

GAZELEY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Gazeley Annual Parish Meeting Held in Gazeley Village Hall on Tuesday 23rd May 2017

Present: Cllr Martin Hooker (Chair), Parish Councillors Judy Moatt, Hilary Appleton, Kevin Grimwood and Tom Morgan.

Also present: Parish Clerk- Lynne Francis, Forest Heath District Councillor - Mrs Rona Burt , Community SpeedWatch Administrator - Mr Rod Curtis, and 18 members of the public.

Apologies: Cllr Colin Noble.

17/APM.1. Chairman's Welcome and introduction.

The Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Martin Hooker MBE, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked members of the public for attending. He stated that although the Parish Meetings was not a Parish Council meeting, it was sponsored and chaired by it.

17/APM.2. Gazeley Parish Council report – Chairman

The Chairman gave a presentation on the work of the Parish Council and the various issues that it has had to deal with during the past year.

The most prominent topic has been the existence of so many potholes in the village. The Chairman encouraged members of the public to report any potholes direct to Suffolk County Council on their website; the process is easy to follow and only takes a few minutes. The status of repairs is also shown on the site and is colour-coded. Anyone without an Internet facility can continue to report new potholes to the Parish Council.

The Speed Indication Device (SID) that was purchased as a joint venture with Moulton was only used in Gazeley for approximately two months in the past year and it has now been agreed that Moulton would reimburse our 50% share in the cost and that each council should own their own device. A new SID has been ordered and should be here within six to eight weeks.

The refurbishment of the pond site at the junction of Moulton Road and The Street was completed in early May. It is envisaged that it will continue to be maintained professionally each year but volunteers are welcome to help keep the vegetation under control between visits from the contractors.

The Blacksmiths' Shop has been placed under a Section 215 notice from the District Council, which means that it has to be made safe by mid-August.

The telephone kiosk, which now holds the defibrillator, is in need of refurbishment, as is the play equipment in Stubbins Lane. Contractors are due to carry out necessary repairs at the playground within the next few weeks. New street signs will soon be ordered for Tithe Close, the cost to be covered by a grant from Cllr Burt's Locality Budget (FHDC).

The Chairman asked that any resident with a complaint about the Parish Council or its process should, as a matter of courtesy, contact their nearest Parish Councillor or the Clerk to see if their complaint is justified and accurate before contacting the local MP and the District and County Councillors.

The Chairman concluded his report by observing that, unlike other nearby villages, Gazeley had relatively few major issues to confront and so residents were entitled to expect the Parish Council to address any problems that may arise without delay and this they will continue to do to the best of their ability.

17/APM.3 Community SpeedWatch – Rod Curtis.

Mr Rod Curtis, Assistant Community SpeedWatch Administrator, explained that SpeedWatch is a community engagement system operated by residents of the village. Volunteers have to be over 18 and are vetted by the police and a minimum of six volunteers is required to operate each scheme. The purpose of the exercise is to educate members of the public to respect the speed limit. All traffic exceeding the speed limit of 30 or 35 mph is logged, reported, and a warning letter will be sent to the offenders. Of the 11,590 drivers to receive letters in Suffolk last year, only 7% were repeat offenders so the conclusion is that it does work. Further information is available from the Safer Neighbourhood Team.

It was proposed that we would await the data output from the new SID before any further decision was made as to whether Gazeley would invest in SpeedWatch. It was further noted that there was potential for a joint venture with Moulton or other local villages. Cllr Vandenbroucke remained the Gazeley PC point of contact for the SID and Community SpeedWatch initiatives.

17/APM.4 District Council Report – Cllr Mrs Rona Burt

Consideration is being given to merge Forest Heath District Council with St Edmundsbury District Council to form a single body for West Suffolk. Forest Heath councillors were given the task of evaluating the pros and cons of a merger and a public consultation will follow before any final decision is taken.

Mildenhall Air Base – There have been rumours that the closure of the air base is again under review but as yet no formal notice has been issued to the Local Authority. As it stands, the base is due to close in 2023.

Local Plan – All documents were sent to the Inspector for Examination two months ago and it is hoped that the plan will receive approval by the end of the year.

Hatchfield Farm – Following a decision by the High Court that the Government should look again at the decision to approve the development, the outcome is still uncertain.

Two new directors have been appointed in place of the former Head of Planning. One post is Director for Economic Growth and the other is Director for Planning and Regulations.

A breast-screening unit visited the Members' car park for several weeks and was very well used;

The new Chairman of the Council is Cllr Ruth Bowman from Mildenhall and Vice Chair is Cllr Brian Harvey from Worlington. The outgoing Chairman, Cllr Carol Lynch, raised just under £800 for a Bereavement charity during her term of office.

On average Cllr Burt attends seven meetings each month as well as reading reports and responding to emails where necessary. She is also Secretary and Vice-Chairman of the Conservative Group at Forest Heath.

17/APM/5 Gazeley Events Committee – Mark Russell

Mark explained that the Events Committee was formed after residents expressed a need for more events to be organised in the village when responding to the Parish Plan questionnaire. It organised the annual GazeleyFest for several years and supported HM The Queen's 90th Birthday celebrations in the village.

Following the retirement of the Chairman, David Pugh, the committee is now down to four members, headed by Cllr Charlene Vandenbroucke who acts as Treasurer. At present the committee has financial reserves of £858.24 as at the end of March. A Quiz Night was held on 20th May and another is planned for the autumn. The present aim of the Events Committee is to encourage and support others to organise events in the village and to join the committee so that it can become a driving force once more.

17/APM/6 All Saints' Church – Simon Gash

Churchwarden Simon Gash reported that they had had a very busy year at the church.

The Rector of 13 years, Stephen Mitchell, retired in May 2016 and the Diocese wished to appoint Rev. Rosemary Rycraft from Beck Row to replace him. Rev Rycraft is keen to be involved in the life of the village and regularly attends the monthly coffee mornings and other events. Work on the nave roof has now been completed and as it came in under budget, the churchwardens obtained permission to complete other minor, but necessary repairs to the fabric of the church. A roof alarm has been installed and all that remains is the repair of the damaged plasterwork but that will have to wait until the wall has completely dried out. Tenders are currently being sought for the repair and it is hoped that the work can be completed before the autumn. It is also hoped that a celebration of the completion of the restoration will take place next year featuring the choristers of Ely Cathedral.

Following a survey, as part of the Parish Plan, it was noted that 85% of the respondents supported the church for a variety of reasons and that has been demonstrated by the excellent response to appeals for funding the repairs. Many people express surprise that the church is always asking for money but this is because the Church of England is 'asset rich and cash poor'. All Saints' Church has to raise its Parish Share of £9,000 each year before any maintenance works can be considered and all such repairs have to be funded by grants and donations. All Saints' is a Grade 1 Listed Building, which is very costly to maintain. Over 200 residents regularly attend the annual Crib Service and it would be very encouraging to see more people at services throughout the rest of the year.

17/APM/7 Pupil Referral Unit – Simon Gash

Firstly, it was very important that everyone understood that the former Gazeley Schools Trust is nothing to do with the church or the diocese. It is a stand-alone trust, with the vicar and churchwardens of All Saints' Church as Trustees, but there the connection ends. The Trustees must make their own decisions.

The history of the school in Gazeley was outlined. It was founded in 1843 on land provided by the parish. It was formed and run by the Trust but one of the difficulties that the present Trustees have been presented with is that the original Trust Deed cannot be found. It was assumed that its purpose was to advance the education of the children of Gazeley. The school functioned, in what is now known colloquially as The Ark, until the late 1950s when they outgrew it and the responsibility passed to West Suffolk (now Suffolk) County Council to provide a more up to date school in the village. The county council approached the Philipps family to purchase the site of the new school in 1958.

The Ark, then vacant, was still owned by the Trustees and they then persuaded the diocese to purchase it to function as a garage and outhouse for the new vicarage. At this point, the County Council took over the Trustees' responsibilities and, as the result of an Act of Parliament, the County Council were instructed to transfer half of the new site, the part on which the school building was erected, to the Trustees. This meant that the County Council owned the playing field behind the school outright. The Legal Title of the land underneath the school building is vested in the Trustees and the proceeds of the sale of The Ark, £300, were paid to the County Council.

In 2004, of the 50 children that lived within the catchment area of the school, only 17 remained on roll. On that basis, Suffolk County Council took the decision to close the school and transfer funding and facilities to other growing villages nearby. At that point the purpose of the Trust then failed because there was no longer a school in Gazeley. The site was then converted to a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) but, after a poor Ofsted report, the school was put into special measures and it was acknowledged that if it was to continue it had to become part of the Academy system but this was impossible to achieve.

After extensive consultation the Secretary of State for Education took the decision to close the PRU, although no decision on the future of the site has yet been reached. The building stands empty and although the County Council would like the Trustees to take over the site, they are not in a position to do so. The Trustees will have to consult the Charities Commission, which will probably insist on a new scheme being started with a new Trust Deed, which will have to mirror, as much as possible, the original aims of the Trust. The school building itself has problems. The surface area is not sufficient to ever become a stand-alone school and the County Council is unwilling to invest in the site. The only possibility might be to operate in conjunction with Moulton School but that would present logistical difficulties. A local charity in Suffolk, which deals in specialist tuition of Science, Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM), has shown interest in using the site but this would involve the creation of two separate leases for the land, one with the Trust and the other with the County Council. It is uncertain whether the Charities Commission would allow it but consultations are on going. Similarly the Trust would have to have the permission of the Commission to sell their interest in site.

A question was asked about the continuing security lighting of the vacant site at night but the County Council is still responsible for the insurance of the site and it is likely that any reduction in the level of security would result in the insurance policy being invalidated.

17/APM/8 – Gazeley Village Hall – Maureen Barrett-Small

Within the past few weeks, the previous Chair of the Village Hall Committee, Angela Ellis, and the Secretary, Suzy Mallen had both resigned. Their places had been taken by Maureen Barrett-Small as Chair and Lori Scharpf as Secretary. During the past year the kitchen had been refurbished and a dishwasher had been installed. Various village organisations use the hall on a regular basis and there are also the monthly Coffee Mornings and Quiz Nights, which prove to be very popular.

The new works at the Village Hall have cut deep into the finances and at the end of the year just over £4,500 was left in the account. For the future, the plans are to increase income and control expenditure. The Committee has been asked to provide WiFi and Broadband and to install a fixed video projector for presentations. The Committee is interested in working with representatives from all the village organisations to move things forward.

17/APM/9 – Gazeley History Society – Hilary Appleton

The History Society has now been running for five years. Everyone who attends automatically becomes a member. The average attendance at meetings is 20-30. The object of the Society is to act as a community resource with an educational purpose. The speakers have been much appreciated, covering oral history, local history and broader scope subjects. Visits have included The Parker Library, Sutton Hoo and the Tower of London. There have also been presentations from local people who waived a fee, which has meant a boost to finances, so the bank balance is fairly healthy at the moment. There are plans to form a development archive so the donation of any reports, books, photographs, artefacts and other memorabilia would be very welcome. The Society would also like to publish a book about Gazeley so, again, any ideas and suggestions would be very welcome.

17/APM/10 – Dalham & Gazeley WI – Lynne Francis

Secretary Lynne Francis gave a report from Debbie Saldana covering her first year as President of the WI. It had been an action-packed year with a variety of speakers at the monthly meetings covering such topics as Bourne Hall Clinic, Henry V111s “dalliances”, in addition to the six wives!, Our Special Friends animal charity, the gardens at Anglesey Abbey, a flower and foliage demonstration, Mindfulness and an evening of entertainment by Jancis Harvey.

In between the monthly meetings members had been on outings to places of interest and there were the usual monthly tea parties, Book Club meetings and the Walking Group outings; the WI did what it does best, eat, drink and be merry! In spite of that, the Gazeley WI contingent of the local Weightwatchers group managed to lose a huge 13 stone between them, an amazing achievement given that most of our activities seem to involve eating and drinking, which is not always of the tea and coffee variety! Debbie Saldana invited all the women of Gazeley to come and join the WI because she has long held the belief that women in general are the backbone of any community and no more so than her fellow Institute members.

17/APM/11 – Gazeley United Charities – Lynne Francis

Gazeley United Charities was formed when two previous charities, The Poor’s Fuel Allotment and the Reverend Tomas Burroughs for Blankets charities were merged. The annual income of £1,500 p.a. is derived from rent received on charity lands leased to Higham Estates. Current Trustees are Lynne Francis, also Clerk to the Trustees, Judy Moatt, Paul Beard and Irene Talbot. Following the retirement of Rev. Canon Stephen Mitchell last year, Rev. Rosemary Rycraft will shortly take his place as Chair of the charity.

No payments have been made by the charity during the past year, although at the last meeting before Rev Mitchell retired, it was agreed that the charity should donate a picnic bench for use at the children’s’ playground area in Stubbins Lane. This has now been ordered and is due to be delivered very shortly. The current balance of accounts is £10,116.70. The charity exists to help children/young people; elderly older people; people with disabilities and members of the general public in need of help during a crisis.

17/APM/12 – Conclusion – Chairman and Parish Council

The Chairman invited all members of the Parish Council to join the other presenters at the table to answer questions from the public. Problems with the footpath through Gazeley Stud continue, where the hedges on both side of the path are overgrown. The Clerk will contact the Footpaths and Rights of Way Officer at SCC.

It was noted that the grass outside the PRU needs attention because its neglected state draws attention to the vacancy of the site.

A question was raised about the future of the playing field. It was suggested that the Parish Council should concentrate resources on the Stubbins Lane recreation ground if the playing field was not being used. The Clerk explained that the Parish Council had appealed for volunteers to re-form a Playing Field Management Committee to organise events and to source funding for improvements and facilities at the ground. It was still the intention to pursue this course of action. If more facilities were provided the use of the ground should increased but this issue has to be properly managed.

There being no further questions from the floor, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 9pm. After the meeting refreshments were served by Bobbie Hooker, Maureen Barrett-Small and Sue Gould and were very much appreciated.