contributed to an £8,000 surplus that will be used to help fund replacement windows in the main hall costing over £13,000. In conclusion the Chairman acknowledged the hard work done by the Clerk and all the efforts of the Parish Councillors who are unpaid volunteers.

Following the Chairman's review the public raised their concerns at the speed of traffic on the B197 and in particular the speed past the school and the issues at the Mardlebury junction. Cllr Smith said that as Woolmer Green is going to grow he would raise the matter again with Highways but the difficulties of underground services made any changes to the Mardlebury junction costly. He said there is clear evidence that vehicles travel at well above the 40mph limit and funds from his PCC Road Safety Fund bid, if successful, could pay for a feasibility study on the B197. In the meantime design work needs to be progressed now and further studies may have to be funded at some time. With regard to the growth of Woolmer Green, Highways will be working with Planning to decide on what improvements will be required.

Various traffic calming measures were suggested.

The landowner of Mardlebury Farm said the signs erected marking the permissive paths have been vandalised or removed completely on a number of occasions. The Parish Council said it could include information explaining about the signs in the Village Newsletter.

Residents also discussed dangerous parking and Cllr Smith said the police are stretched and this is not a priority for them. Stevenage has a system of issuing Traffic Regulation Orders for dangerous parking but it is costly.

5. Cllr Grant Pinney tells us about Wheels on Woolmer Green: Following the success of last year's event the car show is back again on Bank Holiday Monday, 1st May. There will be more cars, two bands and lot of traders and should be a good day out. It is surprising how many interesting cars are owned by residents in Woolmer Green. It is free to attend and all donations will be divided between the Herts Air Ambulance and Prostate Cancer UK.

6. An update on the Local Plan by our Borough Councillor: Cllr Trigg informed the meeting that the Draft Local Plan had been approved by the housing & planning panel, the cabinet and full council and no significant changes had been made. He agreed with the view that it would be better to develop the Entech site rather than the Green Belt but the Entech site was submitted late in the process. If the Borough Council had decided to make any major changes to the Plan a further consultation would be required which would delay the Plan and miss the Government's deadline for submission. If the Borough Council had not submitted the Local Plan on time the Government would take it over. The enquiry by the planning inspector will take place in late July/early August and Cllr Trigg will inform on the programme when he has the information. The inspector will be a Green Belt specialist. The Local Plan could be adopted early next year.

A resident commented that the risk of delaying the plan due to further consultation meant that the Borough Council knew it would not consider changing it, therefore the consultation was meaningless.

7. Questions from the public: Questions from the public included the removal of the litter bin in the hall grounds and the increase in fly tipping. Cllr Smith said the reduced days for opening the waste depots will not be changed. Cllr Trigg said the Borough hold Waste Cage Days for people that are unable to take items to a depot.

8. Close of Meeting by the Chairman. The Chairman thanked everyone for coming to the meeting.

JRP 27.4.17