

WOOLMER GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Nineteenth Annual Parish Meeting 9 April 2019

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

In attendance: J Pearce (Clerk); Herts County Councillor R Smith; Borough Councillors J Cragg, S Markiewicz & R Trigg; Church Warden Sue Keach; members of the public.

1. Opening of the meeting by the Chairman: The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting including County Councillor Richard Smith and Borough Councillors Julie Cragg, Steve Markeiwicz and Roger Trigg. He thanked them for their continued support. The Chairman introduced the Parish Councillors and stated that they are not paid for what they do. He said that the Councillors four year term of office comes to an end in May and that Cllrs Jenny Hawkins and Tony White are standing down. Five nominations have been received and a sixth Councillor can be co-opted at the May Parish Council Meeting. Two candidates have come forward to fill the vacancy. The Chairman referred to the Annual Report available on the tables and said the Council has had a steady year during which the ladies washroom had been refurbished at a cost of £5,000 and the Garden Road balance beam was repaired at a cost of £500. The Chairman expressed thanks to Cllr White who successfully applied for a £1,000 grant from the Parish Paths Partnership to resurface right of way No 24. Thanks also to the Rights of Way Officer who contributed a further £228. The Local Plan is still under examination and the Marshalls site has been submitted to the Borough's "call for sites". The Entech site was granted permission for mixed use and construction is underway. The Parish Council's position is that the Entech and Marshalls sites should satisfy Woolmer Green's quota for development and save the Green Belt and the Parish Council will continue to argue its case. Following a successful bid by Cllr Richard Smith to the PCC Road Safety Fund to pay for a feasibility study on the B197 the Aecom Report was published and is being studied by Highways officers. The Council is grateful to Jackson's Garage which donated £500 to the Parish Council and part of it paid for the plants for the village planters which are tended by Cllr Hawkins. £300 was also donated by a couple who held their wedding reception at the village hall to thank staff for their support. The Chairman thanked the Clerk for all her hard work.

2. Apologies for absence: Sergeant Ian Smith; Mrs J Watson. Sergeant Smith said he is happy to answer any questions raised by residents.

3. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting 2018: The minutes of the 2018 Annual Parish Meeting were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. Church Warden, Sue Keach, talks about St. Michael's Church: The Warden said the Welwyn Team of Datchworth, Tewin, Ayot St. Peter, Codicote, Welwyn and Woolmer Green have had a busy year. Each holds a Sunday service and enjoys the fellowship of other congregations. Lay readers also visit care homes in the parish. St. Michael's held some special events throughout the year including curate Dominic Holroyd Thomas' priesting in St. Albans. The Church was at the centre of the village Armistice Service where Woolmer Green Band and the Brownies took part. It has close links with the school and enjoys taking part in Parish Council events. Following a number of repair projects over the past ten years the inspection of the church building found its current condition is excellent with only minor items needing attention. The churchyard is well maintained and the yew trees have been pruned. Despite a dwindling congregation the church is well managed and life in the church community is very rewarding.

5. Cllr Richard Smith talks about County Council matters: Cllr Smith said he would bring everyone up to date on the progress of the Aecom B197 Feasibility Report. The report was commissioned following a successful bid to the PCC Road Safety Fund which was supported by Welwyn and Woolmer Green Parish Councils, Oaklands and Woolmer Green schools and Borough Councillors. A parent also raised a petition and collected 353 signatures. The report is thorough and contains a number of recommendations to be considered.

Any major works to the B197 are not likely to be implemented until after Highways England has completed the smart motorway on the A1(M) and construction of this is due to start in March 2020, will take eighteen to twenty-four months and cost approximately £170 million. Construction will include new gantries, barriers, signage and safe refuges a mile apart and the motorway will be kept running on two lanes throughout the construction period. Although during this time more traffic will use the B197 the improvements should lead to a good flow of traffic on the A1(M) so that motorists should not need to come off the motorway. There are no major works planned in Woolmer Green in the 2019/20 Highways budget. Later this year there will be a consultation on the South Central Growth Transport Plan and this will cover our area.

There are smaller proposals in the Aecom Report that could be considered and we will make a further bid to the PCC Road Safety Fund in September/October to fund modest schemes like a larger pedestrian refuge outside the school, keep clear markings by Mardleybury Road junction, footway widenings or speed reduction outside of the schools. Other sources of funding could be Cllr Smith's 2020/21 Highways Locality Budget and Parish Council funds.

This Year Cllr Smith's Highways Locality Budget will pay for resurfacing the footways in Longmead which are in a poor condition.

Response to resident's questions:

The speed limit on the B197 from Stevenage to Welwyn Garden City is inconsistent. If we can introduce traffic calming we could look to setting a consistent speed limit of 40mph with a 30mph limit outside of the schools. The Aecom report recommends a pelican crossing outside the school but does not suggest the existing one should be upgraded which it should be. The meeting agreed that there have been a number of dangerous near misses on the zebra crossing. The Parish Council keeps a list of near misses and they should be reported to the Clerk.

The Mardleybury junction is dangerous but Highways have discounted constructing a roundabout there in the past.

Before 30mph signs can be installed the road has to look like a 30mph road; that is why the B197 was narrowed.

The B197 was surveyed after the road was narrowed to determine how effective the changes had been. Traffic speed did not reduce as much as was expected.

Some areas have a 20mph speed limit past schools but Woolmer Green could aim for a 30mph limit past the school as the B197 is a 40mph road.

Housing developments could fund road schemes and the Entech developers will have to introduce a Highways approved safe crossing scheme.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Smith for his support.

6. Cllr Grant Pinney discusses the Carols 'round the Pond event: Cllr Pinney reminded the meeting that Wheels on Woolmer Green will be held on Bank Holiday Monday, 6th May and donations will go to Balls to Cancer. He said that the New Year's Eve party was a success and lots of families attended.

The Carols 'round the Pond had grown over the years and with people spilling into the road and shuffled towards the pond when a car needs to pass it has become a safety issue. We need to decide whether to move the event to the church or the hall grounds or ask for a road closure.

Residents felt that the event would lose its character if it was moved and improving safety by the pond could be achieved.

7. Questions from the public: The Council agreed that Strawplaiters could be coned off during Wheels on Woolmer Green and Village Day to deter inconsiderate parking.

A resident said that the footpath outside the houses on the former Fox pub site has never been installed by the developer and that the issue is a safety concern. Over three years they have gained support from Woolmer Green and Datchworth schools and their MP, raised a petition and appeared in the Welwyn Hatfield Times. She asked the County and Borough Councillors what they could do in support and why conditions imposed by planning were not carried out. Cllr Smith said that Senior Officers from Highways and the Borough Council are working closely on the issue to come up with a plan and a decision will be made by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council in due course.

A resident asked if a bus stop in Knebworth could be installed nearer to the Co Op as non-drivers had a long walk with heavy shopping.

A number of residents expressed concerns about vehicles parking on pavements around the village and asked for clarification on whether this was illegal and who should be enforcing inconsiderate parking. The Council said it has had a quotation from Highways to install bollards on the verge in Mardleybury Road as it is damaged by parking vehicles and causes the path to become muddy. Cars would still be able to park legally on the roadside.

The Marshalls site does not have any permission for development; it has been submitted to the Borough Council's "call for sites" which will be consulted on.

Cllr Julie Cragg thanked Cllr Jenny Hawkins for all the hard work she has done in the orchard and tending the village planters. Jenny said although she was stepping down she was still going to look after the planters.

Cllr Steve Markiewicz reminded the meeting that the Borough Councillors hold a Councillors Surgery every two months in the village hall and would be delighted to hear from residents. He encouraged residents to let Borough Councillors know about any issues they could help them with.

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