

The Annual Parish Meeting for East Garston was held in the Village Hall on Tuesday 24th April 2018 at 7.30 p.m.

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: - Jonathan Rabbitts - Chairman, Chris Tonge, Sue Tulloch, Deana Carpenter and Alan Breadmore (Clerk). Guests: - Graham Jones (District Councillor), Rev. Martin Cawte and Claire McCorquodale (North Wessex Downs AONB). Parishioners: - 29. **Apologies:** Mark Brock, Peter Cook, David Ruse, Claire Hill, Paul Tame, Jane Adamson and Gordon Lundie.

1. Chairman Jonathan Rabbitts opened the meeting by welcoming those present and outlining the agenda. He then introduced the guest speaker.
2. Claire McCorquodale, of North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty delivered an interesting presentation about the geology, history and the human impact on this unique area. The information contained within the presentation may be found at <http://northwessexdowns.org.uk/>
3. The Chairman then outlined some of the activities of the Parish Council over the past year; these included installing a new gate and fence in the Jubilee Meadow with thanks to Lucy and Jon Rich for their financial contribution to this; clearing weeds and brambles in the Jubilee Meadow near the Friend's Meeting House and the plan to plant a new hedge; he offered thanks to the participants in the village clean-up day but reminded residents not to overfill the skip; support for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, which provides free books for under-fives in the Parish; introduction of the book exchange in the redundant phone box in Humphrey's Lane; management of the road salt bins, he asked users to close the lids after use prevent the salt becoming wet; the purchase of a power-scythe to be used to augment the reduced footpath clearance service provided by WBC; the provision of two benches on the Millennium Field, he also thanked Jeffrey Rabbitts for replacing the bench on Lorne Hill; the PC also continue to support the Wantage Bus Service. He commended the residents of Humphreys Lane and Hillside for their fortitude during the sewage leaks and thanked Councillor Deana Carpenter for her sterling work in supporting those residents. He explained that Thames Water had offered a financial restitution package for the loss of the cricket nets and that the PC were now considering options for the provision of alternative sports or leisure facilities. He asked parishioners to offer ideas to any councillor. He paid tribute to the work of retiring vicar Rev. Martin Cawte and wished him and his wife well in their retirement. He also expressed thanks to the retiring Parish Councillors Jane Haddock and Liam Robson and wished them well in their new work commitments. Thanks also were paid to Trevor Butcher, Richard Talmage, David Taylor, Chris Tonge and David Knight for their work in maintaining various parts of the village; to Maurice Duce and PJS for supporting the prescription delivery service; to Jane Adamson for looking after the community defibrillator and Dermot Tredgett for managing the book exchange and to Alan Breadmore for his work as Clerk to the PC. Finally, he observed that due to the local-government ward changes, East Garston would no longer be represented by two councillors in the Lambourn Valley ward but by one in an expanded Downlands ward. He thanked Graham Jones and Gordon Lundie for their support over the years.
4. The draft Summary Financial Report of the Parish Council was distributed. The Clerk explained that the Parish Council had broadly operated within budget and to plan over the past 12 months. He then went on to describe the main areas of focus for the Parish Council's activity. These were Village Maintenance and support for Community Projects and Facilities as well as enabling the maintenance of the rural nature of our community. Grants had been awarded to All Saints Church (Lych Gate), the weekly Wantage Bus Service, the Big Lunch and the Imagination Library. Discretionary funding had been used to support WBC Library Services, specifically for Lambourn, Hungerford and mobile services. Capital purchases of a power-scythe and computer equipment (grant aided) had been made. Community Grant applications forms for 2018/19 will be available soon from the Clerk and on the Parish website. Priorities for the coming year will remain broadly the same with no increase in Precept. However, provisions have been made for flexibility in the budget to help mitigate the "devolution" of services by West Berkshire Council. The Annual Financial Summary and supporting documents will be available on the website
5. Chris Tonge presented apologies from David Ruse who had unexpectedly been admitted to hospital and summarised the activities of the Community Speedwatch team. 26 Speedwatch surveys were performed between July 2017 and January 2018. The volume of traffic is approx. 65 vehicles per hour with over one third exceeding 35mph, a maximum of 59mph was recorded on one occasion. WBC and police are supporting the activity and the police have performed their own speed surveys which have led to some prosecutions. A road audit has been performed and reported, some work has been done to improve visibility of signage and WBC have committed to restoring white lines and installing "white gates" at the village boundaries. The use of vehicle activated speed signs is still being considered but is an expensive item, similarly the PC will look again at the possibility of introducing 20mph limits within the village. The British Horse Society recommendation of 15mph when passing horses was highlighted. Chris Tonge said he would raise the matter with local trainers that those riding out should give acknowledgement to motorists who adhere to this code.

6. District Councillor, Graham Jones reported on West Berkshire Council's activities. The main issue has been the significant reduction in the financial contribution from central government; four years ago, this contributed 25% of WBC's revenue but is now zero. The result has been a series of difficult funding decisions and an increase in Council Tax of 5.99% for the year 2018-19. Escalating social care costs, due largely to the needs of an aging population represent over half of WBC's £125M budget. He explained that the future changes in local government funding will hopefully allow the retention of any growth in business rates, currently just £23M of £85M of business rates is returned to WBC. He reported improvements with regard to public health initiatives, children's services (now rated as "good" rather than the previous "inadequate") and libraries (from the likelihood of most libraries closing two years ago to all but one remaining open thanks to partnerships with local groups and Parish Councils). He acknowledged the support of the Parish Council for their help with libraries and buses in particular. He also identified a concern that West Berkshire had a shortage of young adults (20 to 35), whereby they leave to go to University and do not return until later in life. WBC are looking to continue to grow employment opportunities so that this age distortion may be rectified. He addressed a question from the floor regarding space for new employers given that much retail and office space was being converted to housing. He acknowledged that this was the case in Newbury town but that there was plenty of commercial space in the development areas such as Theale and Greenham Common. He closed by saying how much he had enjoyed representing East Garston at WBC for over 20 years and that, despite the ward changes he looked forward to maintaining close links with the Parish
7. Any Other Business
 - a. Brian Quinn of Penny Post, announced that they would be producing a "Valley of the Racehorse" edition of their email newsletter from the end of April. Anyone interested in contributing should contact him at [brian @pennypost.org.uk](mailto:brian@pennypost.org.uk)
 - b. Christopher Vaughan highlighted that East Garston collected a significant and disproportionate share for the Poppy Appeal this year and thanked Dawn and Chris Tonge for managing the collection.
 - c. Christopher made a vote of thanks to Councillors and Officer for their contribution to the community.

The Chairman closed the meeting by thanking attendees and all of the speakers.

The Meeting closed at 9.20 p.m.

Additional material is available on the Parish Council Website www.eastgartson-pc.gov.uk