

Hilderstone Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 23rd April 2014 at 7.30p.m.

Present: Cllr. Clark (Chairman), Cllr. J. Crump, Cllr. P. Davies, Cllr. A. Harp, Mrs. H. Howie (Clerk), Cllr. J. Jones, Cllr. M. Shelley (Vice Chairman), Cllr. A. Stringer and Cllr. H. Woodward. There were no members of the public present.

1. Chairman's Welcome. Cllr. Clark welcomed the councillors to the meeting. Prior to the start of the parish council meeting the councillors judged the children's posters for the Best Kept Village Competition which had been collected from Green Lea School by Cllr. Crump. There were a high number of entries this year and the councillors enjoyed looking at all the posters. They will make a wonderful display in the village bus shelters.

2. Apologies. None received.

3. Minutes of the last meeting. These were read, approved and signed.

4. Matters arising. Cllr. Crump, the key holder for the village hall notice board said that she had not received the names of people who were not able to access the notice board whilst she was away. No messages had been left for her whilst she had been away about accessing the board. She said it was not wise to leave a spare key because in the past, other display boards had been damaged by members of the public and notices were placed over each other. The village hall notice board is not designed to take drawing pins and could also be damaged. It was noted that the Parish Council Boards are locked because they are too small for public posters and statutory notices must be displayed by law without being obscured. At Eastholme and Cresswell Road large pin boards have been placed in the back of the bus shelters for public notices. It was agreed that the village hall is for use by villagers and is considered to be the main centre for information. Members of the public should be able to get notices onto the boards quickly and the notices should be kept up-to-date. Cllr. Crump's contact details are on the notice board and a reminder of the who to contact will be placed in the village magazine.

Cllr. Crump said that it would be a shame if the village magazine could not continue due to a lack of public donations; as it was an important source of village information. Cllr. Clark said that the magazine is safe for the next four months due to a grant from the County Councillor's fund and a contribution from the Parish Council. It is hoped that more villagers can be encouraged to make a donation in the coming months.

Cllr. Crump also commented that it was good that the contract for the new parish council notice board has been awarded to a local person, Bill Holmes.

Other matters arising were dealt with under the agenda headings.

5. Borough Councillor's Report. The Boundary Commission draft recommendations for Stafford Borough have been released for public consultation. Hilderstone is in the Milwich Ward which has been increased in size to cover Stowe-by-Chartley and Tixall. The ward boundaries have been determined by the number and types of parishes and also on the population. There are approximately 5,000 residents in each ward. Milwich will be a two member ward. Consultation on the proposals is open to comment until 24th June 2014. **Resolved: Hilderstone Parish Council is happy with the proposed Milwich Ward and with the ward name.** The clerk will notify the Boundary Commission of this view.

Most of the focus at the Borough Council is currently on the re-development of the south end of Stafford town. There will be some major new retailers such as Debenhams and H&M. Marks and Spencer will re-locate to the new development. It is hoped that the North end of the town will be re-developed in time as there is concern that this will be neglected. Stone town is also in danger of becoming run down and dominated by charity shops, especially if more supermarkets are allowed to be developed on the periphery of the town.

6. County Councillor's Report. No report.

7. Planning.

New Planning Applications April 2014:

14/20157/FUL Bearstakes, Sandon Road, Hilderstone. Minor material amendment to approved plans, to widen bed sitting area, wet room and first floor bedroom by 55cm.

Resolved: The Parish Council has no objection to this amended application.

Status of Earlier Applications:

13/19733/HOU Beech Tree Byre, Moss Lane, Hilderstone. Retention of timber framed parking/store building. Retrospective Application. **PENDING CONSIDERATION.**

13/19630/FUL Wind Turbine near Drumble Woods , Cotwalton. **PENDING CONSIDERATION.**

13/19774/FUL High Forest Farm, Sharpley Heath Road, Hilderstone – Conversion of existing agricultural building (barn) to 3 bedroom residential dwelling. **PERMITTED.**

Blythe Business Park – no application as at 22.04.14

The enforcement officer has recently visited the stable block at Cresswell Road. The block is still under construction, but the enforcement officer has confirmed that as long as the breeze blocks are clad in wood it will meet the approved plans. The enforcement officer will however, continue to monitor the situation. The Borough Tree Officer is to going to look at the mature trees in the same field and may decide to place tree preservation orders on them. The tree that has been partially felled does not have a preservation order on it and is outside the village conservation area so no action can be taken.

An officer from the forestry commission has been to look at the work carried out to the trees in the small woodland to the rear of the open space at the bottom of The Meadows. The work carried out is coppicing and not complete felling. Woodland owners must have a licence to carry out coppicing or felling of areas in excess of five cubic metres however. The forestry commission is to contact the landowner in due course.

Cllr. Clark has inspected the oak tree in the churchyard and will get the split branches removed soon if the tree officer agrees.

8. Traffic and Highways. Highways have recently been carrying out patching and top dressing in the village including B5066 Hilderstone Road on the Cotwalton Road bend. The tarmac around the drain cover at the bottom of The Meadows has not been repaired however and the clerk has been asked to report this.

Bill Cash MP has received some complaints from members of the public about the traffic calming build-outs. He has written to Staffordshire County Council for a response and this has been forwarded to the Parish Council for information. The County Council has stated that the build-outs were installed after a request for traffic calming measures by the Parish Council. After an assessment by Highways engineers, the build-outs were proposed as the most suitable option for Hilderstone. Public consultation was carried out and this indicated that '80% of residents were in favour of these traffic calming measures'. Speedwatch monitoring has so far indicated that on the whole traffic speeds and the number of heavy goods vehicles have reduced through the village. The Parish Council has requested that the visibility of the build-outs be improved and that an extra bollard is placed on the pavement next to the build-out on Cresswell Road. The scheme has been and will continue to be monitored and revisions and changes will be made as required.

9. Footpaths/Village Maintenance/Best Kept Village. Stone Ramblers have not yet replied to the request made by Cllr. Davies to carry out some work on the local footpaths.

The new tenant at Mill Farm has cut the hedge and the top of the hedge to the rear of 2 Farm Lea has been also been cut, bringing it in line with the other hedges. The very large conifer on Farm View has been removed.

10. Correspondence Received April 2014 :

- Email from Howard Watkin-Jones re 'Friends of' group.
- Draft Proposal from Boundary Commission on Electoral Review of Stafford.
- Letter from John Coutouvidis, Independent M.P. Notifying the Parish Council of his intention to contest Stone seat at the forthcoming Parliamentary Elections in May 2015
- Electoral Role Amendments
- Archives and Heritage Service Newsletter Spring 2014.
- Members' Digest 194
- Letter from Bill Cash re: Draft Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.

Howard Watkin-Jones who had attended the March parish council meeting to discuss the most effective way of encouraging more residents to support village assets and events had emailed the Chairman with details of a 'Friends of' group which he had started to develop. Residents joining the 'Friends of' group will sign up to any of the village assets/projects which they are interested in helping, indicating the amount of time and skills they would be able to offer. The Chairman of each asset or project will be sent the names and contact details of those willing to help, so that they can be contacted when help is required. So far, eighteen villagers have agreed to become 'Friends of'. Mr Watkin-Jones will contact the Chairman of each asset to explain the 'Friends of' concept and issue some information in the Parish Magazine and village website ask for more people to join. The Parish Council felt that this was a very positive development and look forward to progress over the coming months. The Parish Council hope that more people will become involved with the village summer fair, church cleaning and possibly the children's club, all of which are currently lacking volunteers.

Bill Cash MP had forwarded a letter from Brandon Lewis MP (Department for Communities and Local Government) about the concerns raised by Cllr. Clark on the filming and recording of Parish Council meetings by the press and members of the public. In the letter Mr Lewis stated that: 'transparency and openness are essential for robust local accountability.... The intention of the new Regulations is to give local people the right to use modern communication methods to bring the proceedings of a meeting closer to others who for genuine reasons cannot attend the meeting. Allowing members of the public to record or film meetings should not be seen as an intrusion or a barrier to open debate and expressions of issues'.

Members Digest 193 – The Borough Council has written off six council tax cases totalling £20,206. The legal cost of collecting these debts would be more than the revenue collected.

Planning permission has been granted for 36 pitches for travellers on land that is owned by Staffordshire County Council and Stafford Borough Council off St. Albans Road, Stafford. It is a legal requirement set by the government for all councils to make provision for travellers within its area.

Health Security Committee, Principle Officer, Mr T. Jones presented his report explaining that Stafford has statistically a higher level of excess winter deaths and fuel poverty than the England average. The cavity wall insulation grant programme has been a great success and will probably be offered again. Gritting of pavements for safety reasons was also considered, but there were no current plans to grit all pavements.

Three people in Stafford have been fined more than £200 for dumping rubbish in a local lane. Officers traced the rubbish back to three Stafford town centre residents. There were around 350 reports of fly tipping in the Borough in 2013. Over the last five years the cost to the local tax payers for clearing this is approximately £140,000. The Borough Council is sending out a clear message that those discarding rubbish illegally will be fined and prosecuted when traced.

11. Finance. The monthly accounts were presented and signed by the Chairman. The first precept and concurrent payment for 2014-15 has been received. The current account is £7070.04 in credit and the deposit account £3116.78 in credit. Although most of these funds are allocated as indicated by the monthly accounts which are circulated to all Councillors prior to each meeting. The following payments were approved:

1. Mad Science, Children's Club March Event - £245.00
2. SCVYS, Children's Club Annual Membership Fee - £10.00

The clerk is currently preparing the end of year accounts and annual return for the internal audit. The parish council will be asked to approve these at the Annual General Meeting. Under new regulations the clerk has to show the concurrent grant and Government Council Tax Support Grant separate from the precept under 'other income' in the accounts and the annual return. It is being proposed that after 2017 smaller councils with turnover less than £25,000 will be exempt from the annual external audit. These councils will however be required to adopt a financial transparency code which is currently in draft form. Councils may also be required to publish more financial data online.

The Children's Club have submitted a request to the clerk for the Parish Council to pay its insurance premium which is due for renewal in April. The Club has had two quotes one by the existing insurer for £320 and one by another insurer for £234.50 The club has suggested that if it has to pay this out of its remaining funds which currently stand at £674.17, it will not continue and will only run an activity at the summer fair and a family Christmas party both of which will not require insurance. **Resolved: the request is declined for the following reasons:**

- The Club has received a substantial amount of funding in the last 12 months from SCVYS (£2300.00) and a Parish Council donation of £104.00 was made in March 2013 to assist with the first session before the SCVYS grant was released. The Parish Council has also provided banking facilities for the group and postage for payment of cheques etc.
- The Parish Council has always made it clear that in the long run all voluntary groups must be self-financing through a combination of realistic charges to users and further grant funding applications.
- The Parish Council also felt that it could not justify such a large amount of expenditure on a group which currently has reduced the number of sessions due to a lack of volunteers and may be in danger of folding altogether. It was felt that there is currently sufficient funds, for the Club to pay the lower insurance quote it has received and then run some less expensive session where a suitable fee is charged to partly cover other costs.
- As previously explained to Kate Murray, the Club can also apply to the County Councillor's fund for a small grant. This is relatively straight-forward process. Other small grant funding schemes are also available.

12. Any Other Business. Cllr. Crump asked if there had been any news from the Staffordshire Parish Council Association (SPCA) about the area committees which were in danger of folding due to a lack of support and income. No information had been received to date; the clerk will contact SPCA.

It is excellent news that The Roebuck has re-opened by new tenants. The pub has been re-decorated and it is clean and welcoming. It is hoped that villagers will support the pub at a level which will secure its long term future. The Parish Council wishes the new tenants every success.

13. Date of next meeting.

The AGM and next parish council meeting will be held on TUESDAY 20th May 2014 at the earlier start time of 7.00 p.m. The meeting closed at 9.42pm.

