

# Wheathampstead Parish Council

**29 January 2009, 19.30h**

Present	Councillors:	K Stammers	(Chairman)
		A Brewster	
		I Begg	
		J Burgess	
		G Clark	
		N Clements	
		D Hills	
		N Page	
		J Turner	
		S Walford	
		A Waterfield	
		Julia Warren	(Parish Clerk)
		Press	0
		Public	3

## **36-09 APOLOGIES**

None. All councillors present, Lisa Hobden's resignation was noted.

## **37-09 PUBLIC SPEAKING**

Councillor Stammers welcomed Rev'd Brian Gwinn who spoke about the churchyard wall of St Helen's Church. Following stability surveys evidence showed that urgent action was required to avoid collapse. Restoration/rebuild would be costly (estimated at £39,756 - £46,247) and governed by English Heritage and local authority due to its Grade I listing. The Church's Parochial Church Council had sought, unsuccessfully, grants to assist with the rebuild. The wall, separating churchyard and WPC land was a feature of the village and thus an approach was made for council grant funding.

Councillors were supportive to St Helen's needs, confirmed that financial support would be considered along with the precept requirement and as appropriate support for any external grant application by St Helens would be given. Suggestions regarding rearranging the churchyard wall were given to Rev'd Gwinn which he confirmed the PCC would consider.

## **38-09 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors G Clark declared a personal interest in Minute 51-09, Grant application for St Helen's churchyard wall, as an active member and bellringer at St Helen's Church.

**39-09 MINUTES OF COUNCIL**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2008 and 22 December were approved subject to revision of Minute 5 (22 December) final paragraph to read, 'although Wheathampstead Parish Council was charging an hourly rate for Freedom of Information requests, Councillor Begg was pleased that this did not set a precedent as other councils did likewise.'

**Resolve To confirm the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2008 and 22 December 2008, as amended, and for these to be signed by the Chairman.**

**40-09 MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

The minutes of the Finance Committee of 20 January 2009 were approved.

The following committee reports were received:

Memorial Hall Management Committee	25 November 2008
Allotments Committee	2 December 2008
Village Day Committee	11 December 2008
Highways & Public Transport Committee	15 December 2009
Rights of Way & Commons/Environment Committee	16 December 2008 13 January 2009
Playing Fields & Youth Committee	6 January 2009
Village Plan Committee	12 January 2009

It was agreed that the names of committees be reviewed at the February 2009 Parish Council Meeting

**Resolved 1 To approve the minutes of the Finance Committee of 20 January 2009.**

**2 To receive the reports of the following committees:**

<b>Memorial Hall Management Committee</b>	<b>25 November 2008</b>
<b>Allotments Committee</b>	<b>2 December 2008</b>
<b>Village Day Committee</b>	<b>11 December 2008</b>
<b>Highways &amp; Public Transport Committee</b>	<b>15 December 2009</b>
<b>Rights of Way &amp; Commons/Environment Committee</b>	<b>16 December 2008</b>
	<b>13 January 2009</b>

**Playing Fields & Youth  
Committee 6 January  
2009**  
**Village Plan Committee 12 January  
2009**

**3 To review, and change as appropriate,  
committee names at the February Parish  
Council meeting**

#### **41-09 CLERK & RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER**

Following the retirement of Mrs Barbara Green in November 2008 Council interviewed and appointed Julia Warren as her successor to take up appointment formally on 5 January 2009.

Members were asked to formally appoint Julia Warren as Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer as provided in Standing Orders and Local Government Act 1972 (s151)

**Resolved To note the report and formally appoint Julia Warren as Parish Clerk (Proper Officer) and Responsible Financial Officer.**

#### **42-09 BUDGET 2009 – 2010 & PRECEPT**

The budget for 2009-10 as resolved at Minute 33-09 of Finance Committee 20 January 2009 was discussed. Three options to reduce the precept requirement were presented for further discussion by the Clerk. The need to consider the budget holistically as that of the Parish Council rather than too specifically by committees (as budgeted money could be vired following a later Council resolution) was understood. The necessity for purchase orders to be through the office to enable financial monitoring was agreed. A Parish Council precept was agreed being 'option 2' of those presented.

**Resolved**

- 1 To set a precept requirement of £190,061.10**
- 2 That the Clerk notify St Albans District Council of this precept on 30 January 2009.**
- 3 That purchase ordering be through the Parish Office rather than ad hoc.**
- 4 That Committee outturns be reviewed against budget following year end.**

#### **43-09 REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS**

It was acknowledged that Wheathampstead Parish Council's Standing Orders were out of date and in need of review and update. Councillors wished to spend more time reviewing these in detail.

**Resolved:**

- 1 To approve and adopt the Standing Orders as presented by the Clerk (based on the NALC model standing orders)**
- 2 That a further review of these newly adopted Standing Orders be undertaken in March 2009.**

#### **44-09 FINANCIAL ORDERS**

Standing Orders include reference to a number of financial matters. They should be supported with financial regulations, designed to govern the conduct of the financial transactions of the Council and improve governance. A 'model' version is available from NALC upon which the ones presented were based. Once adopted they may only be amended or varied by resolution of the Council.

Finance Committee (Minute 32-09, 20 January 2009) recommended that a draft copy be brought to Council by the Clerk with a view to adoption

**Resolved: To adopt the Financial Regulations as presented**

#### **45-09 OFFICE OPENING**

The Parish Office had been traditionally open to the public Mondays – Fridays 09.00 to 13.00 hours, which coincides with the assistant clerk's working hours. To encourage visitors to respect these times and also allow the office to complete business prior to 'lunch' it was recommended that opening times be advertised as 09.00 to 12.30 hours. This would not preclude appointments made, at mutual convenience, with the clerk.

**Resolved 1 To agree opening times as 09.30 -12.30h**

**2 That these opening times, and the appointment system, be advertised:**

- i) In the Wheathampstead Pump**
- ii) On the website**
- iii) On a wooden sign board at the Memorial Hall**

#### **46-09 OFFICE AND STAFF SECURITY**

Not precluding clearly notifying office 'opening' times on the entrance door to the Memorial Hall, internal office door, and website; almost a constant stream of visitors had been experienced during the first weeks of January 2009. A number had been able to literally walk directly into the office, others 'held' at the door at times wishing to have greater access. This was both disruptive and non conducive to efficient working, and, more importantly, unsafe.

It was noted that Councillors have a duty of care to staff, in particular lone working employees.

For both staff safety and more efficient working it was recommended that a 'hatch' be installed in the Parish Office. Visitors would be clearly visible to the officers and many enquiries, including issuing of keys to hirers, could be dealt with quickly without need for access to the office.

A quotation had been obtained to assist deliberations.

- Resolved:**
- 1 That the Council supports the need for limited and secure access to the Parish Office**
  - 2 That decisions upon the detail of design, position, contractor etc be delegated to the Memorial Hall Committee.**

**47-09 LEASE OF SUBSTATION & EASEMENTS – LAND TO EAST OF EAST LANE**

A lease, for 999 years without ground rent, regarding land to the east of East Lane, between Wheathampstead Parish Council as landlord, and EDF Energy Networks as tenant had been drawn up and awaited Council signature. EDF would be responsible for outgoings with use restricted to that of an electrical transformer substation. Various restrictions applied. A copy of the lease had been available at the parish office for councillor inspection.

Members confirmed that a wayleave free rent had been approved by the previous council administration but queried the validity of a lease without a peppercorn rent, but subject to solicitor's confirmation of acceptance agreed that the lease should be signed

- Resolved:** **Chairman and Vice-chairman, councillors Stammers & Brewster to sign the lease on behalf of the Parish Council subject to solicitor's recommendation.**

*Post meeting note: Debenhams Ottaway confirmed that a nominal sum of £1 has been included and that there was no need to reserve a peppercorn rent*

**48-09 FOLLY FIELDS PLAY AREA**

Following Councillor Brewster's successful grant application, on behalf of Wheathampstead Parish Council to DEFRA, £7,500 had been received. This COMMA (aggregate/landfill) funding is for improving play equipment. The Playing Fields and Youth Committee (Minute 5-09, 10-09) recommended to Council that this be supplemented by £4,500 from the Youth Budget (now part of the amalgamated committee). This play area, for health and safety reasons, and following RoSPA advice, is now lacking in facilities. The £12,000 following further consultation with local residents would be put towards improved facilities in particular inclusive swings and slide.

- Resolved:** **That the Parish Council supplement the £7,500 grant money with £4,500 from the current year's budget to enhance Folly Fields Play Area**

**49-09 DOG BINS**

Requests had been received for two dog bins in the Village – one at Allen Close and one at the top of the footpath which runs parallel to the Hill.

**Resolved: Clerk to write to SADC requesting that they provide this service**

**50-09 SUBSCRIPTIONS**

**Resolved: To pay the following annual subscriptions:**

- 1 Society of Local Council Clerks (£209)**
- 2 Institute of Local Council Management (£80)**
- 3 National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners Ltd (£55)**

**51-09 GRANT REQUESTS – St Helen’s Church**

Finance Committee on 20 January 2009 (Minute 33-09) recommended that the request from St Helen’s Church to assist in repair to the churchyard wall be considered fully by Council and Rev’d Gwinn spoke to members at Minute 37-09. The cost of repairs has been estimated at £39,756. The grant request was considered as part of the budget setting process at Minute 42-09. (WPC has the legal power to support this under the Open Spaces Act 1906, SS 10 - the power to maintain and keep the open space or burial ground in a good and decent state.)

**Resolved: 1 To agree grant funding of £2,500**  
**2 To feature this in the Pump.**  
**3 To support St Helen’s PCC where possible in their external funding applications.**

**52-09 GRANT REQUESTS - Wheathampstead Community Group**

A grant request had been received from Wheathampstead Community Group for their public liability and personal accident insurance of £215.58. Wheathampstead Parish Council has the legal power under LGA 1972 s137 to pay this. The Parish Council has previously supported this group.

**Resolved: To approve payment of £215.58 to Wheathampstead Community Group for insurance cover.**

**53-09 CIRCUS REQUEST**

A request had been received from Circus Tyanna to use Wheathampstead recreation grounds (playing fields) 3 – 7 June 2009. The proprietor advises that they are a family run show with domestic animals – horses, ponies and ducks

- Resolved:**
- 1 Clerk to contact local councils to ascertain their policies on circuses, eg return of land to pre-visit state (damage), insurances etc**
  - 2 To establish a comparable policy for Wheathampstead in conjunction with the Chairman and vice-chairman.**
  - 3 To contact Circus Tyanna stating that WPC as owners of the recreation ground have no objection in principle to its visit.**

#### **54-09 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC – OFFICE IT**

- Resolved:** **To exclude the press and public, as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business to be discussed. (For Minute 55-09)**

#### **55-09 OFFICE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

At its meeting on 22 December 2008 (Minute 6) Council set a number of objectives for its new Clerk. These included a review of the office information technology systems. Quotes had been received and being commercially sensitive, not applicable for discussion in public.

- Resolved:**
- 1 That this decision be delegated to a sub-committee comprising Clerk plus Councillors Begg, Burgess and Turner.**
  - 2 That consideration of a computerised accounts package be included.**

#### **56-09 POSTAGE**

An approach had been made to WPC concerning using a franking machine for postage. The company concerned highlighted savings over the use of stamps. Currently the Parish Council supports the local post office to purchase stamps. Members considered whether to look further and trial the franking machine and agreed to continue supporting the local economy.

- Resolved:** **To continue purchasing stamps from the Village Post Office.**

#### **57-09 ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT**

- Resolved:** **To pay the accounts per January 2009 schedule amounting to £15,390.27 Nett**

#### **58-09 PLANNING**

A request from Rainbow House Nursery Ltd had been received for support for improvements to their outdoor space. This support, which was non-financial, was requested to enable them to access grant funding from Hertfordshire County Council.

