

The Annual Parish Meeting for East Garston was held in the Village Hall on Tuesday 18th April 2017 at 7.30 p.m.

MINUTES

1. **Present:** Councillors: - Jonathan Rabbitts - Chairman, Chris Tonge, Sue Tulloch, Deana Carpenter, Liam Robson and Alan Breadmore (Clerk). Guests: -, Graham Jones (District Councillor). Parishioners: - 36. **Apologies:** Cllr. Jane Haddock, Rev. Martin Cawte, James Pryer, Karen Sperrey.
2. Chairman Jonathan Rabbitts opened the meeting by welcoming those present and outlining the agenda. He offered his thanks, on behalf of the community, to all those that voluntarily give their time to maintain various parts of the Parish. In particular mentioning David Taylor, David Knight, Richard Talmage and Trevor Butcher. He also thanked David Ruse, David Knight and Paul Tame for manning the "Speedwatch" campaign in the village and David Ruse for his help to the Parish Council in representing the library interests of the Parish. He also thanked his fellow Councillors and the Clerk for their support throughout the year and in particular Chris Tonge for leading the volunteer programme the "Garston Gang". He highlighted the main investments for the year, the refurbished Millennium Field steps, for which a WBC matched funding grant was sponsored by District Councillor Graham Jones, and new benches in the Millennium Field. He thanked parishioners for their support in objecting to the Rogers Lane development in particular the help provided by Galvin Mould, David Knight and Andrew James. Finally, he highlighted the concerns of speeding and dog fouling in the Parish for which he appealed for support from parishioners. The Annual Village Fete will be held this year on July 15th.
3. 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 (notice board and churchyard maintenance) and the weekly Wantage Bus Service. Discretionary funding had been used to engage professional services to prepare the objection to the Rogers Lane development. Major project expenditure on the Millennium Field steps had been supported by a WBC grant and new benches for the Millennium Field have also been purchased.
Community Grant applications forms for 2017/18 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. Reserves are such that unanticipated or emergency funds are currently available.
4. David Ruse presented the outcome of the Community Speedwatch campaign that he had been working on with Cllr. Tonge and other volunteers. Unfortunately, the projection technology failed causing the presentation material not to be as helpful as one would hope. However, the key points were clear and lead to questions and debate. The presentation material is now available on the Parish website. The key findings and conclusions show that speeding on Newbury Road is excessive and dangerous, further work will be done to raise public awareness and education, enforcement initiatives will continue and investigations will begin on how environmental measures may be used to limit speeding. Questions from the floor asked that attention is also paid to Back St and Front St. Councillors and volunteers will seek advice on the best way forward for the minor roads.
5. Bob Briant, Churchwarden, presented a brief report on the status of All Saints Church. He thanked Parishioners for their support for the Church building and Churchyard both financially and physically and to those that work specifically on activities in supporting the fabric of the church. Christopher Vaughan for mowing the churchyard, Peter Cook for winding the clock, James Pryer, Trevor Butcher and Martyn Wright for leading the church heating project. He outlined the many social and fundraising events organised by and for the Church throughout the year and promoted in particular the Annual Village Fete, Cello Concerts and a repeat of last year's successful Safari Supper. These which will be advertised soon via flyers and the village website. He drew attention to the Church Annual Report which is also now available on the website
6. Graham Jones reported on West Berkshire Council's activities. He explained that, financial pressures continue to lead to the reappraisal of the provision of and the devolution to Parish and Town Councils of services. This continues to be exacerbated by the rising demand for adult social care which accounts for ½ of the total budget and continues to rise. He referred to the initiative to devolve services to the Parishes and that a funding pot was available together with Greenham Trust to support Parish Councils who were prepared to take on or augment services provided by the District Council. He explained that an Electoral Commission review of electoral wards in West Berkshire was underway and that the likely outcome would be that the Lambourn Valley Ward would be broken up, leaving Lambourn Parish as a standalone ward and East Garston and Great Shefford would become part of a revised Downlands Ward. This is in order to get a more balanced representation throughout WBC and to reduce the total number of District Councillors to nearer the national norm. Some parishioners expressed disappointment at this move especially since it would likely mean that Graham Jones would no longer be District Councillor for East Garston. A vote of appreciation was made for Graham's work and support to East Garston.
Questions were raised re potholes and in particular those on School Lane. Graham referred to the 5 year Highways maintenance plan and undertook to investigate plans for East Garston and in particular the state of School Lane.

7. Councillor Chris Tonge described how Parish Councils were likely to have to become more self-sufficient in the provision of services particularly as they relate to Village Maintenance. This has mainly been addressed in the Parish through the generous donation of time by volunteers and he felt that in the short term this would continue. However, the increasing workload and the aging nature of the volunteers meant that new candidates were needed and a rethink of the approach was required.

He outlined the basics of the WBC Parish Devolution programme which addresses subjects such as Cleaning Road Signs, Drainage Maintenance, Local Grass Cutting, Public Rights of Way Maintenance and trimming vegetation. Whilst this has yet to be considered formally by the Parish Council he expressed a view that the regulations surrounding the formal adoption of these services was such that it would be too arduous for a small Parish Council to tackle on their own. Other options will be considered including joint enterprises with other smaller councils.

A parishioner suggested that if the Parish Council were to provide appropriate equipment she would be prepared to perform dog waste removal from footpaths. Councillors agreed to investigate.

Chris then invited Freddie Tulloch to make a short statement regarding funding available from East Garston Amenities. EGA is a charitable group set up some years ago to raise funds for projects of benefit to the community. In the past, it has been responsible for coordinating the Village Fete and other events and used the proceeds to help fund youth and sporting groups in the village. EGA currently has funds available for any worthy cause that serves the community of East Garston and anyone prepared to manage a project that requires funding is invited to discuss with Freddie, Chris added that the Parish Council also has a fund that is specifically available for making better use of the Village Open Spaces.

AOB: -

- a. Further questions were raised regarding pot holes and speeding as previously referred to. In particular, the potential of 20mph speed limit within the village. These will be addressed as previously noted.
- b. A parishioner drew the attention of the meeting of a complaint that he had made to the Monitoring Officer of West Berkshire Council regarding a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct by Cllr Rabbitts and a lack of transparency with regard to the recording of actions of the Parish Council. He further referred to the ruling of the Monitoring Officer and the independent person appointed by WBC that had found that there had been a breach. Councillors responded by saying that the outcome had been accepted and that the informal resolution recommended by the monitoring Officer was in progress. Cllr. Rabbitts has written a letter of apology to the complainant. With regard to the recommendation made by the Monitoring Officer of changes to procedures for the recording of meetings, the Clerk advised that these are to be considered at the next full meeting of the Parish Council.
- c. A vote of thanks was made by a parishioner to the Rabbitts family for the clearing of trees on the dangerous bend on Newbury Road. Cllr. Rabbitts added that a significant contribution had also been made by the Tulloch family to this work. Appreciation was shown by attendees.

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

The Meeting closed at 8.40 p.m.

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