

MINUTES OF WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE TOWN COUNCIL
ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY
Held on Tuesday 17th March, 2015, at 7pm in the Civic Centre



Present: Councillors R Claydon (Mayor), June Cordwell, John Cordwell, N Clement, Clair Galbraith, K Collins, Chris Galbraith, M Zimmer, T Luker, A Wilkinson, P Smith, P Barton. In Attendance: Town Clerk Ms S Bailey & council staff Members of the Public 31

- 1) **Welcome, Introductions & receive apologies** for absence from Councillors. Apology received from Cllr L Harris.
- 2) **Adoption of Previous Minutes** of Annual Parish Assembly of 18th March 2014 & any Matters Arising from those Minutes. It was proposed by Cllr P Smith and seconded by Cllr K Collins to approve the Minutes as presented, all in favour.
- 3) **Guest speaker; Glos County Cllr Vernon Smith** –Highways Responsibility. Cllr Smith was welcomed and after an introduction, a question and answer session commenced regarding various highways issues in and around Wotton including:
Potholes - £17million has so far been spent this year on resurfacing roads using 3 full time crews throughout the county (will be 7 next year). The resurfacing backlog was originally £96m, & will reduce to £80m by August. The pothole backlog will never disappear as the works cover a third of the network and would take 10 years at the current rate. 79,000 tons of tarmac has been laid so far this FY. Using higher specification asphalt does make repairs last longer but is more expensive. Old Town was cited as a poor example of repairs needing constant repatching.
Rushmire Hill – has already been resurfaced three times inadequately – being repaired at contractor expense if not up to standard.
Yellow & white lines – fading all across the town & need repainting. Cllr Cordwell advised to put into schedule - which has been done but such a large backlog...
Parklands resurfacing – very poor standard of repairs. Agreed & inspected today – site meeting with contractor soon & new specification to decide. Blamed incorrect specification being given for original works.
Old London Rd repairs – appalling length of closure & specification seen as overkill for retaining wall which is also out of keeping with rural lane. Works backlog blamed & change of Highways contractor half way through, thus engineering drawings needed to be re done. Agreement that gabions would have looked better & done the same job.
Court Meadow – constant delays in scheduled resurfacing; the team (after finishing Parklands later than expected) had to go to another job. The road is in an appalling state & safety being compromised. Cllr V Smith promised to chase if later contacted.
Highways contact – area manager is leaving and new one yet to be appointed – poor communications have been an issue and efforts needed to sort them out.
Large vehicles through Wotton – difficult to stop as roads open to all
Verges – leaving uncut better for wildlife but looks messier. GCC policy now to regularly cut only the areas needing visibility, and others once a year. District Councils are working on wildlife seed planting plans for verges.
- 4) **Brief Report from the Mayor** Cllr Roger Claydon OBE.
The Mayor spoke largely about the results of the community questionnaire and thus only mentioned briefly the report which is in the booklet provided.
Once again, it has been busy year for the Town Council aided by the good efforts of the new Town Clerk, the Council has, among other things;

- upgraded the town's CCTV system with financial support from the Police and Crime Commissioner;
- tidied up the garden of Remembrance;
- taken action at Potters Pond to prevent work which would have been damaging to the wildlife in Dyers Brook,
- continued to explore opportunities for providing additional parking in the town, including the possibility of establishing a car park on open land behind the Fire Station. This initiative, facilitated by the Chamber of Trade, is still at an early stage and no planning application has yet been made. Public views are welcomed on this. We have been informed by Renishaw that the company intends to continue its operations in Old Town and develop the Stokes Bakery site, thus these locations are not available for supermarkets, parking or anything else.

The Town Council's action plan for 2015 includes:

- working with the Town Regeneration Committee on an update to the 2005 Community Plan
- updating Town Council website to improve communication between the Town Council and residents; and
- bringing the Chipping Club Room under the management of the Town Trust.

The Town Council has continued its financial support for the:

- Swimming Pool,
- Synwell Playing Field,
- Wotton in Bloom,
- Youth Centre,
- Library,
- Citizens Advice Bureau.

Summary financial information, including budget plans and civic grants is included in the booklet. The Precept for the coming year has been set at £264,373 with total planned expenditure of £310,095.

In the past year farewell was said to Cllr Jackie Cartigny who was replaced on the Council by Alex Wilkinson who is also President of the Chamber of Trade and Commerce. Council elections take place in May and so there may well be a "new-look" Town Council next term! All who have skills, time and energy were urged to apply.

Feedback is now available on the charts around the room, for the Community Questionnaire, where residents were asked to indicate their opinion on 58 issues by expressing a priority. Some 3000 questionnaires were distributed with the "Wotton Directory" & 270 questionnaires returned and analysed; an initial report is also available on seats. Determining a priority order from the results obtained has not been straightforward and several methods were tried, including weighted scores, totals by Priority and percentage scores. Using weighted scoring, the highest priorities included the swimming pool, library, shops, local employment opportunities, condition of footpaths & pavements, traffic management and roads, the bus service and Charfield Railway Station. At the bottom, the lowest priorities included introduction of parking charges and the need for more private housing development. Around 170 of the questionnaires contained additional comments, many of which were about the poor state of the Town's roads. A significant number of people also commented on the need for more parking, pavement maintenance, traffic problems in the town, dog fouling, Charfield Railway Station and support for the Swimming Pool.

Putting the results of the questionnaire scores and comments together the following seem to be the issues of most concern to the community:

- The need for proper road maintenance to deal with potholes, road condition and road marking;

- The poor condition of footpaths, pavements and verges;
- Traffic Problems in the Town and problems caused by parked cars restricting traffic – although, based on the questionnaire returns, the enforcement of parking restrictions would not be welcome.....
- The need for more parking in the town - although there is clearly no appetite to pay for such a facility either through increasing the precept or introducing parking charges;
- Initiatives to encourage Tourism – although there were several comments about not wanting to waste money on such activities. There was a negative response to the suggestion that a coach park should be provided;
- A desire for the Town Council to continue its support for the Library, Swimming Pool, Synwell Playing Field, Citizens Advice Bureau and Youth services;
- Other high priority items include: re-opening Charfield railway station, the need for better bus services, shops, local employment opportunities, improved police presence, littering, dog fouling, improved public toilets, and affordable housing;
- In the questionnaire response, the need for a new supermarket was identified as a low priority but the comments received showed an equal number for and against

The results from the consultation exercise will be taken forward by the Town Council and the Regeneration Partnership, with a view to updating the town's Community Plan. Volunteers from the community are asked for help in doing this.

5) **Annual Police Report** for 2014/15. No member of Police present, however a report is in the written booklet provided.

6) Reports from Town Council Committee Chairs:

- **Planning** (Cllr Chris Galbraith). The report in the booklet shows Council activity in responding to planning applications and particularly regarding Potters Pond developments, and contributing towards the draft new Stroud Local Plan which is yet to be decided. Wotton's infrastructure continues to be under threat also from proposed housing developments of neighbouring Charfield and Kingswood. The booklet report mentions the Full Moon housing however this should actually read affordable housing possibility at Fountain Crescent instead.

- **Footpaths** (Cllr Chris Galbraith). In addition to the booklet report, the Council has managed to avert proposed weirs in the stream at Marchesi Walk. The protected white clawed crayfish have been moved upstream for safety during developer activities. The stream needs some clearance and this will be undertaken soon.

- **Allotments** (Cllr Clair Galbraith). The Knapp Rd site has seen boundary improvements regarding trees & hedging – funds have been put aside for works to the bank thus improving the top access footpath. The large hole which appeared under and allotment and was related to previous water pump housing has been infilled. The New Rd site needs a deeper water pipe system to be installed due to legislation changes and funds are being earmarked for this large project. A replacement site representative is also needed. The waiting list is about 5 or 6 at the moment for an allotment.

- **Regeneration** (Cllr June Cordwell). Along with 5 Councillors, a cross section of organisations contribute ideas & initiatives to promote the Town. Funding has been put towards Christmas trees, the farmers market, town map/leaflet, etc. This year will see Magna Carta celebrations, improved weed spraying capabilities after a staff member is trained, and hopefully an improved flowerbed/borders display. The open spaces contract involving hedges, grass cutting & flowerbeds has been awarded to a new provider.

- 7) Receive brief updates from Council supported organisations
- **Wotton Youth Club.** The Youth Liaison Group was set up originally as a forum to network & exchange ideas for all youth provision in the town. It also evolved & developed fundraising as a means to provide extra sessions at the new Youth Centre after County funding was totally withdrawn. Grants are available for capital projects but harder to find for working capital session provision such as funding a youth worker. It is thus important that new members come forward to offer skills any way they can so that provision for youth in the town continues and that initiatives such as curry evenings for fundraising are supported.
 - **Wotton Library.** No attendee, however a written report provided in booklet.
 - **Wotton in Bloom.** Mrs S Hunt sent attendance apologies, as unwell. In addition to report in booklet it was noted that the baskets looked stunning around town last year and the group was congratulated. Fundraising to start soon for this year's baskets.
 - **Wotton Swimming Pool** Mr George spoke of the continued success of the Pool due to a large group of dedicated volunteers helpers, and how it continues to be well supported locally through swim attendance – more details are in the report provided. The Committee is trying to broaden its appeal & vary the types of swim session offered. The pool costs an extra 25p per household in local tax to run and the recent questionnaire confirmed support.
 - **Wotton Community Sports Foundation.** The site's sports facilities continue to be well used with over 3000 users in January – the site is run as a joint venture facility with KLB School. Mr Beere also spoke of the successful new skatepark for which over £84,000 was raised, with £64k of this in the previous 9 months as momentum gathered pace. An opening ceremony will take place next weekend. 4000 trees have now also been planted on the site. Negotiations have now started, to provide a safe access path rather than along the busy road, and agreements with the adjacent landowner will soon be in place to provide a safe access footpath for which about £90,000 needs to be raised; a planning application should appear soon. Various initiatives include selling a 'foot' of footpath as well as grant applications.
 - **Synwell Playing Fields** Committee. Apologies for no representative, report available in booklet.
 - **Neighbourhood Warden.** Mr Glead from Stroud District Council attended but left meeting earlier – report provided in booklet.
 - **Citizens Advice Bureau.** No CAB attendee, however the Town Council representative spoke of the continued valuable service which is provided every Tuesday morning in Wotton for local residents - full report provided in booklet.
- 8) **County Council** matters - report from Cllr Dr JE Cordwell on. Role this year at County Council roles similar to last year although now part of Highways Advisory Group, involving much criticism of new Amey highways contract. This coming year will see a new streetlighting contract and plans to change to LEDs. County budget is standstill but with cuts in real terms thus some deterioration in service provision expected, apart from libraries which will now have free wifi installed. We await to

see if the £40,000 Active Together grant from public health funding will continue. £19k of this went towards the skatepark with the rest split 5 ways. The Javelin Park incinerator project has been handled strangely in that the contract was placed before the planning application was determined, affecting the cost implications. Regarding road markings, white lining issues are being chased for Wotton, along with poor communications regarding bus services and the lack of timetable information particularly when road closures occurred recently. Although Old London road opened recently, there are questions over the design work specification for the new retaining wall. The KLB Drive For Life event involving educating 6th form students many of whom had just passed their driving test, was very successful showing what can be achieved with partnership working. A question asked why weren't street lights dimmed or switched off to save energy – the reply was this was done some time ago but if individual lights that had been adjusted in this way were causing local concern the County was willing to reverse the change. Also, the change to LEDs would greatly reduce the energy and maintenance costs. Turning off depends very much on location since guidelines state situations where turning off is not possible, eg busy junctions. The booklet contains a more detailed county report.

9) **District Council** -report from Cllr P Smith who is currently vice chair of the Environmental Committee. (Cllr June Cordwell is on the licensing & housing committees, whilst Cllr Reeves is on housing). Although Council taxes have been frozen again, the 2015/16 SDC budget includes extr£7m for new build housing. The Boundary Commission has consulted on changes to proposed electoral warding and both SDC and WTC have responded that that proposal of 1 Town Councillor as part of a group of properties near Kingswood is not viable due to small number of voters. The new draft Stroud Local Plan was held up temporarily due to extra housing numbers work required, and then illness of inspector. April 2015 should hopefully see the Plan adopted. Veolia's district wide multiservice contract will end soon. with Ubico (a council consortium) to take over the service. A forecast saving of £493,000 would arise if contract kept for 25 years. A question on frequency of waste collections asked whether service would be lost – hopefully not. An SDC report is provided in the Annual Parish Assembly booklet.

10) ***No further comments from the Public on Town Affairs, thus Assembly concluded at 8.45pm where Parishioners were invited to share refreshments with Councillors and staff***

Signed Date
Chairman & Town Mayor