

CHAIRMAN
TERRY HALL
BRICKFIELD HOUSE
SHOREHAM LANE
HALSTEAD
KENT TN14 7DE
01959 532098



KNOCKHOLT PARISH COUNCIL

www.knockholtparish.org.uk

CLERK
DOREEN JONES
5 OLD LONDON ROAD
KNOCKHOLT
KENT TN14 7JN
01959 532150
e-mail:kpc@5oldlondon.freereserve.co.uk

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 21ST APRIL 2004 IN THE VILLAGE CENTRE

The meeting was attended by 64 parishioners. Cllrs Crafter, Crick and Martin sent their apologies.

1. **THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL**

a) **Report of the Chairman – Cllr. Terry Hall**

May the 1st marked the commencement of the new four year term for the Council and its Councillors. At the May meeting I was again elected as Chairman and I have pleasure in giving the following brief report on the past year's business.

The Cllr's elected in May represented the Parish Council during the last term of office.

Unfortunately in July Cllr John McIntyre retired from the Council to be able to spend more time with his family. John's expertise particularly with Policing and other matters were invaluable to the Council and we wish him well for the future. In October we were back up to strength and were very fortunate to co-opt Cllr Joe Malzer as John's replacement. Having served many years in the Police the Council were very keen for Joe to join us hence the Council's quick persuasion to appoint him to the Police and Civil Protection Committee. He has agreed to take on the additional duties of Flood Warden. Although policing comes as every day business to Cllr Malzer, the Flood Warden appointment is a new challenge and I am sure that he will do us proud should the situation ever arise in the Village.

The past twelve months have been a busy time for our Parish Councillors and our Clerk with many varied tasks undertaken.

I am pleased to report that vandalism in the village has been minimal during the past year compared with previous years. The Parish Council has spent a considerable amount of time looking into ways and means of involving the youth of the village. To this end an action plan was produced in conjunction with representatives of various groups associated with children in Knockholt, the Sevenoaks District Council, our Community Police Officer and our local shop keeper..

A questionnaire was produced and delivered to every household in the Village to ascertain what facilities the young people would be interested in having.. This followed with a meeting between a group of youngsters and Councillors from the Open Spaces Committee.

The outcome of these actions is that it has been agreed, subject to obtaining suitable funding to provide the young people with a Youth Shelter in the recreation ground. An application for a grant towards the costs has been made to the Sevenoaks District Council and hopefully we will know the outcome of this in the course of the next few weeks. If we receive a positive result for a grant we will then be in a position to go ahead and install the shelter with the minimum of delay.

In addition to the shelter we also hope to provide a Basket Ball Hoop and a set of Football Posts.

As a Council we are of the opinion that if we can help to keep the youth of the Village somewhat occupied this will hopefully reduce any vandalism. Time will tell.

Within the children's play area on the recreation ground one of the spring animals had to be removed as it had come to the end of its useful life and was dangerous. This was replaced with a new piece of equipment. The play area and equipment have remained in good condition the only vandalism being to a small section of the wire fencing which was replaced. All of the equipment has been repainted and this area continues to give the younger children of the village many hours of fun and pleasure.

On the question of the "Shanty Town" adjacent to the football pitch which was raised previously by Parishioners I am pleased to report that the old and dilapidated Portacabins have now been dismantled and removed from the site and the area tidied. In addition to this the entrance gates and adjacent fencing have been replaced

The Railway Carriage which houses football equipment etc will shortly be repainted and will then complete this particular project.

Transport for the Village has been a topic of much discussion at meetings during the past year. As you are aware the R5 bus route has a new operator and at the commencement of their contract the service was only running one way. I am

pleased to report that after much input and discussion by the Parish Council they have now agreed that the service will run in both directions. A thank you is in order to Councillor Martin who are responsible for transportation matters in the Village following a considerable amount of time and effort that he has put in on this matter.

We have recently received a Strategic Rail Authority Integrated Kent Franchise Train Service Specification Consultation document.. This indicates proposed drastic cuts in the rush hour rail service from Knockholt, Chelsfield and Dunton Green stations. Another unsatisfactory transport situation for our village and the Parish Council have replied expressing great concerns and disagreement with the proposals.

As you may be aware the Post Office building has been sold and there has for sometime been talk regarding the post box being kept in the village. I am pleased to report that after several discussions with the Post Office the box has now been repositioned opposite, adjacent to the entrance to the recreation ground, thus preserving some of the old history of our village and giving continuity of mail collection from this point.

During the year we were advised that the War Memorial at the Church is in need of urgent repair. We were also advised that this is the responsibility of the Parish Council. A considerable amount of time has been spent in finding out the history and information such as its origin, the date it was dedicated etc. In order to obtain any grant towards the cost of the required work it has been necessary to obtain listed status for the Memorial and I am pleased to report that the Council have managed to achieve Grade 2 listing by the Ministry of Culture Media and Sport. Tenders have been obtained for the work involved and a grant application has been submitted.

Throughout the year we have had our usual share of problems associated with Street Lighting within the village but generally speaking the response time by the contractors has been fairly good

At our request the road markings outside the village school have been repainted. We, as a Council consider that in the interest of safety to the children crossing lights should be installed outside the school We have approached the Highways department of Sevenoaks District Council only to be informed that we do not meet the regulations required for crossing lights. We do not agree with their decision and are taking the matter further.

You may remember sometime ago we announced that we had been successful in reaching an agreement with the Highways people to install gateway markings at the entrances to the village. After progressing this project several times throughout the year we have been assured that this work will be completed by the end of May. Hopefully their promise will materialise.

Policing throughout the village has become even more of a serious concern and during the past year this Council has spent many hours of discussion on this particular problem. However you will note that this is an agenda item and a full report will be given by your Councillor responsible for Policing matters in the Village.

Fly tipping throughout the village has been, and is becoming more of a problem. Over the year more and more rubbish including old cars have been tipped around our country lanes. I consider that the Parish Council and in particular our Councillor responsible for Environmental matters have done a first class job in keeping abreast of the problem. Generally speaking Sevenoaks District Council have responded fairly well to our requests for the rubbish to be removed.

As mentioned many times in the past and again in our last News Letter some dog owners in the village are continuing to let their dogs foul the pavements in Knockholt particularly along by Ringfield in the Main Road. I personally just do not understand the mentality of these dog owners and remind them that this is a fineable offence. Sevenoaks District Council employ Dog Wardens and one of their duties is to catch the guilty owners who allow their dogs to foul the public highway and prosecute them. Unless this filthy habit ceases we as a Council will have no alternative other than to request that the Dog Wardens patrol our Village. I hope that this action will not be necessary and trust that the few guilty dog owners will take note and abide by the law.

A tidying up exercise at the Letts Green Pond will take place in the spring when a volunteer party will be required to assist with the work involved. It would be very nice to see some volunteers from the Parish as in the past only your Councillors have turned out.

On behalf of the Parish Council and all the Parishioners of Knockholt I would like again to thank Coolings Nurseries for the lovely flower beds that they provide in the village and maintain for us throughout the year. They certainly give great pleasure and enhance our Village.

The Councillors responsible for both Planning and Financial matters have had another busy year and will both be reporting on their activities under the agenda item.

We have, in the past year, again produced and delivered to every household in the Village the quarterly Parish Council News letter. In addition minutes are produced and are available for every meeting and are available on the website so that we feel that we have fully kept you up to speed with your Parish Council's business. Regarding the web site I am pleased to report that this has been redesigned and is now up and running.

Due to the increasing amount of the Council's paperwork that now has to be displayed to the public it has been agreed to purchase and erect a larger main notice board on the Pound adjacent to the footpaths map. This we hope will be in position very shortly.

Recently a review of Civil Protection in Knockholt was discussed and it has been agreed that the Parish Council will formulate its own simple Parish Emergency Plan based mainly on the use of the Village Centre. A plan will now be drawn up to include lists of volunteers, details of professional residents with specific skills such as Doctors, Fire

Officers, Electricians and Plumbers etc who would be prepared to assist the village in an emergency situation on a voluntary basis.

Before we move on to the next agenda item I would like to thank the Parishioners for giving the Parish Council the opportunity to represent them in the past year. On a personal note I would like to thank all the Councillors and our lady Clerk for their support and hard work during this period and also Mr Michael Stevens for all his help and expertise given on Planning matters

b) Report of the Treasurer – Cllr. Barry Page

The Treasurer reported on the end of year figures. The Council had kept within budget and had a surplus which accords with the level agreed by the Council and will go into reserves. Money for ongoing projects has been allowed in this year's precept, which had increased by only 0.7 % over last year's.

c) Report of the Chairman of Planning – Cllr. Alan Hildrew

In preparing this short report on the activities of the Planning Committee I took a look at the comments I made last year in an effort to avoid repetition. However upon review it became apparent that for the benefit of new attendees at this meeting a bit of repetition would be in order.

Firstly the Parish Council is not a planning authority. The majority of local planning decisions are taken by Sevenoaks District Council. The Parish Council is what is known as a statutory consultee. That is to say on all planning applications made to Sevenoaks District Council that concern Knockholt the Parish Council receive a copy for review and comment. The Planning Committee meet as and when required as we are given deadlines to make any representations. Meeting dates are posted on the Parish Council noticeboards. If you are particularly interested in a certain application you can contact the Clerk who will advise when it will be discussed. As with all Parish Council meetings the meetings of the Planning Committee are open to the public.

It is the aim of the Planning Committee to provide a local unbiased view of the proposed development within the guidelines of the Sevenoaks Local Plan. Individual members of the public can of course make their own submissions on any planning application direct to Sevenoaks District Council. The Planning Committee is always happy to receive copies of individual representations made to Sevenoaks District Council.

Over the past year the Planning Committee has reviewed approximately 45 planning applications and replies have been returned to Sevenoaks District Council. It has never been policy of the Parish Council to highlight any particular application for comment in this review but there have been a number of issues that do warrant mentioning.

Our location on top of the North Downs continues to attract the attention of mobile 'phone operators. Either we are faced with applications for new masts or for additional dishes on the existing two masts in the village. The policy of this Council is to encourage mast sharing in preference to the proliferation of masts in the Green Belt and Special Landscape Area which covers most of the Parish. To this end when faced with applications for additional dishes on existing masts this council has normally responded along the lines that we have no objections as long as the District Council are satisfied with regard to health risks. Applications for new masts in the village have been successfully resisted in the past but the Planning Committee is aware that there will likely be substantial additional pressure for such developments in the future as new technologies come on stream.

Another issue that continues to tax the Planning Committee is the somewhat haphazard way domestic curtilages are shown on applications the majority of which are prepared by professional architects and draftsmen that you would have hoped would have known better. The Planning Committee continue to press Sevenoaks District Council to obtain revised plans clearly defining the domestic curtilage (which should be outlined in red on the plans) and details of other land in the ownership of the applicant (outlined in blue) on all applications. The purpose of this is to prevent the over-development of plots within the village and to preserve the openness of the Green Belt where appropriate.

Over the past year a lot of time and effort has been given to the use of land by the various businesses in the village. These types of applications are by their very nature complex as consideration of the Local Plan and the planning history of such sites are most important in determining our response. They therefore unfortunately lead to long meetings!

The Planning Committee also reviews strategic planning documentation and consultations. For example we have recently responded to the Strategic Rail Authority regarding Integrated Kent Franchise – Train Service Specification. For the record we have objected most strongly to the proposed reduction in the level of train services from Knockholt station.

d) Report of the Police Liaison Councillor – Cllr. Malzer

There have been considerable concerns regarding the apparent lack of police coverage of the Knockholt area. We do have our own police officer, WPC Jackie Allen who unfortunately is responsible for four other villages. Consequently the time she can devote specifically to Knockholt is limited.

We are officially designated a low crime area, which presumably justifies a lower police presence, and that, coupled with the fact that we are on the furthest border of the West Kent Police Authority nearest fully manned police station being Tonbridge, leaves some residents feeling vulnerable. This conception has resulted in some residents clubbing together and employing private security to patrol their area at the top end of the village. It is clearly not satisfactory when residents feel that they have to take such steps to protect themselves.

Although designated a low crime area we still suffer a lot of burglaries, thefts of, and from, motor vehicles, vandalism, handbag snatches and a large number of thefts from garages and sheds; this appears to coincide with increasing problems of 'travellers' calling door to door and trying to gain access to outhouses etc.

The Parish Council is well aware of these problems and over the last six months or so has had three face to face meetings with groups of police officers. One beneficial result of these meetings is that the Crime Reduction Unit has recruited another officer for this area to work with WPC Allen, which is good news. Operation Bantam which is a rural task force of one sergeant and four P.Cs is also in operation and, in fact, has been seen in the village.

Possibly the most persistent complaint we receive is that of vehicles speeding through the village. In response to these the council has agreed to join the Speed Watch scheme. Briefly, this is a partnership between police and teams of village volunteers to be trained by police in the use of speed detection devices (radar guns). Once trained the volunteers will monitor roads throughout the village, record the registration number of vehicles exceeding the speed limit and pass these details on to the police. Volunteers must be eighteen or over. The cost to the village of the equipment required is affordable (the gun is £160).

As a result of these meetings the Council has decided by a majority vote to bid in partnership with Halstead Parish Council for a Community Police Support Officer. CPSO is a government sponsored scheme to employ a uniformed body to be a visible presence on the street to act as the eyes of the regular police. The shared cost to the village would be £7,500 per year i.e. £26.50 per household – the government pays the rest of the cost. The scheme runs out in 2006 at which time if the funding ceased we would be responsible for the full cost, whatever that may be in the future.

It must be remembered that these support officers are NOT police officers or special constables and, consequently, do not have the powers of a fully warranted officer. Following training they work a 37^{1/2} hour week between the hours of 7 a.m. and 11 p.m. and are paid approximately £12,000 per annum. They do have a limited power of arrest and can issue fixed penalty notices for some offences and take action against antisocial behaviour and consumption of alcohol by juveniles.

Questions on these reports were then taken.

2. Launch of the Village Design Statement – a joint initiative of the Council and The Knockholt Society
Mr Michael Stevens of the Knockholt Society made a presentation about Village Design Statements to the meeting. The parish Council and the Society had agreed to launch the initiative at this meeting. They wish to involve the whole community in this and to that end are hoping for volunteers to help with the gathering of information about the village and the way forward. An initial meeting for those interested will be held on Wednesday 2nd June at 8 p.m. in the Village Centre. Mr Stevens kindly answered questions after his presentation. He was thanked by the Chairman.