**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY 12TH APRIL 2012 AT THE GUILD HALL,**

**ASTON CANTLOW**

**Present:** Cllr. Harvey, Chairman,Cllr. Hardy, Cllr. Findlay, Cllr. Simmons, Cllr. Pemberton, District Cllr. Sir William Lawrence and six members of the public.

 Mrs. S. Edkins, Mr. W. Evans, Mr. P. Somerfield, Mr. S. Law, Mr. M. Gloster and Mr. T. Twynam.

**Apologies:** County Cllr. Richard Hobbs

Cllr. Harvey welcomed the members of the public and thanked them for attending the meeting.

**Minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 2011:**

These were approved and signed.

**Chairman’s Report:**

Cllr. Harvey first of all thanked Cllr. Simmons for getting the Parish Council back on an even keel to enable a good start to the new year. She then gave the meeting a full update of the progress made and the initiatives undertaken by this council. Full report attached on page 7.

**Annual Accounts for 2011/12**

The Income & Expenditure account had been circulated prior to the meeting.

 Cllr. Simmons reported on the accounts explaining that following a detailed analysis of the council’s long term financial health it was realised that the Parish Council was heading for insolvency if it continued to draw on reserves to balance its budget.  It had been decided that the priority was to bring the council’s finances into balance and in line with recommended best practice regarding the adequacy of its reserves, contingency allowance within budgets, and maintenance of an earmarked fund for asset maintenance & replacement.

 Mr. Gloster and Mr. Evans requested sight of the Income and Expenditure account and a copy was passed to them for consideration. Both expressed their dismay that grants had not been awarded to the Village Hall for the playground and the PCC for maintenance of the churchyard. It was explained that a specific additional sum of £1,000 was included in the 2012-13 precept and the decision had been taken that it should be allocated following a participative budgeting exercise to ensure that there is a proper mandate and support for such grant aid from council tax payers. Mr. Gloster said he thought the Parish Council could have advised in advance that no grants or donations would be made during 2011/12.

 Cllr. Simmons asked whether the Village Hall receives any other

 donations for maintenance of the playground and Mr. Gloster advised that donations are received from the honesty box at the caravan site which help towards this.

 It was agreed that when reviewing the Standing Orders in the near future we must include a paragraph indicating that important information has to be provided in writing.

 Numerous questions were asked and items queried, in particular the figure of £4,216.84 for General Administration.

 Again it was explained that in the region of £3,000.00 was from the restricted fund balance. Mr. Gloster requested a breakdown of this figure.

 Mr. Evans expressed his concern at the rise in the Council Tax for 2012/13 and asked why the Parish Council had requested such a large increase.

Cllr. Harvey advised that £2,500.00 had been added to the Precept to enable the Parish to secure improved Broadband services. Balvinder Heran, SDC, had asked if the Parish Council could make a contribution in the region of £60 per property and it was agreed that the most satisfactory way of achieving this was through the Precept. By doing this we are assured by SDC that this will have a positive impact on any work schedules.

 Mr. Evans queried the intention of the Parish Council becoming a Quality Council as he understands the Clerk has to be qualified and two thirds of the Councillors have to be elected, neither of which are applicable at present. Cllr. Harvey responded that these are the only two outstanding requirements and it is hoped that both can be achieved in the not too distant future.

The other question asked by Mr. Evans is why draft minutes are not posted on the website. Cllr. Harvey advised that at times Councillors may wish changes to be made and it had been proposed and agreed that minutes would not be placed on the website until they are approved. She pointed out that a brief report of each meeting is available in the Parish magazine. Furthermore Cllr Findlay advised that now the council meets on a monthly basis there is very little delay in information being made available – and where there is a question this could be directed to the Clerk or the individual could attend the next meeting and raise it.

 The question of work to the ditch in Brook Road was raised and Cllr. Simmons advised that the hold up is due to waiting for Western Power to move the electricity pole. Cllr. Findlay said she thinks this might be imminent as the immediate neighbours had received notification that they will shortly be having a break in their power supply. Cllr. Simmons confirmed that a new hedge is to be planted and also that Peter Bones, WCC Flood Risk Manager, is aware of all concerns.

 Ms. Edkins, owner of Meadow Furlong caravan site, had very kindly attended the meeting in case any concerns were raised by residents. Cllrs. expressed their appreciation to her.

**Issues of Particular Local Importance:**

 **Broadband:** Mr. Phil Summerfield, our local Broadband Champion, provided an update as attached on page 4.

 Cllr. Simmons proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Summerfield for taking on this role.

 **Bus Services:** Mr. Steve Law, Wilmcote & Aston Cantlow Bus Group, attended the WCC Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee this morning to participate in the discussions under heading 4 of the Agenda; The Community Impact of Bus Service Reductions. He outlined his report on this meeting which is attached on page 5.

 A vote of thanks was also proposed to Mr. Law for fighting the cause regarding the bus service changes.

**Other matters raised by an Elector of the Parish:**

 No further matters were raised and Cllr. Harvey declared the meeting closed at 9.00 p.m.

Aston Cantlow Parish Meeting

12th April 2012

Broadband update – Phil Summerfield

1. I am your ‘Local Broadband Champion’ – WCC role to support and help our Parish.
2. Broadband today – No plan for Great Alne Exchange to get ‘Infinity’. Speed is poor in Aston Cantlow and unacceptable in outlying hamlets like Newnham.
3. Broadband future target is to deliver 100% at >2Mb and 90% Superfast at >24Mb.
4. So who’s paying? - Funding for upgrades from Govmt+WCC-SDC+(Suppliers such as BT) based on Black/Grey/White rating where White is the lowest and will receive funds/upgrades. SDC has over 50% of population in this low rating. A contribution has been asked for by SDC through Balvinder Heran from Parish Councils based on approximately £60.00 per property, this amount has been included in the Parish Council precept for 2012/13 in order to strengthen our position.  The amount raised, £2,500.00  -  has now been ring fenced by ACPC specifically for this project .
5. Local Broadband Plan is now approved and will fund £8M to Stratford District, (half from Govmt, half from WCC). Additional sum will come from contractor (BT?).
6. Contractor will be appointed in December 2012.
7. Focus will be on current speed + DEMAND
8. HOW CAN YOU MAKE THIS HAPPEN? –> Please tell your neighbours and friends – we have to show that we have a very high demand for superfast Broadband. Letters sent to SDC in 2011 were good. Now need 100% responses to WCC Broadband survey – [www.warwickshire.gov.uk/superfastbroadband](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/superfastbroadband) You will find 2 surveys, one Residential, one for Business – Please complete both if you do work at home of any kind. Please tick POOR for current service. Please tick all boxes for what you want to use it for – video, films etc – there is no commitment from you here.
9. SDC meeting 16th May 7pm-8.30pm
10. I will receive new materials from WCC soon including paper copies for people without Broadband so we must encourage a 100% response.
11. Superfast Broadband will add to your house value so is worth having

**REPORT FROM STEVE LAW, WILMCOTE & ASTON CANTLOW BUS**

**GROUP**.

I attended the WCC Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 12 April 2012, to participate in the discussions under heading 4 of the Agenda; The Community Impact of Bus Service Reductions.

On 15 February 2011 WCC’s Cabinet approved and confirmed budget cuts of £1.3m (a 43% cut) to bus services throughout the county. This was to include a complete withdrawal of evening bus services, without taking into consideration of loadings, revenue generated, or impact on communities and passengers, a fact explicitly made clear by the WCC officials present.

Since this announcement was made and implementation began, and with extensive media coverage, complaints came from every MP, 57 out of 62 CC’s, over 100 PCC’s and Town Councils, and thousands of telephone calls, emails and letters from the public and 15 petitions have been received.

Summarising before discussions began Cllr Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways, admitted that it was the most difficult and demanding policy implementation that he had ever undertaken. He also expressed surprise that the majority of complaints were from rural areas of the county, such as ours. At no time did any of the cabinet members present, who took the decision, attempt to justify their actions.

It was my intention to ask that the COSC wait on the WRCC & WALC surveys being conducted and analysed before any COSC recommendations were made. In addition I was able to point out that the discontinuation of the 29 service was surprising considering the number of towns and villages it served, it’s usage and cost. The WCC’s officers present appeared to agree with this.

At the end of the discussions, excluding the ruling Cabinet members present, it was clear there was considerable opposition, and negative impacts on local communities, resulting from the actions taken last year by the Cabinet.

In conclusion the Chairman, Cllr John Whitehouse, proposed that during the next 6 months the following actions should be undertaken. A comprehensive consultation to include the results of the WRCC & WALC survey, to consult locally service by service (to include detailed costings of each service broken down into daily cost), it’s impact locally, across the county especially including access to Hospitals, and present options for each service.

Agreed unanimously.

I think that we must work in tandem with all other bodies covering the affected area of the service 29 to put as much pressure on as possible to re-instate this route. The recommendations of the COSC meeting are a positive step in this direction.

Stephen Law

13 April 2012

CHAIRMANS ANNUAL REPORT 2011/2012

The year started out really with there being a full contingent of councillors making up ACPC, due to several new members being co-opted – Peter Reid and Lydia Pemberton. Unfortunately as many of you will know, Cllr Reid was taken ill a few months back and has therefore had to step down. We started by setting our priorities which were:

* Continuing with the development of the Community Website
* Achieving Quality Status
* Flood Relief
* Broadband Improvement
* Local Transport Issues
* Neighbourhood Planning
* Participative Budgeting

Apart from the list there was of course the ‘business as usual’ duties of the council, whereby we monitor the state of the parish roads/verges/footpaths, assets and any other areas that are identified as needing our attention.

The Website continues to be popular with both residents and visitors, we monitor the number of hits and identify where those hits are coming from which makes interesting reading. From that we can see that people within our community do look at what events are coming up – they look at the ‘hot topics’ and they look at the minutes of the parish meetings. Visitors from outside the region tend to look at places of interest/where to stay/ and so on.

We will continue to develop the website over the coming year and would welcome hearing from parishioners about any enhancements/changes that they would like. Just let us know if anything springs to mind.

The Council continued to work on achieving Quality Status following from the initiatives started during 2010/11. After doing a progress check we found that we were about 85% complete – the only outstanding items were having a Qualified Clerk and a fully elected council. The good news is that our clerk Mrs. Liz Butterworth has been investigating the routes open to her to obtain the necessary Qualification and through the elections this year we hope to achieve the fully elected council item.

The advantage to the Parish of ACPC obtaining Quality Status is really important now that the government has published the Localism Bill through which many services will be pushed down through the councils to Parishes where there is a demonstrable ability for them to take on significant initiatives. The capability would be demonstrated by having achieved Quality Status which is why the outgoing council are recommending that this initiative be continued in order to safeguard our position in being able to represent Aston Cantlow Parishoners.

Flood Relief was the next of our initiatives and this centred on identifying – together with Mr. Peter Bones – the areas of greatest risk within the parish and then being able to prioritise and agree any actions proposed by the District or County Council. Cllr Simmons and Cllr Twyman (since stepped down) walked the parish with Mr. Bones and together they made note of all the problem areas and the outcomes to the parish from flooding.

Since then we have been informed that a significant budget has been identified which will now enable work to be started on putting in place some flood relief plans. Some of you will already have noticed that the work has commenced with the removal of the hedge at the lower end of the village, and some land drains having been dug out on Salters Lane. Work will continue over the coming months which we anticipate will have a significant positive impact on the village.

Cllr Simmons, who is retiring from the council this year , has agreed to become our local Flood Champion so he will continue to work on this high priority initiative on our behalf – reporting progress to the ACPC on a regular basis so that we can monitor progress and report it back to you all. We are very grateful to Cllr. Simmons for agreeing to take on this very important role.

ACPC were made aware through a number of channels that Broadband improvements within the District were a high priority and as such there could be plans afoot to improve services within the communities. The major driver for this is the Government and locally SDC have expressed a desire to give everyone in the District the opportunity to participate in council meetings through the internet – of course in order to be able to do that all areas in the district need to have the capacity to do so which currently is not the case.

The good news here is that we were quickly able to identify a local Champion for Broadband Mr. Phil Summerfield from Newnham who is both knowledgeable in this area and could make the time available to keep on top of this for us. We made contact with the Project Head at SDC – Ms. Balvinder Heran who agreed to come to one of our meetings to make a presentation to parishioners about the plans, timescales and outcomes of this initiative. Her information was well received with the majority of those attending the meeting agreeing that this should be high on our list of priorities. We identified that in order to secure a strong position ‘in the queue for upgrade work’, it would be beneficial for us to make a contribution to costs. Therefore a decision was made to raise money through the Parish Precept which has now been done. That has secured our position which is really great news . We are anticipating work starting either later this year or early next (2013) on this project which will mean that all houses in the parish will have an effective Broadband service. What that means of course is that business will be better able to run their businesses, individuals will be enabled to work from home and those of you that enjoy music and film will be able to download them in a reasonable time scale. It also means that when we watch iplayer or catch up tv the buffering won’t be such a problem as it is now.

We have recommended that the incoming council continues to push ahead with this initiative and Mr. Summerfield has kindly agreed to continue his position as our Broadband Champion.

The cancellation of Bus Services without proper consultation was as many of you are aware quite a significant for many villages within Warwickshire and beyond and Aston Cantlow was no different. We are fortunate to have another local Champion in Steve Law who kindly puts focus and muscle into this initiative ensuring that he keeps us updated with regards to progress or further initiatives. At this point in time there are no plans to reinstate the evening bus services – but we haven’t given up hope and again our recommendation to the incoming council is to continue monitoring the situation and putting forward forcibly our position. Mr. Law has very kindly agreed to continue to be our Transport Champion.

The last two items, the Neighbourhood Planning and the Participate Budgeting process came along later during the year. As many of you will have seen through the Village Vine updates, a Neighbourhood Planning working group was set up – and held the first 2 meetings which were positive. However, due to some lack of clarity from Government and District it was felt that we needed to undertake a bit more background research before pushing this ahead. The Neighbourhood plan is important to all of us as it gives us a platform through which we can express views about the development of our Parish – how it grows – in what area that growth happens or if indeed we don’t want any growth or changes. We believe this will take around 9 months to achieve and will involve everyone in the village through questionnaires and interviews and where possible involvement. Once again we have recommended that the incoming council keeps this as a priority for next year.

Participative Budgeting was the final area of focus for us. We felt that it was important (particularly in light of the localism initiatives and also best practice working standards) to involve all of the parish in decisions around how we spend any monies locally. Given that we only have around 225 households our precept is not that great. A lot of it is already earmarked to ensure that the council can continue to operate and represent the parish’s interests. What is left is typically around £1,000 which is not a lot of money. Therefore how we spend your money matters not just to us but to all of you we believe. In the past some automatic grants have happened without any consultation – as that was the way things were done. However, it is more common now to involve the parish in decisions about where grants or donations are made and where they believe the priorities are. That is where Participative Budgeting comes in – what it means is that we invite you to participate in our budgeting process and help us to decide which community ventures you believe we should support.

We had hoped to do this before the end of our tenure but for a variety of reasons this has not been possible. We have therefore recommended that the incoming council give this their immediate attention once they take up office to ensure that grants/donations are made without further delay.

This coming year looks to be a very positive one where we should see progress in Flood Relief – Broadband and in finishing our Neighbourhood plan as well as you all being involved more closely in the work of the council. We thank you for your continued support and assure you of ours.

Lesley Harvey

Chairman Aston Cantlow Parish Council