

MINUTES OF SAUGHALL AND SHOTWICK PARK'S PARISH MEETING held on 24 May 2004 at the Vernon Institute, Saughall

In attendance: Councillor A Bailey (in the Chair)
Councillor Mrs P Humphrey
Councillor B Kerr
Councillor RA Storrar
Councillor Mrs J Young

and 3 Parishioners as recorded in the attendance register

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from:

Councillor A Marsden
Councillor C Moss
Councillor C Wynne-Eyton (Tree Warden)
Councillor Mrs D Whitton

2 NEW VICAR

The Chairman welcomed Reverend Brian Harris to the meeting and to the village. He had recently relocated from St Thomas' Church, Stockton Heath, Warrington.

Rev Harris informed that he wanted to be involved in the life of the village. He offered his time and services in anyway that was considered appropriate.

3 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of Saughall and Shotwick Park's Parish Meeting held on 19 May 2003 be confirmed as a correct record.

4 CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

The Chairman welcomed Parishioners to their Annual Assembly and then presented his Annual Report setting out the Council's achievements and successes over the last twelve months. He detailed on-going initiatives and the Council's aims and aspirations for the future.

Various issues were highlighted and considered in detail, these included:

??From the Parish Council Elections in 2006, 13 Councillors will represent Saughall and 1 will represent Shotwick Park. This decision has been made following representations to Chester City Council to address the imbalance because currently there are 12 Saughall Councillors representing 2,458 electors and 2 Shotwick Park Councillors representing 34 electors.

??There have been 55 formal meetings of the Council and its Committees as detailed below:

- 14 Council
- 12 Planning Committee
- 8 Golden Jubilee Park Focus Group
- 7 Finance and General Purposes Committee
- 6 Environment and Highways Committee
- 6 Parish Plan Steering Panel
- 2 Community Safety Focus Group

??The Council continues to hold weekly surgeries on a Saturday between 10:00am and 10:45am in the Parish Room.

??National/Regional issues under discussion over the last 12 months have included:

- o Regional Government and proposals for unitary Councils in Cheshire
- o Future role of Parish Councils
- o Quality Parish Council Accreditation
- o Members' Code of Conduct and Declarations of Interest
- o Freedom of Information Act 2000

??Local Issues

(a) Affordable Housing

The Parish Council has been facilitating the purchase of a parcel of land off Lodge Lane by a Housing Association (Arena) on which to build 12 units of mixed affordable housing. Cheshire County Council has agreed in principle to sell the land for this purpose but unfortunately Arena has failed to secure funding in 2004/05 for this purpose. The Council was optimistic that this project would go ahead in 2005/06.

(b) Bus Services in Saughall

Proposals to cut evening and weekend bus services from Chester, through Blacon to Saughall had been reported in the local press. The Council had made strong representations to Cheshire County Council who was proposing to cut subsidies to the bus companies. Unfortunately, despite best endeavours, the Council was unable to prevent the budget cuts and services from and to Saughall would cease at 20:30hrs each day from July 2004.

This was the most disappointing decision that the Parish Council had dealt with in the last year. It had been proposed that all evening bus services in the County would not be subsidised. There were serious concerns that this blanket cut contravened Cheshire County Council's other policies i.e. support to rural communities, social inclusion, etc. Official notification was still to be received and on receipt of it the Council would decide whether to take any further action.

(c) Bus Shelters

The Council continued to work in partnership with Cheshire County Council to replace the bus shelters in Saughall with modern constructions on which an annual maintenance charge was levied.

Church Road bus shelter had been vandalised numerous times and windows broken by nuisance youths who congregated in it and dropped litter.

Two more new shelters were to be erected in the next year at sites to be determined.

(d) Double Taxation

The Parish Council's 2004/05 budget was £46,806 made up from the Parish Precept and some grants from Chester City Council. Each householder in a 'Band D' property had paid £27.75 per year. (Band D property was one that was valued between £68,000 - £88,000 by the Inland Revenue as at 1 April 1991.)

Residents of parished areas paid their Council Tax according to the value of their dwellings. They also paid a Parish Precept. (Money paid to the Parish Council to run village services such as street cleaning, bus shelter provision, litter bins, purchase and maintenance of playground equipment, etc.)

These additional costs were not levied to residents of the urban areas of the UK and therefore was considered unfair and inequitable. Chester City Council was reviewing the financial arrangements with Parish Councils. Councillor B Kerr was leading on this and a further report on the outcome would be made at the Annual Assembly next year.

(e) Golden Jubilee Park

The Council continued with its work to develop a Golden Jubilee Park on its land in Fiddlers Lane.

A public consultation exercise had been undertaken during the year before any planning application was submitted to Chester City Council, the Planning Authority, for change of use of the land. The Council listened to all points made and took them into consideration when drawing up and finalising plans. It also carried out a full ecological survey and established a Golden Jubilee Park Funding Panel to raise the estimated £190,000 needed for this Capital Scheme. The end result would be a purpose built league Cricket Square, two extra football pitches, an environmental area with a village pond and an attractive footpath with seating suitable for all residents including the disabled.

The planning application had been submitted and Chester City Council's Planning Board had been expected to make a determination on it at its meeting on 26 May 2004. City and Parish Councillor Mrs JE Storrar would speak on behalf of the Parish Council at this meeting.

However, Councillor RA Storrar reported that the determination might not be made in May because Cheshire County Council's Highway Engineers had not responded to the Police's Report. The next Planning Board meeting would be

in July 2004. If a formal response had been received from Cheshire County Council, the planning application could be considered then.

(f) Local Consultation

The Council maintained very good contact with the community it served. It published regular newsletters, held Parish Surgeries, had a presence at the Church Fete, maintained a website and welcomed members of the public to all Council meetings.

Members would continue to review and monitor how the Council interacted, communicated, consulted and related to its electorate. It would identify and introduce new initiatives to continue to improve its communications and consultation networks.

(g) Road Traffic Issues

During the past year the Council had obtained access to speed awareness equipment purchased by Chester City Council's North Gowy Area Committee for local community use. Several volunteers from the Council had set up this digital speed display equipment in December 2003 in both Church Road and Hermitage Road. The idea was to make motorists aware of their speed in an attempt to make them more responsible when driving through Saughall.

The results in Church Road showed that the majority of traffic during the times the equipment was in use conformed to the speed limit of 30mph, typically between 35-40mph. They were backed up by official surveys carried out by the County Council's Highways Department in Hermitage Road, that showed that 98% of all vehicles using the road over an extended period were travelling in excess of 30mph, a few in excess of 65mph.

(h) Parish Plan

With the help of the Cheshire Community Council, the Parish Council had been putting together a Parish Plan to guide the Council and make it easier for it to work with a whole host of organisations to take forward the aims and objectives set out within it to bring about improvements in this village.

The compilation of the Plan had been a long and very intensive process. A snapshot report would be provided for every household in the village and the official launch of the Plan would be at the Village Fete on Saturday, 3 July 2004.

(i) Policing Issues

The police continued to inform that the crime rate was reducing, especially house burglary, theft of/from vehicles. However, local people did have a perception that this was not so and the fear of crime was a big concern.

(j) Quality Parish Council Accreditation

It remained the stated aim of the Council to apply for Quality Parish Council status. Once this was obtained it was thought that the Council would have

more ownership of the functions and services delivered to Saughall and Shotwick Park.

(k) Planning Applications over the border in Wales

On several occasions in the past year the Parish Council had not been informed of planning applications that had significant impact and implication for Saughall. These applications were determined just over the border in Wales by Flintshire County Council.

In particular, concerns had been expressed over the type of housing being built on the old Caxios site and the caravan park and Quad-bike track on Sealand Road. Chester City Council had been consulted but it had not chosen to inform the Parish Council of the neighbouring Planning Authority's proposals.

A Planning Authority was legally bound to inform a neighbouring Planning Authority about significant planning proposals on its boundaries but Parish Councils outside of its administrative area did not have to be informed.

Chester City Council did not have to inform the Parish Council of any application that it was told about by Flintshire County Council, although it would seem sensible to do so.

Consequently, the Parish Council was working with Chester City Council to establish a protocol to improve the flow of information in respect of planning applications just over the border. Mr Brian Hughes, of Chester City Council's Planning Department, had agreed to attend a meeting to discuss the details with Members.

Throughout the Chairman's report comments were made and questions asked and the Chairman responded as appropriate.

5 QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

- Closure of Roads in the Village

It was reported that County Highway Engineers at Backford Hall had arranged the closure of Hermitage Road without consultation with the Parish Council or Mr Graham Anderton, the District Engineer.

The Parish Council had not been informed that Flintshire County Council were closing Sea Hill Road in order to carry out work on the sewerage system. There had been a breakdown in communications.

As a result of these road closures local businesses were suffering hardship.

6 PARISH PLAN

The Chairman provided the Parish Meeting with a progress report on the Parish Plan, the work undertaken by volunteers and the activities of the Focus Groups established to inform the Plan. A Parish survey had been undertaken and some of its findings were shared. It was noted that only 25% of questionnaires had been returned.

The snapshot report would be distributed soon and the official launch would take place in July 2004 at the Village Fete. There would be a publicity campaign and the Lord Mayor of Chester had been invited to attend and speak at this important village event along with other dignitaries.

7 VOTE OF THANKS

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and the Members of the Council for their efforts over the last year. He also thanked Members for their support during his second year as Chairman.

The Chairman also singled out for a particular thank you Mr Charles McIlwrick who had been Chairman of Saughall Homewatch until March 2004.

Reverend Margaret Banks had recently undergone an operation and the Chairman sent her best wishes for a speedy recovery.