

# HUGHENDEN PARISH – ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

## CONFIRMED

The Annual Meeting for the Parish of Hughenden was held in North Dean Village Hall, Speen Road, North Dean on Tuesday 25th May 2010, commencing at 8pm.

### **Attendance.**

There were, in attendance, 11 members of the Hughenden Parish Council, Cllr Gibbs (District), 67 members of the Public and the Parish Clerk.

The Chairman of Hughenden Parish Council, Cllr Peggy Ewart, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and asking them to remember to sign the attendance register, for the record. She also welcomed Jim Foy, from the National Trust, the speaker for the evening and said she was looking forward to his talk. She confirmed that any public questions would be taken in item 7 under 'other matters'.

### **Apologies for Absence.**

Apologies had been received from Cllr Andrew, Cllr Gould and Cllr Jarman. Apologies had also been received from Cllr Pushman (County and District) and Cllr Carroll (District).

### **Minutes of the 2009 Annual Parish Meeting.**

Although it was noted that copies of the previous years' meeting minutes were not available at this meeting, these had been made available after the previous years' meeting and therefore the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 19th May 2009 were proposed by Cllr Rogers, seconded by Cllr Whitehouse, **RESOLVED** by the Meeting and duly signed by the Chairman.

**Matters Arising.** There were no matters arising.

### **Chairman's Address.**

The Chairman, Cllr Peggy Ewart, gave the Chairman's report for the year.

The past year has not been without incident! There have been considerable achievements as well as some disappointments. I will come to those in a moment but first I would like to express my appreciation to my fellow councillors for their support and encouragement to me personally. It is not always understood that parish councillors are unpaid volunteers, trying to do their best for all parishioners. Not all residents will like some of the decisions that are made but they are collective decisions of the whole council by which all councillors have to abide. The Chairman is responsible for enabling discussions to be drawn to a conclusion but does not act without the knowledge and permission of the council as a whole. My colleagues have enabled me to maintain my equilibrium when I have been under personal attack and I thank them very much for that.

The Council has three committees which report to it; Planning meeting every three weeks, Services and Finance & Administration meeting quarterly.

Councillor Gould, brings great experience and expertise to the chairmanship of the planning committee. He is unable to be here this evening, but doubtless he will read this later. This is the only committee which can act alone in the sense that it can respond directly to WDC regarding applications, and report to Council at its next meeting. The committee consists of a representative from each ward. This year the committee has dealt with over 130 applications of which just 16 were subsequently passed by WDC contrary to the committee's opinion. The ward representatives are very dedicated, know their own 'patch' and visit sites if necessary. Their local knowledge is valued by WDC.

The Services committee consists of ten councillors, drawn from all wards. It ensures that the Council's 60+ acres of land assets are well managed in a cost effective way. More allotments have been let by reducing the size of the plots to make them more manageable; there are 180 plots and currently about 210 tenants. Expenditure far exceeds income and always will. The plots are mostly very well worked and the hedges, fencing and grass well maintained. Sheep are grazing in Vincents Meadow, aiding good husbandry of this land. John Morris from the Chiltern Woodland Trust has assessed the Parish woodlands, which were given good marks and he has provided a management plan for the future. Grants may be applied for to assist with future developments. The beauty of the Garden of Rest at Four Ashes is a source of pride and gives solace and some pleasure to the bereaved. Councillor Davies chairs this committee and his expertise and commitment are greatly appreciated. He has also served as Vice Chairman this year and I have valued his experience and advice very much, particularly in difficult times. Thank you very much!!! The knowledge, experience and advice of the previous Chairman, Cllr John Rogers, has also been of considerable help to me.

As you know, the Parish Council maintains the village halls' playgrounds in Hughenden Valley, North Dean, Naphill, and Widmer End. It is pleased to be able to provide this service, ensuring safety and promoting the enjoyment of children. It also facilitated the provision of a climbing wall in several locations during the school holidays.

The Council owns the play area at Templewood and also those on Great Kingshill recreation ground. It is delighted to have been able to provide another piece of replacement equipment in Naphill, funded in a collaborative way by BCC, the Village Hall Council, and the Parish itself.

The provision of a new 'teen' area on the recreation ground at Great Kingshill, and the refurbishment of the very limited and outdated original play areas have been completed to the great satisfaction of the Council. Grant funding was provided for about two thirds of this cost. The work involved in organising two consultations, gathering views, dealing with tenders, not to mention appalling weather, was enormous. The Council is very appreciative of the work done by the Clerk, Lynne Turner, and also by Emma Marsden, in bringing this project to completion. There were stresses and strains along the way because, sadly, not everyone appreciates this achievement. We were delighted that the High Sheriff of Buckingham was able to attend the official opening on 8th April, together with councillors, BCC and WDC play area officers, and local residents.

The report of the Finance & Administration Committee will be presented by its chairman, Cllr Konieczny, later so I will not comment on this aspect.

The Parish Council is pleased that the Neighbourhood Action Group area is now exclusively for this parish, bringing far greater relevance to our local community. The Parish Council is well represented on the NAG, councillors attending from each ward. We also appreciate our close co-operation with PC Turnham, our dedicated police officer.

The Council is consulted on wider issues as a matter of course. For example, sites for gypsy and traveller encampments and the high speed rail link. The latter will be responded to later, following liaison with County, the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Chiltern Society.

The Council is linked to its neighbours through the North West Chilterns Area Forum and the Vice Chairman, David Jarman, is at a meeting tonight regarding the proposed high speed rail link in Princes Risborough. The forum committee meets quarterly as a rule and decides upon the use of some delegated funds such as for youth services and highways projects. The sums are small but we did receive a grant for the climbing walls and £2000 for playground equipment in Naphill.

The second Parish public meeting of the year was held in October, some 40 parishioners attending to listen to, and ask questions of, Alistair Nicholson of WDC's planning department. The Council will continue with the practice of holding two public meetings per year. Council meetings are always open to the public.

The Parish Council knew that its efforts to facilitate the provision of rural affordable homes would be contentious because of the difficulty in finding suitable sites. Any site in the Parish is likely to be green field and green belt and require to be treated by WDC as an Exception Site. A consultation Open Day on 10th March produced a lot of opposition, some support and approximately 40 expressions of interest in properties. The Council has listened to concerns and criticisms that the Housing Needs Survey was conducted in 2006. Wycombe District Council has requested that the Parish Council updates this survey; and, to this end, a new survey will be carried out in September, of the whole Parish at the same time rather than ward by ward, which is the way it was done the last time. This should make it clearer that any houses built subsequently would be for people of the whole parish, not just those in the ward in which they might be built. It has also been agreed to reassess all the sites on the original list, and to add new ones if any possibilities can be found. All this is being done in the interests of greater transparency, not because there was anything inherently wrong with the initial processes. If one development is successfully completed the Council could look at building more. At the time of the original Survey it was thought there were at least 10 'candidates' in each of the 4 wards; an estimate borne out by the Open Day.

The Parish Council meets monthly and the Standing Committees, Finance & Administration, Services and Planning make recommendations to it. Some items, such as rural housing, remain on the full Council Agenda for a long time! Thus all decisions are made by the full Council. This Council believes it should be active in the service of all of its parishioners. It could just maintain things as they are, and do it well, but it should also be looking forward in order to serve the local community even better. Just maintaining the status quo might lead to a quieter life but would also be an abdication of our wider responsibilities.

I wish to record my thanks for the dedication of the Clerk, Lynne Turner, and the Clerical Assistant, Emma Marsden. They work very hard, often in difficult circumstances. The Council is also appreciative of the work done by its contractors, organised and monitored by the office staff.

The Chairman then closed by saying the members of the public were welcome to ask questions of me, the Clerk, or one of the committee Chairmen, later in the Agenda.

### **Parish Accounts.**

Copies of the un-audited Parish Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2010 had been distributed. Cllr Konieczny, as the Chairman of Finance, spoke about the four general areas in which expenditure is allocated; allotments, play areas, Garden of Rest and open spaces.

Allotments cost the Parish approximately £4,000, with only £2,600 as income, and it should be noted that over £1,000 of this cost is on the provision of water. Allotments are one of the only services which a Parish Council has a statutory duty to provide and, in this area, there are more than 180 plots available, many of which are divided into half plots to meet the changing lifestyle needs of tenants.

The Parish Council maintains the play areas for four of the village halls within the Parish and also owns three others. This means that annual maintenance is around £10,000 every year. This year there have been some major changes and the Chairman has already mentioned the new and refurbished areas at Great Kingshill, which cost approximately £20,000 for the Parish.

The Garden of Rest at Cryers Hill is a delightful area to visit and always costs more to maintain than the income received. The Council's contractors do a great job in this area and residents are welcome to visit this tranquil, beautiful area to see it for themselves.

It is good to have open spaces and footpaths available to parishioners but the ongoing maintenance can be about £50,000 per year. There is a programme of work on the woodland areas at Four Ashes and Hughenden Valley and this is likely to continue for three to four more years.

There were grants given to local organisations this year of £9,000, which includes, village halls, newsletters and sports clubs and the Parish Council has always been pleased to be able to help in some small way to keep these facilities available within the Parish.

I would like to record my thanks to the Clerk for the way in which she maintains the accounts for the Council. Particularly, for installing a new financial software system, which should make big differences to the way in which the accounts are recorded in future.

I would also like to assure parishioners that all items of expenditure are scrutinised by the Councillors, as they continue to maintain the Parish in the way they believe it should be done.

1) Mr Pringle from Hughenden Valley raised a point of order stating that the meeting should not be asked to approve unaudited accounts and that there was no balance sheet with the accounts available at the meeting. Cllr Konieczny stated that Parish Council accounts are very different from normal 'businesses' and that to prepare an accurate balance sheet would involve a costly professional valuation of the many plots of land owned by the council. As the value of the land does not affect the way the Council does its business, or indeed will ever be realised, it is completely unnecessary to provide a comprehensive balance sheet.

Explanatory note: the Council's independent internal auditor has confirmed that, as long as the income and expenditure information is made available, this is sufficient.

Following some discussion it was then proposed by Cllr Sole, seconded by Cllr Whitehouse and **RESOLVED** by 15 votes to 12 with 14 abstentions, that the un-audited accounts for the year ended 31st March 2010 be accepted by the Parish Meeting.

**Speaker: Jim Foy, General Manager of the National Trust, based at Hughenden Manor.**

The Chairman then introduced Jim Foy to the meeting and he showed slides and gave a very interesting talk on the work undertaken at Hughenden Manor, in particular, in the year since he had been in office. Last year they had achieved record attendance at the Manor, of over 70,000 visitors. Lots of improvement work is being undertaken and they have even appeared on national television, such as Bargain Hunt and the Dog Whisperer and they will shortly be shown on an upcoming Agatha Christie, The Pale Horse. All of this helps to raise the profile of the National Trust and the houses in particular and one of the projects being worked on at present is to provide a new boiler system, which will help to reduce the carbon footprint, although it does require extensive initial funding. Mr Foy informed the meeting that West Wycombe Park, although home of the Dashwood family, is owned by the National Trust. It is one of the top parks in the country, although it is only open for a short season, June to August. They have recently restored the south colonnade and he recommended a visit.

Bradenham Manor, estate and village, is also owned by the National Trust, although the manor is leased to Grant Thornton and is not open to the public. The grounds are open 6 times a year and it will be open on National Garden Scheme day.

West Wycombe Hill and Coombe Hill are in the process of having some refurbishment work done at the moment and it is hoped this will enable these areas to continue to be enjoyed for many years to come.

He then continued by speaking about Hughenden Manor and some of the challenges it faces with regard to how it is shown. Conservation is a very important part of the work but public access is also important to encourage more people to come and visit. Funding is always an issue and they try to ensure that there are new things to see, to encourage visitors to return again and again.

The Chairman then asked if there were any questions and one was about the Primrose League. Jim did not have any information about it. It was noted that this was started by Disraeli.

As there were no other questions, the Chairman then thanked Jim for his very interesting talk and information on all the changes that are happening and planned.

Jim stayed for the remainder of the meeting and answered individual questions after the meeting had closed.

**Other Matters**

The Chairman then asked if there were any other questions or comments. She requested that speakers give their names, for the record.

Many members of the public spoke about the issue of the rural affordable housing scheme on which the Council had gone out to consultation, holding an Open Day on 10th March 2010. They voiced their concerns over the scheme itself, as well as questioning the processes being followed by the Council.

The Chairman re-iterated that a new Housing Needs Survey would be carried out in the autumn and it was hoped this would provide up to date information on parishioners' views. She confirmed that most of the Parish's Councillors were present at the meeting and residents' comments were noted.

The mood of the meeting was intemperate and the Chairman tried to close the matter in order to allow other comments or issues to be raised. Some people continued to speak across the room, with several speaking at once and no-one being heard clearly. As the meeting was not coming to order, the Chairman closed it at 9.47pm.

A member of the public proposed a vote of no confidence in the Parish Council, due principally to the Housing scheme but also on the issue of trains and lorries regarding Warrendene Road, Hughenden Valley. A parishioner asked people to vote in favour and a majority of the meeting did so, although a specific count was not taken. As the meeting was already closed, no further voting was taken.

*Explanatory note: A vote of no confidence from a Parish Meeting has no validity in law. Any resolutions passed are not binding on the Parish Council, apart from a request for allotments to be provided.*

The Chairman stated again that Councillors had been made well aware of the views of residents and invited people to remain after the meeting for refreshments.

Signed: .....

Date: .....