

KNEBWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 4 May 2022 at 8.00 p.m. at Knebworth Village Hall

Present: Councillors Roger Willocks, Adrienne Charter, Rosemary Conybeare, Charlotte Cosson, Philip Farr, Steve Hemingway, Paul Jobling, Jeremy Godfrey and Paul Ward

In attendance: the Clerk, County Councillor Thake and 72 members of the public

1. Chairman's Welcome

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Knebworth's Annual Parish Meeting. My name is Roger Willcocks and I'm the Chairman of Knebworth Parish Council.

Thank you very much for coming out to see us this evening.

It's been three years since we last had an in-person meeting. Last year's was a minimal event held remotely over Zoom, and the year before we had no meeting at all because of Covid restrictions.

Happily, things are mostly back to normal, but it means we've got three-years worth of catching up to do. So please use this opportunity to ask us questions, hold us to account, and give us a clear sense of how we can represent you in the future.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Harrison, Nash and Stringer.

3. Minutes

Proposed by Mrs Charter, seconded by Mr Stringer and **Resolved:** that the minutes of the meeting of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 5 May 2021 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Chairman's Report

Let me introduce your Parish Council Members:

Paul Ward, Colin Stringer, Rosemary Conybeare, Steve Hemingway, Philip Farr, Paul Jobling, Jeremy Godfrey, Adrienne Charter, Charlotte Cosson, Lisa Nash and Jenny Harrison.

The members of the Parish Council are elected, but unpaid, volunteers. 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 (about four percent), out of which we have to maintain the recreation grounds and the pavilion, the village hall, the toilet in the car park, and various other bits and pieces, such as the Christmas lights. Last year

we added the allotments to the list; and two years ago, we bought and reopened the Station Pub, which pays for itself.

The Parish Council is consulted on planning matters, and we sometimes pay for professional assistance, but we are not the Local Planning Authority; planning decisions for Knebworth are made by North Herts District Council.

Councillors are elected every four years, and an election was due this year. However only ten people stood for twelve places, so there was no need to have a public vote. So there's no Parish Council election this year, but the District Council election is still happening; and there will also be a referendum on the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Neighbourhood Plan is a legal mechanism which allows the Parish Council to have more influence on planning decisions; Paul will tell us more about that shortly.

Our job as Councillors is to mainly 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.

Looking back at last year's minutes, I said it was the lull before the storm; a decision on the North Herts Local Plan was due within weeks. But another year has passed and North Herts is still stuck waiting for the planning inspector's sign-off. But the storm is here.

I said there was a real danger developers would jump the gun and put in hostile applications, using the shortage of land zoned for housing to justify building on green belt land. And the promoters for KB4 East of Knebworth have done just that – they applied last September for outline permission to build 230 homes.

That's one of the reasons why it's crucial the Neighbourhood Plan is approved. More about that later.

I also told you that the Parish Council had bought the allotments in Watton Road. They are right next to KB4. If anything's built there, we've asked that some land is reserved to enlarge the existing allotment site. We've also said we need a multi-use community building.

You will have seen a 'framework' plan for land west of Knebworth, including ideas for traffic lights on Station Road, and the closing off of various through routes. This is part of a complex discussion between the developers, North Herts District Council and Herts County Council, trying to figure out the best way to deal with existing and future traffic issues across the village.

This is a negotiation, not a done deal, and the Parish Council is working hard to make sure it has a place at the table.

We have objected to green belt development at every opportunity, but we would quite rightly be criticised if we failed to get the best deal we can for Knebworth.

In other news, this is the first 'real' meeting we've had since the Parish Council bought and re-opened the Station Pub.

You will remember that three years ago, in this hall, I explained that the SOSPub group, together with the Parish Council, had lost a planning appeal to save the pub garden being built on, but the pub had to remain a pub. I said that the Parish Council

wanted to be in a position to submit a viable offer, as an insurance policy if the SOS Pub group didn't submit a bid, because we were half way through a six-month moratorium.

The asking price was £595,000. That was for the pub on its own; it didn't include the adjacent Coach House. And it didn't include the large garden which was eventually bought by a developer for a million pounds or so.

The SOS Pub group planned to sell shares to fund a community-led bid for the pub and did a great job of running events and raising cash. But they didn't reach their ideal target, so the Parish Council stepped in and made an offer for the pub, backed by a low-interest loan from the Public Works Board. After some complex legal wrangling, the Council bought both the pub and the coach house for £100,000 less than the original asking price for the pub on its own.

The Council paid for the pub's restoration and engaged a commercial landlord to run it as a business (so it's not a community pub). It reopened on Valentines Day 2020.

And apart from the small niggle of a global pandemic, I hope you agree it's been a great success.

What else? The fast trains which disappeared at the start of the pandemic have failed to reappear, despite them being shown on the planned new timetable. Obviously passenger numbers are lower due to people working from home, but we do seem to have been overlooked.

The three McCarthy and Stone shops on the High Street are still empty, as I believe, are some of the flats.

And we have a new Village Hall sound system. Thank-you to Knebworth Village Trust for their generous grant.

Finally I'd like to make clear the Parish Council is not a political organisation and we want to work constructively with whoever wins at tomorrow's District election, regardless of their party.

5. Amenities report – Philip Farr in the absence of Colin Stringer

Village Hall

Government restrictions were in place last year which limited the reopening of the hall to all hirers for the first six months.

The majority of regular hirers did not return until last September, with only two deciding not to return.

Due to the restrictions, the Council benefited from a £1,500 business support grant from NHDC, but this did not cover loss of earnings.

The final six months has seen weekend hire return to more normal levels and so it is hoped that revenue for 2022/23 will be closer to 2019/20 levels.

During the year the kitchen extract was upgraded to comply with regulations and, as I hope you are able to detect this evening, a new sound system and noise limiter were installed with supported by a £10,000 grant from Knebworth Village Trust.

In addition, a new scrubber/drier was purchased to replace its fifteen year-old predecessor.

Recreation Grounds

In the autumn we had a couple of sessions to clear the village pond of weeds and, as a result, the pond is now looking much better. The resident moorhens had three chicks and a grey wagtail has also been spotted around the perimeter.

At the request of the farmer, the gaps in the fencing were filled in as, watched by their doting parents, children had been playing 'chicken' with the tractor that had been ploughing.

On the topic of tractors, the gears have recently broken on the tractor that we purchased a few years ago. This has necessitated the interim use of contractors but we hope to be self-sufficient again soon.

We have granted permission to the football club to build a fenced-off area for their equipment and, hopefully, this will keep things a lot neater.

A full tree survey of land owned by the Parish Council was undertaken in the autumn. All 328 trees in the Recreation Grounds have now been tagged with numbers for easy identification. The survey revealed that a large beech tree near the play area was suffering from a root fungus which would ultimately make the tree unstable and so, at the recommendation of the surveyor, this tree was felled.

A new bench has been installed in the recreation grounds, donated by Mrs Luders in memory of her late husband.

Allotments

In the course of the last year the Parish Council has cut back the hedges on the Eastern perimeter of the allotment site and also organised sessions, with the 'allotmentees' to clear the site, firstly of metal and then of other extraneous material. Clearance of some overhanging branches is scheduled for the coming year.

Two new water bowsers have been purchased, one as a replacement for one of the existing tanks, and a new base has been built for one of these at the Southern end of the site. Arrangements have been made with another neighbouring resident to refill this tank on an as-and-when basis. The annual charge for water has been increased to cover the improved availability of water to the site.

During the year we have said farewell to 2 allotmentees and two plots of the smaller plots were amalgamated.

The Gladman proposals for the development of KB4, adjacent to the allotment site, included an additional area for allotments. This was incorporated without any discussion with the Parish Council, but you can rest assured that we will continue to seek opportunities to increase the number of allotments available in the village, either by way of an extension to the existing site or in a new, more suitable location; there is still a waiting list for plots.

4. Planning and Environment Committee – Paul Ward

Welcome, planning matters are coming into sharp focus in the parish.

I will cover:

- What we do and applications impacting the parish.
- Progress on the NHDC Local Plan and the new housing proposals.
- Most importantly, major progress on our separate Neighbourhood Plan for the parish.
- There is a referendum on this tomorrow, and we urge everyone to vote yes for it, to help us have more influence on all development in future.

What the Planning and Environment Committee Does

North Herts District Council is the Local Planning Authority. They decide upon planning applications.

They also develop the Local Plan overall for the district with all the housing proposals in it for expansion. The Parish Council does not. We are consulted like everyone else is. We are a statutory consultee on planning applications, 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 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. What has been going on over the last year? There were 56 applications last year across the Parish. There is an increasing trend for change of use of buildings, notably in the village centre.

London Road - Office to sui generis – coffee and gelateri approved
 London Road - Pharmacy to chicken and pizza take away
 London Road pharmacy to wine bar- approved
 London Road betting shop to extend the Indian restaurant – approved
 London Road – Estate agent to beauty salon – approved
 London Road – office to residential – refused
 Old Knebworth Lane radio station to service use - approved.

Our Neighbourhood Plan seeks to promote local businesses and therefore we are keen to see new business and not conversion to residential use. Eleven related to loss of garages to habitable conversion – this is something we are concerned about if it results in a lack of parking spaces. Four applications for new dwellings
 Demolition of bungalow and three new houses
 Three houses on a corner plot
 Additional flats on Park Lane Court – with no s106 funding.

We made a Rights of Way application for a footpath from Watton Road to Old Lane, which failed. Herts County Council's report found that there was insufficient evidence to support the creation of a right of way.

2. North Hertfordshire District Council – Local Plan Update

It is the most significant and controversial planning matter impacting us. It is a plan for future development to 2031 drawn up by the District Council. The Local Plan is now at an advanced stage of development, and is likely to come into force over the next few months, although this is not certain.

The Local Plan has been going through review by the Planning Inspectorate. Further Main Modifications response was made last year, with the expectation of the planning inspector's decision being received by last December. This has still not been received.

Development will be allowed within a re-defined settlement boundary around the main village i.e. Knebworth will be expanded by changing the Green Belt Boundary to allow for more housing. The total of proposals in the current Local plan is 736 homes, of which 598 are new. Old Knebworth is identified for limited in-filling only. The rest of the parish remains designated Green Belt.

There are three main sites, all of which are currently in Green Belt.

KB1 – west behind Deards End Lane

KB2- west, behind Gypsy Lane: homes and a primary school

KB4 – east of the village, homes and secondary school allocation.

The Parish Council has been talking to the site owners and developers in order to understand their plans better. We hope to influence them. This is one of the reason the Neighbourhood Plan is important.

Site KB4 – Large development Land south of Watton Road – we held a public meeting to raise awareness of this. This is to the east is now subject to a formal planning application, which is in progress. This has been submitted prior to the Local Plan being finalised and the Green Belt boundary changed. We have objected to the proposals due to this and other issues such as the impact on Swangleys Lane and the school

Sites KB1 and KB2 are subject to informal consultation by the developers (Countryside) but no planning applications have been made yet.

3. Our Neighbourhood Plan

We have made significant progress in finalising our Neighbourhood Plan, but one last crucial hurdle remains – tomorrow's referendum. We have progressed our emerging Neighbourhood Plan through Regulation 16 consultation during March to June 2021. It then went through a planning inspection process.

A brief presentation on the Neighbourhood Plan was given. There is information available on line and in the hall.

5. Questions and Answers

CC Thake: Herts County Council is not the arbiter of what the Neighbourhood Plan says. With the proposed development the Parish Council has an obligation to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. It is clear from the size of growth that the infrastructure is inadequate. This is not helped that NHDC does not require s106 funding for developments under ten dwellings. There are a lot of developments under this

number with no funding for infrastructure. Please support your Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Plan.

Mr Hall: I would like clarification regarding a leaflet being distributed around the village. Please would the Parish Council confirm that Lisa Nash is not disqualified from standing in the District Council elections tomorrow.

R Willcocks: Yes she is eligible to stand.

Mr Fothergill: Is the Neighbourhood Plan a live document.

P Ward: if the plan gets approved it is made. We have the ability to review and update it.

Mr Raper: Densities for development are a bit vague. For every house there will be at least one car and some two. I see that there is a proposed controlled flow under the railway bridge. I would suggest that the number of vehicles arising from the developments will cause a problem.

P Ward: There is no fixed density. The NHDC Local Plan numbers, KB1 200, KB2 184 plus a school and KB4 200 and a secondary school, are guidance only and are not necessarily the numbers promoted by developers.

There is parking provision guidance. The Neighbourhood Plan promotes adequate provision of off street parking for new homes.

The traffic lights on the railway bridge, Station Road, are not a formal proposal. It is one option to accommodate the new development. Herts Highways are proposing several changes some of which the Parish Council believes will have a detrimental impact on Knebworth. The roads around Knebworth are not designed for the current houses never mind new ones. There is a complex group of stakeholders to try to influence.

The Council has concerns regarding loss of parking on the High Street, to ease traffic flow, which would have a detrimental impact on local business.

Mr Nation: the proposals for KB1 & KB2 show access off Park Lane and traffic will use Deards End Lane. What does CC Thake think about a proposal for access through the golf course to avoid Deards End Lane?

CC Thake: The HCC Local transport Plan 4 (LPT4) has been well consulted on with aims and strategy to obtain a modal shift without the capacity is ridiculous. I find that I am at odds with HCC, I genuinely believe that Henry Cobbold wants to be an exemplar with the development on KB1 & KB2. not follow through will not be if result in traffic chaos on the High Street.

I am not against removal of parking spaces but without replacement it will adversely impact businesses and will not get my support. There must be a mechanism which is compatible for residents to get a lifestyle they deserve.

Mrs Kirk: I pay for a parking permit in Milestone Road, which was introduced to get rid of commuter parking. However, traffic wardens are told not to patrol the area and I have problems parking with people who are not paying.

CC Thake I am also a District Councillor, send me a reminder and I will look into this.

Mr Furzedon: I had a meeting with DC Mandi Tandi about double yellow lines on Gun Road. It's an accident waiting to happen, but nothing has happened.

CC Thake: The Parish Council is not the authority for implementing double yellow lines, it is District and County Councils. I have argued with officers regarding a blind spot on a stretch of road on Gun Lane, which needs yellow lines, with no success. I have raised points with NHDC and County and will continue to do so.

P Farr The Parish Council frequently gets complaints about the village and the need for double yellow lines. The Parish Council does what it can and refers it to the appropriate authority. Speed signs were offered a few years ago.

Mr Sprigge; On several developments, they refer to sustainable transport and the bus routes. However, some buses have a two hour frequency. This does not solve the modal shift.

Marilyn Park Lane: I have lived on Park Lane for forty-one year and there have been several near misses before the double and single yellow lines. People drive on the pavements if they can't get through. Campaigned for fifteen years for double yellow lines. Even with the speed signs they come flying down the road, we need the 30mph speed written on the road.

Mr Nation I want to place on record that the planning application for 12 Deards End Lane to demolish it and build a basement was no objected to by the Parish Council. HCC considers Deards End Lane a minor access road with no accidents. There was a serious accident last year and the year before. Does Highways know what is happening? Police officers have stated that there will be no change to the speed limit unless there is a death.

CC Thake: HCC has to prioritise work. The police keep records and regularly consult with HCC, recommending interventions.

P Ward: NHDC and HCC understand that the development needs master planning. Highway modelling has been at a high level only. There must be data from the police, from SIDs (speed signs). The Parish Council collected data to promote safer roads.

Mr Fothergill: The railway line is a problem there are two bridges, three with Deards End Lane. Can HCC influence Network Rail to sort out the bridges?

CC Thake: No

Mr Allen: The traffic data is out of date with development at Odyssey and Bragbury End.

P Ward: We haven't seen any data and would expect more surveys and traffic counts, something that District and County Councils should do. We need to ask what do they want to do, what do we need to change, there is a lack of data to support proposals.

Mr Allen: Densities quoted, are figures gross or net? Land west of Gypsy Lane needs provision for flooding. Will this lead to an increase in density?

Henry Cobbold: Any development will have a layout. I am committed to keep parking off the road. There will be apartments which will help with numbers.

CC Thake: HCC requires Sustainable Urban Drainage schemes (Suds) for development, otherwise they will not go ahead. However, who will maintain them? Suds require ongoing maintenance. Much flooding has been caused by Highways England not maintaining the lagoons at the side of the A1.

R Willcocks: The Parish Council has twelve spaces with only ten councillors elected. The new council will be able to co-opt so if you are interested, please get in touch.

P Ward. If you support the Neighbourhood Plan, please tell others to support it too.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 09.30 p.m.

Chairman _____

Date _____