

ASHMANSWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Council

Date: 14th May 2013 **Time:** 7.30 pm
Place: Ashmansworth Village Hall
Present: Alan Cox (Chairman) Carol O'Shaughnessy (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors: Kieron Black
In Attendance: Maxta Thomas (Clerk) Cllr Horace Mitchell (Borough)
Cllr Tom Thacker (County) Jonty Gethin (Village Hall Committee)
PC Matt Deery
Visitors: 11 members of the public

Action

1. Welcome and Apologies

Cllr Cox welcomed everyone to the Annual General Meeting. Apologies received from Cllr Johnson, and from Cllr Izett (Borough).

2. Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman

This item was missed on the evening of the meeting, and will be formally dealt with at the next meeting in June.

3. Achievements and Financial report 2013/14

See Appendix A.

White lines on A343 – Matt Deery stated they would only comment on this if there were accidents. The Council will need to deal directly with HCC Highways. A parishioner also noted that there is a bridleway that crosses the A343 at that point, as well as there being a bus stop. Cllr Cox noted that the Council have also requested a 50mph limit on the A343 from Highclere to Cross Lane.

Downgrade of A343 – Matt Deery observed that he is very surprised at how much traffic is going west after having been directed by satellite navigation units. Cllr Mitchell stated that he has been campaigning to get signage changed to direct Andover traffic away from A343.

Wayfarers Walk – it was noted that motorbikes appear to be causing some damage to the path.

Cllr Cox assured the parish that he was working on the base station problem.

Cllr Cox thanked Jakes Ferguson for picking up litter over the year.

Cllr Cox encouraged parishioners to look at the new Switch Hampshire initiative.

The Chairman gave a report on the various achievements of the Council in 2013/14. The Clerk gave a report and update on the Council finances.

4. Reports from Borough/County Councillors

Cllr Horace Mitchell gave the following report as Borough Councillor.

Your borough councillors are Horace Mitchell and John Izett. We work closely together, but given the size of the council ward and

with six parishes, ***Cllr Mitchell takes a lead role for Ashmansworth and Crux Easton and is the first point of contact for residents who need our help and in support of your Parish Council.*** Cllr Izett serves on the Borough Council Cabinet, with responsibility for property and finance. Cllr Mitchell serves as chairman of the Development Control Committee (aka 'planning committee') and sits on two other committees and a number of specialist working panels. We both regard response to our parish councils and individual residents as our prime responsibility.

Under the Conservative administration the Council has ***frozen the council tax for a fourth successive year and has committed to keep it at the same level again for 2014-2015***, while maintaining all key services and increasing support for crime prevention, which is consistently reported as a high priority for residents; crime rates in the borough have fallen by 24% since 2005. Through this period the Council has also maintained weekly bin collections, which a majority of councils abandoned in recent years, and introduced glass recycling collection. We are able to do this because the Council embarked on rationalisation and more effective performance management long before the economic crisis made this essential for all public services. ***Your Borough council tax is the lowest in Hampshire and the sixth lowest of any district council in England.*** This month Basingstoke & Deane has been short listed as among the 'best achieving' councils nationally, all the other nominees being much bigger city, county or equivalent authorities. It's notable that the Council's outstanding financial results in recent years have been under the guidance of your ward councillors, with James Lewin preceding John Izett in the role.

While the Conservatives broadly support Government efforts to reign back the explosive growth of the welfare state, the Council is providing direct support for those in genuine need who may be most affected by the changes, for example maintaining the current level of council tax benefit through to March 2014.

Work continues on the new Local Plan, which will affect new development for the future, and a further consultation will take place this year. Argument continues on how many houses should be built and on where they should go, with those most likely to be affected by large scale development quite naturally doing whatever they can to defend their own areas. At some stage Settlement Policy Boundaries* will be reviewed, but we anticipate that Ashmansworth Parish will continue to be protected from unwanted new development. On that basis our advice has been that the parish has no obvious reason to take up the new 'Neighbourhood Planning' programme or a Community Right to Build scheme.

On a day to day basis ***individual planning matters*** are the most frequent reasons for residents to contact your borough councillors. While Basingstoke & Deane's planning team actually provide a much better service and standards than many other authorities, including some of our neighbours, we believe there remains scope for improvement and we're working behind the scenes on this. Meanwhile, those making an application are encouraged to inform the Parish Council at the earliest possible time and, if they envisage difficulties or simply need advice, contact Cllr Mitchell as early as possible. Our advice is equally available to applicants and to anyone who believes a particular proposal is inappropriate.

We know that residents of Ashmansworth and Crux Easton particularly value the natural environment and **our beautiful setting in the AONB**. Cllr Mitchell represents BDBC on the AONB Council of Partners and welcomes input from any resident with views as to its protection and enhancement. Both BDBC and the County Council contribute to the costs of managing the AONB. The AONB website** has recently been enhanced and it's worth a visit to check out items such as the walking, cycling and riding maps and events such as the excellent 'Rock Detectives' children's geology club, whose next session is at Shaw on 29th May.

We are all too well aware of the **poor (or non-existent) broadband service available here**. BDBC, with the County Council, has signed a £13.8millions contract with BT and Broadband Delivery UK to improve broadband availability in rural areas. There is however no guarantee that service to a particular village will be enhanced, so it's essential that anyone who has not yet done so signs up as soon as possible to the County's broadband campaign***. For areas that may not be reached by this programme, or where the local community aspires to a level of service higher than the 'minimum of 2 megabits per second' proposed under the Government funding programme, there is a Rural Community Broadband Fund. This programme's current deadline is later this month but we expect a new scheme to appear. Cllr Mitchell recommends that the Ashmansworth and Crux Easton communities would be well advised to investigate ways to ensure provision of higher performance broadband under their own control.

Cllr Horace Mitchell – cllr.horace.mitchell@basingstoke.gov.uk – 01635 254677

Cllr John Izett – cllr.john.izett@basingstoke.gov.uk - 01635 254400

Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council - www.basingstoke.gov.uk

*Settlement Policy Boundaries (SPD) designate those areas deemed to be 'sustainable' from a development perspective, within which planning applications for new dwellings tend to be viewed positively. There is no SPB in this Parish.

**<http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk>

*** see <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/broadband/broadbandmap.htm> and associated web pages; at present the whole RG20 postcode shows only 70 registrations of interest and demand, probably because in the more densely populated areas around Woolton Hill broadband download speeds of 6 megabits per second (Mbps) are already obtainable on BT lines. High performance broadband as widely deployed in Basingstoke already guarantees 15 Mbps download with an option being developed for 330 Mbps; the 15Mbps service is being extended to parts of the Tadley area.

Cllr Mitchell was asked about the standard of drawings and plans on the BDBC website on planning applications, and whether it is the new planning website pages causing the lack of high standards. Cllr Mitchell replied that the planning application system at BDBC has just been upgraded, and that he is aware of issues with it. However, the quality of drawings and plans very much depend on what is submitted to BDBC – applicants are being encouraged to improve in this area.

Cllr Mitchell finally noted the proposed Harwood Paddock development. He has been advising East Woodhay Parish

Council to put in place a neighbourhood plan, as this will give them a much stronger defence against plans of this kind.

Cllr Tom Thacker gave a verbal report as County Councillor.

Cllr Thacker has been appointed vice chair of the HCC pension fund, which has around 100,000 members. He has also been appointed to the Committee for Adult Services. He acts as deputy to the regular member on the Police and Crime Panel.

Cllr Thacker observed that most local issues had been covered by Cllr Cox, the Clerk and Cllr Mitchell. He noted the ownership issue of the diseased beech tree, which has now been resolved. He also noted the mix up with neighbouring beacons for the jubilee celebrations, but was happy that the celebrations went well.

Olympics – Cllr Thacker said that HCC has committed some funds towards the Olympic legacy – this is mostly towards sports clubs and schools.

Council Tax was frozen last year, and has been frozen again for the fourth year running. It is hoped to freeze it for the year after that, but this cannot be guaranteed.

Cllr Thacker noted the loss of the library service, but observed that there has been little backlash to this.

Highways – constant issues are being raised, with this spring being particularly bad due to the poor weather. The Highways department are working flat out to address issues. However, HCC need to do more quality control.

Schools – The Clere School is improving since being put on special measures - the temporary administrative team have done an excellent job. Testbourne school is doing well, coming 5th in league tables for Hampshire. Primary schools in the area are also doing well.

Assistant to Executive Member on Adult Services – this area takes a large part of the HCC budget (care for the elderly in particular). Cllr Thacker highlighted the services that HCC run. He noted that emphasis is placed on enabling people to live in the community as long as possible.

Planning – Cllr Thacker noted that an application for a 14 generator wind farm has just gone in. This will be placed south of Whitchurch. The generators will be as high as Salisbury Cathedral. Cllr Thacker asked for volunteers to take this up with the Borough, and also via www.hamphsiregreen.co.uk. There is much concern about the size of this wind farm. He noted that objections should be made that are salient from a planning point of view – personal opinions on wind farms are not relevant.

5. Police Report

PC Matt Deery gave a report on behalf of the Police. He noted the new PCSO Abby Carpenter, who was unfortunately unable to attend. Crime is very low in the Parish. He looks after 7 parishes, with Ashmansworth having the lowest crime rate of the 7.

Theft from outbuildings is a priority for the Police, and this includes metal theft. Metal theft has almost disappeared in the last six months – new legislation has helped. The second priority is handling of stolen goods. PC Deery stated that much has been recovered.

Antisocial behaviour is minimal, although there has been one unpleasant incident recently involving door to door cold callers. There are schemes to help prevent this, which may worth Ashmansworth Council considering.

Speeding – A343 is the major focus, through Highclere – this will be extended in the next year, in an attempt to slow traffic down along A343. He did note that extra speed limits lead to manpower problems for the police as these need to be enforced. He noted that traffic calming could be a solution to this.

Neighbourhood Watch – PC Deery noted that this is becoming more important as police numbers drop – most of his work comes from info from NHW.

Police & Crime Commissioner – Simon Hayes is the Commissioner for Hampshire – PC Deery noted that he has a focus on rural policing. PC Deery suggested that parishioners contact Simon Hayes if they have any issues.

Recent crimes – Tadley church has been broken into – parishes needs to be aware.

Oil theft appears to be on the rise in the area. A parishioner asked if the police are recommending locking oil tanks. PC Deery confirmed that this is the case, along with alarm systems and cages outside oil tanks also being recommended.

Thefts from cars – this tends to happen in local beauty spots – handbags that have been tucked under seats are a target.

6. Report from the Village Hall Committee

Jonty Gethin gave a report on behalf of the Village Hall Committee.

The hall has been refurbished over the last few years to provide a good local resource. A new kitchen was installed in the last year – he thanked the Greenham Common Trust, HCC and the Parish Council for grants towards this. A new patio has also been installed in the last year. The committee are looking to replace the chairs – a grant has been obtained from the Big Lottery Fund. The Committee are trying get the hall used more for local activities. There are regular Zumba classes, and also regular bingo activities. Ad hoc events include quiz nights, race nights etc. Mr Gethin finally noted that the Village Hall accounts are very stable with a good reserve for emergencies.

7. Open Forum

Cllr Cox thanked the speakers for their time, and all attendees for turning out.

Appendix A – Chairman’s report & Clerk’s Report

Agenda

- Welcome and Apologies
- Presentation on Achievements and Financial Report for 2012/13
- Report from Borough / County Councillors
- Report from Police, meet new PCSO
- Report from the Village Hall committee
- Public discussion and questions

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Who are we?

- Alan Cox chairman
- Carol O'Shaughnessy vice-chairman
- Mark Benzing – resigned 16/4/13
- Kieron Black
- Johnnie Johnson
- Clerk - Ruth Kent until October 2012
- Maxta Thomas from October

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Our Role

- Cover villages of Ashmansworth and Crux Easton
- Lowest level of Democracy
- Provide guidance on Planning Applications
- A link to Borough and County Councils on what is planned and what we want
- Focus of local interest eg: Neighbourhood Watch
- Non-political
- One of the smallest in the county, limited budget
- Thanks to all members for their hard work!

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What do we do?

- We meet roughly every 6-8 weeks, usually in the Village Hall, sometimes in Crux Easton Church
- 10 Planning Applications in last year
 - 7 were granted, 3 withdrawn/rejected
 - Considered several tree applications, tree warden
- Lot of interest in Road Repair and Safety
- Grass cutting for Recreation Ground
- Village details on Website
- Budget to spend our Precept to benefit Parish

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Planning Guidelines

- For many years, our decisions on planning applications (whether or not to object) were rather subjective
- Grateful to Mark Benzing for leading formulation of set of Guidelines, based on plans and regulations from Basingstoke, AONB, Conservation Area status and local knowledge
- Still Guidelines, but now more objective!
- Concern at proposal for 70 houses at WH

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Planning Guidelines

- Sympathetic Materials
- Not disproportionate size
- Sympathetic extensions
- Preserve and enhance AONB & Conservation Area
- Suitable building materials
- Preserve character of village
- Etc!

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Roads

- Ashmansworth Potholes repaired at last, though still waiting for Crux Easton
- Crux Easton sign post still missing
- Improvements at A343/Cross Lane junction – still seeking more!
- Seeking downgrading of A343 to B
- 4WD traffic on Wayfarers now prevented, except briefly in summer over part

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Broadband

- Growing concern in our villages at the poor performance of broadband services, due to the distance from the Highclere exchange
- Welcome help from John Izett, Dan Fearnley
- Exploring possible microwave or fibre link
- Hampshire have recently awarded contract to BT for whole county
- Plan an open meeting with Daniel in July
- Concern at our Vodafone base station not working - chasing!

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Communications

- Email List very useful for distributing information and seeking opinions & guidance
- Website – now launched Local Directory Listing. Offered free entry to local residents
- Parish Calendar written by Mike Sarson, distributed monthly to every house – many thanks to him and our distributors
- Great support from:
 - Borough Councillors Horace Mitchell, John Izett
 - County Councillor Tom Thacker
 - Steven Lugg at Hampshire Association of Local Councils

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Neighbourhood Watch

- Established good contact with PC Matt Deery and PCSO Dan Lines
- Welcome to PCSO Abbey Carpenter
- Generally quiet during past year
- Warn residents of local threats
- Thanks to co-ordinators:
 - Carol O'Shaughnessy and Sally Burch

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Website

- Full of local information and links to local databases
- Regularly updated with local news and announcements of events
- www.ashmansworth-pc.gov.uk – do use it!
- Basingstoke have withdrawn support and we are now supported by Vision ICT
- New website much easier to maintain
- Annual cost reasonable

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Community Enhancement

- Tender for new Grass Cutting contract
- Ashmansworth has lost its Mobile library service due to low usage, but remains at Crux Easton, East Woodhay, Highclere
- Planted new hedge at Recreation Ground
- Litter – concern at litter in village and on approach roads. Locals collecting bagsful
- Heating Oil Co-operative
- Any interest in “Switch Hampshire” electricity co-operative?

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Queen's Diamond Jubilee

- “Big Lunch” picnic, followed by children’s games and Barn Dance
- Mugs for all children in parish, funded by two anonymous donations – many thanks!
- War Memorial has been cleaned to celebrate Jubilee – donations from a number, including families of those named
- Jubilee Beacon
- No plans for Coronation anniversary?

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Clerk's Report

- Engaged as Clerk in October 2012
- Put electronic accounts system in place
- Reviewing council procedures – Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, etc
- Put Grass Cutting contract in place
- Kept Councillors up to date on administrative details, particularly with regard to Precept setting and planning

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Financial Report

- Income as expected – extra donations to war memorial clean and Jubilee celebrations
- VAT reclaimed for 2011/12 and 2012/13
- Income of £1100 Grant & £1500 Precept
- Extra grants from BDBC of £240 for grass cutting and £375 towards new website
- Expenditure high due to new clerk and spend on war memorial and jubilee, and new website
- Opening balance £1260, closing £356

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Budget Explanation

- **2012/13 Audited on 9th May 2013**
- **2013/14 Budgeted**
- **Grant** is given by Basingstoke & Deane BC
- **Precept** is paid in our Council Tax, decided by us
- **Running Expenses** are: auditors, clerk, hire of meeting room, training, books, stationery, insurance, HALC
- **Useful Tasks** are: Grass Cutting, Calendar, Trees
- **Subscriptions** to: CPRE, GLEAM
- **Grants made** – None made in 12/13 due to budget restrictions. Hopefully more in 13/14
- **Reserves** – these need to be built up – aiming for a reserve of £500 in 2013/14

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Budget Comments

- Aim for fair but not excessive balance
- Precept for **2013/14** increased to pay for our new clerk! Increase only around £1 per month
- Council tax still lower than much of our Borough and far lower than Newbury area
- Allows us to spend on worthy causes to benefit us all, such as Village Hall – otherwise all spent on bureaucracy!

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Conclusions

- Thanks to all for their hard work and for turning out to meetings on cold dark evenings!
- Welcome suggestions and assistance from everyone, especially for Community Enhancement
- What more would you like us to do?

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Appendix B – Accounts & Budget

Local Councils in England and Wales					
Annual Return					
For the Year Ended 31st March 2013					
Ashmansworth Parish Council					
Section 1 - the Statement of Accounts - Analytical Review of Entries					
Box No	Title	31/03/12 £	31/03/13 £	Comment	31/03/11
1	Balances brought forward	596	1,260	<i>Reserves ready to clean war memorial</i>	287
2	(+) Annual Precept	2,090	1,500	<i>Last years precept figure included extra grant from BDBC ; next years precept to increase.</i>	1,500
3	(+) Total Other Receipts	1,381	2,487	<i>Jubilee donations and VAT reclaims</i>	1,340
4	(-) Staff Costs	200	1,090	<i>New clerk appointed 3/10/12 : being paid salary rather than gratuity.</i>	400
5	(-) Loan interest / capital repayments	0	0		0
6	(-) Total other payments	2,607	3,801	<i>Clean war memorial £790 new website £400</i>	2,131
7	(=) Balances carried forward	1,260	356	<i>unbudgeted website and clerk – precept to rise in 2013/14 onwards</i>	596
8	Total Cash & Investments	1,260	355	<i>see box 7</i>	596
9	Total fixed assets	0	1,761	<i>New clerk setting up proper asset register – will change next year when war memorial valued</i>	0
10	Total borrowings	0	0		0

Ashmansworth Parish Council 2013-14 Budget			
2012/13	2012/13		2013-14
Budgeted	Actual (31/10)		Budgeted
£	£	Income	£
1100	1100	Grant	1,100.00
1500	1500	Precept	3,000.00
240	240	Grant from BDBC - Grass cutting	240.00
375	375	Grant for Website	0.00
485	0	War memorial donations carried over from 2011.12	0.00
200	0	Jubilee Donations carried over from 2011.12	0.00
0	505	Jubilee Donations	0.00
0	0	Sale of Website advertising space	0.00
250	266	VAT recovery	100.00
4150	3986	Total Income	4,440.00
		Expenditure	
252	245	Auditors	260.00
1090	1090	Clerk's Salary	1,400.00
0	115	Clerk's Expenses	200.00
0	0	Silchester Parish Council	0.00
144	121	Hire of meeting room	144.00
120	0	Training	120.00
20	0	Books	20.00
20	51	Stationery	50.00
265	265	Insurance	280.00
120	121	Subscriptions HALC	124.00
350	576	Website	211.00
800	776	Grass Cutting etc	900.00
35	0	Parish Calendar	35.00
0	0	Trees	0.00
30	29	Subscriptions CPRE	30.00
100	100	Donations CPRE (section 137)	100.00
15	15	Subscription GLEAM	15.00
0	0	Other Section 137 donations	0.00
300	334	Jubilee Mugs	0.00
440	432	Jubilee Beacon	0.00
600	588	Memorial Clean	0.00
0	0	Information Commissioners Office Registration	35.00
4701	4858	Total Expenditure	3,924.00
		Net result	
-£551.00	-£872.00		£516.00
Actual Balance at 31/3/12			£1,260.00
Actual Balance at 28/10/2012			£356.00
Target Balance for 31/03/2013			£300.00