

ST STEPHEN PARISH

IN THE DISTRICT OF ST.ALBANS, COUNTY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD AT GREENWOOD PARK COMMUNITY CENTRE, TIPPENDELL LANE, AL2 3HW ON THE 30 APRIL 2015 AT 7.30 pm

Present: Councillor Mick Freeman (Chair of the Parish Council) in the Chair
St Stephen Parish Residents

Minutes: Mrs J Pienaar (Clerk to the Parish Council)

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Cllr Freeman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Members of the Council.

### 1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 MAY 2014

The minutes were approved by a show of hands and signed by the Chair as a true record.

### 2. School book presentations

The Chairman briefly outlined the Parish Council's Sponsored School Books scheme. The Chairman presented books to the representatives and pupils from Mount Pleasant Lane JMI School, Killigrew Primary School and Park Street C of E School. Cllr Getley collected the books on behalf of How Wood Primary School.

### 3. ANNUAL REPORTS

#### (a) Report from the Chairman

The Chairman said, *It has been my honour and privilege to have been the Chairman of St. Stephen Parish for the last 12 months. As always the Parish has been extremely busy working on behalf of the residents and I will touch briefly on some matters as a fuller picture will be presented by the respective chairman of the various committees and I will further address you on planning matters.*

*We continue as a Parish to strive to improve the facilities for the residents and areas that come under this umbrella are items such as the open spaces, which provide the various sports facilities. We continue to receive praise from the Frogmore cricket club in respect of the vast improvements that have been made to the pitch at the Park Street Recreation Ground and I thank our dedicated Grounds Team for all the hard work they put into maintaining and improving the various sports facilities. Park Street Recreation Ground is still owned by the District Council and it is the ambition of this Parish Council to take over this ownership. The Park Street Pavilion has been fully refurbished internally.*

*A great deal of work has been undertaken and completed at Greenwood Park with the exterior and interior improvements.*

*A defibrillator has been installed on the outside of the Greenwood Park building. A large percentage of the cost for this vital piece of equipment was borne by the various user groups of the facilities. The instructions for its use are simple and apparently you cannot cause somebody harm with its use if the machine detects a heartbeat.*

*For the first time the Parish in November hosted the Remembrance Day service at the Parish War Memorial. It proved ever more popular than the previous year. It is very encouraging for us to see more and more of the youth organisations participating with many of them laying posies and wreaths in memory to the fallen. This year was particularly poignant as it marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the commencement of WW1 and a wreath was laid in memory of the Unknown Soldier. This event has now become so popular that we are in talks with the police as to how the main road can be closed off for the duration of the service, as there now is insufficient room for those participating to stand safely on the pavements.*

*Our 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Carol Concert took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> December and once again was a resounding success and it is put in perspective when comments received from residents are received, such as "We know Xmas has arrived when we attend the Carol Concert". Centre stage was commanded by Larry, a real lamb, who I must confess was a little bit bigger than I had anticipated. Fortunately a bucket of food kept him placid whilst on stage as he had a full set of horns to compliment his size. I thank Penny Farmer for supplying Larry. The event was attended by our MP, Anne Main, together with the deputy Mayor Cllr Janet Churchard. Entertainment was provided by How Wood, Park Street and Mount Pleasant Schools, together with a mixed choir drawn from the local churches. The music being provided by the Watford Brass Band . The collection in aid of Dementia UK raised £446.*

*Last year we held a much larger Armed Forces Day event and this raised £1,130 toward Combat Stress. Again the Parish will be hosting Armed Forces Day in June, but I will leave Cllr Kerry to tell you more about that. Bus stops continue to figure prominently in our concerns. I will leave Cllr Bell, who is the Cllr that is closely associated with this matter to tell you more later on.*

*It is anticipated that next May the Parish will once again be hosting the Bi-annual Parish Festival and you will be kept abreast of dates and developments if and when they occur.*

*Other items that you will hear about this evening are the Parish in Bloom, the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, Love Parks week and trees and woodlands, all of which will presented by the respective Cllrs involved.*

*If you didn't already know that the Post Office in How Wood has closed. This is a great loss to the residents, bearing in mind that two other Post Offices in Park Street have already closed. Great efforts have been made by Parish Councillors to identify suitable premises in the vicinity that could accommodate a Post Office, but to date this has been unsuccessful. However other avenues are being explored as to where Post Office Services could be located and as soon as there are any developments we will keep you informed.*

*After some years of not increasing the precept to continue to provide excellent services and facilities, as well as progress new initiatives and projects, we as a Parish felt that we had no option to increase the precept by 2%. This equates to 2.5pence per week or £1.24p per annum for a band 'D' household. Unlike the County and District Councils we as a Parish do not receive a share of the business rates or a share of the Government incentive which would have enabled us to keep the precept at no increase.*

*I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for attending and trust that there will something of interest for you. It goes without saying that events such as this and all the other events that are hosted by the Parish do not happen on their own. A lot of hard work goes into these and this would not possible without the valuable help and guidance of the Clerk, Mrs Pienaar and all her staff, which includes the grounds team and our maintenance man, all of whom come to our assistance on numerous occasions and hopefully continue to do so. By way of closing I had the honour of representing the Parish at the Watford North Scouts St. Georges Day Parade, last Sunday. I was very warmly received and the Parish were thanked for maintaining a close liaison with the Bricket Wood Scouts, who come under the Watford North Scouts.*

## **(b) Reports from the Committees**

### **Woodlands Committee**

*Cllr Bell said, 'Volunteers and the grounds team continue to manage and care for the two woodlands owned by your Parish Council. Many of you will have attended the Open Day held in Blackgreen Wood where woodland management and crafts were demonstrated. Residents particularly enjoyed watching the horse teams at work and having a go at some of the traditional skills used by woodsmen of the past. On the day a number of people signed up to help look after the wood and since then they, and supported by the Friends of Hanstead Wood, have improved access by clearing holly and brambles and also installed two benches for quiet contemplation of the natural world. For those of you who haven't discovered it, there is a new entrance to Blackgreen Wood from Park Street Lane via a small bridge just south of where the lane goes over the M25.*

*Volunteers have also been busy in St. Julians Wood carrying out a number of tasks which included placing brash (cut branches) along the edges of the woodland paths to help protect the bluebells. Unfortunately the paths have started to become wider and as a result the bluebells at the edges have suffered so hopefully the brash will now give some protection. We have had mixed results with some tree saplings that were planted last year with hawthorn and hazel doing well but the oaks appeared to have vanished however we shall keep an eye on the*

survivors. You will also see some work being carried out by our grounds staff who handle the heavier tasks in the wood. They have been thinning and coppicing some of the trees in selected areas to increase the light falling on the woodland floor. This will help the dormant seedbanks in the soil to germinate and in the long term regenerate the wood. As part of the management of both woodlands, this Council has entered into a contract with the Forestry Commission which will help us look after the woods for the next 5 years. This scheme allows us to claim grants towards the costs of carrying out various tasks such as tree surveys, felling, holly clearance and access improvements. Through the scheme we have been granted enough to purchase information boards which are to be installed at the entrances to both of the woods.

Not strictly part of woodland work, our volunteers have also enjoyed carrying the old craft of hedge laying along the cycle path at the rear of the allotments in Greenwood Park. This has greatly improved the state of what was a very old hedge but is now restored in health and vigour.'

### **Buildings Committee**

Cllr Brannen said, 'It's been another busy year for the buildings committee as we continually strive to maintain and improve the building facilities with what seems like an ever decreasing budget.

So this year in the Greenwood Park sports hall we have replaced the lighting with a low energy phased system, the floor has been sanded, relined and resealed and the walls painted. It looks fabulous and comments from the users have been very positive with one saying how much nicer it was than Westminster Lodge.

There are plans afoot to extend and improve the tennis and cricket club facilities at Greenwood Park pavilion.

The plans and grant funding necessary to carry forward this project is being driven by Greenwood Park Tennis Club with enthusiastic agreement from Council. If St Albans District Council approve the scheme and the grant funding is successful, then the pavilion will be extended and improved at no cost to the Council.

Has anyone noticed the new UPVC cladding to Greenwood Park? This scheme replaced the rotting wooden cladding, is maintenance free and will last for many years to come.

At the Parish Centre, the 18<sup>th</sup> Century barn is in the process of returning to the original black colour which will also preserve the Oak cladding.

We continue to investigate how best to provide a fully accessible public access point. The suggestion is to utilise a small part of this hall and the coat lobby. We are waiting to see how much this will cost.'

### **Leisure Committee**

Cllr Pryce said, 'The leisure committee looks after all aspects of leisure supplied and organised by the Parish Council. This includes all six parks and open spaces; the children's play areas within those parks and open spaces; the adult exercise equipment at Park Street Recreation Ground together with some of the activities in the Parish premises.

The equipment within the children's play areas has to be in tip-top condition making a safe and sound environment and so it is checked once a week by our grounds team and annually by a specialist company authorised to make those checks. At the last check all the equipment received a low risk rating – the lowest that can be achieved – however, many of you will know that some of the equipment is old and although we try to keep it in good condition we have had to remove various pieces which were potentially dangerous. We have plans to put new equipment in Greenwood Park, Park Street Recreation Ground and some of the other areas, money permitting.

All the open spaces are used not only by residents but people who come from far and wide Greenwood Park in particular has a special attraction as it offers a wide range of activities, outdoors, football, cricket, tennis, indoors Basketball, Bowls, Badminton, Martial Arts, Dance and exercise, it also has ample parking space.

In 2012/13 The Council applied for and were successful in getting the Green Flag Award for Greenwood Park, we have applied again this year for Greenwood Park and Park Street Recreation Ground, here's hoping we will be successful with both.

We have also applied for the Park Street Recreation Ground and Woodbury Fields to be devolved to the Parish – both being owned by the St. Albans District Council but leased to the Parish.

We would like more people to use the parks and open spaces as it provides exercise and fresh air to parents and children alike and to encourage that we are again taking part the National 'Love Parks' week in July.

*Don't forget that once a year we have an open forum where you can meet the Councillors and Staff to talk about your needs, wants and desires, comments and criticisms as far as the use of the Councils premises and leisure in the parish is concerned, we look forward to seeing you.'*

### **Planning Committee**

*Cllr Freeman said, 'Planning applications continue to arrive at the Parish in ever increasing numbers and it is evident that St. Albans and the surrounding areas are a desirable place to live.*

*Major applications that are of interest include the proposal to build a Sainsbury's convenience store on the garden adjacent to the Three Hammers public house. A great deal of opposition came from residents to this application and the SADC Planning Referrals Committee on principle refused the application. However the applicant had gone directly to appeal on the grounds that the application was not determined within the time limit. The outcome awaits.*

*The ongoing application to redevelop the former HSBC site in Bricket Wood is still pending and when the latest application, which had reduced the number of dwellings being built went before the Planning Referrals Committee it was refused. It is anticipated that this application will now go to appeal. Again the outcome awaits.*

*It was disappointing news that the latest battle to stop the Rail Freight Terminal was dismissed by the court. However the fight is not over as SADC have decided to challenge the decision of the court and again the outcome awaits. For those who have done so I would urge you to sign the online petition to the County Council urging them not to sell the land to Helioslough, the developers.*

*A major application has been received for the redevelopment of the former Harperbury Hospital site in Harper Lane. This is for the erection of 206 dwellings on the site, public open spaces and associated infrastructure. As part of this application it is proposed that the bridge at the junction of Harper Lane and the A5183 be controlled by traffic lights, thereby making the bridge a one way system. It is also proposed that on the existing bridge is a 2.5m cycle/footpath. Again the outcome awaits.*

*Applications for permitted developments continue to come in and Mr. Pickles has recently announced plans to streamline the system, thereby making it easier to achieve permitted development.*

*You will hear later about the emerging Neighbourhood Plan and this will be your opportunity to shape the future of building within the Parish.*

*A further application has been received regarding the proposed Hilton Hotel opposite the Noke Hotel, and in this application it is proposed to reduce the size of the hotel.*

*On a point of good news, the application to build 10 dwellings on Green Belt land to the rear of Orchard Drive was refused, both by SADC and on appeal on the grounds of inappropriate development within the Green Belt. The Parish has in the past held public consultation for major planning applications where it is thought appropriate. This gives residents the opportunity to view the full size plans, without having to rely on going on line. This has proved successful in applications such as the Three Hammers, Cherry Hill, HSBC, the Rail Freight and the Hilton Hotel to name a few. It is the view of the Parish that we will continue to hold these consultations where it is deemed appropriate.*

*The Parish is surrounded by the Metropolitan Green Belt and some of this is already owned by potential developers, who are awaiting the green light to develop. However rest assured that we as a Parish will continue to resist development in the green belt wherever it is deemed appropriate.*

*SADC have to build extra houses by law and whilst I am not in any way attempting to defend them, they are under intense pressure as to where these houses will be built. The brown fill sites are virtually exhausted and that therefore only leaves the Green Belt. The latest proposals from SADC with regards to future development, concerning the Green Belt is not with this Parish, but to the north of St. Albans and towards Hemel Hempstead. Thank you and if you have any questions regarding planning I will be happy to answer any questions afterwards. I have already thanked many people for their help and I would like to thank Carol Hardy for all the help and assistance she has given to me in relation to planning.'*

### **Bus shelters**

*Cllr Bell said, 'The Parish continue a programme of maintaining our rural style bus shelters around the three villages. Checks and repairs are regularly carried out by our staff with the object of keeping residents safe and dry*

*while waiting for the bus. The older shelters are gradually being replaced by funding through our rolling replacement plan or from grants. However, because of highway restrictions for our staff to work on the A405, we have now negotiated with County to take over the two shelters near the Blackboy Pub. The Highways Agency and County are also arranging to improve access and waiting conditions at both shelters. Hopefully this work will be completed in the very near future.'*

#### **4. PRESENTATION OF AWARDS**

##### **a) Community Award presentation**

After giving a short resume of their contributions to the Parish, the Chairman presented the awards. The Community Youth Award was awarded to Cameron O'Connor, for his volunteer work at How Wood Keech Hospice charity shop.

The Community Award was awarded to Mrs Niki Dunn for, *'her dedication and inspiration to the younger generation'* in her role with Park Street Scouts.

#### **5. ST STEPHEN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Cllr Pryce said, *'This is probably the most exciting and wide ranging community event that this council has undertaken. It must involve the whole community and requires commitment and enthusiasm from those willing to take part.*

*The inaugural meeting of the Neighbourhood Plan took place on 31 March with some 60 people take part. The meeting was designed to give an overview of Neighbourhood Planning, to ask those present what they wanted for their Parish and those interested to put their names down for one of the five specific areas of interest; the answers are now being analysed. A presentation from our consultant Alison was followed by a Q & A session.*

*There are now a further three meetings which will allow those unable to get to the first meeting to hear a similar presentation with a Q & A session.*

*On 23 April the SADC Cabinet met and decided that the Parish Boundary was the appropriate boundary for the Plan. We are now keen to progress the plan and would encourage anyone interested and who was not at the first meeting to come along to one of the following meetings:*

*St. Stephen Parish Centre – Tuesday 19 May – 6.30pm – 8.30pm*

*Greenwood Park CC – Saturday 30 May – 10am – 12 noon*

*Park Street Village Hall – Thursday 4 June - 7.30 to 9.30pm.'*

#### **5. FORTHCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS**

##### **a) Communications**

Cllr Tyndale said that stage one of the new website had been launched with the same address. The aim had been to create a site that was more accessible, useful and timely with information on local services, events, news and parish facilities. Feedback was welcomed.

Cllr Tyndale said that through his involvement with the production of the Parish newsletter he aimed to make it more interesting and useful.

The Council was taking a more pro-active approach with media communications.

He attributed the success of improvements in communications down to the team in the office.

##### **b) Parish in Bloom**

Cllr Getley said that the Parish was in its third year of running the Parish in Bloom competitions. Award categories included the Best Kept Allotment, Best Back Garden, Business etc. Entry forms were available on the parish website.

##### **c) Love Parks week**

Cllr Pryce said that Love Parks was initiated by Keep Britain Tidy to encourage people to take pride in their parks and open spaces. The Parish Council would be holding a craft day at Greenwood Park during the last week of July for adults and children to indulge in visual art.

**d) Armed Forces Day**

Cllr Kerry said that this event would be held on 27 June with a small ceremony to raise the flag to show gratitude to the serving armed forces. A parade would start at 3.30pm from Hunters Ride, Bricket Wood and process to the Parish Centre. There would be memorabilia, teas and a brass band.

**e) Remembrance Day**

Cllr Getley reported that 30 people had attended in 2010. Numbers had grown over the years to around 700. The Parish Council would be organising a service at the Parish War Memorial at 2.45pm and would involve the schools, scouts, guides and brownies.

**f) Carol Concert**

Cllr Getley said that the event involved the whole parish on the first Sunday in December with a brass band. Refreshments would be provided afterwards. He thanked Mr Ian La-Riviere for his assistance since the event started in 2000.

**g) 2016 Festival**

Cllr Whittaker said that the Parish had taken on the event from Park Street Residents' Association and had combined it with the parish Arts Festival. The 2014 Festival ran over a full weekend starting on Friday evening and ending Sunday afternoon. The event showcased local talent, artists and dancers and received lots of positive feedback. The Council would like to run a similar event in 2016, the format of which had yet to be discussed. Anyone with ideas or an interest was encouraged to speak to one of the Councillors.

**6. OPEN FORUM**

The Chairman said that Members would endeavour to answer questions. Where they didn't have the answers he asked the enquirer to leave their name and contact details so that someone could get back to them.

A resident asked what the prospects were for the provision of a refreshment facility at Greenwood Park.

Cllr Freeman said that the Council was currently looking at a suitable location for a tea room in Greenwood Park. It was envisaged that the tea room would be open throughout the year for all park users.

**6. MEETING CLOSED**

The Chairman thanked everyone for being an attentive audience.

He re-iterated his thanks to Mrs Pienaar, the Clerk and the other members of staff and said that without them the Parish could not function.

He thanked the Councillors who had been responsible for organising the evening and Cllr Hurford for the catering and for organising the books for the schools. He thanked the Councillors and members of the public who had very kindly volunteered to help with the washing up. He thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm.