

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN WESTMILL VILLAGE HALL on
Wednesday 18 May 2022 at 7.00pm**

Councillor: Michael McRae (Chair)

Clerk: Sarah Kubica

Present: 6 members of the public

Present: County Cllr Jeff Jones

22.021 Minutes of 2021 Meeting

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 19 May 2021 were signed as a correct record.

22.022 Report from the Chair of the Parish Council

The year 2021 again brought disruption to everyone's lives with the ongoing effects of Covid. We did however manage to hold 'face to face' parish council meetings in the village hall commencing with the AGM on the 19th May 2021, following several previous meetings been held remotely with the aid of Zoom.

Four formal WPC meetings were held in the 2021/22 financial year; these being May, September and December 2021 and March 2022.

We operated with 5 parish councillors, therefore had a vacancy which was filled by co-opting parishioner James Beaven in December 2021.

Sarah Kubica continued to carry out the duties of our **Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer** – our only employee. Sarah carried out an excellent job and made a significant contribution to the running of our parish council. She demonstrates initiative, commitment and efficiency to this important role, which is much appreciated by all our Parish Councillors. One of our Councillors has an ongoing dialog with **Hertfordshire County Council Highways** to report potholes and road issues to Highways to try to get these repaired as quickly as possible.

Fly-tipping is an increasing problem to many parishes, Westmill being no exception. It has not helped with the Buntingford tip not reopening after Covid shut downs, however, much of the rubbish tipped appears to come from commercial activities, with debris including old tiles, plumbing items, paint cans, off cuts of wood, etc which is just dumped on the verges or in a field gateway.

One of our Councillors contacts East Herts Council, where fly-tipping has occurred on a highway verge, who usually respond fairly quickly to get this removed.

On Friday afternoon 1st October a number of travellers arrived at a field on Cherry Green Lane. This was immediately followed by 2 large mobile homes, several touring caravans and equipment being delivered to the site.

Over the weekend many large trucks with hard-core, diggers and machinery arrived. The whole field was converted from agricultural field to residential use within 2 days. This unauthorised development and change of use on this field were reported to East Herts Council, who then managed to obtain a High Court Injunction Order that was served on the occupants for work to stop with immediate effect. This was ignored and work continued, so EHC were again made aware of this and their enforcement officers visited the site.

A planning application was then submitted by the occupants for a change of use of the land for '2 Gypsy and Traveller residential pitches, accommodating the siting of 2 mobile homes, 4 touring caravans and 2 dayroom / amenity buildings, alongside the formation of an access road, areas of hard standing, provision for foul water drainage and widening the site entrance onto Cherry Green Lane'.

This is now going through the formal planning process, but is taking much longer to obtain a decision that we would have expected. We continue to liaise with EHC for any progress on a decision to this retrospective planning application.

Other planning applications for our parish are shared with all parish councillors, then if concerns

or objections are raised these are submitted to EHC for their consideration when deciding these applications.

WPC carry out ongoing **risk assessments** for the land and assets they are responsible for, which are then reviewed at each parish council meeting.

The village green grass was maintained throughout the 2021 growing season by a local garden maintenance contractor. WPC also appreciates and thanks a local resident who cuts the grass verge on the high street each week at no cost to the parish council.

The **village litter picking** and emptying of litter bins has continued to be carried out by a Westmill resident, funded by EHC.

A few residents also try to keep the lanes around the village free from litter which is an ongoing task and we thank them for their efforts.

The **two old benches** on the village green that were located under the large Lime tree were removed in February 2022, fully refurbished and relocated back to new positions on the same green. This work was carried out by another of our parish councillors with the help and support by Ed Pearce from Pearce's Farm Shop. The parish council and residents appreciate the excellent work that has been done to restore these benches, so thank you to those involved. **WPC**

Councillors are now moving into their last year of the four year term of office, which ends next May 2023.

The present councillors will be required to submit their application to East Herts Council if they wish to continue for a further term of office. Westmill parishioners will also be made aware that a new parish council will be formed at the AGM in May 2023.

Anyone interested in serving their community will be encouraged to apply to join the parish council, where they will be a total of 6 councillor positions available to be filled. If more than 6 applications are received by East Herts Council, this will involve a local election to be held in this hall in early May 2023 to make up the new Parish Council.

I now refer briefly to the Greg Trust, who continues to own and manage some important village facilities, including the Village Hall, Recreation Field, Playground and the village allotments.

The Trust was managed by FIVE Trustees throughout 2021 which continue into this year.

The Trust spent a significant amount of time throughout 2021 in discussion with the Charity Commission and Almshouse Association to update the scheme to meet today's requirements. The Trust was initially set up by Mary Greg in the 1920's when she donated some properties and land to the village for the benefit of residents.

Following consultations with all residents, over a period of time, the new Scheme was approved by the Charity Commission in December 2021.

There have been several community activities and initiatives that have been launched in the village in the past year, these include the popular Croquet Club meeting in the playground each Wednesday, (even throughout the winter months), a Christmas 'lighting up' event for the village children and the creation of a small nature reserve in the Twitchell.

These community initiatives are welcomed both by our residents and the parish council, who offer their thanks to those involved in creating and making these events popular in our lovely village.

This year we also look forward to the return of the **Westmill Art Exhibition** over the August Bank Holiday weekend. Although this could not be held for the past two years – due to Covid – this year will be the 35th Year of this popular and successful village event. Finally, I wish to thank my fellow Councillors, along with our Parish Clerk for their commitment and involvement in dealing with village issues and the personal support they have provided to me and WPC.

This concludes the chairman's report for the 2021/2 year.

22.023 Open Session

Open session, no matters were raised.

22.024 The meeting closed at 7.10pm