

REACH VILLAGE

Minutes of Annual Reach Parish Meeting held on; Wednesday 5th May 2010

Attendance

Michael Aves	Vice Chairman	Present
Ross Clark	Chairman	Present
Rita Dunnett	Councillor	Present
Hilary Fielding	Councillor	Present
Joyce Harrison	Councillor	Present
Angela King	Councillor	Present
Helen Platt	Councillor	Present
David Parr	Clerk	Present
Allen Alderson	District Councillor	Present
David Brown	County Councillor	Present

plus members of the Reach public.

Chairman's Report

The Parish Council is in good shape financially. In a year of fiscal embarrassment nationally, the council managed to spend less money this year than last. In 2009/10 we spent £6,688 and received £7,787 in income. In 2008/09, by comparison, we spent £7,871 and received £6,841 in income. We have managed to bear down on costs in areas such as insurance and accounting. The new mowing contract is working well. In 2009/10 we spent £1,435 on mowing – less than we spent in 2008/09 doing the job ourselves with our own mower. We now have a healthy, though not excessive, reserve which will allow us to operate without significant increases in the parish precept for the foreseeable future.

The Amenity Fund this year handed out £512 in grants. There is currently £3,434 in the fund – before an expected contribution from the fair. Applications are welcome for any activities or equipment which will be of benefit to a number of villagers. A new Amenity Fund Committee has been set up this year, comprising two members of the Parish Council, two members of the Village Centre Committee and one external member. This will improve the situation which has previously existed, under which the Parish Council and Village Centre Committee were expected to make decisions on applications, even though the two bodies do not actually meet together.

The Parish Council has this year provided a site of 10 allotments at Barston Drove, created by the subdivision of a half acre strip owned by the Swaffham Prior Parochial Charities. Further land may well be available should further demand arise.

The Parish Council is pursuing the possibility of creating a tennis court at the northern (roadside) end of the recreation ground – while still allowing room for football. East Cambridgeshire District Council has agreed to make a grant of £10,000 towards this facility – funded by section 106 money (money paid by house builders to fund infrastructure and leisure facilities). A further £1,000 has been promised from the Amenity Fund and a £500 donation has been given by a villager. A further grant is being sought from money raised through landfill tax. A tennis committee has been formed in order to raise money for the ongoing upkeep of the court.

The Parish Council has also explored the possibility of providing a cricket net on the recreation ground. Half the estimated cost (£1,000) has been promised from the Amenity Fund. An application to Sport England for funding for

the remainder has not so far been successful. Other means of raising money are being explored.

The Parish Council has agreed this year to join the Parish Paths Partnership – an initiative through which the District Council works with parish councils to help maintain rights of way. This will hopefully lead to footpaths and bridleways being kept in better condition in future.

Finance Report

The following comments are based on our 2009-2010 unaudited accounts.

Income for the financial year was as per our forecast at £7,787.

Cemetery costs were lower than expected since the water has now been turned off, less mowing took place (mainly due to a dry spell during the summer), a rates rebate was granted and there were no other maintenance costs.

Our maintenance and repairs costs were some £500 less than forecast. This was mainly due to no maintenance costs for the bus shelters and the playground or on equipment hire plus again, reduced mowing costs. These savings were offset by an overspend on cutting the hedges on the playing field.

Other expenses were lower than expected mainly in the area of insurance and general/clerk's expenses. The Clerk's salary was overspent against forecast due to the pay review which came into effect during the year.

Overall it was a financially successful year and the Parish Council increased its reserves by £1,100, they are now at £3,263 which is nearly 50% of our year ending 2010 spend, which is a comfortable amount.

For year ending 2011, following a 3.6% increase in precept, the Parish Council is forecasting a break-even situation.

County Council Report

Looking back over the year for my first annual report it has been quite a learning curve, but a thoroughly enjoyable time and I feel very honoured to have been elected to represent the views of local people.

Committee Membership

One of the first things to arise after my election was the allocation of places on committees. I was appointed to the Environment and Community Services Scrutiny Committee, the Adult and Communities Policy Development Group, the Services Appeals Committee as well as becoming the County Council representative to the Local Government Association Rural Commission and the Cambridgeshire Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs. I have attended meetings of all these bodies during the year.

Buses

After the successful campaign to save our local buses in 2008/09 which I was involved in at District level, I had hoped that 2009/10 would be quiet on the bus service front – some hope! Stagecoach announced a variety of cuts to local services on commercial grounds. Whilst this is ultimately a decision for Stagecoach rather than the County Council, I have taken up a number of concerns for local bus users with Stagecoach and at the time of writing, those discussions, aimed at improving the service for users of all ages, continue.

Library/Archives

After some delays the County Council officially opened the new Central Library in Cambridge. The County Council Archives section was successful in saving some historic documents regarding the draining of the fens for future generations. Owing to budget pressures we are looking at the provision of library services, with the current level of service from mobile libraries of particular local interest.

Service Appeals

I attended two service appeal committees during the year. Both of these related to appeals from parents who had been turned down for free home to school transport for their children. Such cases can be quite involved and require careful consideration.

LGA Rural Commission

The LGA Rural Commission met, with the provision of local health services and supply of affordable housing high on the agenda. The affordable housing issue tied in well with a member-led review of affordable housing provision across Cambridgeshire, which I am taking part in.

Budget

Probably unsurprisingly in light of the economic downturn, budget discussions and setting the Council Tax took up a considerable amount of time during the year. With a combination of savings and a modest rise in Council Tax we were eventually able to agree a balanced budget.

Highways Issues

With the County Council responsible for highways, I have had numerous requests for help and assistance over a variety of issues. These have included reporting potholes for repair, work on dropped kerbs to help the less-mobile, routing of Heavy Commercial Vehicles, the A14/A142 junction at Newmarket and of course, the "traffic calming" measures at Quy. Many of these issues are ongoing.

Requests for Help

There have been numerous requests for help and guidance from local people and organisations on a wide range of issues. I have tried to help where possible and hope and believe that I have done my best.

Highs and Lows

There have been numerous high points during the year. A few that spring to mind include Burwell Village College being the first school in the country to achieve all three standards in the national "Sing Up" awards scheme, being invited to read a lesson at Swaffham Prior Carol Service, the official opening of the new play equipment in Swaffham Bulbeck and securing a change in bus times so that workers at the Prospects Trust in Reach could use buses. Undoubtedly the biggest low, on a personal level, was representing the County Council at the funeral of Private Robbie Hayes, following his untimely death in Afghanistan.

District Council Report

East Cambs Budget 2010/2011

This is probably the toughest budget that this Council has ever had to set due to the impact of the recession and the smaller than expected government grant settlements. ECDC has had to make across the board savings to cover a deficit of £1.65 million over the next year. The savings made meant that the council tax increase was just 2.95% which is less than eight pence per week for a band D property.

Plastic Bottle Collections

Unfortunately one of the cost saving measures in the budget is the ending of the plastic bottle collections at a saving of £119,000. The Council are looking to provide more plastic bottle banks in the district in areas of increased use.

Citizens Advice Bureaus

The Council provides funding for Ely and Newmarket CABs. This funding has been maintained in recognition of their importance during this recessionary period.

Tourism

Oliver Cromwell's House is holding its own during the recession without a drop in attendance or income generated. ECDC is updating its tourist website on May 11th; it will then have more information available.

The Armed Forces

Because of the important role that our armed forces play, ECDC have decided that any members or ex-members in East Cambs will not have their income set against any benefit entitlement.

Member Visits

During the last year the Council has arranged a series of member visits to give councillors a better understanding of the district. There have been visits to the new waste management plant at Waterbeach, to Turners and D S

Smiths in Fordham and to G's Salads near Ely.

Committees

During this last year I have been a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, plus the Licensing Committee. I have also been a panel member of the South Area Neighbourhood Panel.

Swaffham Prior Parochial Charities Report

Scout Hut

The lease ran out and after discussion with solicitors, their recommendation was to renew every five years as opposed to every twenty five.

Rent Review

This was considered but after taking advice from Cheffins, it was decided not to increase the rent for the time being.

Allotments

A number of allotments have changed hands both in Reach and Swaffham Prior. The charity is pleased to see the land being used for its original purpose, that of family food production.

Grants

This year we had fewer applications for help than normal, there being only two private applications. We followed our normal practice of helping the Swaffham Prior School.

Christmas Grants

This was £75 last year due to our investments holding up in value very well. It will probably be late October before we will know the financial position for allocation of this year's grant.

Village Centre Committee Report

For those of you who are not aware, the Village Centre Committee are responsible for the day to day running of the Village Centre, which is leased from the diocese, as well as organising Reach Fair.

The bulk of the annual costs are covered by money raised during the Fair and we have no precept on the rate, unlike many other villages of our size. We also contribute all the funding to the Amenity Fund. The initial results for Reach Fair 2010 are that a total profit of approximately £5,500 was achieved. For the financial year to the end of May 2010 it is forecast that the charity will have approximately £3,600 in its current account and £10,000 in its deposit account.

The hall is rented out to regular users like the playgroup and occasional users such as birthday parties, weddings etc. We have a range of items for hire, including marquees, barbeques and games.

This year our main capital expenditure has been on the redecoration of the rear bar room, including new light fittings. We have carried out minor maintenance to the heating system and the usual PAT testing and electrical systems testing. Any suggestions for further improvement to the amenities will be gratefully received.

I would also like to take this opportunity to give my thanks to all the committee members who give a great deal of time to organising the Fair, for not much reward and also to those who volunteered to help on the day itself. Again, if any ideas for improving the Fair are out there please let us know.

Amenity Fund Committee

This will meet for the first time on Wednesday 12th May 2010.

Report collated by David Parr

12th May 2010