

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON 1st MAY 2008 AT 8PM IN THE CHURCH ROOM, WEST WYCOMBE**

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

Dist Cllrs Mrs J. Teesdale and Mr I McEnnis

10 members of the public including Mrs M. Hilder, West Wycombe Estate, Mrs C. Burslem, BCC GC2C, Mrs Beverley Cope, Churchwarden West Wycombe PCC, Mr D. Winterburn, Bucks Free Press local correspondent

APOLOGIES: Cllr Mr R Seymour

The Chairman welcomed everyone.

Chairman's Annual Report 2008

Compared to other years this past year has been reasonably quiet because we have had no major projects to supervise.

There are many things we would like to do in the Parish such as street lights on Church Lane by the school and also a light by the toilets in Meads Yard.

We are at present investigating leasing the Pedestal Playing Field and to perhaps create a children's play area there. We know from the parish appraisal we carried out a couple of years ago that a play ground is something many people would like in the parish but up to now we have not had anywhere we could use.

The cost of these types of projects is expensive and we felt it would be too much to precept for in one year but we plan to save towards these ideas over the coming years.

The precept is the money that we annually ask Wycombe District Council for to run the Parish Council and you see on your council tax statement. Parish Councils are not capped with how much they can ask for but obviously we want to give good value for the money you entrust us with.

It has been a year of changes, mostly handed down by Central Government.

Almost every week there are training sessions to attend and meetings to keep us up to date on the latest developments in planning or the way Bucks County Council and Wycombe District Council want us to work with them to bring the best services to our community.

We have attended six meetings of our local Neighbourhood Action Group. These groups have been set up by Thames Valley Police to put "local" back into policing. They are about making sure that the police, working with other agencies, such as us, provide the service that people want, tackling those issues that are important to local residents. Buckinghamshire has 57 neighbourhood policing areas with their own NAGS which determine the priorities and objectives for each area. This could range from tackling anti-social behaviour, clearing litter to parking and speeding issues.

It has taken about three years to get this initiative off the ground but I think it will benefit us all in the end. We are grouped with the villages of Piddington and Wheeler End, Stokenchurch and Lane End.

Many of you complain about vehicles parked on pavements. When the Special Parking Areas (SPA's) come into force in October 2008 the whole of the Wycombe District Council area will be policed by traffic wardens. Parking on pavements, which has always been an offence, will then be 'policed' more strictly.

We have been very concerned by the number of plans we have had other the last few years where developers want to knock down family homes and build single occupancy flats. We have lobbied WDC hard to try and get the parking sorted out with these developments, with little success, because we know parking is a major problem everywhere in West Wycombe. WDC have to abide by BCC and Government guidelines on parking and width of roads etc which mean our concerns are sidelined. The SPA's might help with parking but we worry where people will be

able to park when many of our smaller roads especially off West Wycombe Road, just cannot take any more parked vehicles.

We are, of course, aware that we do need affordable homes in and around West Wycombe but we think we are reasonably well served here and further down the West Wycombe Road with these types of properties. We are concerned that taking away family homes alters the dynamics of our community.

We attended and spoke at the planning enquiry for 473 West Wycombe Road as did The National Trust. Although the developers won the appeal we did secure a filter lane for this development from the Pedestal roundabout to try and make the road safer. We are watching the development closely to make sure the filter lane is built.

We have 42 extra houses paying council tax this year making 550 in the parish and if they become occupied another 34 next year will be eligible.

We have answered many residents' enquiries about boundary problems and lawfulness of buildings, trees and hedgerows.

It has taken about 3 years to get the "Getting Closer to Communities" (GC2C) meetings sorted out too. This is a Bucks County Council initiative which puts our local Bucks County Councillors and Wycombe District Councillors, the representatives of the departments at Bucks County Council who deal with our area and Parish Councillors together to try and sort out any problems we may be experiencing. We belong to the Marlow Rural area which includes Hambleden, Marlow Bottom, Lane End, Stokenchurch, Piddington and Wheeler End. Being mostly rural parishes we have a lot of the same issues in common and can all help each other. The police also come along to these meetings.

We were consulted on the BCC speed review for areas 5 and 8 which include all the roads in our parish.

We are running out of patience with the speed review department because it is 2 years since we asked them to take down the incorrect sign in Bradenham Road saying "Welcome to West Wycombe" We are promised it will happen soon!

The Burial Ground car park has been resurfaced this year and we have installed a kissing gate in the top fence to make it easier for all of you that like to walk through this peaceful area.

We have had trees and shrubs planted near the Pedestal monument to stop vehicles parking there and planted daffodils in the grass verge by the flint wall leading into the Village.

BCC have investigated all the gullies and drains for us this year and jetted many of them that caused problems the previous year when it rained heavily.

We have been concerned about the condition and maintenance of the buildings in West Wycombe Village so we arranged a meeting with The National Trust in November and hopefully we shall see some improvements in the look and repair of the buildings this coming year. The National Trust put in a drain to help with the flooding in The Swan Yard.

With the help of our County Councillor we were able to have bollards put up on the corner of Chapel Lane to stop people blocking the pavement and there will be others soon on the corner leading into Copperfields off the West Wycombe Road for the same reason.

We belong to The Bucks Association of Local Councils

I am on the Executive Council of this group.

We also belong to The Wycombe Association of Local Councils.

I am on the training team for this group.

I am a Parish Council representative on Wycombe District Councils Standards Committee.

We attend The Rural Forum meetings at Wycombe District Council.

We also attend The Local Area Committee Meetings arranged by Bucks County Council which are mostly based around highway issues. We managed to secure our continuing bus services by regularly talking to BCC.

By our attendance at these meetings we make sure our parish is definitely in the front line and is fully informed of any new developments and to put in our views and ideas.

We have been asked to take part in the pilot trial of the new Pathfinder initiative between BCC and WDC.

We are an accredited Quality Parish Council.

We have supported both the Library and The Village Hall with their plans this year because these buildings are very much needed in West Wycombe.

I would like to thank the people who come regularly to our meetings. We really do appreciate your support.

It is impossible for us to be everywhere and see everything that might not be quite right in the parish so we rely on you, all our parishioners, to be our eyes and ears and to contact us if you see anything untoward. If there are any issues you wish us to consider please use our website or talk to any of us. Our phone numbers are on the website and in the notice boards.

As I have said before we might not know all the answers but we will do our best to get the information you need even if it is at times, unpalatable!

I would like to thank our County Councillor Frank Downes, who is also one of our Parish Councillors and Jean Teesdale and Ian McEnnis our Wycombe District Councillors for their help and support this year. We are always pleased to see them at the many meetings and training events too, which means we are all looking for the best solutions for the parish!

My thanks too, to Nick Phillips for his continued support of the Parish Council. Mr Phillips is the National Trust Property Manager for West Wycombe. Surrounded as we are by National Trust land and properties it is good to have him on our team.

Our thanks too, to Mike Henson who looks after our website. Please use the website to advertise your local events and organisations. The website is well used and complimented on.

www.westwycombe.org.uk

My chairman's report would not be complete without my thanking Sharon, our brilliant Clerk, for all her hard work. This Parish Council would not be as successful as it is without Sharon's dedication to detail and zeal for her job.

Of course the Parish Council would also be nothing without enthusiastic, interested Councillors and I would like to thank all my fellow Councillors for their support and commitment.

Being a Councillor can at times be frustrating and time consuming. You need bucketfuls of patience, tolerance and a sense of humour! We work well as a team, each member bringing in their expertise and knowledge. Local knowledge is particularly valuable. We don't always see eye to eye on everything but we all agree that we want West Wycombe to be protected but not stifled and a very good, safe place to live.

The Financial Report

We have finished our financial year with a sensible balance. We did not increase our precept for the year 2007/08 and therefore have been very careful with expenditure. Our major projects have been to resurface the car park and paths within the burial ground to provide a safer and easier surface for walking on. We also installed a kissing gate into our top field which has helped local residents with dogs have access to a safely fenced field throughout the period of time when the sheep are in the lower field. Apart from the addition of a Wycombe District Council refuse bin for the coming year we do not have any further plans for the Burial Ground. It is a delightful area to visit and very tranquil and reflects the surrounding countryside.

We joined forces with Piddington and Wheeler End Parish Council to have the footway from West Wycombe to Ham Farm cut back, this created a much wider path for those residents who chose to walk its length.

We had hundreds of daffodil bulbs planted along the Park wall – these are still in bloom and are a cheerful addition.

We looked at the cost of installing 4 extra street lights near the school, but at £13,000 we have decided that we must save for this over the next couple of years. We have also asked the lighting contractors to investigate ways of carrying out an energy audit. It could be expensive as we would need to change some of our light fittings to allow for lower energy usage lighting. We have made

a contribution of £500 towards the Community Library and £1500 to West Wycombe Community Association for improvements to the Village Hall.

We purchased a new PC and the cost of this was shared three ways between Piddington and Wheeler End PC and Hambleden PC, as is the cost of the telephone line.

The air pollution monitor, installed in the Village Hall Car Park by Wycombe District, continues to function and we are about to receive the first report on its findings. WDC refund all the costs of the energy used.

Report from Mrs Mary Hilder, Estate Secretary, West Wycombe Estate

The Estate has said goodbye to James Elliott, who had been our gamekeeper for 16 years. Dave Swallow has taken over and is very pleased to have his daughter attending West Wycombe School. The past year has been very busy with film and television work with scenes from Cranford, Sense and Sensibility, Miss Marple and The Wolf Man all being filmed on the Estate. Carters Fair will be with us once again from the 13 – 18th May and Classic Fantastic on the 27th and 28th June.

There are plans to resurface the Church Lane and The Caves Car Parks. We are working on improving signage to try to avoid all the problems with parents from the school parking in these areas unofficially. We also want to try to sign the Estate more efficiently, this would help dog walkers and tourists.

The farmer renting out the fields for sheep grazing has reduced their stock number from 1000 to 400, however this year that smaller number has caused far more trouble with escaping and they would like to thank the community for continuing to report loose sheep.

The rules for set aside land are about to change, however the Estate will try to ensure that the grass is not cut until after the orchids have bloomed.

Government rules for farmers cutting their hedges have had a dramatic effect on our landscape as, under the scheme that most farmers are working to, they can only be cut every other year and obviously not in the period when birds are nesting.

There has been a great deal of publicity about the increase in grain prices, however the other side of the story is that fertilizer prices have tripled; there is a greater chance of making a profit but nowhere near as high as the general public imagine.

Working with the Bucks County Council/Chiltern Society Donate a Gate scheme we have ordered two kissing gates to be installed into the Pedestal Field from the Bradenham Road and further along the footpath into the adjoining field.

Report from by Cllr Mrs Smith, Chairman, West Wycombe Community Association who are responsible for the management of the Village Hall

The Village Hall continues to be well supported. With our regular weekly users, quizzes and children's parties it is rarely empty which makes it quite difficult at times to be able to get in to do cleaning and maintenance. We are, of course, very pleased to see it used as much as it is.

The planning application we put in to extend the Hall was passed by Wycombe District Council but the Lottery Grant we applied for was unfortunately turned down. We have looked into achieving our aim to update the Hall in a less expensive way but we will still need a good sum of money to do this.

Because one of the main worries we have is the heating system we have decided to install electric heating panels on the both side ceilings of the Hall which we originally thought could be used as back up when it is very cold or when the big fan heater fails, as it did before Christmas. They have proved to be very effective and provide good instant safe heating and with the timing mechanism ensuring they are not left on for hours we could be using them regularly. Fortunately we managed to find someone to repair the big fan heater before Christmas which will give us some financial breathing space.

Fund raising has got to be crucial part of our work this next year because the rest of the renovations needed on the kitchen, hallway, extra ladies' toilet and the staircase are quite urgent to keep the hall running efficiently. General painting and maintenance have got to be kept up to date too.

Replacing the windows continues to be a difficult problem because, at the last estimate, they could cost £48,000! Because we live in a Conservation Area the windows have to be made of wood in the same way they are now and of course we would like them to be double glazed to help keep the heat and noise in the Hall.

We have replaced more guttering this year. This has to be made of cast iron, which is very expensive, again because of the Conservation Area rules.

West Wycombe Parish Council has given us £1,500 this year and budgeted to give the Hall another £1,500 this coming year. (WWPC Financial year starts in April) to help with the Village Hall improvements.

The Parish Council involvement could help us obtain grants.

The car park continues to be used by all and sundry, causing much annoyance to Hall users and people who pay a yearly fee to park in the car park. We have talked many times about this problem and have up to now resisted the idea of using a clamping company because of the problem of identifying legitimate vehicles. So many people come to events at the Hall it could be difficult to know which car had the right to be there!

We lost the antique fair that had used the Hall every month for over 25 years because of the difficulty for them and their customers parking.

Jane Temple continues to be our Letting Secretary and cleaner but unfortunately Jane had an accident at home at the beginning of the year and broke her hip. She has managed to still do the letting of the Hall and Mr and Mrs Mark Curran, who live in the High Street, have kindly stepped in to do the cleaning whilst Jane is out of action. They did a splendid job and we are very grateful to them for helping us out.

Graham Wood our Treasurer does a sterling job keeping our finances in order and Marion Brown does the same with our minutes, agendas and secretarial work.

Roger Seymour and Mel Webster have spent many hours again this year trying to find the best way to move the Village Hall renovations forward without huge cost and too much disruption to the users.

We are immensely grateful for the work they all do for the Village Hall.

Everyone on the Village Hall Committee is unpaid and all are keen to keep the Village Hall a viable asset for West Wycombe residents now and in the future.

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

The National Trust owns a fair proportion of the village; there are however properties we do not own. Some of the tenants have lived in the village for many years. We want to protect, improve and conserve the village as a living entity.

Properties

We have not done all that would have liked. We have refurbished several properties when they have become vacant, prior to re-letting. We have carried out on-going maintenance, however this has been a slow process as the workforce have to cover a large geographical area.

We had a very forthright meeting with members of the Parish Council and Senior National Trust Management, where the Parish Council asked how we could improve the appearance of the properties. We have now been allocated a larger budget this year to enable us to get our properties up to an acceptable standard. Part of the problem with the visible appearance of some of the houses was caused by a plastic based paint used on the houses 12 years ago which means we cannot use the traditional water based lime wash. We had a group of volunteers work on removing the paint on one of the houses last year, however this was not a successful exercise as it damaged the brickwork. After a great deal of searching we think we have at last found a product which will dissolve the plastic paint, thereby allowing us the use traditional limewash which allows the properties to breathe and reduces the incidence of damp.

We have to get on top of the management and presentation of our properties and Vicki and I will be going round the village to prioritise the work required.

During one of the recent refurbishments we exposed 15th Century beams in the roof, not 18th Century as previously thought, this makes us think that there may be other 15th Century properties in the village.

West Wycombe Hill

Work on the Hill continues with grass cutting, tree works and litter picking. It has been noted that the amount of litter is being reduced. A new Warden, Steve has been employed and a new Assistant Warden is due to start. Martin has moved up to the Midlands. Working with Defra and Natural England we are improving the management of the Hill which is chalk grassland. We will show everyone the proposals once they are available.

Volunteers

West Wycombe Park had 10,000 visitors last year, we would like to see more locals visiting the park and Chris Hathaway, our Head Guide is always looking for more volunteers.

We have enjoyed helping the Parish Council erect the two Christmas trees and supported them and Wycombe District Council in finding a site for the installation of the air pollution monitor. The environment can have a detrimental effect on our properties and anything that we can do to improve matters can only be a benefit to all. We are pleased to see that the Community Library has been a success and we use it for regular meetings. There is an excellent Conservation Area Study of West Wycombe and we would like to see as many photos of the village through the years to find an 'ideal' period and appearance for us to work to and maintain the village to that standard. We have 80,000 plus visitors a year and a forthcoming report carried out by the Chilterns Conservation Board on visitors to Hughenden Manor could provide useful information for this village.

There never seems enough time to do all I would like to. I am however determined to see the village presentation improve. 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.

Questions

Mrs Cope asked about the surface on the top of the Hill - The top of the Hill will be scraped and re-laid with a harder core base on an annual basis. We have to be very careful as there is an ancient monument below the surface of the Hill. We plan to install stud posts to reduce the amount of land which can be driven over and used as a car park and hopefully this will help the surface of the Hill.

Mrs Manning asked if Wardens could investigate the use of footpaths by horses.

Mrs Judith Gerrard stated that her late husband, Mike, had a collection of books on the village and she felt it would be good to build on that collection and that perhaps it could be held at a central point – the Community Library. A piece will go in Contact asking for people who have any information to make contact with Nick Phillips.

Cllr Mrs Dakin suggested that the Residents Pass idea be resurrected.

Cllr Mrs Harris suggested that more Family/Children's events should be held in the Park.

Report from Carole Dakin Community Governor at West Wycombe School

Staffing

Once again we started the new academic year fully staffed. We recruited two more TA's over the summer and had over 36 applicants which was very pleasing.

In March 2008, we were finally able to appoint a new Deputy Head Teacher and congratulations went to Mrs Marks, who as most of you will know has already served the school for many years. This will now enable the Head to put together clear staffing structure and allow the school to move forward in terms of leadership and management.

Pupils

West Wycombe School continues to be very popular and this year for the first time we have taken Foundation Stage pupils on a full time basis. This seems to have gone well.

Caretaker

After Chris and John Parker retired at the end of the summer term, we had been without a caretaker for some months. However, thankfully, we were able to appoint a temporary caretaker, Paul Bennett who has already proved a useful asset to the school. The County have refurbished the caretaker's house ready for the new caretaker.

Fund Raising

Several fund raising events have taken place including a fashion show, Eid party, Carol concert to name but a few and over £2,500 has been raised for the school.

Achievements and Standards

As you are no doubt aware, all schools have to set targets for Key Stage 1 and 2 SAT's test. These targets are often challenging for both children and their teachers and this year it's pleasing to be able to inform you that the previous Year 6 children (key stage 2) achieved extremely well indeed. Targets for this year are again challenging and I'm sure they will do their best to achieve them.

Governors

At the beginning of the academic year several new governors were appointed and after many years as Chairman Carole Burslem stepped down and we now have a new Chair of Governors Helen Murdoch.

General

Looking back over the last year the school has completed its building programme. At the beginning of 2007, we had no ICT suite, no outdoor learning environment for the Foundation children and no designated music room. Now we have a fully functioning ICT suite with flat screen computers, a computer in every classroom giving the whole school immediate access to the internet. The music room provided the best environment for practice, the Foundation stage children can enjoy their new classroom and outdoor learning environment and there are new blinds in the hall, making a huge difference to everyone whilst watching school assemblies.

Much has been achieved and we continue to provide our children with a safe, enjoyable place in which to learn. There are many exciting times ahead for West Wycombe School

Report from Mrs Beverley Cope, Church Warden, St. Lawrence and St Paul's Churches 2007-2008

Under the Chairmanship of Revd. Nigel Lacey, the PCC met six times during the year. Average church attendance at St. Lawrence and St. Paul's 11 am Sunday services throughout the year has been approximately 30 people, with considerably more at baptisms, Christmas and Easter. There was a fair response to invitations to 'Back to Church Sunday', in September, and it was agreed to repeat this.

There continues to be a shortage of children and young people attending services, but there is a well equipped- playroom for restless youngsters, with adult supervision.

The Serbian Orthodox congregation and the PCC would like to draw up a lease, enabling the Serbs to install toilets at St. Paul's, but this is currently pending a response to enquiries.

The carvings in the Chancel of St. Lawrence, were restored and returned to their settings by the summer and have been much admired. We are planning to get appropriate lighting installed soon. Further to this work the university held their MA show in the church in December. This attracted many visitors and the standard of work was very impressive. This year's exhibition will also be held in the church.

There have been visits to St. Lawrence Church, throughout the year, organised by 'City and Village Tours', which we expect to happen again this year. Our main source of regular income continues to be opening the Church and Tower to visitors during the Spring and Summer. It is quite hard work finding volunteers to keep this going and we are always delighted to receive offers of help.

A Harvest Supper was held in the Church Room and much enjoyed.

The Revd. Nigel led a Lent course in St. Paul's. The various elements of the Lord's Prayer were discussed and the course was much appreciated.

A major improvement to our facilities has finally reached completion. These are the new toilets at St. Lawrence Church. They have been long awaited and will now enable us to host events without discomfort.

Eight concerts have been held at St. Lawrence Church over the past year, and further events are in the planning stage.

We are waiting for a Quinquennial Inspection before we can plan any further maintenance and repair work on the Church buildings.

We continue to be a very popular venue for weddings.

We like the Churches open not only as places of worship but as a resource for the wider community and, as such, we welcome enquiries and suggestions as to how the buildings might best serve the people of this parish. For example we were delighted when St. Lawrence Church was most recently chosen as the venue to induct a new member to the 'Beavers.'

Report from Cllr Mrs Jean Teesdale, Chairman of West Wycombe Library Action Group

The Library has been open for just over a year and is becoming the hub of the community. We are open from 9.30 – 1pm every morning for coffee and cakes, with profits going to the Library. On Monday we are open from 3 -5pm for the over 60's Coffee Club, and until 7pm for the exchange of books. We are also open from 2 – 7 on a Thursday and 10 – 1 on a Saturday. To help with fund raising which is a major challenge, we are selling home made bags, greetings cards and books. We held a very successful quiz raising just under £900 and we are about to organize a Picnic in the Park, courtesy of Sir Edward Dashwood. We will be holding our Annual Dance in November in West Wycombe Village Hall and a Race Night. We plan to repeat the Christmas Readings round the fire. We really need to obtain a grant to act as financial cushion. We have recently been given £800 from the Garnett Trust which will be used to purchase fold up tables and chairs so that we can serve cream teas during the summer months.

I would like to thank the members of the Parish Council for their support at events and to all those people who have helped either as members of the Committee or through donations of time or money or books. The important thing is to keep this building available for all members of the community.

Cllr Downes asked if the Community Library would be doing anything in connection with National Reading Year.

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