

# KNEBWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

**MINUTES** of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 2 May 2018 in Knebworth Village Hall at 8.00 p.m.

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Present: Mr Roger Willcocks (Chairman), Mr Kevin Burr, Mrs Rosemary Conybeare, Mr Philip Farr, Dr Graham Fothergill, Mrs Jenny Harrison, Mr Stephen Hemingway, Mr Paul Ward,

In attendance: The Clerk and seventy nine members of the public

## 1. Welcome by the Chairman

Good evening ladies and gentleman. Welcome to Knebworth Parish Council's Annual General Meeting. My name is Roger Willcocks, and I'm Chairman of the Council. Thank you very much for coming out to see us this evening.

This meeting is an opportunity for you to hear what the Parish Council has been doing upon your behalf over the past year. It is also a chance for you to ask us questions, to hold us to account, and to give us a clear sense of how we can best represent you in the future.

This is the 2018 Annual General Meeting of the Parish Council, where we tell you, the parishioners, what we, the Parish Council, have been up to, what we're planning to do, you ask us questions, and we try to answer them.

The members of the parish council are elected, but unpaid; most of us also have a full time job. Our main responsibility is the wise spending of that small part of your Council Tax we get each year, out of which we have to maintain the recreation grounds and pavilion, the village hall, the toilet in the car park and various other bits and pieces, such as Christmas lights.

We are also consulted on planning matters and we sometimes pay for professional assistance if we need to write a detailed response.

But first things first, let me introduce you to your council members:

Rosemary Conybeare - our vice chairman, Paul Ward - chairman of the planning committee, Kevin Burr - chairman of the amenities committee, Dr Graham Fothergill  
Stephen Hemingway - who is also your district councillor, although  
He's up for re-election tomorrow, Jenny Harrison and Jeremy Godfrey who joined us last year.

We're theoretically up for re-election tomorrow, but there were only eight applications for the twelve seats, so the people that stood were automatically elected unopposed. That means we have some spaces to fill, so please speak to me later if you are interested, particularly if you disagree with what we're doing; there's no point in having twelve people who always agree.

On that note I'm sorry to say that Graham Fothergill is standing down having served on the parish council for twenty years, and Kevin Burr is standing down after eight years. I'd like you to join me in thanking them for their time and effort.

Our job as councillors is to mainly to listen and advise; the clerk is the person who actually gets things done. Claire has been doing that for a long time now and she is very good at it. We would be lost without her. Thank-you Claire.

Paul has to leave early, so he's going to update us on various planning issues, and tell us some more about the neighbourhood plan.

### **5.3 Planning and Environment – Mr Paul Ward**

Again we have had an increasingly busy period.

Both on planning strategy and planning control issues effecting the Parish I will cover

1. What we do,
2. Progress on the Local Plan from North Herts District Council,
3. Progress on our Neighbourhood Planning process.
4. Some other applications impacting life of residents in the parish,
5. Our Chairman, Roger, will cover an update on The Station Pub and the Chas Lowe redevelopment in his speech

#### **1. What the Planning and Environment Committee Does**

- North Herts District Council is the Local Planning Authority. They decide upon planning applications and develop the Local Plan overall.
- We are a statutory consultee so we have a degree of influence.
- The planning applications we saw over the year range from many smaller residential property improvements through to large commercial developments.
- We listen carefully to what neighbours and other local residents tell us.
- If there are no objections from neighbours, and we see no obvious breach of planning guidelines in an application we are unlikely to raise objections.
- We are available to be contacted, and all of our meetings are open to the public if they wish to present their views in person.

#### **2. North Hertfordshire District - Local Plan update**

- It is the most significant and controversial planning matter impacting us.
- Knebworth is part of the Local Plan for North Hertfordshire.
- It is a plan for future development to 2031 drawn up by the District Council.

#### *Impact on Knebworth*

- Knebworth village classified as a Category A village.
- This means that general development will be allowed within a re-defined settlement boundary i.e. Knebworth will be expanded using Green Belt.
- Old Knebworth is identified as a Category B village – limited in-filling only.
- The rest of the parish is designated Green Belt.

- There are four main sites, three of which are currently Green Belt.
  - KB1 – north west behind Deards End Lane: 200 homes
  - KB2 – west, behind Gypsy Lane: 184 homes & primary school
  - KB3 – the Chas Lowe site in the village centre, now to be 49 assisted living flats including the sand yard as part of a retirement home
  - KB4 – east of the village, 200 homes and space for a potential secondary school as part of the site
- The total of proposals in the Local Plan is 663 homes.
- But there are more homes already going through planning, most approved. Odyssey redevelopment 70 homes was approved in May 2017. The old Hamilton's business, the old Surgery, Station House (not pub).
- These are called "windfall" to meet the district's target. In total this adds up to about new 800 homes in the village.
- There is more nearby development likely to impact Knebworth. This is due to proposals in the north end of Woolmer Green.
  - Land behind Marshalls / chocolate shop has 150 homes planned
  - Entech also has 72 homes proposed, although this has recently refused an application and there is an appeal pending.
- All told we expect there could be over 1000 new homes in and around Knebworth over the next 5-10 years. This is about a 51% increase.

#### *Our concerns*

- The Parish Council has a number of overall concerns which we have made representations to the District Council and the Planning Inspector on.
- Unnecessary use of Green Belt land around the village when alternatives are available without demonstrating exceptional circumstances (i.e. west Stevenage).
- Disproportionate scale of the cumulative developments relative to the current village, when the impact of the adjacent proposals by NHDC & WHBC.
- Lack of specific infrastructure policy proposals for Knebworth to make this development sustainable.
- There is a risk overall that delivery of the Local Plan may fundamentally change the character and identity of the village.

#### *For example*

- **Road infrastructure** – is inadequate to cope with the new sites and schools with fundamental problems like the railway bridges and Conservation Areas. This is on top of the existing parking and congestion issues.
- **Education** - A single form primary school is both inadequate for the scale (c. one entry per 500 homes) and also an unsuitable location next to the most busy and polluted section of A1M.
- **Education** – the plan from North Herts proposed space for a new 4 form secondary school on the site east of the village, near the recreation ground. However the education authority at country level disagree with this land allocation and prefer to build a bigger new secondary school north of Stevenage. We do not know where this will conclude yet.

- **Retail village centre economy** – the Plan states in the spatial strategy that Knebworth is targeted for growth “that allows the community to continue to thrive” and “supporting infrastructure and facilities will be delivered” by the Plan for Knebworth. The plan does not deliver on this commitment, for example redesignating the Chas Lowe site as predominantly residential.

*What have we done about it?*

- The Parish Council has engaged professional help to respond to the Local Plan examination and other recent windfall planning applications.
- We have also made a £2000 contribution to an independent Save Our Green Belt campaign across the district.
- The Local Plan is now being examined by the Planning Inspector after North Herts District Council approved it in 2017.
- There have been many public hearings over the last six months.
- He can decide to make changes to the plan, which may have to be consulted on again.
- We have made written representations and we have put these arguments across in person at the public hearings in February and March.

*What have we done about it?*

- We now await the planning inspector’s findings.
- It is possible that the Local Plan may be significantly modified, however it is likely that in some form it will go ahead and be approved possibly within 6 months to a year from now.
- At that point we may expect to see specific planning applications for the sites as they will no longer be in the Green Belt area.
- I believe it will be very important for us to work collaboratively with the planning authority and land owners now to ensure the best outcomes for the parish with these potential developments.
- We may not have agreed with the district’s approach but if and when it is set, we have to cope with it.
- This is from many perspectives including design, infrastructure and funding for social good in our community.
- One route to achieve this through planning policy is the Neighbourhood Plan, which I now address.

### **3. Neighbourhood Planning - update**

*What is it?*

- Power under the Localism Act 2011 to parish councils and local groups
- Allows parish councils to take the lead in creating a plan containing specific policies for an individual community.
- It fits with the National Planning Policy Framework and the district Local Plan.
- However it is different from the Local Plan, this is about Knebworth Parish.
- A Neighbourhood Plan can influence the type of development that should happen in the neighbourhood.
- It can also define certain policies, for example design standards.
- However a plan cannot conflict with strategic policies in the district Local Plan or be used to prevent development in the Local Plan.

- It has to be considered in planning applications once created.
- Previous parish plans exist but they are not used in the planning process.

*What have we done so far?*

- The Parish Council started the process to create one in 2016 for the Parish.
- It will take 1-2 years from now to complete.
- The basis we are developing the Neighbourhood Plan on is that expansion of the village will happen in some form. We want to use this process to help shape how that happens for the good of everyone in the Parish.
- We have an established Steering Group with several volunteers, to which I would like to say a public thank you for their time and effort so far.
- In particular I'd like to thank Clint Bull who chairs the group and cannot be here this evening to present unfortunately.
- A survey of residents was done in early 2017 and on this basis work streams were set up to work on the priorities identified for the parish.
  - o Housing and Character
  - o Traffic, Transport and Parking
  - o Schools and Education
  - o Wellbeing – including health and public services
  - o Local Economy including retail, bars and restaurants
  - o Environment and flooding
- Each work stream is agreeing Objectives, then fact finding to produce draft Policies. These go into an overall Neighbourhood Plan.
- The proposals will be consulted on across the Parish, then has to be reviewed by a planning inspector, then finally needs to be approved via a majority of parish voters in a Referendum.
- Consultation with all stakeholders is a fundamental part of it. This includes residents, community groups, local businesses and land owners.
- Last month we held two open days to display the progress and also gather people's input and preferences on some of the issues. We will use that input to develop the proposals further. Thank you to those who came along.
- Thank you to those who came along. You can see the material in the Hall. Please comment and provide feedback.

*What's next and what help do we need?*

- The Parish Council has engaged professional help to facilitate the Neighbourhood Plan process alongside our volunteers.
- We have started to talk to the land owners as part of the process to understand their ideas. This is important as they are part of our overall community and key to what happens in the future developments.
- If the district's Local Plan is approved then this will become vitally important.
- The Neighbourhood Plan will only happen because of the effort of volunteers who want to make a positive difference to our community.

- We are still looking for people to volunteer to help spend time to work on the specific policy areas. In particular we are in need of people to lead and work on two key areas: Traffic, Transport and Parking and Local Economy.
- Please get in touch!

#### 4. Other Developments

Finally I will highlight some other developments in the parish this last year.

- New Surgery and Library – modified plans were approved after removing the planned flats from the top of the new building. The old surgery site will become flats.
- The former Hamilton's billiards site has now had planning approved for flats and houses. Again, the Parish Council successfully objected to the original proposals as over-development with inadequate parking, and this was rejected by North Herts planning committee. A revised and cut back proposal was approved.
- Station House – is the building not to be confused with the pub but opposite it and next to the ticket office. This is going through a Change of Use process by its owners to turn it from offices into residential flats.
- These are all examples of the “windfall” I spoke to earlier, in addition to the use of the green belt land for major new sites.

I shall now hand over to our Chairman who will talk about the former Chas Lowe site and The Station Pub, two key sites in the village. Thank you for listening.

#### 2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Farr and Mr Stringer.

#### 3. Approval of the Minutes - Annual Parish Meeting 3 May 2017

Proposed by Dr Fothergill, seconded by Mr Burr and

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting, held on the 3 May 2017, be taken as read and approved as a true record.

#### 4. Chairman's Report

Looking back at last year's review, it's surprising how little has actually changed on the ground; but this is the lull before the storm.

This time last year, the North Herts Local Plan had just been passed to the planning inspector and we expected it to be looked at late last year. In fact the Enquiry In Public - at which Paul nobly represented the Parish Council - finally finished in late March, and now we're waiting to see what changes need to be made. After that there will be another six weeks of public consultation.

The parish has a longstanding policy of opposing building on the green belt, and we have done everything we can to make our position known, paying for professional assistance where necessary and funding, with other local parish councils, the save our green belt group.

It might not have been enough, and it's best to be prepared.

One day we will get a definite answer, but I think we need to assume that the Green Belt boundary will be adjusted to the east and west of Knebworth, so the land will no longer be green belt, to make space for new homes to be built between now and 2031.

So it's important that we start thinking about how that will affect Knebworth and what extra facilities we'll need to handle the extra people. The neighbourhood plan, as Paul has just described, is an important part of that, and we would very much appreciate your help in driving that forward. The parish council has very little real power, but we can facilitate meetings and encourage communication between interested parties, including developers and landowners, so again if you have any ideas please let us know.

The Chas Lowe site was bought more than a year ago by McCarthy and Stone and it has been sitting empty since. They now have permission from North Herts to build forty-something retirement flats above and behind three new shops, and two flats above a shop on the sand yard opposite. So we should expect development there to start soon. That's likely to increase the number of older people using the high street, but the developers didn't have to fund any infrastructure changes because of the nature of the development.

The Station pub's also been closed for more than a year; the developers, Market Homes in Borehamwood applied for permission to build nine flats on the pub garden, and to convert the storeroom into a flat, leaving the main building alone. Following representations from the Parish Council and the save-our-station-pub campaign, who we are happy to support, North Herts refused planning permission a couple of weeks ago. The fact that the Parish Council had registered the site as an Asset of Community Value was key to their decision. So we are waiting, again, to see what the developers will do.

In the meantime, the Lytton Arms in Old Knebworth is planning to reopen on the 17th May, a year to the day after the landlord, James Price, sadly died of a heart attack. It will be run by a company called AC Inns, which is owned by the Nye family.

Knebworth has several social media / Facebook groups which are a good way to discover what's going on locally. In particular the save-our-station-pub group have been running pop-up-pub and quiz nights here in the village hall and have a strong media presence, as does the knebworth rail users forum, for those of you interested in trains and timetables.

Talking of trains, we've got new trains and the timetables will be changing from May 20th this year; from here they'll still just run to and from Kings Cross, but you'll be able to go to Brighton from Stevenage. There does seem to be a reduction in early trains to Finsbury Park though, which could extend some journeys. One quick note: a London Terminals ticket is valid through to Moorgate via Kings Cross.

With very much appreciated help from the Village Trust we installed some cool, awesome and amazing play equipment in the 'small rec' in September and we're now looking at doing something similar in the George 5th playing fields in Old Knebworth.

We're going to replace the Christmas rope lights in Station Road;

We have a new solar-powered speed awareness sign, which is currently outside the Catholic Church, but it's going to move soon to outside the village hall;

And parking continues to be an issue; there really isn't anything I can say about that which hasn't been said before. But feel free to ask questions.

## **5. Reports from Committee Chairmen**

### **5.1 Amenities – Mr Kevin Burr**

My name is Kevin Burr and I am chairman of the Amenities committee for Knebworth Parish Council. I am not standing for re-election tomorrow, so this will be the last occasion on which you have the pleasure of sitting through one of my speeches.

The Amenities committee is responsible for three recreation grounds comprising the Recreation Grounds, Lytton Fields and King George V playing fields, the village hall, the maintenance of Norton Green Common and the amenity land at Bellamy Close. This Financial Year has been a mixed bag.

In the Recreation Grounds maintenance of the football pitches, involving 60 tonnes of top dressing as well as fertiliser and seeding, along with careful management by the groundsman has resulted in fewer matches having to be cancelled this season.

Trees on the central avenue and around the pond have been pollarded and a newly purchased leaf collector has helped keep the paths and pitches clear of leaves during the autumn months.

On the downside, the timber play equipment was set alight. This resulted on the equipment being closed for a number of weeks and a bill for £250 to cover the excess on a £2,700 insurance claim.

In July, section 106 funds and a contribution from Knebworth Village Trust enabled us to have new play equipment installed in Lytton Fields. This seems to have been well received.

The Village Hall is an important local asset. The Parish Council has supported local groups including SOS Pub, KATs Link up Luncheon Club and others with discounted rates and Knebworth Community Chorus has benefitted from the purchase of the new portable staging.

We have entered into a new fixed rate contract for gas and electricity and have had Smart meters installed to help monitor costs accurately.

The Photo-voltaic panels are continuing to perform well, income this year was £3,623 taking the total since installation to £17,283. The cost of installation was £26,617, so by 2021 they should have covered the capital outlay and be making a valuable contribution to Parish Council funds for the next fifteen or so years.

The Parish Council is working with Natural England to improve the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Norton Green Common. This last year has seen the meadow cut, trees pollarded and ditch renovation. The Parish Council would like to fence the meadow to restrict vehicle access and to allow management of the area by grazing. This is subject to permission from the Secretary of State.

2017/18 has seen a lot accomplished, it only remains for me to thank the clerk, Claire Graham, for all her hard work expertise that has made all this possible and our grounds keeper for all his hard work in the recreation grounds throughout the year.

The Parish Council, as always, is open to suggestions of facilities or improvements to our facilities and we endeavour to investigate, cost and occasionally find funding for them if they are agreed and practical.

## 7. Questions & Answers

I have lived in the village for over fifty years and have been a trustee of Knebworth Village Trust. Last month I attended the Examination in Public where the Parish Council did as much as it could to object to the expansion of Knebworth. The inspector has to review the plan and will suggest minor modifications only. My belief is that nothing more can be done pursuant to government policy. The village could have a major say in the detail.

Thirty years ago the Parish Council stopped opposing development and accepted Kerr Close and Peters Way. It worked with the developer and this resulted in the formation of Knebworth Village Trust with the sale of Station House and nearly £1M has been given back to the community. The basic message is that it is possible, if you are proactive to get good packages out of developers.

Paul mentioned dialogue with landowners. This does not prejudice the Inspector's decision. Landowners have set aside fourteen acres for a secondary school. HCC does not want one so children will have to leave the village. A few years ago there was a move to provide a secondary school. The Parish Council could support NHDC with this and convince Herts County Council to build a school.

Funds could be sought for a dedicated youth facility, improvements to the school, indoor and outdoor sport in the village. There could be a plan for a bypass on the east side of the village. The Parish Council must fight for the best packages from developers, it cannot wait for the inspector's decision because the plans will be formulated and it will be too late. It must not just oppose but influence.

A few years ago the Council took over the toilets in the car park, how is that going?

*Generally alright. NHDC was spending large sums of money keeping them open. The Parish Council made it unisex and only opens one. There is a problem of youths congregating and vandalising the toilets. The Council has looked at reducing this but it would reduce the convenience.*

*K Burr*

There is often a lot of rubbish strewn across the place in Knebworth Recreation Ground. What is being done to reduce this?

*There was a tweet about the rubbish around the youth shelter, this is minor littering. The Council does employ someone to litter pick. The youth shelter does provide a place to congregate. The fact that there is rubbish around it shows that it is being used and if it was not there the rubbish would be in other areas of the recreation grounds. The Groundsman can prioritise this area early in the day.*

*K Burr*

How much does the damage to the toilets cost?

*The damage to the timber equipment was approximately £2700 with an excess of £250, the combat cableway seat £200 each and two to four are replaced annually. The toilets must cost about £500-£700. The CCTV is limited in the recreation grounds. One offender caught on camera had to undertake limited community service.*

*K Burr*

I walk down Stevenage Road and Park Lane and the pavement is overgrown with weeds. The hedges are overgrown down one side of Park Lane. I hear about vandalism but I've never seen anyone do community service to clear pavements and hedges. Can we get some?

*Noted. There is an issue with proximity to roads.*

*R Willcocks*

What is the view of adults using the play equipment?

*There are weight restrictions on some equipment and it is for the children. However I am not sure there is much that can be done as long as it isn't damaged.*

*K Burr*

*The Parish Council is considering installing CCTV across the recreation grounds to monitor anti-social behaviour.*

*P Ward*

The burning issue is infrastructure and the proposed development. There are issues with water, sewage, roads, and schools. I have lived in over thirty places, in Texas the new infrastructure, the schools and hospitals are built before the development. Can Knebworth cope with a thousand houses? I don't see any real plan or questions answered about the infrastructure for Knebworth.

There is so much development in every community. How many developers are likely to come forward?

*The Council does not allocate the sites without it being assessed and the landowners consent.*

*P Ward*

*There is a requirement for the plan that the site is sound and developable. NHDC cannot allocate land that landowners have not put forward. Developers will come forward. I am not sure which order sites will be developed but it is down to the landowner and developer.*

*S Hemingway*

There has not been much mention of the redevelopment of Lowes. There are 47 flats and 27 spaces and no visitor spaces. Older people do not want cars, they want doctors. NHDC didn't discuss this at a full Planning Control meeting; it was approved under delegated powers. The development doesn't have affordable housing. I want people to write to the MP. It's a disaster in the village.

*We had concerns when it was approved under delegated powers and we have raised this with the District Council.*

*P Ward*

A couple of weeks ago the SOSPub Group went to the NHDC Planning control committee and it rejected the pub application. There were several aspects of the application which contravened national and local planning policies. Market Homes could submit another application, it could appeal or it could sell. Other similar sites have been rejected on appeal. The SOSPub Group is working with Camra and a professional planner, who believe we have a good chance to win an appeal. The Station Pub is an important part of the social infrastructure of the village. Socialising is important for community cohesion. We have been running fundraising events and are looking for volunteers. If you want to help please speak to one of us.

I previously mentioned that heavy goods vehicles, exceeding the weight limit, are using the bridge on Deards End Lane. I asked about fixed cameras on the bridge, what has been done?

*The Examination in Public raised the issue of the bridge, it had no information on restricting traffic.* P Ward

*We will write to Railtrack.* R Willcocks

There is already a weight restriction on the bridge that has been broken. The Council should involve the County Council to enforce it. It is a Grade II listed bridge.

The main offender is the refuse lorry and deliveries to the Golf Club. The drivers claim it is the only way into the Golf Club. Railtrack has portable cameras to record offenders. There was a similar problem in Saffron Walden.

The drains are bad around Deards End Lane. The bridge is the biggest brick span bridge on the East Coast Mainline, we don't want a major disaster. Either side of the bridge is chalk.

When is the start date for the new surgery?

*It is due to start in July. The various legal documents have been signed and the whole operation will take about two years. So it will be 2020 before it is up and running.* G Fothergill

The new surface around one of the new drains in Gypsy Lane is breaking up.

A couple of years ago I asked about seats in the village. The one near the undertakers is well used and it would be nice to have one at the other end of the village.

*We are looking at this.* R Willcocks

What are the Parish Council's plans for young people aged 12-17. What can be done? I have done a survey and I can let you have the information. I am willing to help more needs to be done for older children. Mr Deakin Davies

*Noted.* R Willcocks

In the age of Health and Safety, how does Highways get away with not repairing potholes?

*There is a pothole hotline, the number can be found in the Parish Magazine. If it has been reported you can make a claim if your vehicle is damaged because Herts County Council is liable.* K Burr

*The definition of a pot hole is loose. It has to be a certain depth before it is classified as a pothole.* G Fothergill

Does anyone monitor the quality of repair?

*I have been counting potholes and there are 77 in Wadnall Way. Herts County Council has 96,000 to repair and limited time and funds so they have to be prioritised.*

If dealing with the potholes can they also sort out the overgrown hedges in Wadnall Way. If we have to have development off street parking is not used because it need lighting in new development.

During inclement weather the main roads are gritted but not the side roads and the snow is not cleared. This is creating more potholes, can we get the side roads cleared?

I know that Wadnall Way and Woodstock has a steep incline. I did a survey and County Council is to install new grit bins in the area.

The Chairman stated that the Parish Council could purchase the pub using reserves, a loan and an increase in the council tax. He asked residents present the question: Should the Parish Council try to buy the Station Pub if it comes on to the market? The majority of those present supported the Parish Council trying to purchase the pub.

The chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9.30 p.m.

Chairman \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_