

ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY
AT 1900 WEDNESDAY 13th APRIL 2016 IN LONGSTOCK VILLAGE HALL

Present: Cllr Sophie Walters (chairman) (SW)
Cllr David Burnfield (DB)
Cllr Ivan Gibson (IG)
Cllr Charles Grieve (CG)
Cllr Rebecca Griffiths (RG)
Cllr John Milne (JM)
Cllr Selina Musters (SM)

Clerk John Musters, and as in Item 1 below.

Apologies: Borough Councillor Daniel Busk (DaB) following recent surgery; PCSO Cathy Bonter of Hampshire Constabulary, called out an hour before to an RTA; and Colin McIntyre of Leckford Estate.

1. **Welcome:** The Chairman welcomed County Councillor Andrew Gibson (AG), Borough Councillor Peter Boulton (PB) and two Longstock electors.

2. The **Minutes** of the Annual Assembly of 2015 were approved and signed.

3. **Matters Arising.** There were no matters arising from the 2015 APA.

4. In the absence of the PCSO, the **police report** was not available in time for the meeting, but from her notes sent afterwards Longstock clearly remained a low-crime area. A male had recently been arrested and charged with two local burglaries and was on bail, but it was not clear whether these offences had been committed in Longstock. Last August there had been the unusual theft of a Royal Mail post box in the village, apart from which there had been one recorded incident of tampering with a motor vehicle, one of a theft of an electricity generator from a farm, and four occasions when suspicious traders were reported, offering garden services and garden machinery. The police were working with Trading Standards to tackle rogue trading, and their advice is not to accept any services or goods offered by cold callers and to report any suspicious callers to 101.

5. **County Councillor Andrew Gibson** said that Hampshire's Council Tax next year would be the lowest of any county in England and Wales, despite the axing of the Government's Council Freeze Grant and the Government authorising County Councils to raise Council Tax by 2% to pay for additional provision of Adult Social Care and so ease the burden on the NHS.

After six years with a 'stand still' of Council Tax in the county, Hampshire had had to raise its precept by 3.99% this coming year, an increase of £41.40 on a Band D property, or 80p a week. In real terms after allowing for inflation the Hampshire tax was still lower than it was five years ago - a tribute to competent and prudent administration. In practical terms the HCC component of the Council Tax was about 75%, hence the total Band D Council Tax rise would be circa £52 pa.

As one of the largest counties in England Hampshire had an annual budget of some £1.9bn, a direct workforce of just under 10,000 employees and over 25,000 in education.

The Hampshire & IOW Devolution initiative could change the way Local Government funding is structured. However the Government was insisting on support for an elected mayor as a prerequisite to the bid being considered. This was proving a challenge and had caused a second bid from the Solent CA which included Portsmouth and Southampton. The situation was fluid and AG expected more information within the next two weeks.

AG said this was a challenging time for the Authority which had seen huge reductions in its central government funding in recent years, affecting budgets for all services, and HCC were looking at savings to the Library Service of at least £1.7 million (14%) by 2020. To which end an 11-week public consultation on HCC's draft Library Strategy aimed at transforming and modernising the County Library Service had been conducted, and had attracted 8,972 responses through an open online and paper consultation, and a further 603 Hampshire residents via a telephone survey. This feedback would be considered on 18th April. The results showed:

- 77% strongly or tended to agree with sharing library buildings with complementary partner organizations;
- 62% strongly or tended to agree with the closure of the Mobile Library Service;
- 58% strongly or tended to agree with increasing the number of trained volunteers;
- 50% strongly or tended to agree with investing £500,000 every year for four years from the Book Fund to improve buildings.

Such majority agreement for large parts of the draft Strategy would enable the service to meet the changing demands of customers, invest in digital technology and make the service more financially sustainable.

The consultation showed lower levels of support in some areas, including permanently reducing the Book Fund by £500,000 from 2020 onwards and transferring specialist library collections to other providers. AG stressed that the proposals did not at this stage include any plans to close static libraries.

We were experiencing strong resistance from Highways to changes to speed limits where reduced speeds on certain sections of road had been requested. He urged use of the portal link on <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/roadproblems> to report roads problems, making sure applicants kept the reference number so that HCC could escalate when there had not been a satisfactory conclusion to the request.

DB thanked our County Councillor for his work on our behalf and support throughout the year, especially in his understanding of our problems! AG left the meeting after this item.

6. **Borough Councillor Peter Boulton** brought apologies from Cllr Busk, and made his report under four broad headings: Council Tax, Government grants to Local Authorities, Devolution and Planning.

The Borough Council element of Council Tax had increased by £5 this year, the maximum increase permitted by Government and the first increase by Test Valley for several years. As AG had said, the HCC element of the tax had gone up by about 4%, half of which was designated for Adult Social Services. The increase would be about £50 per household per year.

Government Grants to Local Authorities (the mechanism by which business rates are returned to Local Authorities) was set to fall this year, as in the previous three years, and would fall again next year. This had resulted in an annual painful

exercise of cost cutting and other efficiency measures, in an attempt to maintain services. This was getting more difficult every year.

Devolution had been the subject of much discussion between Government and Local Authorities which, if implemented, would lead to an elected mayor with possibly a Hampshire-wide Authority with more power and more funds. Talks seemed to be endless, even floundering, perhaps because Southampton and Portsmouth favoured a South Hampshire Authority with a mayor, and most Hampshire Boroughs wanted a whole Hampshire model, but without an elected mayor. TVBC representatives in these talks included the Leader and the Chief Executive who were determined amongst other things that Romsey would not be absorbed into Southampton or Solent City.

Planning continued to be a major preoccupation for our two Borough Councillors, with DaB chairing the Northern Area Planning Committee, and both heavily involved on committees and panels, involving a minimum of four meetings a month and sometimes five or six.

The new Borough Plan had been adopted on 27th January, but was subject to a legal challenge by the Barker Mills Estate on grounds that not enough houses had been proposed. The designated areas to be developed in the next 20 years included 1,200 houses south of Romsey, the completion of the development north of Andover, and some small pockets of development within the village settlement boundaries. In some parishes, however, applications seemed to be coming in with unseemly haste; PB reminded the Assembly that Borough Councillors could often help a parish's case, but they could not change planning policy.

Turning to other matters, he and DaB had helped achieve an overflow parking solution in Stockbridge, but he was not entirely convinced that it would achieve its desired aim of accommodating traders and their staff to free up High Street parking for customers.

On the wheelchair access into the bottom end of the Roman Road estate, he had asked TVBC's Highways officer to chase his counterpart at HCC, but there were evidently difficulties arising over various services under that corner of the pavements.

PB highlighted the Community Asset grants as the result of the New Homes Bonus, and the Councillor Community Grant for smaller projects. A number of projects in this ward's villages had been helped in this way.

PB also reminded the Parish Council to keep its "Wish List" updated in order to benefit from Developer Contributions, which were being replaced this summer by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which was not quite as generous but which councils would need to become familiar with.

Finally he thanked Longstock councillors and clerk for all they did for the Parish.

SM thanked our Borough Councillors for their work and support through another year.

7. Parish Council Chairman Sophie Walters felt that another busy year had seemed to pass in an instant. At the 4-year Parish Council elections in May all seven councillors had stood again and, with no other candidates, were returned uncontested. She thanked councillors for all the hours of work they put in for the village. She also thanked County Councillor Andrew Gibson for his support and interest in Longstock; and Borough Councillors Peter Boulton and Daniel Busk for their continuing support.

Especially welcome this year had been the excellent relations re-established with the Leckford Estate, due to the leadership and interest shown by both Andrew

Hoad and Colin McIntyre. She said it was a breath of fresh air to have a positive influence at the helm. Our quest for affordable housing continued, a task not made easier by the government's decision on the right to buy, so landowners were now more reluctant to provide land for those in need. Having said that, discussions continued with the Estate who were aware of our needs and were trying to move this vital issue 'up the agenda' with their property committee.

We had had twelve property planning applications to assess this year and seven tree applications. We had also been drawn into a Stockbridge application for Hunters Lodge as it would have had a significant visual impact on the south end of the village, which had been withdrawn now – but a re-application was awaited.

The parish lengthsman, Richard Wheeler, continued to do much useful work throughout the village that otherwise would not be tackled. This was a HCC initiative that had been very positive for us, thanks to Andrew Gibson and Alyson Lownie, the co-ordinator. It would be good if the lengthsman could fix the roads which continued to be a problem, especially as our C roads were never designed for size and weight of modern traffic. We were due a full 'surface treatment' this spring, but its effectiveness remained to be seen. Whilst talking about roads, the number and size of groups of cyclists using Longstock seemed to be in inverse proportion to their attitude and manners! Chairman said she was still chasing the wheelchair ramp project in Roman Road, which seemed after nine years to be a lot more complicated than first thought, but she remained optimistic that we could get something done.

Our footpaths were in good condition and being walked regularly by residents and visitors alike. Dog mess was still a cause for concern especially in Church Road, but she had been in touch with TVBC's Dog Warden who was very helpful. We now owned a set of mess markers intended to shock owners into behaving properly, if only for a short time. Chairman reminded councillors that they had the right to issue on-the-spot fines if they saw someone neglecting responsibility for their dog's mess.

The playground was another area where dog mess could be a problem, but we had put up several stickers asking people to bag it and take it home. We were against providing bins as they attracted general waste and then people just leave rubbish at the foot of a bin when full, so the battle continued. The playground however, remained a great asset to the village and was well used. It was good to see children outside playing and not all in front of TVs and computers. Some parking issues there had been resolved with the help of the Leckford Estate, who also continued to mow the grass, for which we were very grateful. She warmly thanked her 'inspection' team who checked the safety of the equipment every week; and David and Roshi Ingram for their generous gift of two picnic tables for use of everyone at the playground.

She thanked Jan Greep for continuing to give the Parish Council excellent support by publishing all our minutes and agenda on her Longstock Village website.

The Peat Spade continued to provide generous support of our Remembrance Sunday commemoration, and she warmly thanked the managing team. The pub had just held a re-opening party following internal and external renovations.

The Henry Smith Charity had once again given us a generous grant of £2K enabling us to pass on £1,000 to help some of our more senior residents; £142 to help school children join field trips; and £ 680 on the annual seniors' lunch. Whilst still on the theme of entertainment, last year's fete organised by the PCC was very well attended and the best for a long time.

Our beautiful cemetery was in good shape, although all the cherry trees had now died. Cllr Gibson was thanked for keeping it looking so good. Thanks were also due to Peter Moore who tended the central garden in the cemetery, which was always

a picture, and to Dave Watts for the upkeep of the grass and beds by the war memorial. The memorial itself was due for a clean in the next year or two and the clerk was confident of a grant to offset the cost.

The allotments continued to thrive after six years under Gareth's Evans's guiding hand. All the plots were occupied. The new three year lease started at the end of March at £470 rent per year.

The Village Hall was as ever being well maintained and run as a focal point of the village. Keeping the hall in such excellent shape was far from easy and there was a team of dedicated volunteers who helped under Dane Oliver's leadership. Cllr Musters was thanked for her energetic administration of the hall's affairs; and also for her editorship of the Newsletter which maintained its excellent quality as an informative and eagerly-awaited record of village life.

Test Valley School was doing well by all reports and we again sponsored the annual French prize which was presented by Cllr Becky Griffiths.

Our finances were in robust health under the expert hand of our clerk John Musters and we had kept the Precept once more at £6K. We had a clean bill of health at last year's audit and the chairman thanked Patrick Coates, local chartered accountant, for doing the Internal Audit.

Finally, a big 'thank you' again to all Longstock councillors for another good year's work, and a very special thank you to our clerk for keeping us on a steady course.

DB thanked the chairman for her excellent leadership through another year – swan-like, with apparent calm on the surface but a lot of vigorous activity unseen!

8. **Finance.** The clerk reported another very satisfactory year, which had started with a balance of £3,625 and ended with £4,563. The Precept had been kept at £6,000 as an insurance against a contested election in parish council elections in May 2015, which would have cost several hundreds of pounds. In the event we had no new candidates standing, and the existing council (all of whom had renewed their candidacy) was returned unopposed. So having precepted sensibly for expenditure that was not in the event necessary, we ended the year with a much higher balance. For 2016/17, the Precept was again £6,000, anticipating expenditure on HM The Queen's 90th birthday celebrations and the clerk's increased fee, approved by councillors in setting the budget last December.

Comparing significant differences in elements of income and expenditure between the two years: the newsletter turned a profit again after a small loss the year before; there was no fee for the external audit (£100 the previous year); and \$137 expenditure was some £950 less than the previous year, when there had been considerable outgoings on marking the centenary of the start of WW1.

9. **Questions/Comments from the Public.** Mr Tim Nedas of Test Lodge asked if anything could be done about speeding traffic on the narrow and dangerous corner by his house. He suggested periodical police speed checks; or a 'ducks crossing' sign to make traffic slow down – it clearly didn't for his children! Clerk would look at this with the police.

ACTION: Clerk

10. **AOB.** Nil.

The Chairman closed the Assembly at 2000.