

THE PARISH MEETING OF WHISSENDINE 2014

This was held in the C of E Primary School, Main Street, Whissendine on Wednesday, 19th March. It commenced at 7.39pm.

Present: Mr Will Farr (Chairman)
Mrs Linda Arnold, Mr David Hatton, Mrs Pat Lake, Mrs Alex Mould, (Parish Councillors) and
Mr Brian Montgomery (Ward Councillor)
Mrs Jen Lacey (Parish Clerk, taking minutes)

30 other local government electors, Mr Roger Begy (RCC) and 1 police officer were in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

Apologies were given on behalf of Mr Rob Comber, and Dr Andrew Moyce.

1. Welcome

The Chairman thanked residents for coming along to attend the meeting, and welcomed particularly those representing organisations and any who might be attending for the first time.

2. Minutes of 2013 meeting

These were accepted on the proposal of Mrs A Mould and signed by the Chairman.

3. Police Comments

The police were represented this year by Police Community Officer Martin Clarke who said he was based mainly in Oakham, but had a special knowledge of countryside issues. He gave assurance that Oakham police station would not close in the foreseeable future, but in any case a police presence would be maintained in the town.

He commented briefly on Whissendine's crime statistics which once again were low with only four minor incidents in the last few months: house and outbuilding break-ins, damage to a vehicle and a 'domestic' matter. Then he went on to mention the types of crime the police were dealing with in the area so that people could take particular care: heating oil theft and catalytic converters stolen from certain types of car. A security padlock was demonstrated, and along with other devices recommended as obtainable from Oakham Police Station.

The information that concerned most people was that the peddlers of dusters etc were mostly operating illegally (licence required from RCC), and were probably looking for an opportunity to commit crime. The recommendation was that the police should be contacted on 101 when they were in the village.

There was again discussion on the parking situation in the village, particularly at school time. PC Clarke had a novel suggestion. He promised to arrange that a fire engine was driven through the village at this time to ascertain how blocked the road was. If there were vehicles causing an obstruction drivers could be warned, but most importantly it gave visual impact. Residents looked forward to the new initiative, though it was remarked that the police had not followed through on previous actions. PC Clarke gave an undertaking that he was committed to do this and he would remind a colleague that letters had been promised to be sent out by the primary school.

4. Chairman's Report on the work of the Parish Council 2013-4

Mr Farr commented first on the speed reactor sign that had been installed in Melton Road, with the purchase and installation being paid for entirely by the Parish Council.(£4440) It had been saved for from the precept over a three year period. The intention now was to take comment on whether it was perceived as successful and also participate if there should be a further Speedwatch campaign offered. Both would give information to determine whether money should be spent on a second sign in Ashwell Road. Data from earlier Speedwatch indicated speeding was almost as bad at this entrance to the village.

The Chairman went on to mention efforts to find additional land for allotments. There had been some negotiation with Stapleford Estate and some had been available. he was pleased the parish Council had been able to assist in the establishment of a Whissendine Allotment Society. (Later in the meeting it was clarified that as yet there was no actual society, but a steering group had been formed to create one.

During the course of the year there had been further negotiations with RCC Highways over the best method to avoid a vehicle/pedestrian incident in Cow lane, and it had been agreed that the road sign indicating pedestrian (small and large figures) should be used. It was hoped those would be installed at the beginning of the new financial year.

Mr Farr observed that during the wettest of winters Whissendine had not suffered too badly, but there was Councillor concern for road surfaces and the drainage system. A meeting with Highways had been arranged to ascertain future plans for the infrastructure. Councillors had also met with the Environmental Officer, Mr Howat, to walk the brook. Dredging was not advised at that time.

Finally, the Chairman reminded Whissendine organisations that the Parish Council could support them financially for projects, purchases and activities that were of benefit to the village overall, or specific groups within it. However, as with any funding, the spending of public money had to be accounted so applications needed to be made with the purpose designated and need for finance made clear.

Mr Farr thanked Parish Councillors for all they had contributed over the year. As well as being active within the village they also attended meetings representing the Council with other organisations. The work of the Parish Clerk on behalf of the Council was also acknowledged and appreciated. However, the Parish Council was now short of three councillors. The Chairman hoped people would come forward to fill the vacancies, and reminded them that the initial commitment was to a meeting that lasted just over two hours on the first Monday of each month.

5. Questions on matters arising from the minutes and reports

a) There was some concern over the number of additional allotment sites provided. Mr Hatton clarified that the piece of land offered would have provided four by area, but unfortunately only one was considered suitable for cultivation. Both the Parish Council and WEG continued to look for other possibilities.

The Ward Councillor commented that affiliation the National Allotment Society could help, and suggested the Whissendine AS liaised with Empingham's AS who had recently established successfully and benefited from affiliation with national body which had much advice and experience to offer.

b) The Chairman confirmed that the signs agreed for Cow Lane would be placed at both ends to alert motorists to the possibility of pedestrians on the roadway. The lane was already covered by a 30mph limit.

6. Ward Councillor Report

Mr Montgomery first thanked the Parish Council for the installation of the speed reactor. He believed it was the first to be entirely funded by a parish as elsewhere there had been RCC contributions. Comment he had received on it from residents was entirely favourably and he believed it was making a difference. He hoped that there would be further measures to reduce speed in the village in future.

He went on to observe that the largest number of complaints he received were to do with the road surface and drainage at various points in the village, particularly in The Nook where matters were exacerbated by flooding and retained water, and the road surface was rapidly disintegrating.

7. Comment from Councillor Begy, Leader of Rutland County Council

Mr Pocock (RCC Cabinet Portfolio holder for Highways) had been invited but was unable to attend. Mr Begy promised to discuss further some of the concerns residents had with the relevant RCC officers:

- possibility of a one way system for Cow Lane
- the need to repair the road surface of The Nook and prevent water collecting there
- drains failing to cope with surface water, (though he noted Parish Councillors had an appointment to discuss infrastructure problems in early April)
- the flooding of the Whissendine Brook

He agreed that the right approach had been taken re the speed indicator reactor, as it had been established that where the sign flashed up the actual speed, and said 'thank you' to those within the limit, there was an average speed reduction of 4-5mph. Therefore other SIDs would most probably be useful.

Mr Begy also gave up to date information on the construction of the path to link Whissendine to the Langham cycle lane to enable those on bikes could get to Oakham on a safe route. It had been anticipated that the work would be completed by early summer, but delays had been caused because of slow negotiations with landowners and the need to maintain safe bridle way provision.

8. Community Action

a) The Village Hall

Mr Dickinson said that after extensive renovations the Village Hall was proving an definite asset to Whissendine. It was now viable with the rent coming in from regular and casual letting covering the maintenance required. Recently there had been an upgrade to the heating system and work was now planned for the path round to the rear of the hall. Parish Council grants had/would be contributing to this work. Mr Dickinson concluded by thanking all those who contributed by fund raising and donating time assistance.

b) The Sports Club

The Sports Club representative commented on the fantastic facility that Whissendine possessed, and the struggle to raise the profile to gain membership. Events held there, such as the children's day and Bonfire Night had been very well supported, but regular commitment was needed. It was planned to hold a meeting at the beginning of April to find out what would prove popular. The building had been redecorated and pitches prepared and Parish Council funding had contributed towards this work.

c) Good Neighbour Scheme

Mrs Griffiths observed that the Whissendine GNS had now been in operation almost 4 years and was operating extremely successfully. Due to this some organiser time was given to visiting places where schemes were beginning to offer support, and take part in workshops to advise on best practice. They had been delighted to receive a Rutland Times Award for their work. In the past year a wheelchair had been bought and was kept in the church, for the use of any Whissendine resident, their visitors and/or relatives.

d) Neighbourhood Watch

Mr Maunders remarked that when he first took over Whissendine Neighbourhood Watch in 2001 there had been 12 participants and now that number had doubled at 24. The group was involved in the preparation of leaflet packs to provide information and in becoming familiar with online facilities for regular updates. Contacts with the police were maintained, and the local Inspector was interested in establishing a Rutland Horsewatch. They were also aiming to achieve awards.

e) Environmental Group

Mrs Moyce reported that the group had been active over the year in supporting the establishment of an allotment society within the village and working on improvements for the footpath between the old Methodist Chapel and Foxhill. There had been a grant from the Parish Council in support of this. In addition they were advising the Parish Council on improvements to the lower part of The Banks looking for suitable tree planting sites.

f) The Allotment Society

Mr Dugmore said the steering committee formed in November would shortly be having a meeting to form the Whissendine Allotment Society. He was very disappointed that as they had drafted a constitution and opened a bank account the Parish Council had not approved a request for a start up grant.

The Clerk replied that all organisations requesting a grant had to stipulate an amount, state its purpose and show relevant costs and any other money available. The Society had been informed of the requirements rather than turned down, and meeting expenses would continue to be paid.

9. Future of the Grapevine and Village Website

It was announced that Mr Brian Penny of 5 Main Street had agreed to take over as Grapevine Editor, and the next magazine would be Mr Lake's last after years of dedicated service. However, there would be a period when Mr Penny would be responsible for producing the magazine, but Mr Lake would continue to deal with the advertisement content, advertising revenue and ensure invoices to advertisers were sent out.

The future of the website was of much greater concern. It had been well established by Ms Reynolds, but was not being regularly maintained as Ms Reynolds had had to leave the Council due to lack of time. It was hoped that the Clerk could receive some instruction to ensure the site was kept up to date. It was an asset for the community and should not be allowed to decline.

10. New Parish Councillors needed

(Covered in the Chairman's report)

11. The Long Clawson Charity Report

17 people had received £70 at Christmas from the rent received for arable land at Long Clawson (£2150 gross per annum) and a contribution from the Hurst Jackson Trust. The number had fallen slightly from the previous year, but all the vouchers given out had been spent in the village shop and those retained from the previous year had also been used. A total of £1641.72 had been paid out.

However, the Parish Council was aware that not all the money was used for its prime function of giving a little more to those who most needed it at Christmas, as there was now over £5000 on deposit. Councillors had therefore welcomed an opportunity to participate in a scheme entitled 'Financial Crisis Provision' organised by RCC Social Services Dept. This would enable Social Services to ask for a contribution on behalf of any Whissendine resident they considered needed urgent financial assistance. The transaction would be made via RCC SS. The resident(s) would not be known to the Parish Council. As it was relief of poverty it was acceptable to the Charity Commissioners as this was the designated function of the charity.

12. Public question time.

a) It was asked if the acquisition of a defibrillator could be considered as the first responder had now left the village. The Chairman promised further research to be sure it would be a useful purchase, there was a suitable site and that it could be adequately maintained.

b) Mrs Edmunds volunteered to operate a village diary to try and prevent organisations holding events on the same day. It was acknowledged that for this to operate successfully it would need the support of organisers, and Mr Penny promised to get the message out in the Grapevine. Ideally the website diary would be kept up to date as well.

The meeting finished at 9.40pm