

THE PARISH OF WARBOYS

Minutes of the **Annual Parish Meeting** for the **Parish of Warboys** held on 20th April 2022 at the Parish Centre, Warboys.

PRESENT

Councillor Dr S C Withams, Chairman of the Parish Council in the Chair.

Seven Members and the Clerk of the Parish Council
11 members of the public.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors G C M Willis and Mrs A R Wyatt.

MINUTES

Upon being moved and seconded, the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 26th May 2021 were approved and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 26th May 2021.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman indicated that she was pleased to be able to meet in person, although Covid 19 continued to pose problems with a high number of infections locally at the present time. In so doing, she expressed her great appreciation to all those had supported and helped relatives, friends and neighbours in the community during the pandemic.

The Chairman expressed her delight in being able to continue in the role of Chairman of the Parish Council and she thanked Parish Councillors for the work and time they contributed voluntarily, each bringing a range of invaluable talents and skill sets. Thanks also were extended to the Clerk for his guidance, advice and administrative skills in his work for the Council.

Copies of the Chairman's report had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting. In it, the Chairman mentioned that coronavirus had continued to pose problems throughout the past year. These had included a Government requirement for Council meetings to be held in person and this had presented difficulties for some Members in attending due to their health or work-related issues. Limited capacity in the Parish Centre had restricted its use to maintain social distancing requirements, with frequent changes in the hire conditions to comply with Government guidance.

The Chairman paid tribute to the impressive volunteering efforts in the village which had helped those in need in the community. The Moat House Surgery had continued to offer high standards of care throughout the pandemic and special thanks were extended to Wards of Warboys and their team of volunteers for delivering vaccinations in the village.

Meetings of the Parish Council had returned to a face-to-face basis after May 2021 but most working party and liaison meetings not involving decision-taking had remained on-line as they had proved convenient for those attending. However, the pandemic had resulted in reduced attendance at meetings, due to infections, self-isolation due to contact with others who had been infected and additional work commitment.

Mrs C Evans had resigned as a councillor in March due to the pressure of work commitments during the pandemic. With the term of office of councillors coming to a close in May, Councillors R A Payne and Mrs M H Harlock had decided not to stand for re-election. The Chairman expressed her thanks to them for their hard work and service for the local community as Members of the Council. The remaining councillors had been re-elected unopposed, together with one new councillor, Mr A Ntuk. Consequently, the Council would be making arrangements to co-opt to fill the remaining two vacancies.

The Chairman stated that the Parish Council was grateful to County Councillor S J Corney and District Councillors G J Bull and M Haines for their help and support over past year. Both of the district councillors had decided not to stand for re-election in May and the Chairman wished them well for the future.

A special mention was made of Warboys Unites which had continued to co-ordinate help and assistance for the vulnerable during the pandemic. Volunteers also had been involved in the foodbank and deliveries of food and meals to the vulnerable. Reluctantly, the Council had decided to wind up the Timebank scheme following the resignation of the Co-ordinator in August. Although the organisation had been funded by Council for five years, it had failed to engage people's interest in Warboys and membership levels had not justified the continued cost. A litter pick had been arranged by the Community Association earlier in the month, to add to the efforts of a number of parishioners who collected litter on a regular basis

The Chairman pointed out that Warboys continued to grow. Although construction at the David Wilson Homes and Bellway developments was nearing completion, planning permissions had been granted for 24 dwellings in Ramsey Road and 8 in New Road. Further allocations had been made in the Local Plan for 20 dwellings in Ramsey Road, 10 in Church Road and 50 south of Stirling Close but Huntingdonshire District Council also had announced their decision to dispose of land in their ownership in Station Road for 50 affordable homes which had not been allocated for development in the Local Plan. The Parish Council had brought this to attention of local people and engaged professional consultants to advise on the response.

Notwithstanding the impact of growth on village facilities where capacity was limited, it was pointed out that this had generated little additional business for some of the local shops with the hardware outlet possibly closing soon to add to the loss of other shops in the village in recent years. There were also few new jobs in Warboys, although many people were now working from home due to the pandemic. The Chairmen advised that it was now unlikely that the unpopular combined heat and power and waste water treatment

plants at the Landfill Site would be progressed as, unless work had commenced on site by July 2022, the planning permission would lapse.

Newmans Stores at 66 High Street had stood empty for over 25 years and allowed to fall into disrepair by the previous owner, creating an eyesore in the heart of the village. It was reported that a new owner was trying to refurbish the building for use as flats and develop the site but his efforts to obtain planning permission had been refused due to the premises being a listed building.

The Chairman reported that plans were progressing for the replacement of Parish Centre but the planning application submitted in September had yet to be determined. Following a well-attended public exhibition of the plans in May, the intention was to design a flexible interior to meet as many needs as possible with a large hall that could be divided for smaller uses, a demountable stage for performances, three smaller rooms of varying sizes and office for staff. Every effort would be made to retain the present Parish Centre as long as possible for existing users while construction work was taking place. The Council would be applying for grants towards the cost but might need to obtain a loan to meet the final cost.

All of the many village organisations had been affected by the pandemic in various ways but were slowly returning to normal. However, some had lost membership and there was a perennial shortage of volunteers. The Community Association had remained very active in helping the vulnerable in the community and co-ordinating village events and the Warboys Diary continued to provide a vital source of village information.

The Chairman referred to the fact that some village activities had also been badly affected by the weather as well as the pandemic. After the cancellation of Feast Week in 2020, some of the fairground operators had failed to arrive in 2021 as they had been unable to leave a previous site due to waterlogged ground conditions and the Christmas lighting switch-on in November had had to be cancelled due to storm Arwen. However, the Remembrance Sunday service and Fireworks display had been able to resume. The churches had re-opened for services, the library had re-opened and sports activities started again. Extensive arrangements were being planned locally for Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June and the Chairman extended her thanks to all those involved.

The Chairman drew attention to the limited availability of open space in Warboys for public access and the difficulty in increasing the amount of land for open space and sports provision at affordable prices. Fortunately, the owner of just over 6 acres of land adjoining A141 opposite Wilthorne who had allowed public access for many years had agreed to sell the field to the Parish Council which would secure public access for the future. A management plan was being developed with the assistance of the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust to enhance the land as a natural asset and wildlife haven. Traffic consultants had been engaged by the Parish Council to advise on the safety of the access across the A141 and the outcome of a bid to the County Council as highway authority was awaited to fund measures to reduce the risk for people crossing.

It was reported that further open space was being provided by the developers on the new estates in the village as a condition of the planning permissions but these would become the responsibility of management companies to be run by the residents themselves. Some realignment of the public footpath network and new paths had been provided by the

developers to improve pedestrian access in the village and reduce reliance on car journeys and the Parish Council continued to try to persuade the County Council to extend bridleways in the fen to create a circular route for both horse riders and walkers.

In terms of young people, there had been widespread recognition that they had been adversely affected by pandemic lockdowns and school closures. The Connections Bus Project visits on Friday evenings, funded by the Parish Council, had restarted in the autumn with attendance levels again high. A very successful week-long holiday sports club for 50 younger children had been funded by the Council and Whittome Wind Trust at the primary school in August and funding by the same sources would enable the club to operate for two weeks in the forthcoming summer. Warboys continued to be well served with children's playgrounds with new equipment installed at Jubilee Park costing just under £10,000 in March, again with financial assistance from Whittome Wind Trust. A smaller fourth playground in the village had been provided by David Wilson Homes on their estate at Mahaddie Way which would be maintained by a management company.

The Chairman reported that complaints continued to be received about speeding at various locations in village. Councillor S J Green had re-established the local Speedwatch team and sessions were being undertaken to identify speeding motorists. There had been a spate of accidents in the village at the Clock Tower and SPAR junctions, potentially exacerbated by the extensive fading of the white lining in the carriageway. One of the collisions at the Clock Tower junction in November had resulted in a lighting column and electricity unit having to be replaced which had affected the Christmas lighting display. After 18 months of repeated requests by the Parish Council for the repainting of the white lining at the Clock Tower junction, work eventually had been completed in March.

With climate change in the news currently, the Parish Council had established a working party to produce an environmental strategy and action plan which was likely to be available shortly.

The Chairman mentioned that a number of staff and volunteers had departed over the past year, namely Mr W Buddle as Senior Handyman, Mrs N Everett as Timebank Co-ordinator and Mr G Hansell who had acted as Internal Auditor and she expressed the Council's appreciation to them for their work in Warboys. She also extended her appreciation to the current staff and reported that additional administrative support would be engaged in the forthcoming year to help with the growth of the village.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The Clerk presented the provisional financial statement for the Parish Council for 2021/22, a copy of which had been circulated with the agenda.

As at the preparation of the report, the Clerk reported that the balances were as follows:-

Earmarked reserves	£664,480
General Fund	£ 93,726

with the earmarked reserves comprising –

Landfill site fees	£ 12,694
Replacement Parish Centre	£120,000
Capital receipts allocated to replacement Parish Centre	£105,039
CIL	£423,247
Vehicle Replacement	£ 3,500

The Clerk pointed out that income in 2021/22 had been supplemented again by Community Infrastructure Levy receipts which had amounted to £59,334. These could only be used for infrastructure improvements as defined in the CIL Regulations and not to subsidise revenue expenditure. However, the last of the CIL payments from the David Wilson Homes development at Station Road and the Bellway development south of Farriers Way had now been received and income from this source would be much lower in future years unless other major development took place.

The Clerk reported that the cost of the land acquired adjacent to the A141 had been £50,000 plus fees but that grants had been obtained of £10,000 from Red Tile Wind Farm Trust, £20,000 from the District Council's CIL fund and £14,500 from a section 106 agreement for off-site public open space provision from the Croftholme Close development.

Further grants had been obtained towards the holiday sports club, replacement play equipment and delivery of soil improver for allotment tenants. Successful claims had been made under the Council's insurance policy to cover the cost of replacement play equipment that had been vandalised and damage to a street light and feeder column at the Clock Tower junction. As a result, a surplus had been achieved in 2021/22 of £73,144.

With the growth of the village, the Clerk reported that the Council Tax Base continue to increase which provided additional revenue. Having regard to the major scheme to replace the Parish Centre, the Parish Council had decided to increase the council tax precept by 5% for 2022/23 to £85.68 for a Band D property which still remained one of the lowest for the larger towns and parishes in Huntingdonshire. Also, figures had been released recently showing that the average increase for town and parish council precepts nationwide for 2022/23 was 4.6%.

RAMSEY ROTARY

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mrs J Green of Ramsey Rotary addressed the meeting. She explained that the organisation was hosting an open meeting at the Parish Centre on 30th April to try to encourage new members to join the Ramsey branch initially but hopefully with a view to establishing a new branch in Warboys.

The Christmas Santa float continued to collect money door-to-door in Warboys for worthy causes and the Ramsey branch had managed to secure a second float from another branch which it was hoped would be used exclusively in Warboys in 2022. Volunteers were needed to help with the collection and the money raised would be donated to needy causes in Warboys which Rotary required assistance in identifying.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman then invited those present to raise any matters for consideration.

Arising from a question about the preparation of a climate change strategy, Councillor Mrs Sproats explained that the Parish Council had established a working party which hoped to submit a draft policy for consideration in the next few months which would address the Parish's carbon footprint and actions that could be taken locally.

A question was asked about alternative means of access to Onyetts Field but the Chairman explained that this had been explored with specialist traffic consultants and the highways authority and the only means of access would continue to be via the public footpath crossing the A141 from Wilthorne.

A question was raised about the increase in energy costs that had come into effect at the beginning of the month. It was reported that Warboys Unites would refer those in need to organisations that might be able to assist but that there was little that the Parish Council could do in this respect.

NEXT ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The Chairman thanked those present for attending and informed everyone that the next Annual Parish Meeting would be held on 19th April 2023.

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed.

Chairman.