

HUGHENDEN PARISH – ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

UNCONFIRMED

The Annual Meeting for the Parish of Hughenden was held in Hughenden Valley Village Hall, Coombe Lane, Hughenden Valley, on Thursday 24th May 2007, commencing at 8pm.

Attendance.

There were, in attendance, 11 members of the Hughenden Parish Council, Cllr Pushman (County & District), 28 members of the Public and the Parish Clerk.

The Vice-Chairman of Hughenden Parish Council, Cllr Peggy Ewart, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and reminding them to sign the attendance register, for the record.

Apologies for Absence.

Apologies had been received from Cllr Rogers, the Chairman of the Council, who hoped to be able to attend later in the meeting.

Minutes of the 2006 Annual Parish Meeting.

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 22nd May 2006 were proposed by Cllr O'Malley, seconded by Cllr Gould, **RESOLVED** by the Meeting and duly signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising.

Chairman's Address.

Chris Morley, as out-going Chairman of the Parish Council, gave the Chairman's report for the year.

"Good evening everyone. I would like to extend my congratulations to John Rogers on being elected as Chairman of the Council for the coming year and also to Peggy Ewart on being elected Vice Chairman. I would like to say a public thanks to the Chairmen of Committees – Linda O'Malley, for her sterling work during the year on Planning and David Davies for the Services Committee, for his tireless working for the benefit of the Parish. Also thanks to Peggy Ewart for her work on the Finance and Administration Committee and for being a great support during a trying year.

There have been lots of changes in the last couple of months, with Ian Bond, John Harris, Jenny McGee and Matt Piercy not standing for re-election, as well as myself. This has meant that there are still a couple of vacancies on the Council and I would urge anyone interested to approach the Clerk for further information. The Council also lost the services of John Moorby as Parish Warden at the end of March. I would like to thank all those people for their work for the Parish during their varied tenures.

I would also like to thank the team of Lynne, the Clerk, Emma, the Clerical Assistant and Jenni, the Burial Ground Assistant and also to express great thanks to PC Lee Turnham, our Area Beat Officer, who attends nearly every Council meeting to update the Councillors on what is happening in the area and does a great job on behalf of the people of the Parish. Retrospective thanks are also due to all those in the Residents' Associations, Village Hall committees and sports clubs in the Parish who do all the work, ensuring that this community stays the amazing, vibrant place that it is.

Well, what has the Parish Council done in the last year? There has been a new website – hughendenparishcouncil.org.uk – and I would urge people to visit the site and see the extent of the Parish Council workings. Thanks for this lie with Cllr David Jarman and Emma Marsden, who were instrumental in getting it off the ground. The village design statements are still ongoing, although the problems being brought up by Wycombe District Council are making this process very elongated and distressing to all who have put in a lot of hard work on this issue. The four ash trees, of Four Ashes fame, have been re-instated and this was well received by the local residents. A piece of land at Templewood, Walters Ash, is being donated to the Parish and it is hoped that, once the land is handed over, the area will be developed with a children's playground being placed upon the site, something which has been sadly lacking over the last few years. Another aspect that is not totally due to the Parish Council is the new speed restrictions which have been introduced. Although this is a County Council responsibility, the Parish Council has had lots of discussions with them over the last few years and hopefully the Parish is now a lot safer. There has also been a new pedestrian crossing on Valley Road, Hughenden Valley, which the Parish Council has been trying for many years to get installed.

One thing that happened that I am very proud of being connected with, is a Drugs Awareness Evening, which we held in conjunction with Jeff Pegg from the Neighbourhood Watch Association. This had been a very effective and moving meeting, where a mother of twins spoke about her and her boys' experiences with coping with the effects of drug use. Anyone with teenagers or anyone at all should attend one of these evenings if they get the chance.

I would like to pass on some personal thoughts now, and say that Parish Councils, although they have certain powers and duties, including the powers to make grants to village halls and sports associations, are not really the decision making bodies. Parish Councils tend to be consultative, with tremendous amounts of time being taken up by consultations from SEERA, SEEDA and the ODPM. I had thought that the demise of the ODPM would have reduced the amount, but this has not proved to be the case. We have recently responded on the National Waste Strategy for development in South East England and we continue to respond as we are afraid that if we don't, we will no longer be consulted at all and therefore might miss the one thing that will be important to our parishioners. Even on more local issues we get consulted but our voices are not always listened to. One example of this recently was the speed limit review done by the County Council. The Parish Council spent a lot of time with the County Council discussing the problems and suggested solutions on this matter and it became apparent that where the Parish Council differed with BCC then their opinions were ignored. Another example was very recently and concerned the turning off of the lights on Valley Road, Hughenden Valley. As far as I am aware neither the Parish Council nor the Residents Association were consulted on this issue. It has been stated that there was consultation, but views were either ignored or there wasn't any consultation in the first place. The Parish Council continues to respond to these bodies but if their views continue to be ignored, the scepticism felt by Councillors will soon turn to cynicism - and if that were to happen at local level - as already is the case at national level - this would be a tragedy.

I would close by saying that I have greatly appreciated being able to represent this Parish over the last eight years and I will now hand back to the Chairman, Cllr Ewart".

Cllr Ewart then allowed questions on the Chairman's report.

- a) Angus Idle from Hughenden Valley gave information about ash trees, that they can be both male and female and suggesting that if replacements are chosen, that male ones be used, as these are stronger. It was mentioned that ash trees need space but Cllr Ewart informed the meeting that the trees were placed as requested by the local residents and would be monitored and maintained by the Parish Council.
- b) David Frost from Naphill asked about the pedestrian crossing in Hughenden Valley, stating that he had never seen anyone on it and questioning the siting and the cost for such limited use. Cllr Ewart and Cllr Davies gave information that the siting had been dictated by the houses, as it could not be within a certain distance of driveways and its main use was to assist in the 'walk to school crocodile' as well as access to the Doctor's surgery for elderly residents in particular.
- c) Sarah Bacon of Naphill asked about the inspection of the children's play equipment and whether it is still being done by the Parish Council. Cllr Ewart assured her that these regular inspections are still being done and the annual RoSPA inspection is due soon and any adjustments will be made, if notified. She continued by stating that maintenance of the Parish land is being reviewed and decisions on the way forward will be made, probably some time in the autumn.
- d) Mr Hitchen of Widmer End asked about the speed in North Road, Widmer End. Cllr Ewart stated that although the Parish Council does report this to the Police and raises it with BCC, there does not appear to be a lot more that can be done. After some general discussion it was **AGREED** that the Parish Council would take this matter up again at the BCC's Local Area Committee and GC2C meetings, for action.

Parish Accounts.

Copies of the un-audited Parish Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2007 had been distributed. Cllr Ewart mentioned that one thing all Council's are criticised for is raising the precept. Although this has been raised by the Parish Council for the coming year, the increase amounts to less than £1 per household per week. One of the major reasons for the recent increases has been the cost of maintaining the playgrounds within the Parish. This used to be the responsibility of the village hall committees but this became too onerous and costly for them to continue and so the Parish Council took on this responsibility, in order to keep the playgrounds from being closed.

Another high cost for the Parish Council remains the upkeep and maintenance of its land assets. There is a lot of land within the Parish to be looked after and this is currently undergoing scrutiny with decisions to be made during the autumn, as mentioned previously.

From the Income & Expenditure sheet Cllr Ewart noted that the fees for the burial ground had decreased. Whilst this means that fewer burials have taken place, which is a good thing, it also shows how difficult it is to estimate 'income' for this item for each year.

Another item noted is that there is a large amount in donations, but this is a contra entry with the expenditure, and involved a non-turf pitch at Great Kingshill, for use by the young people in the Cricket Club. There is a large amount also in expenditure for tools and this was part of an insurance claim after a break-in at the Garden of Rest.

Cllr Ewart then opened the meeting for questions which she would try to answer, with the help of the Clerk, Lynne Turner, who is the person with responsibility for the accounts. The Parish Council is grateful for her continued hard work in the production of the annual accounts.

- a) David Frost from Naphill had a query on the layout of the accounts and stated that he was pleased that the burial ground fees were reduced as it meant fewer people were dying. He then asked why the 'administration' costs were so high and Cllr Ewart stated that this was a confidential matter relating to severance pay by mutual agreement and she was unable to go into any more detail on that issue.
- b) David Frost then continued by stating that the precept had been increasing steadily since 1993 and asked why this is the case. Cllr Ewart informed him that inflation does come into the equation but the main reason for increases over the last few years have been for the playgrounds, of which there will be a new one at Walters Ash during this financial year. Cllr Gould also pointed out that all of the five village halls in the Parish have needed help with updating their facilities over the last two or three years and this has resulted in expenditure of more than £30,000 for the Parish Council.
- c) Terry Williams from Great Kingshill spoke about the matter David Frost had raised on the Balance Sheet and it was **NOTED** that this was merely a question of the layout of the sheet, which the Clerk agreed to address for future years, although she informed the meeting that the accounts have always been produced in the same way for her thirteen years in post and had never been queried before, either by parishioners or indeed by the auditors. It was further **AGREED** that, once accepted by this meeting, the end of year accounts will be placed on the Parish Council's website, for information.

As there were no further questions it was then proposed by Mr Richard Pushman of Naphill, seconded by Peter Charles of Great Kingshill, and **RESOLVED** that the un-audited accounts for the year ended 31st March 2007 be adopted by the Parish Meeting.

Other Matters.

- a) Cllr Pushman (District and County Councillor) asked to speak and possibly give answers to some of the queries raised earlier in the meeting. He stated that the County Council actually has plenty of space for landfill waste but there is a very high tax on this and therefore the need for more recycling is great. The preferred sites for incineration plants will be considered in the next few weeks but he wished to put parishioners' minds at rest by informing them that they do not pollute the area and they are shielded so that they are not visible in the landscape. With regard to speed consultation, speed of cars is noticed by pedestrians, not by the drivers of the cars, which means there is constant conflict. Most drivers do observe the speed limits but occasionally, during spot checks by Police, it is shown that those going over the limit are, more often than not, the local residents themselves! With regard to the lights on Valley Road, Cllr Pushman did accept that there was not sufficient consultation but a meeting has now taken place with County Council representatives and local organisations and the decision is still awaited. Cllr Pushman stated that he preferred the less obtrusive white lights, rather than the yellow ones and this received general support.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Pushman for his information.

As there were no other questions or matters to be raised, the Chairman then invited everyone to share in the refreshments that had been provided and declared the meeting closed at 9.02pm.

Signed:

Date: