

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF
THE COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL
HELD AT THE CHARLES MORRIS HALL TYTTENHANGAR
ON THURSDAY 6TH APRIL 2006 AT 7.30pm

Present;- Cllr's Rump-Chair-Cllr M Corley -Cllr S Hall-Cllr C Brazier-Cllr J Day
Cllr D Crump-Cllr J Henchley-Cllr P Reeves-Cllr D Clarke.

District Councillor's- Cllr C Brazier & D Clarke (also a Parish Councillor's CHPC)

County Councillor- Cllr Brian Lee (The Colneys)

Countryside Management- Ms Rachel Keen-Manager

Clerk & Assistant Clerk;- Mr J E Dean & Mrs Kim Parker-Mead

Public Attendance- 28 members of the Parish attended the meeting

Apologies Mr Jo Stephens CVS -Mr M Marlborough CHFC-Mr J Ely H/T
Mr K Lane N/watch* Liaison Officer Herts Police-Mrs P Watson
Mr M Pendock Lafarge Aggregates-Karen Chittenden T/Tots

Table Top Displays provided by;-

Debbie/Carolyn	Treasure Tots Pre School, prospectus/education-2.5/3.5 years
Cllr P Reeves	Archive Photo's and Tyttenhanger sign
Lafarge Aggregates	Static Display and visual on Gravel Extraction and workings
Rob Allen	Highfield Park Trust

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman asked that everyone help themselves to a glass of wine if they wished he thanked everyone for attending and opened the meeting just after 7.40.

The Chair reminded everyone to view the presentation displays from the various local groups and other organisations that had set out in the hall. He reminded those present that afterwards again a cheese and wine was set up for all to participate.

He also welcomed Rachel Keen who planned to give us a power point presentation on the Countryside Management Services on Colney Heath. Adding it was very encouraging to see so many people from the parish attend and thanked the Charles Morris Hall committee for allowing the use of the facilities this evening.

Harvesters Football was mentioned as being very keen to promote and encourage new young players-and has links with CHFC-contact Cllr Crump for more details.

Unable to attend Ken Lane* sent details of street co-ordinators on neighbourhoods

1. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2005

Copies of the 2005 minutes were available to each person attending, the Chairman summarised these were then approved as correct;-

Proposed By Cllr Henchley

Seconded by Cllr P Reeves

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

3. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL.

By-Cllr Geoffrey Rump

As chairman of the Parish council it is my duty to report on the principal activities that the council has undertaken over the last 12 months. This is by far the most daunting of all the tasks I have undertaken during the year as Chairman.

Year on year the activities of the Council, in general, remain the same and I will briefly cover these later. The exciting activities are the introduction of new and better services and facilities for the benefit of everyone in the community.

A number of you review the minutes of the Council meetings through our web site and consequently are aware of the progress (or not) of the regular issues we strive to address. Unfortunately, I do not expect to tell you anything new this evening. However, we will continue to improve the Web site and the information it contains, and try to improve communications with the residents of the Parish. As you are aware you are all invited to attend the Council meetings which are held once a month, whether it's for a specific issue you have, maybe on planning or disturbances, or just out of general interest, you are welcome to come along.

Many of you are very helpful, not only with your support for a number of activities carried out by the Parish council, but also in reporting direct to the departments responsible at the District and County Council on issues such as, the condition of roads and pavements, fly tipping and anti social behaviour. This is very helpful - but if you could also notify the parish at the same time, this will help us build a more complete picture of the level of some of these problems, as we endeavour to build statistics on the regularity of these issues. For instance we have a log of 70 instances of fly tipping, but I'm sure the full number is way in excess of this. This information we can use in our debates with the departments responsible as well as with the police, in striving for better services and responses in these areas. Again resident associations are very important to the community and their feedback to the Parish Council is extremely valuable.

The members of the Parish Council contribute a significant amount of their own time and effort to improve the local facilities which I'm sure is very much appreciated. Thanks to Stuart Hall, the Vice Chairman for his support during my year as Chairman, and to Margaret Corley who is taking over the role of Chair Person for the next 12 months. I would also like to thank my fellow councillors for all your ongoing efforts, because I have been very lucky this year in being able to work with a strong team, who are very knowledgeable in parish matters and who work with youth-full enthusiasm, a team which is an important blend of youth and experience, but in reality, without the youth.

More seriously, as the legal accountability of the Council gets even more stringent, with greater auditing, and personal liabilities on the Councillors, it is essential to follow the correct processes in all situations. Fortunately, we have a very good clerk (and assistant clerk by the way), but John Dean here, spends a lot of his own time in keeping up to-date on the latest legislation, and advises the councillors accordingly, allowing us to sleep a little easier at nights. John will be taking and hopefully passing a senior clerks exam later this year, which will improve our status as a quality council. Which is quite important if we finish up under the South East of England Regional assembly.-commonly referred to as SEERA, you may have noticed national publicity.

An example of our legal accountability recently introduced, is that of ensuring Parish Council ownership and control over access and rights of way to all parks and commons within the Parish. We held a public meeting to explain the legal position of

(Continued. 3 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL)

the council to the local residence affected and why it was necessary to begin to formalise the right of access over council land which had been assumed for many years. This was accepted at the public meeting and soon new Way leave licences will be issued to those residents that boundary the common and other parish land.

Safety within the community is of major importance to the council. Whether it is pavements, roads, parks or play areas we need to continually review the quality of the surface and equipment. The parks are regularly inspected by the Clerk and his team and maintenance carried out as identified as necessary. Clearly the situation can change between inspections either through deterioration or vandalism and we appreciate any such cases being brought to the council's attention. This speeds up getting the situation rectified and reduces the risk to users of the parks.

The council is aware of certain cases where play equipment is not up-to date and looking a bit tired. We will be contracting an independent organisation in the near future, to review the quality of all our play areas and equipment and report on their suitability and safety. The organisation is expert in its field, but are consultants (if I dare use the word), not a sales organisation, so we expect a fair and independent assessment. It is then down to the council to act upon the report. We have set aside some money to do this in our budget and we have also applied for the BIFFA Grant.

The council is also planning to look at sub contracting the on-going monitoring and maintenance of all the play areas and equipment to a separate external organisation in the coming year. This will ensure that all legal and safety issues are met in the future, and to provide better facilities and peace of mind to the families that use the areas. Unfortunately this does not come cheap.

Unfortunately, the quality of pavements and the road surfaces are not under our direct control but we continually badger the authorities to improve the level of service they are providing, at the moment not with a great success, but we keep on trying. We have had some success with the clearance of ditches and reducing flooding but it is a hard grind to get the work done effectively. Pot holes continue to appear would seem poorly repaired when they do get attention, and the repair is short lived. Every week we are onto the Highways department chasing work that has been scheduled many months before.

A lot of work has been carried out in improving the natural environment of the common and preparing the specified area for future grazing and we will hear more about this from Rachel Keen who comes from Countryside Management Services, shortly. Rachel advises us about the best method of regeneration and helps us in getting hold of grants that are available. The council is also working with external organisations on ways to improve the flow of water through the River Colne.

One of the highlights of the year for the council has been the opening of the Highfield Park Community Hall and the facilities it offers to the local community. The Hall, which is being run by the YMCA, offers a wide range of sports facilities for the young and old as-well as a number of individual rooms which can be hired for private functions. Highfield Park Trust do a great deal of work for the benefit of the environment and continue to improve the park and surrounding areas and are still looking to add further facilities to the area.

The opening of the SPAR shop, doctor's surgery and chemist are also of a major benefit to the local community but unfortunately this has increased the problem of

(Continued. 3 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL)

litter being left in the area. It is hard to understand why the litter cannot be disposed of appropriately by the people concerned.

I would like to thank all the volunteers who litter pick throughout the Parish to help maintain a pleasant environment for the public in general.

At the other end of the spectrum, another major achievement of the council has been the removal, although at great expense, of the illegal settlement by travellers in Colney Heath and there subsequent trespass issue on the common. Having been on the flood plain land, which they own and attempted to occupy for over three years and with an amount of inactivity and ineffectiveness by the District council, they were finally removed over a planning issue when they became the responsibility of the Parish Council after they moved onto our common committing trespass and refused to leave given adequate notice. The Parish Council had to seek retribution and possession through the courts to remove the caravans but is soon to be made liable for the cost of their storage as they cannot be scrapped for a lengthy period. This has added to the costs the council have expended and consequently the level of compensation the council will be claiming back from the assets of those concerned. Again, I'm sure this will turn out to be a very lengthy, but necessary, process. And as always all Public money has to be rightfully accounted for.

We were disappointed this year when we were forced to close the Youth Club which had been operating very well at Colney Heath FC, but unfortunately, we lost the services of the trained youth worker and they are very difficult to get replacements. Currently we are expecting to re-start the club in-conjunction with the YMCA at the Highfield Community Hall; hopefully, in the near future we will announce something.

On a brighter note, the Treasure Tots pre-school is continuing to be well supported and well run and with the benefit of grants we have been able to improve the facilities available. Cllr Margaret Corley got £7000.00 for us earlier last year to provide outside play facility. A combination of professional staff supported by the Council and local residents has proved to be very successful. With a small increase in the number of attendees the venture would become profitable but is currently operating within the costs council has allowed for in the budget as part of our service to the community.

The introduction of the regular community bus service, which runs once a week from Colney Heath to the major supermarkets in the area, run totally by volunteers, is proving to be of great benefit to the village elderly and non-drivers. The Council will endeavour to ensure its continual operation and hopefully its extension. We would like to thank our team of volunteer drivers and couriers that help every Friday.

The Colney Heath FC, in its 100th year, is having a very successful season and is encouraging to the young people in the area. The club have won their league and are looking forward to bringing a higher level of football to Colney Heath. The link between Colney Heath FC and Harvesters youth football will ensure that more young people can benefit from senior football in the area in the future and the council will endeavour to continue to improve the facilities on offer. The local community also benefits from the social forum on offer within the club and the clubhouse with many functions taking place.

Mr Martin Marlborough, Chairman of the FC, unfortunately could not be here this evening, but would like to send his thanks to the Parish Council for their continued support of the Football Club.

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The Parish Council continues to actively support local communities and Residents association, threatened by large unwanted housing developments. Clearly, there is a need for additional housing in the country and the St Albans area has been identified as an area tasked with significant further development, however we will do all we can to protect the Green Belt and only support those projects which we see have been fully thought through in terms of community services, education, health, infrastructure and social impact. We currently have a district wide shortage of water and already experiencing a hose pipe ban due to the lack of water in the area. We do not see conversely how significant additional housing will improve that situation.

The principle bane of the life of the Parish Councillors is the large continual and unacceptable level of fly tipping in the area. We have a number of problems with this, firstly the reporting and collection of illegally dumped rubbish, secondly, deterring future dumping, and finally the identification, prosecution and conviction of the Fly Tippers. To add to the problem we have recently been notified that it is not a Police matter but down to the Environment Agency. Why is breaking the law not a police matter, and what powers of arrest do the Environment Agency have? Where do ASBO's fit in, and who's going to issue on the spot fines? We know the answer to the last point, no one, as we no longer have a Police Officer allocated to our area and have also lost our PCSO.

Hopefully, in the near future, we will get clarification of the processes to be followed. In the mean time we will continue to look at ways of deterring the fly-tippers and encourage the District Council to fund the installation of appropriate equipment in the areas with the greatest problems. However, after years of pursuing this with District Council over this unfortunately we do not expect an immediate resolution.

I'm sure I have left out a number of other activities carried out by the Parish Council, but hope I have given you all an overview of the key issues and activities. Should you have any questions or would like further clarification of any of the points raised this evening we will be happy to answer them the best we can following the next presentation by Rachel Keen from the Countryside Management Services and the report on the Parish Council Finances by our Clerk John Dean.

Thank you all for coming this evening, please stop and enjoy a glass of wine and meet the Councillors.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were two questions raised:-

The bridge that was proposed by Lafarge some years ago over the Colne was to have been started in 2006. What was the progress, Cllr Brazier said that it was not progressed because of requirements to meet new flooding guidelines and new plans would have to be drawn up. There was a Lafarge meeting in June and are the hosts so it can be raised then.

Also the safe keeping of parish archives and records, was there an intention for the PC to have a safe home for the various items that were around in various peoples possession for safe keeping. The Clerk said that this was a very important matter and that he had found it difficult to gain past knowledge, but was going through past old Chronicle magazines he had been given to try and research key dates and issues.

The Chairman noted both these important points and asked the Clerk to make sure that they be bought before the council at another meeting.

4. COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT AND COLNEY HEATH COMMON

Rachel Keen / Plus power point presentation

This was a very important wildlife, fauna, and historic area dating back centuries and was a vital part of the county history being one of the few natural gorse and heath lands left in Hertfordshire. The PC had over the last three years accepted and funded with some grants, DEFRA Common Stewardship Scheme clearance and coppicing. This was as essential to the long term survival as a common. Slides were shown to explain the progression of the work that was mainly done in the winter months and how it was producing results of better management and offering open space to all. Rachel went on to say about the plans for grazing sheep in order to create a balance for sustaining the important species of plants, insects, and wildlife. Working here very closely with the Council, it was important to understand the viability of the grassland and its very special cutting regime.

The Chair thanked Rachel and said we were very lucky to have someone with such interests to advise us and how we will continue to make sure that funds for proper management of the commons is sustained in our budgets.

5. COUNCIL FINANCES

CLERK & RFO-JOHN DEAN/Plus OHP explaining figures and budgets

The Council finances are back in good shape and now at last we can see where we are going to help the Council keep their budget promises. The controls the Finance Committee accepted when I joined the parish in 2003-4 have provided this council with the proper regulatory structures that all councils of this size now require.

On the attached format you can now see where we have spent the precept over the past three years; each cost heading represents a group of smaller costs that combine as in normal payment headings in a payments and receipts format. This way you can begin to see how it compares year on year. Where in many cases your council have used some of the reserves to top up funding to the essential community services that go to benefit all in Colney Heath. These can now be clearly seen by the income over expenditure totals. This sort of analysis was not available when I came here, and it has taken me three years to get it in shape, it provides the "road map" to the finances that all can understand. Each payment is categorised into twelve payment headings to arrive at a budget control to manage the precept and other income we receive. Just like a business you must have a tight grip on the operating costs, councils are no different. It is something we must keep in place for the future and not let it slip. We will publish this in the Chronicle to bring to the attention of all in the parish as many other Parish Councils so you can see where the precept is spent.

We have twice yearly reviews by an independent firm of auditors now who spend a day here going through our books and records. This directive came into force in 2002 requiring local councils under section 151 of the Local Government Act to appoint a Responsible Financial Officer and that person is usually the Clerk. We take financial controls very seriously and have a parish council policy of openness fairness and transparency on such issues.

The auditor will look at how the income has been received and spent and have we done a proper budget with the precept and other monies we receive. Equally they will look that the council is not building up massive reserves you will see from the last budget figures is properly regulated by this council. This year we estimate we will spend a budget of £140,000 on community projects and running the parish affairs.

(Continued-5. COUNCIL FINANCES)

In our Precept application 2006-7 we calculated £90,950 for administration Buildings and other headings, & £37,983 on Leisure and other public facilities-total £128,933. The difference will be made up of income, grants, leases, and use of the reserves. We have proper controls over the payroll and we use a certified payroll system to carry out that task. We have including Treasure Tots up to 12 employees on the payroll most are of course part time but still have the same rights and conditions as full time employment, as a part of local authority have to keep to proper conditions Apart from office services we do not take any large cash sums; we generate all the revenue from about seven income streams all arrive via cheque or bank draft. This does not include Treasure Tots which is funded by parents and HCC grants.

INVESTMENTS

We generate extra income from investing the reserves and other sums on high yield investments such as Treasury Bonds for various fixed periods throughout the year. We have been using this method to give an extra boost to income so we get value for our reserves rather than banks. Typical rates this year have been just under 4%. From this we have gained consistent increases over the past two years and for this financial year just gone we will have made over £3000. It is this sort of thing that goes towards additional services. Normally we keep about half the average yearly precept in reserve in case of unexpected areas of expenditure and other issues.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS- LINKED TO THE PARISH PLAN

Here we have three main projects-Community shopping Bus, Treasure Tots and Youth Club. Your Parish Council have every intention of continuing and enhancing these important services to the local community.

PRE SCHOOL

Treasure tots are run as a separate entity, but it does receive a grant from the Parish Council, but the benefit to local parents is important in the community. We have over 110 sessions taken up for the new term and the pre-school is well run by Karen and her team five days a week including a lunch club. Important extra hours that allow the parents to take up employment or return part time, or have personal free time. The Treasure Tots Pre School has a full OFSTED Qualification for 26 children equating to around 130 sessions per week. Each term is 11 weeks soon to go up to 13 and produces a turnover of about £50/60,000 per year. Kim Parker-Mead is the secretary and also the assistant Clerk so the Parish Council has their full 60% involvement arranged in this community project. The objective is to make the pre-school self financing as soon as we can; this depends on the parents and children. We had hoped to reach that point last September, pupil numbers vary and it is hard to predict the up-take each term. But your council makes the grants available to enable it to break even. This is after all a community project and we do not wish to charge fees that are excessive to hard working families or profiteer as others do.

GRANT AID

As you will see from the attached budget format for this forthcoming year we will make grants available to local organisations totalling £16,000 payable in May. This is carefully scrutinised by the full council and finance committee at budget time with each applicant providing their accounts and estimates for the grant application. In most cases the council does not give a 100% grant for the whole project there has to be a contribution. As with the new grounds-man job for St Marks Church as just recently in conjunction with them we have just taken on a new employee to manage the closed church yard and graveyard grounds area for about 28 hours per month. This additional cost can be partly paid for from Grant Aid. The Church is also going to contribute a significant share of the payroll and we thank them for their generosity.

(Continued-5. COUNCIL FINANCES)

We used some of the reserves to provide a grant for a disabled toilet in the Pavilion, essential with the DDA Act 2004; otherwise we would have to close the facility. That was tendered out and cost £12,000. A kitchen upgrade installed at the Pavilion and we shared that cost at 50% with CHFC other large sums were a grant to start up Treasure Tots of £15,000 and this matches the earlier years when we gave £14,000 to CMH for the parking and surfacing works. This year we are putting new money of £2,500 towards the splendid Tyttenhanger sign and we too have received a grant of £800 from Lafarge. Plus the proceeds of a collection is to come from the local pub, all of which we are very grateful. You will be very pleased with the result the design and finish will look very good. We have some pictures later and this is expected to be put up in the summer. Cllr Reeves has taken charge of this, after winning with his design.

COMMON STEWARDSHIP

We have heard from Rachel Keen about the common and we have a DEFRA income stream from the common stewardship plan that averages about £2,500 per year and we have invested that into the regeneration of the common. After all a common is a common it is not woodland. Our intention is to fence the Furze Field; soon we will be grazing sheep probably in 2007. The cost of 1200mtrs stock fencing is about £9,000.

ASSETS AND INVENTORY

We have an outstanding requirement to bring all of our assets and inventory on to a more realistic footing, and work in our maintenance schedules more evenly than in the past to our buildings and facilities. Grant money is becoming harder to get for things like swings and kids recreational kit its costly, there is a lot of competition for money now. We have buildings which are owned by the council but run with their own management teams or as with CHFC a lease on the building and area. This is usually an amicable arrangement with the revenue they generate used by them in their own way to cover their costs. We usually insure the building and claim back the use percentage. This is in line with regulations and responsibilities on halls and buildings owned by a Parish Council. We could ideally do with another revenue stream that would give an additional £5000 for giving a regular maintenance fund, and keep some of our reserves in place for a rainy day. The Clerk offered to have some ideas to put before the members in the next financial year.

TRESPASS ON COMMON

Finally the big issue, this regrettable incident has weighed heavily on the finances, with legal costs court costs, bailiff and removals as well as storage we will severely dent our commons reserve this year. It has to be done for the preservation of our open space and common land. Regrettably the ODPM rulings on this matter and no funding available from District and County Councils have left us to fight it ourselves. Members of the Council feel certain that is the wish of the Parish and guidance with solicitors and legal opinion has put this matter very much in the spotlight. In the long term we will be continuing to seek recovery of that money via the courts. Our important common land conservation area and open spaces must be protected.

Finance -Public Questions

The Clerk volunteered to answer any questions regarding the Parish Finances, there were none, and he concluded by thanking the Chairman and the members on behalf of the Assistant Clerk and himself on completing a satisfactory and successful year.

6. OTHER MATTERS RELATING TO THE PARISH IN OPEN QUESTIONS-

The Chairman invited questions from the floor; Cllr Henschley said the issue of Fly Tipping continued. This year alone we had noted over 60 recorded incidents. He was intent on continuing the campaign to achieve prosecutions for offenders if they could be apprehended in the particular local areas were continually being used.

Highways

Cllr Henschley also added that the response of the Highways Agency left a lot to be desired, he was regularly campaigning for the improvements to Colney Heath roads. cleaning of ditches and the re-surfacing of the High Street, which is rumoured to be on the list for re-surfacing in 2007. The campaign for improvements to the long about to make the on approach slower for safety was another issue.

Planning

Cllr Brazier gave his views on the building issues in the district and said he would continue to oppose building in the Green Belt especially the kind of increase in housing stock that was being suggested.

Chairman's conclusion

The meeting closed at 8.45 with the Chairman thanking those local organisations who had set up excellent presentations in the hall, and suggested those present would find it interesting to view them after. He thanked Rachel Keen for an excellent presentation and County Councillor Brian Lee for attending. He had enjoyed his year as Chair it had been a significant year and thanked his fellow Councillors for their enthusiasm. Everyone was invited to join the councillors for a glass of wine after.

There was a montage of media picture images set to run in the interval showing highlights of the happenings in the parish year, also the typical things the parish does or looks after, good and not so good. All made for interesting overview of the day to day work of the Parish Council in Colney Heath.



John Dean
Clerk to the Council