

Hail Weston Annual Parish Assembly

March 21st 2017 at 7.30pm

Veronica Bolton welcomed five residents to the meeting and speakers. Apologies received from Cllr. G Warner.

Report from Hail Weston Parish Council Chairman Veronica Bolton

A very warm welcome to the Annual Parish Assembly. We have some speakers and an opportunity for questions followed by liquid refreshment!!

I'm very pleased to report that the PC realised full memberships in 2016 reaching its full capacity of seven. This is something that has not been achieved since 2012 but unfortunately was short lived. The council welcomed Jane Sugars in April 2016 and Rebecca Rowley Smith in January of this year. This currently leaves one vacancy. Please do get in touch if you're interested and want to find out more of what is entailed. The work isn't too onerous and can very rewarding. It is a real insight into how your community works.

The work of the council falls into two areas -

- representing you on issues effecting the community such as planning the applications - 7 in the last year
- Maintaining our open spaces - the allotments, playing field, the new cemetery and grassland

The council strategy has continued around the actions raised from the Community Plan

- Communication - launch of the new website along with twitter and Facebook platforms
- Development of a playing field committee consisting of volunteers who have made playing field improvements, repaired and painted fencing and generally keeping the area spic and span
- Garden of rest - members of the village were keen to make this area more attractive and consequently a better used space. The PC has approved a plan to renovate the garden including the siting of some apple trees. Phased work has begun.
- Highways - application to reduce the speed on the B645, improved signage including not suitable for HGV signs at ford, support the safety committee who undertook an

excellent job of fund raising for a defibrillator, and starting the community cafe - watch this space for more activity. Many thanks to Maurice and Sue for leading on this.

The end of February saw us organise the Annual litter pick with a fantastic 21 volunteers helping to clear 25 bags of rubbish. It was great to see so many new faces.

Sadly a lot of improvements to the village require money. The precept for 2017/18 was approved in November reflecting an increase of 20% approx. £2 a week per household. Advice from both HDC and CCC is consistent with previous years - in that finding remains tight and undoubtedly services will be effected requiring the PC to do more. Following a disappointing outcome from last year's Highway Initiative it was clear that Hail Weston would need to submit a stronger proposal and importantly include more investment towards realising the feedback from the community plan of trying to achieve a safer B645. That along with replacing 17 Parish owner street lights made for another significant increase.

District councillor Jonathon Gray and County Councillor Peter Downes do a sterling job at keeping HWPC informed of opportunity to shape consultations and wider county news. I would like to thank them both. Peter Downes has served this council for 12 years and I understand that this is his last Parish assembly.

I want to thank all the village volunteers who help this village to become a more attractive and nicer place to live. Too many to thank individually but from those individuals who simply report issues on line or via our parish clerk such as potholes and fly tipping to those support the Church Restoration, Crime and Safety, Gardening Group, Village Hall Committee endless and apologies to any I have missed.

I would also like to thank my fellow councillors without who I couldn't take the role of Chair. They have taken the burden of the work, for which I thank them. I think my fellow councillors would also like to join me to thank Jen Abell our Parish Clerk for her sterling work supporting the council, all her hard work makes our role so much easier.

This is my last Parish Assembly and I will be standing down from the Council in May and the AGM. It has been an enjoyable time and I urge anyone interested to give a go. Thank you

Cllr. T Baker briefly outlined successful bid for funding to secure B645 road improvements and speed reduction. Full details will follow. Cllr. Baker outlined that it was due to the work of CLP team and production of plan that was presented, CCC Peter Downes support,

a revised impactful and amended financial submission from the PC that resulted in success following last year's refused application.

A resident thanked PC for efforts with this significant success. Also thanked the Chair Veronica Bolton, as it was to be her last Parish Assembly for her continued work as Chair of HWPC over the years.

Report from District Councillor Jonathan Gray

Awaiting full report – Specific work as Ward Councillor: -

I regularly provide help and advice to residents and the Parish Council. I am particularly pleased that the Royal Oak situation has now made positive progress. We have worked on this together over several years, and it is a case study of its type. Rarely has a village pub been able to see off conversion into a private house. By working together, watching out for loopholes, and by being flexible in how it could be delivered, we are now within touching distance of success.

I attend the vast majority of Parish Councils right across the Ward in order to keep informed on matters specific to your village and provide support and advice to your Parish Councillors.

I continue to lobby for vital and valued services in rural areas – which already have considerable less council 'spend' – to be maintained. For example, I have repeatedly turned down officer requests to introduce charges for all green bins. Whilst this would have made in excess of £1m improvement to our budget, I know residents greatly appreciate this service.

A resident and Parish Council thanked Cllr. J Gray for his continued support in assisting with the pub negotiations from not being sold as a residential dwelling. The resident encouraged the PC to secure for the foreseeable future its continuation as listed as an Asset of Community Value.

Report from St Nicolas Church - Churchwarden Mary Deacon

Very pleased to announce the news that the Bishop has appointed a new Vicar, Reverend Nicki Bland who will be joining the benefice of the Staughton's with Hail Weston at a service in September to which residents of Hail Weston are all invited. Revd Nicki's background is that she is currently chaplain to Kimbolton school and is Associate Priest in the South Leightonstone Benefice Group of churches including Barham, Spaldwick, Kimbolton, Tillbrook, Easton, Covington and Stow Longa. Nicki and her husband, John will be moving into the vicarage once a parish office is completed hopefully by mid-summer.

The Restoration Group have now employed an architect to draw up plans to reflect the wishes of the all interested parties and keeping the integrity of our lovely church. It is hoped the plans will be available to view at the village fete. Please do come and make your views known. Fund raising has started and had a boost last Friday thanks to the very well attended talk given by Revd Canon Annette Reed entitled Sex, Sin and Scandal, which raised £496. Keep a look out for future restoration fund raising events. The PCC are extremely grateful to the restoration group which allows the PCC to carry on with the general maintenance of church and churchyard.

Despite the vacancy since August 2016 the PCC have been able to continue services using retired clergy to whom we extend our sincere thanks. Special services such as Christingle, Plough Sunday and Rogationtide are very well attended and hopefully will continue.

The church has been used by individuals and groups for activities other than services such as the Mondays Singers, musicians, meetings, pop up café which are in line with the Bishops Strategy of using church buildings by those other than regular worshippers.

The Mondays concert and the pudding night were great success stories in that everyone who attended enjoyed the music and puddings. The PCC hope to offer more of the same this year including cream teas during summer months, a quiz night and a Pimms night.

Finally, but not least the PCC would like to thank the Parish Council for the contribution towards the upkeep of the church yard. It has enabled us to carry out the wishes of resident's feedback from the parish plan the PCC really are very grateful.

A report from Richard Braddick PSCO

Richard introduced himself having served Hail Weston alongside a further 28 other villages for last 3 months. He has moved to the area from Yorkshire. He outlined challenges with rural policing. He felt strongly about Service for rural communities and discussed priorities as Rural Watch: - enlisting support from volunteers and keen to hear from any who could spare some nights a month to work alongside him and Community Speed Watch. He also encouraged his involvement with youth/resident Groups in Hail Weston where he could provide security & personal safety talks and be a part of our community.

A report on Cambridgeshire County Council from Cllr Peter Downes

1. The political balance of the Council

After some defections (from Conservatives to UKIP and vice versa, and one Conservative to Independent) the political composition of the Council now stands as: 32 Conservatives, 14 Liberal Democrats, 8 Labour, 10 UKIP, 5 Independents.. The Council has a system of 5 decision-making committees, each comprising 13 members, politically balanced. The

general view is that this works quite well since it involves all councillors more fully (but, not surprisingly, some people would prefer to be in total control).

The Chief Executive, Gillian Beasley, is shared with Peterborough as part of the policy of reducing back office costs and the Director for Children Families and Adults is also a shared post.

The next Council election on revised division boundaries will take place on Thursday, May 4th and the new Council will have 61 members.

2. What the Council provides

Social services to children and young people, older people, people with mental health problems, physical and learning disabilities; Planning of school places and some support for schools (although the funding for day-to-day running comes from central government); Coordinated Early Years provision, nurseries etc.; Libraries; road maintenance; road safety measures; Overall transport strategy; Growth and wider development issues; Trading standards; waste disposal and recycling centres. The full details can be found in the Council Tax booklet delivered to all residents.

3. The key issue faced by Cambridgeshire County Council: reduced funding

This year has seen a continuation and intensification of the debate on how to continue to provide the services residents have come to expect but in a context of severe financial pressures. Central government has continued to reduce its revenue grant to local authorities; locally that is from £86 million in 2013-14 to nil by 2019-20. Councils have little flexibility to increase tax levels (see below, para. 5). The demand for services is increasing as the elderly population and the under-fives increase and services are costing more. I have kept the Parish Council regularly informed about this and produced summaries of the main issues.

4. A new development - the Combined Authority and a directly elected Mayor

From May 2017 there will be a 'Devolution Deal' comprising a new 'Combined Authority' for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough with a Mayor elected in a separate election to be held on the same day as the County Council election, Thursday, May 4th. This 'deal' provides an extra £20 million per year for the next 30 years and this is to be used for a wide range of infrastructure projects across the combined areas. The office of mayor and staff will cost over £800k per year. There will also be extra funding for housing. The combined authority comprises Peterborough City Council (a unitary authority), the district councils of Huntingdonshire, Fenland, East Cambs, South Cambs and Cambridge City, and the County Council. The Mayor will have a Cabinet comprising the Council Leaders from all the constituent councils and there will also be a scrutiny panel. This outcome was reached after much debate and major disagreements between the political groups: Labour and Conservatives in favour, Lib Dems and UKIP against.

5. Council Tax

This year the government allowed upper tier councils with social care responsibilities to increase council tax by 2% on top of the normal 2% permitted increase, or 3% for the

coming two years only. Cambridgeshire CC decided to accept the 2% social care increase but decided on no increase in the basic council tax. Thus the total increase in council tax for 2017-18 will be 2% i.e. £24 pa for a Band D household or 46p per week.

6. Services for older people

More and more people are living longer and, in the main, healthier lives. When they do become dependent, the cost to the Council is very considerable. The Council's aim is to enable more people to live longer at home and be supported there rather than going into sheltered accommodation. Last year the buzzword was 'Reablement'; this year it is Transformation. This is a significant reduction in personnel together with higher expectations on the voluntary sector and an assumption of a willingness on the part of beneficiaries to accept new ways of being supported. However it is dressed up, there can be no disguising the fact that provision will get worse for some and this is a matter of great concern, both locally and nationally.

7. Transport and Highways

- a. The bus services continue to cause concern for their frequency and reliability. The Huntingdonshire Association for Community Transport (HACT) provides a valued service.
- b. Road maintenance, footpath repair and general maintenance of village infrastructure are a constant source of complaint from residents.

8. Education

All Cambridgeshire secondary schools are now 'academies' which means that the Council has no jurisdiction over them. The proportion of Cambridgeshire secondary school pupils attending schools rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' has increased since last year. National research findings confirm that becoming an academy does not of itself raise standards. Only a small minority of primaries have become academies. The Ofsted assessment of our primary schools is much more positive and the improvement has been more marked in the maintained primaries than in the academies. The financial advantage of being an academy, significant in the earlier days of the policy, has now disappeared. The County Council retains responsibility for the 'well-being' of children in academies though it has no formal role in intervening when things go wrong.

Central government grant to Cambridgeshire improved in 15-16, was maintained for 16-17 and will be continued in cash terms for 17-18. So a school with more pupils will get more money but, at a time when costs in schools are increasing, this means a real terms cut, estimated to be about 8% over the next four years. . The long-awaited national fair funding formula has been published and, with almost as many losers as winners, is naturally controversial. It will start in 2018-19 and then in 2019-20 every school will receive its grant direct from Whitehall with no 'interference' from the Local Authority. Cambridgeshire is, overall; a net gainer but small rural primary schools will be worse off. Those wishing to read more about this should contact me via peter.downes@cambridgeshire.gov.uk.

Major reductions in the services for young people are included in the CCC Business Plan.

9. Work in Cambridge undertaken by your County Councillor

Every councillor is expected to develop an area of personal expertise and for me this is Children and Young People (CYP). As the Liberal Democrat Spokesman for CYP, I have regular briefings from the Executive Director, attend the CYP Services Committee, the Corporate Parenting Board and serve on panels choosing providers of new schools, as well as on many other working-parties aimed at improving performance in all schools.

10. Hail Weston specifically

I attend Parish Council meetings as frequently as I can. I report on current issues and listen to the reaction of the Parish Council. I liaise with the Parish Clerk between meetings as required. A number of residents contact me direct for advice or to 'get something done about it'. I am pleased to have been able to support Tony Baker and Jen Abell in getting the Local Highways Initiative bid approved.

11. The future for local government services and the implication for communities

I have been frank with the parish council in recent meetings to explain how I see local services in the coming years. There is no disguising the government's intention to squeeze councils further. So a parish council has two options (which are not mutually exclusive):

- a. Moan about what is not being provided and complain to the MP about what is happening as a result of central government policy
- b. Do something about it themselves. This can either be by:
 - i. Raising the parish council precept so that the parish council can pay for some of the tasks to be carried out by local contractors or individuals
 - ii. Promote the creation of volunteer groups to carry out permitted activities previously done by the upper tier authority

12. Farewell and thanks

I have been County Councillor for Hail Weston for the last 12 years but this evening marks the end of my formal connection with you. I will not be standing in the revised division on May 4th. I would like to thank the Parish Council and the Clerk for their unfailing courtesy and warm welcome, even when I was telling them things they did not want to hear! Hail Weston is fortunate to have many socially-engaged people and I wish you well for the future.

Veronica Bolton Thanked Peter Downes for serving Hail Weston so well over last 12 years. Veronica presented Peter with a small gift of appreciation.

A discussion ensued regarding Right of Ways, parking charges in St Neots, B645 improvements and Royal Oak Pub, VB thanked residents for attending.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm. Refreshments were served.