

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON 4TH MAY 2006 AT 8PM
IN THE CHURCH ROOM, WEST WYCOMBE**

PRESENT: Cllrs Mrs J. Smith (Chairman), Mrs C. Dakin, Mr D. Callaghan, Mrs A. Harris,
Mr F. Downes, Mr N. Timberlake Mr N. Phillips (National Trust)
Mrs S. Henson, Clerk

20 members of the public, Cllr T Nixey Chairman of Hambleton PC, Cllr Mrs Storey a member of Piddington & Wheeler End PC, Dist Cllrs Mrs Teesdale and Mr I McEnnis, Mrs A Cobb, Head of West Wycombe County Combined School, two Bucks Free Press reporters, Mr D. Knowles.

APOLOGIES; Cllrs R. Seymour, P.C. Dave West

The Chairman, Mrs J. Smith welcomed everyone present and then announced a surprise. Sharon Henson, Clerk to the Council had been entered into the Bucks Clerk of the Year Competition, and Cllr Mrs Smith was able to announce that Sharon had been made the joint winner. Mr Des Knowles, Chairman of the Bucks Branch of the Society of Local Council Clerks then made the award of a plaque, a swan ornament and a set of Cross pens.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2006

If there is one thing we are very good at West Wycombe Parish Council it is making sure that we do not go unheard!

We have objected and complained at great length on many things this year. The following are just a few of the subjects we felt we should comment on.

The pre signal at the Pedestal. This is a year- long experiment by Bucks County Council to see if the traffic light helps the flow of traffic on the A4010.

We were pretty sure before the traffic light started that it would make little difference except to create more fumes in the High Street. We have asked the County Council to monitor the pollution and feed back to us the traffic findings at the end of the year.

The parking problems at the Pedestal both around the Garage and the football field at weekends.

We have objected to the closure of West Wycombe Library.

We have voiced our concerns to The Primary Care Trust and our MP about moving vital services from High Wycombe Hospital to Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

Also the affect all the extra traffic of this and the new houses planned for the north of the County will have on the A4010. Only last week Cllr Callaghan and I went to a meeting in Princes Risborough with other Parish Councils who have the A4010 running through their Parish. Collectively we are appealing to SEERA, The South East Regional Assembly and GOSE, the Government of the South East and our MPs to make them see they must get the infrastructure right before all the building starts.

BCC have been conducting a speed limit review for the last two years. We asked for the speed limit on part of West Wycombe Road and Bradenham Road and Chorley Road to be lowered. Very soon you should see the new speed limit signs on those roads.

We are very concerned that we may lose the Rider on Call bus service that has been particularly useful to residents in Bradenham Road and Chorley Road. The Central Government funding has long run out and BCC are hard pressed to find the large amount of money needed to subsidise the route. We are meeting with BCC again very soon to see if there is some way it can be kept going.

We have heard on the grapevine that there could be a new hourly bus service between High Wycombe and Stokenchurch calling at West Wycombe. Let's hope the rumours are true.

Much of our time is taken up with responding to consultations. We definitely do want to be consulted but at times we do wonder if anyone ever looks at the tons of paper work that we and other Parish Councils seem to generate.

For instance, we contributed to Wycombe District Council's Parish Fact File even sending in corrections after they got things wrong but still it has come out with wrong information about the Parish!

We do our best to be supportive of other organizations in the Parish and have worked with The National Trust, BCC and West Wycombe School to provide a path from the junction of Chorley Road and Church Lane up towards the school. Hopefully this will be completed by the start of term in September.

We continue to pay for a School Crossing /Lollypop Lady in Chorley Road.

We are pleased to see the West Wycombe Road pelican crossing that we helped fund has made a difference to the children going to and from school.

We have given monetary support to St Lawrence Church Trust to help them implement their Green Apple award.

We invited a representative of The Neighbourhood Watch Association to give a presentation a few months ago and have encouraged residents to get in touch with Mr Geoff Pegg tel. no. 01494 523649 to see if a scheme could be started in their road.

We are putting new pavement lighting along the Bradenham Road. Many residents have asked for this to be done and we are sorry they have had to wait so long. You may recall we did the first stage of new lights on Bradenham Road last year.

Once the proposed lighting scheme in The High Street has been completed in the next few weeks every road in the Parish will have good safe lighting.

It has been an expensive task over a number of years to achieve this end but we felt it very important for people to feel a little safer in the place they live.

Part of the scheme in The High Street is to put in two permanent places for Christmas trees and lights.

Most months there are planning applications for us to decide on. If you see any of us lingering around property in the Parish you can be assured it is because there is a planning application for that property and we have decided to do a site visit to make sure just what the application means for the property and its neighbours. WDC do take note of what we say but theirs is the final decision, unless the plan goes on to an appeal.

There can be very few properties left in the Parish, apart from the Village of course, that has not had an extension of some description!

You might be interested to note that we have over 550 premises in the Parish and 915 adults. We want to reflect their ideas and make this an area that is a good place to live.

One of our priorities is to keep our Burial Ground well maintained because we know it means a lot to our residents who have loved ones there.

We have purchased two slow signs and two flood signs so that when it rains heavily in the Village we can ask the traffic to slow down and try and stop unnecessary flooding of homes and businesses in the High Street. Mr and Mrs Plumridge and Miss Barry have offered to look after the signs and put them out when needed.

We pay for extra grass cutting to try and keep our verges throughout the Parish looking tidy.

There may be some people who think we don't do anything for their part of the Parish but I can assure everyone that we think of the Parish as a whole but can only react to situations if we are told about them. We do try to have eyes and ears everywhere.

We have had preparatory talks with the aim of putting together a contingency plan should there be any sort of disaster locally. A Community Safety Plan.

The Bundsfield explosion made us realise we need to have an emergency team.

We would like to make a list of people in the Parish who have a trade or qualification that we could call on should the need arise. Doctors, nurses, policemen and women, fire fighters, paramedics, people who know First Aid, plumbers, electricians, builders, farmers, anyone with lifting gear, people who work in telecommunications, anyone who thinks they could help in an emergency.

Please contact our Clerk or any of your Parish Councillors if you think you could help. Your help could save lives.

This time last year we launched our website and I would like to thank Mike Henson for designing and looking after the site for us.

We do wish more people used it and that the businesses and organisations in the Parish would put their details on the website to make a comprehensive directory for anyone wanting to know more about West Wycombe.

We have a very good working relationship with Bucks County Council and Wycombe District Council and mostly things we ask for do get done quite quickly. Potholes, blocked drains, over grown hedges and fallen trees are just a few of the type of things we have called them out for this year. BCC's "Highways on Call" is another telephone number that is useful for members of the public so that they can report a problem quickly. 0845 230 2882

We belong to the Wycombe Association of Local Councils and attend their meetings regularly. I am part of a team from that Association that organises training for Councillors.

I represent Parish Councils on Wycombe District Council's Standards Committee.

We belong to The Bucks Association of Local Councils and I am on the Executive Committee of that Association.

We attend Bucks County Council's Local Area Committees because we are committed to making sure we are up to date with any changes and are there to ask questions and put forward our ideas.

Exchanging views and ideas with other Councillors is always educational and useful.

Cllr Frank Downes is not only one of our Parish Councillors but our County Councillor too and he represents us on West Wycombe School's Governing Body.

Roger Seymour represents the Parish Council on The West Wycombe Community Association Committee who manages the Village Hall.

Neil Timberlake joined the Parish Council this year and I thank him for his interest and patience.

I think it comes somewhat of a shock to new councillors when decisions seem to take forever to turn into action.

Cllrs Danny Callaghan, Ailsa Harris and Neil Timberlake have worked very hard to bring you the Parish Plan results which Danny the Chairman of the Parish Plan Committee will give to you later.

It is good to have Nick Phillips, The National Trust Property Manager for West Wycombe work with us on the Council as a non-voting member. Surrounded as we are by NT houses and land it is easier to talk directly at a meeting rather than letters/emails going backwards and forwards.

I would like to thank our two District Councillors, Mrs Jean Teesdale and Mr Ian McEnnis, who regularly attend our meetings and look after our interests, particularly in planning matters. They are an integral part of the way in which this Parish is cared for at local government level.

There have been 3 memorable dates for us this year.

It was a great shock on June the 30th last year when one of our longest serving Parish Councillors, Michael Gerrard died.

Michael was West Wycombe through and through and a real character. He has left a legacy of local knowledge which we only hope we have well documented and

remembered. One of the last things he enjoyed doing for us was consulting with Wycombe District Council's conservation department to produce the West Wycombe Conservation Study which is a good interesting read as well as a planning guidance document. Michael is much missed.

Secondly, West Wycombe Parish Council was awarded Quality Status on September the 8th last year.

We had to fulfil stringent criteria to prove we know local council law and procedure and that we run the Council in an efficient way for the benefit of our parishioners.

We hoped it would bring some extra monetary gains and powers but that hasn't been forthcoming as yet.

There is only one other Quality Council in the Wycombe District and only 260 in the rest of the country, so I think we are justified in being rather proud of ourselves.

Which brings me to our third memorable date, which is this evening the 4th of May 2006. Because tonight Sharon our Clerk has been presented with the award for "The Best Clerk in Buckinghamshire."

She shares the honour with Pitstone PC's Clerk.

Sharon has worked for us since 1995. We have encouraged and watched her go from strength to strength. Learning and absorbing every new piece of information she can get her hands on!

Without Sharon gaining her qualification in Local Council Administration we would never have been able to apply for Quality Status.

We put Sharon forward for the award and we congratulate her on her success.

Of course we have always known she was the best!

Her knowledge and reputation has meant that other Parish Councils want her to work for them and she is now clerk to Hambleton PC and Piddington and Wheeler End PC too.

We have entered her for the National Association of Local Councils Clerk of the Year award.

This time next year will be election time for parish councils and I would like to remind everyone that West Wycombe Parish Council is completely non political and Parish Councillors do not get paid. All the time we give to and for the community is voluntary.

I would like to thank my fellow Councillors and Sharon for the support they give me and the time and effort they put into the Parish Council often beyond the call of duty, such as Sharon and Ailsa washing down the white gates earlier this year! Also I would like to thank the members of the public who come to our meetings to support us and give us their views and ideas.

The Clerk presented Cllr Mrs Smith with a bouquet and thanked her for her many years of service to the community and being the driving force behind the Parish Council, always prepared to take on new ideas and strategies and become involved.

The Financial Report

The RFO had issued copies of the accounts to everyone present and briefly went through them.

We had allowed for £5000 to be contributed to BCC for the new lighting scheme in the High Street, West Wycombe and this money is included in our balance as the scheme has not been completed; we paid £3551 for the new lights this side of the Bradenham

Road Bridge; we carried out our Parish Plan questionnaire which cost £625 to produce and award prizes; we had run out of letterheads and had more, with the Quality logo, printed; the internal and external audits cost £400; Insurance increased by £100; we have our own telephone line; we paid for the unexpected repair, caused by the power cuts, to the Church Loft Clock although through personal donations, a coffee morning; support from our District Councillors Community Fund and receiving a goodwill gesture from Southern Electric we have been able to recover most of this; we have purchased 5 litter pickers, 4 SLOW and FLOOD road signs; a printer; salt for the salt bin; personal alarms to support a Thames Valley Police initiative; we have new signs on the Burial Ground Gates, 50% of which was paid for by our County Councillor from the Community Leaders Fund; and we paid £500 in legal bills. The RFO gave people the opportunity to ask questions.

Report from the Parish Council Representative on the School Governing Body,
Cllr Frank Downes

General

It is always a pleasure to be able to report success and this year is no exception. At the end of my seventh year as the Council Representative on the School Governing body, I am pleased to be able to report on yet another year of continuing success with the school having a successful OFSTED in October 2005 when it was judged to be 'Good'. As in past years, the key factors in producing this success have been the continuing commitment and dedication of staff, the sound leadership of the head teacher and the ready involvement of parents both individually and through the PTA

As I reported last year, Alison Cobb took over as Head Teacher in April 2003. She has now completed her third year and continues to lead an outstandingly good school. She has quickly established her own style of leadership and we look forward to being part of a continuing success story.

Finance

For the last four years, I have been able to report a balanced budget and I am pleased to report that once again, we are looking at a satisfactory financial position. Naturally, the school could always make use of a higher level of funding but this year we have benefited from a substantial government grant which allows us to implement a large building project giving the school an additional two classrooms and an out door area for the reception children.

Academic Results

Academic standards have not been as high over the last three years as the school would have liked and strategies have now been put in place to address the areas of concern and we look forward to seeing the standards rise in the future.

The number of pupils on the SEN register this year is 37 in total with 2 children holding statements of special educational needs. This is slightly less than last year and results show that these children progress as well as all other groups within the school.

Of the 30 Year 6 pupils who sat the selection papers, 6 have obtained grammar school places and one who requested a review was successful. These results are similar to last year and in line with expectation.

Catchment areas and Admissions Policy

The school continues to attract a large proportion of its parents from out of catchment and there is a considerable waiting list for entry into the reception class every year.

Staffing and numbers on roll

At the start of the Spring Term this year the number of pupils on roll was just over 204 which is about the same as last year.

Full time teaching staff remains at seven, plus the Head Teacher. Following the recent government initiative, all teachers now receive 10% of their teaching time for preparation, planning and assessment (PPA) and 3 part time support teachers have been employed to cover the classes.

Premises

As you may recall, the school was awarded a 'Level 3' travel plan grant and this year the school has retained its 'Level 3' status. The building project commenced at the beginning of 2006 and is progressing according to plan. Deliveries of building materials take place mainly at the start and end of the day which has minimal impact on traffic through the village at the busier times.

Conclusion

The school continues to produce a high level of academic achievement in a friendly and supportive environment. With a steadily improving financial position the Governors and Staff are looking forward to the continuing success of our village school.

Report from the West Wycombe Community Association by Mr Graham Wood

The Village Hall continues to be well used and we are pleased to have regular groups who use the Hall on a weekly basis.

I have been Treasurer for 10 years and that my first task in April 1996 had been to bank the grants from Bucks CC (£4,000.00), Wycombe DC (£2,500.00) and West Wycombe PC (£500.00) towards the new floor and stage at the Hall, which had cost over £11,000.00.

Since then we have not embarked on anything nearly as ambitious, although an ageing building like the Hall requires constant maintenance and we have to carefully balance expenditure on maintenance as well as improvements against the type of events and users - we have to be very careful not to incur expenditure resulting in having to increase our hire charges so that they are not competitive with similar venues. The Hall is no longer booked for events such as wedding receptions and dances like it was several years ago. For several months we have been discussing exciting plans to extend the Hall but we had unfortunately to decide that they would not be appropriate, although we remain committed to making the Hall as attractive and modern a venue as possible and practicable.

In 2005, for the first year, I have been able to get in all income for the year before 31.12.05, which enabled us to have a clear picture of the year's income and expenditure. In 2005 income and expenditure were £15,949.09 and £12,941.18 compared with £15,144.75 and £16,238.28 respectively in 2004. As at 31.12.05 we had £16,406.94 in the bank compared with £13,434.87 as at 31.12.04.

Our main project in 2005 was repairs to the roof and the replacement of guttering - the cost of materials, labour and scaffolding hire amounted to £2,254.59. We paid £2,671.21 for electricity in 2005. The annual inspection of our fire extinguishers resulted in two having to be replaced at a cost of £388.54. These are just examples of the expenditure incurred in running the building.

As a charity we are not charged rates. However, since the Hall is non-residential, we have to pay privately for waste collection - the charge for this in 2005 amounted to £1,055.17 - in 2001 the cost had been £538.21 but since then the cost has increased by over £100.00 per year due to landfill tax.

Although our car park is provided for Hall users, we do our bit to help the parking problems in the village by providing, at a modest cost, parking permits for two local businesses and the small number of local residents - five so far in 2006 - who are honest enough to admit to parking; this also provides some welcome income. As in previous years we made no charge for the use of the Hall for the Festive Fair in early December and for refreshments after the New Year's Day walk.

We were lucky to have the services of Mrs Maureen Plumridge as Lettings Secretary and Mrs Jane Ross as Cleaner. We were sorry to lose Maureen's services in January of this year due to ill-health but it was good to see her at the PC AGM looking so well. Fortunately Jane had been able to take on the Lettings Secretary role.

As an ageing Committee (although we do have two members in their thirties) we would welcome new blood. Our AGM is usually held in late January and is a relatively painless experience lasting no more than 30 minutes, so it would be good to have more than the same two non-Committee members present.

Report on the Results of the Parish Plan Questionnaire from Cllr Danny Callaghan

Since the last Annual Meeting, the questionnaires have been collected and analysed. We had a good response, with around 20% of questionnaires completed.

Overall there were no real surprises, with roads and traffic being seen as the major problem. Generally the speed and volume of traffic is the problem, but more specifically the area around the Pedestal Roundabout, difficulties in joining the West Wycombe Road from the side-roads, and congestion caused by the Car Boot sales were frequently mentioned. Suggestions as to how to address these problems included having lorries use the M40 instead of the A40, generally lower speed limits, installation of speed cameras, and installation of mini roundabouts for the side roads off the West Wycombe Road.

A large majority of respondents would not be opposed to some sort of building development to give housing for local people, with a general view that some sort of Affordable Housing is needed.

The survey showed generally good support for local facilities (Post Office, shops etc.), with the notable exception of the Library (a combination of people not being interested, and problems with the opening hours)

There was strong interest shown in having more community events such as a Parish Fete, and people do feel that the Parish would benefit from extra activities such as Brownies and Guides

We did ask whether a Parish Handbook, with details of local facilities would be considered a good idea, and there was a considerable support of this

A surprising 25% of respondents had been the victim of crime in last three years. These were mainly burglary, car crime and vandalism, with very little crime against the person. Most of these crimes had been reported to the Police, however the satisfaction rating for how these had been dealt with by the Police was fairly lukewarm. On the whole, the feeling is that the Parish is poorly Policed, and perhaps because of this there is a lot of interest in Neighbourhood Watch.

We asked for comments on Youth issues, and encouragingly all the feedback was very positive, and really centred around the young people of our Parish not having enough facilities.

So, where do we go from here? The results fall into two categories; those that are really information that the Parish Council can use in its normal activities, and those that need further action, such as community events. The Parish Council have discussed this, and have concluded that the most sensible way forward is to formulate a Community Group. A Community Group would actually have more freedom than the Parish Council does to get these ideas off the ground. As a Parish Council we are restricted by law as to what we can spend money on. Curiously, if we wanted to apply for a grant to start, say, a Brownie group, we would be able to receive the grant, but wouldn't necessarily be able to then legally pass the money on! A Community Group can set its own mandate and constitution, and not have the same restrictions.

If you would be interested in joining a Community Group, please contact the Parish Council.

Report from Mr Nick Phillips, Property Manager, The National Trust

An update on the activities in Hughenden, West Wycombe and the Chiltern Countryside

Visitor update so far

There has been a good start to the year with visitors at West Wycombe. The lake has raised some eye brows. The decision was taken to dredge the lake when the water level was low. Sadly it is likely to remain low for at least the next year.

The regional archaeologist took the advantage of the conditions and researched the lake finding not only ancient footings from the Roman period but also coins and a Saxon dagger handle. The Trust will also take the time to repair the bridges that are normally difficult to work on.

Work has started on a number of properties in West Wycombe and more is planned throughout the year. A meeting is set for the Village Volunteer Group and we will try and work again on the litter, undergrowth and other presentation issues.

Volunteers

Chris Hathaway has had an excellent response to her request for volunteers and we are looking forward to welcoming the new team to West Wycombe. This year we are hoping to offer guided walks of the Park.

West Wycombe Hill

The Hill is still suffering from the results of regular anti-social behaviour and our warden Tom Hall has carried out a great job in picking up the results from syringes to televisions as well as grass cutting and hedge trimming. Tom alone clocked up over 250 hours in West Wycombe last year.

Hughenden Manor

Family Friendly Museum Status

Hughenden is the only NT property to gain Museum Family Friendly Status. This is due to the hard work of VSM and CLO in introducing family friendly activities to meet the aims of the property. The financial benefits are also obvious as the number of payers and new members are a direct result from these local family visitors.

The Walled Garden

The Walled Garden at Hughenden has opened to a great response. The Full Time Volunteer project leader has set up raised beds, information about growing in walled gardens and through donations gives all visitors their own "grow kit" with a focus on Vegetable of the Month!

Hughenden Manor may be hosting the Antiques Road Show which is planned for the 13th July with up to 2000 visitors expected.

Staff changes

Sara Atkins, House Manager resigned. Much as she loved the job the responsibilities of key holder made for a limited social life.

It has been an interesting year for me and at times frustrating. The property group now includes Hughenden, West Wycombe, Bradenham and 3500 acres of countryside so there never seems enough time to do all I would like to. I am however determined to see the village presentation improve. We have made steps in that direction this year but still have a way to go. We have another painting scheme starting soon and will look to refurbish some of the properties that are now becoming vacant. The job has been made a little easier by the fact that I have been so well supported by both the Parish Council and the members of the village this year. Thank you.

Annual Report by County Cllr Frank Downes

General

The County Council has had a difficult year in attempting to continue to deliver the Services needed and expected by the residents of Buckinghamshire against a background of ever tighter financial controls imposed by Central Government.

Just before Christmas 2005, the County Council was awarded Four Star rating by Government Inspectors. This is the highest ranking a local authority can achieve and puts Buckinghamshire amongst the very best performing Councils in the country. In addition to this, an independent survey of Buckinghamshire resident's puts customer satisfaction at the highest level ever recorded.

Perversely, all of this has resulted in the lowest ever Central Government Grant for the year 2006/2007 with an increase of only 2% on the previous year.

With inflation nearer 3% and the ever increasing demands on all services provided by the Council, this led to a significant shortfall in funds to maintain current levels of service.

As a consequence of all this, the Council has been forced to accelerate its programme of change in the way it delivers services and to cut back in some service areas in order to maintain Council Tax at acceptable levels.

The Library Service

As you will be aware, one of the casualties of this financial challenge has been the local Library Service.

Along with seven other local Libraries, the West Wycombe Library Service has been earmarked for a change in the way it is delivered. The proposal is to replace the static Library with a Mobile Service and in this way to reduce the cost while continuing to deliver an efficient service to the village.

Naturally, this proposal is not popular and with my full support, West Wycombe residents have formed a "Save our Library" group to maintain the Library in the existing building in the centre of the village. I will continue to support this Group and the Parish Council in their endeavours to find a solution which is acceptable to all the residents of West Wycombe Parish.

Traffic

In an attempt to improve traffic flow along the Bradenham Road, an experimental traffic light has been installed as you approach the Pedestal Roundabout along the A40, through the village. The effect of this experiment will be monitored carefully and in particular, any changes to pollution levels along the High Street.

Village School

Although this is the subject of a separate Report, it is worth recording the County Council commitment to improving the facilities at the school with the new classroom building programme currently underway. Much of the credit for this programme must rest with the School Governing Body, the Head Teacher and her Management Team. Constant pressure has resulted in the County Council finding the funds to undertake this work.

Parish Council

Although I am a member of the Parish Council, as County Councillor for the area, it would be remiss of me not to congratulate the Parish Council on its achievements over the last 12 months.

The Chairman has provided you with details of most of these but I would particularly like to single out the Councils achievement of "Quality" status. This puts the Parish Council in the Premier League of Parishes and I feel that residents should be made more aware of their good fortune in having such a dedicated group of people working on their behalf.

Well done West Wycombe. I am proud to be part of the team and to serve you as County Councillor

Everyone was given the opportunity to ask questions and then joined in light refreshments.