



**Annual Parish Meeting
Thursday 13 May 2010 at 8.20 pm**

Present: Councillor. John Haselden (Chairman)
Clerk: Caroline Jones (Parish Clerk)

Parishioners: Charlotte Benson, Robert Denham, David Ginn, John Kilby, Jackie King,
Peter Pryor, County Councillor Jane Pitman, Marty Kilby

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

2. MINUTES OF APM HELD ON 7 MAY 2009

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 7 May 2009 were received. One correction was made to the Chairman's Report being year 2008-9 and duly signed as a correct record.

3. PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2009-10

As Chairman of the Parish Council for the year 2009-10 John Haselden gave a report to the meeting, as follows

Hormead Parish Council Chairman's report 2009-2010

Disclaimer: This report represents my own views and does not necessarily represent those of the Parish Council

Hormead Parish Council has met every couple of months throughout the year at the village hall, once again achieving a comprehensive attendance on every occasion. In addition there have been *ad hoc* planning meetings as necessary in the intervening periods.

Once again it is worth re-emphasising that the Parish Council has few, but important assets, and a very real budget paid for by the parishioners through the Council Tax precept. With that in mind, we will continually strive to best use those funds and assets in support of the community.

As always, I would like to take the opportunity to thank fellow councillors for the level of commitment shown. It should be remembered that we are individuals representing not only our own views but those of parishioners in a way that we each believe is in the best interest of the community. As with any 'elected' representative body it is difficult to strike the right balance between over-stating one's own feelings and what you infer to be the parishioners thoughts. In our case as a PC's there are particularly divergent and entrenched individual opinions to take account which I believe this year have hindered us reaching consensus – this has been challenging from a chairperson's perspective!

After a number of years as our clerk, Mrs Marty Kilby has moved on to pastures new to serve as the clerk of Ardeley PC – once again I thank her for her considerable contributions and guidance given to the council. We have since recruited a very able replacement in Mrs Caroline Jones of Hare Street and we wish her well as she picks up the reins of 'clerkship'.



I would also like to highlight the significant contribution that Mrs Charlotte Benson has made behind the scenes since the PC agreed to reinstate the vice chairman position. She has provided me with a very supportive 'moral shoulder' and this has markedly eased the burden and angst of HPC chairmanship.

Planning Matters

These have been the most emotive of subjects during the PC year.

The 2 plans causing the concern have been the Hares 'car park-cum-training pitch' and the refurbishment/rebuild of the village hall. It is fair to say there have been some forthright views presented on both these aspects causing a lot of strife and some uncomfortable moments during meetings. I will not relate to you my own feelings about these but suffice to say, such conflicts in open fora are destructive rather than constructive and can lead to feelings of deep mistrust.

(1) The Hares car park/training pitch

The planning for this was disapproved of by the PC on the grounds of the threat to 'green belt' and over-expansion of the football club beyond our infrastructure – however this was over-turned in unanimously by council planners and left a bitter taste in the mouth.

Personally I believe that the football club were primarily aiming to alleviate the parking issue on the roadside that had been highlighted to them by the PC repeatedly – because of planning law relating to change of greenbelt land only in exceptional cases (i.e. sport-related) there was no option other than to include something like provision of a training pitch – this rationale seems to have been over-looked.

(2) The Village Hall

The village hall plans came before the PC earlier this year amidst much fanfare and after informative presentation evenings. Ultimately the PC could not reach consensus on the plans although no one was in any doubt that something needed to be done – and that is what we have to remember. We are destined to be blighted by indecision paralysis on this plan if the VHC does not have the guts to stick by their guns and follow it through. The VH plans have been discussed since the early 60's!

The effort that the VHC and in particular Chris Rogers went to is remarkable and I would like to thank them for such a comprehensive set of plans. There was considerable discussion around aspects of 'why this' and 'why that' and perhaps much of the finer detail was lost in subsequent heated debate. What was clear was that there were aspects that needed clarification or re-emphasis. It is those points that I have personally raised with the VHC and am awaiting responses to following their next meeting.



Personally, I think the plans are fantastic – it would be a superb facility of which we could be justly proud and will hopefully see considerable progress on in the near future subject to planning approval. Yes there are compromises and if parishioners took time to understand the rationale, many of the sticking points have been very carefully considered but there are constraints on what can be done. My one concern is the funding aspect and getting some assurances around having all the phased funding in place before any deal is struck. That to my mind has not been relayed in a particularly effective manner to date.

Of course many of these matters could have been addressed through PC input from the outset when Heather Moore approached us. The decision at that time was to remain neutral and have no input otherwise we could not view the plans impartially. I believe now, that that decision was fundamentally wrong and we have failed in our PC duty to provide timely and appropriate input that could have guided the planning concerns. It has happened and that's that and it is behoven upon the PC to work with the VHC to ensure the best outcome for the parish.

Highways & Byways

It seems a perennial moan but our roads are still a disgrace! Admittedly the weather this winter was a major factor in the rapid deterioration of our roads and there have been welcome repairs up at Wiladacre corner on the Buntingford road.

In light of last year's Anstey Quarry traffic decision which left us speechless, the volume and frequency of HGVs through Hares Street is truly intolerable. The use of the B1368 as a rat-run around Royston to the lower reaches of the A10 has also contributed to this problem and although there is currently a county council review of the highway network, I suspect we will struggle with our demands to have the route downgraded or weight-restricted. That is even before we consider the naiveties and vagaries of SatNav routing.

Relating to the ongoing saga of village signage, we have reached an impasse with highways where it seems we cannot really have what we want. The colours are not acceptable, and we seemingly need to pay for planning permission (and the signs) if we go with our own 'unique' designs, or still have to pay even if we go with approved council signage. At a cost of approximately £7000, this is not an acceptable or appropriate use of the parish precept when it is something I believe highways should be paying for! On this basis the proposal has been shelved for now until such time as we get absolute clarity on what financially realistic.

Community Matters

Playspace – This is the responsibility of the PC and is subject to a rigorous ROSPA inspection annually whilst comprehensive cover is provided by our insurer. The reason I highlight this is that we are currently awaiting the outcome of an insurance claim against the PC from a Stevenage footballing parent whose child (unattended) was allegedly hit in the face accidentally by the self-closing sprung gate.



School – Things are looking up as numbers are apparently on the rise, supported by the fact that some former pupils have returned from other local primary schools. Much of the credit must go to the headmaster who has engendered a real buzz about the school. I understand there are emergent problems with the fabric of the school and as the PC, we will try and do everything we can to support the school and its governors as they seek resolution to these issues.

Newsletter – An extremely valuable aspect of our community and the one consistent medium of communication that we strive to make good use of every month. The PC still have the ability to support it as and when the need arises and thanks must go to Chrissie Withers and Liz Pickup as co-ordinator editors.

Playing Fields –

In light of the angst surrounding the planning issues already alluded to, I want to see the Meads used to its fullest potential and am very proud that we have such a vibrant setup. Numerous comments are made by non-parishioners about how lucky we are to have such a setup for the children and whilst I accept that it is not everybody's rural idyll, once again plea for tolerance on all sides. Compared with what did go on down at the Meads, this is Nirvana!

In due course, we will be in a more robust situation regarding the annual licenses for both the FC & CC relating to scope of use and rights of access. Our previous agreements and schedules documents are in the hands of our solicitors (Breeze & Wyles) who are drawing up the suitable legalese for us to review.

One of the most deplorable aspects, whether it be petty-mindedness (if deliberate) or just lack of consideration, is the fight against uncollected dog faeces on the playing areas and surrounding areas. There are continual messages in the newsletter relating to this fact. Hopefully our new dog warden will be able to nail the culprits and the PC will very readily be willing to enforce the stiffest byelaw penalties as happened recently in Barkway (albeit unsubstantiated as yet).

The pavilion has had a considerable amount of money spent on it over the course of the year and it is looking fantastic. We are awaiting more clement weather before the exterior is re-decorated. As we near completion it is worth reminding groups within the community that this is facility available for their hire/use as required.

Local Environment

Once again many thanks must go to Steve Ruff who continues to do a fantastic job as our litter picker and it has been proposed that undertake a preventative maintenance program for our full complement of notice boards across the parish.



Neil Gardner continues to provide the PC and parish with a wide range of services including cutting the play space area, the Meads and the cricket square as well as maintaining the War Memorial.

One further note, I was very glad to see the completion of the Archie Daniels memorial in Great Hormead and believe that these 'token' attractions for want of a better word, add to the fabric of our community. Thank you to those that raised the funds and oversaw the project.

Looking to the future

Last year I mentioned village plans etc and events but it seems to me that many of these may be more forthcoming when the Village Hall project reaches some conclusion. With that in mind, I want to see the village hall project progress effectively and rapidly but this will require considerable goodwill and input on the part of many parishioners. I urge us all to remember that or we risk another 50 years of inactivity!

In Conclusion

It is a shame to end on such a negative note but feel that this has been a particularly challenging year as chairman. It would be fair to say that we have struggled to be cohesive as a Parish Council through pedantry, interpersonal conflicts, poor behaviour and from my perspective the lack of being able to reach effective conclusion on some matters. Ultimately the onus has rested with me to try and bring some sense of order, maintain dialogue between warring factions, interpret misplaced comments whilst trying to retain the respect of the parishioners we represent. I'm not sure I have achieved that this year so I urge all councillors to consider that as we head into the final year of our tenure. There are some significant challenges ahead.

4. FINANCIAL REPORT

Had previously been received and approved by the Council.

There being no questions or motions, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting closed a 8.40pm

Signed: _____

Date: _____