

Willaston Residents' and Countryside Society

Minutes of the AGM held on 26th September 2014 in Willaston Memorial Hall

Approximately 80 people were in attendance.

1. Welcome & Apologies

Chris Hampshire welcomed everyone present to the Annual General Meeting of the Willaston Residents' and Countryside Society (WR&CS).

Apologies had been received from Madeline Hughes, Jen Williams, Caroline Thompson, Helen Mayles, Vicky Spraggon, Barbara Jordan and Joan and Keith Butcher.

2. Minutes of the AGM held on Friday 27th September 2013

Copies of the minutes had been placed on seats prior to the meeting for attendees to read. Chris asked for any amendments to the Minutes. There being none, the minutes were proposed by Christine Barnes and seconded by Barbara Kennedy. By a show of hands, the minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

3. Chair's Report

Chris went through the agenda which was displayed on a screen. He explained that WR&CS is made up of unpaid volunteers who support the village in many ways. He then outlined some of the activities that had been undertaken over the past year that were not being presented on later in the agenda.

The Planning Officer, Barry Vowles is very active in monitoring planning applications and making representations to Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWaC) where there are concerns. We are particularly anxious to protect the Green Belt.

Our Footpaths Officer, Jane Townsend has put a lot of work into ensuring that the footpaths are in good order and accessible. She is supported by a team of volunteers who have 'adopted' footpaths. Overgrown hedges, particularly along Hooton Road have also been a problem which we have made representations to CWaC about.

The consultation on the Willaston District Community Plan (WDCP) has now been completed and the final document was presented to WR&CS to implement.

Over the year, we considered the advantages of becoming a registered charity, in particular the fact that it gives us access to more grants than we can currently apply for. We got agreement from the Charity Commission that our objectives were charitable but we would need to change our constitution to apply formally. After discussion, we decided not to go ahead with this.

We have been in discussion with the Library Service who has been consulting about the option of closing the Library in the Methodist Church and replacing it with a Mobile Library.

Chris then explained that we are keen to hear from residents about issues and have expanded the options to get in touch. The first 15 minutes of our meetings are open to any resident to come and raise an issue. In addition, we have a website: www.willastoninwirralresidents.org and an email list if people want to be kept up to date about an issue.

4. Annual Accounts and Treasurer's Report

Hilary Booth, Treasurer, presented the accounts which had been placed on seats prior to the meeting and were also shown on a screen. She explained that we have a number of accounts.

The Current Account funds our core work. This shows a grant of £95 which was received from Cllr Myles Hogg to remove a stone in the bus shelter so people could see when a bus is arriving. There is also a grant for the play area which was received in the 2012-3 financial year and which was transferred to the play area account when that was opened. We have also received a final balance

from the WDCP of £342.69. This money can only be spent on projects identified within the plan. The Current Account ended with a balance of £581.59.

The Fundraising Lottery Account shows the income relating to the Willaston Lottery. This is our main source of money and Hilary encouraged people to join it. There are prizes of £25, £20 and two £15 prizes each month. We were able to transfer £400 from the proceeds of the Lottery into our Current Account this year – this is the maximum allowed. The Lottery Account ended with a balance of £473.44.

The Play Area Account shows grants of £6971 which were received from CWaC and then transferred back into an account that they are holding for the play area on our behalf. There is a balance of £5137.75 in the Play Area Account.

The WDCP Account got no further receipts and the major expense relating to printing of the plans which were distributed to every house in Willaston. The final surplus of £342.69 was transferred to the Current Account and this account is now closed.

Hilary then stated that the accounts have been audited by Mr Nigel Pratten as an honest record and said that the accounts will be on the WR&CS website for inspection. There being no questions, the accounts were proposed by Martin Collins and seconded by Jane Townsend. By a show of hands, they were accepted as a true record.

5. Election of Organisational Representatives, Officers and Resident Representatives

5.1 Election of Officers

Chris explained that officers are elected for a period of three years on a rotational basis. This year the posts of Chair, Planning Officer and Treasurer are up for election.

Chris indicated his willingness to continue in the role of Chair. There being no other nominations, he was proposed by Hilary Booth, seconded by Hilary Morris and agreed by all present.

Barry Vowles has indicated his willingness to continue in the role of Planning Officer. There being no other nominations, he was proposed by Lyn Jackson-Eves, seconded by Sheila Smith and agreed by all present.

Hilary Booth has indicated her willingness to continue in the role of Treasurer. There being no other nominations, she was proposed by Martin Collins, seconded by Jane Townsend and agreed by all present.

5.2 Resident Representatives

Chris explained that a number of residents are elected onto the committee for three years. Two residents have indicated their willingness to stand.

Paul Janvier was nominated by Hilary Booth, seconded by Barry Vowles and agreed by all present. Madeline Hughes was nominated by Fiona Ennys, seconded by Carol Mercer and agreed by all present.

There were no other nominations made from the floor.

5.3 Election of Society Representatives

Chris explained that all societies are invited to send a representative to meetings. During the year, Willaston and South Wirral Rotary has been formed and have been approached and agreed to have a representative on the committee. Colin Jerrett proposed, Myles Hogg seconded and all present agreed that they should be added as a member.

6. Presentations

There then followed a number of presentations on issues affecting the Village.

6.1 Friends of Hadlow Road Station

Chris introduced Simon Wood, the CWaC Ranger who is responsible for the Wirral Way. Simon gave a short history of Hadlow Road Station. The train service between Hooton and West Kirby was opened on 1st October 1866. Passenger services ceased on 17th September 1956, after which it was used mainly for freight transportation and driver training. It was finally closed on 7th May 1962 and the tracks lifted in 1964. The route became the Wirral Way footpath and part of Wirral Country Park in 1973. Hadlow Road Station has been preserved to give an authentic 1950's look and is designated by English Heritage as a Grade II listed building. Simon showed some slides of what the station has looked like in the past and said that the aim would be to preserve the station in the 1950s style.

Chris then explained that a key action from the WDCP is to improve and enhance the facilities of the station and to develop facilities to attract tourists. As the Station is owned by CWaC, anything that we do has to be approved by them so members of WR&CS had met them and agreed in principle to set up a Friends' group. The aim would be to establish a separate organisation with a committee. The new committee would have to agree a constitution and the scope of what they want to do. One option would be to have a carriage to serve refreshments from at weekends. The committee would also have to establish a legal agreement with CWaC about its role and grants would need to be obtained. Chris then asked that if anyone was interested in joining this group, either as a committee member or as a supporting member, then please leave contact details at the back of the room.

Following the presentation, a number of questions were asked:

- When will the Friends be ready to start?

Chris said that this was dependent on the level of interest but he would like to see the committee established this year.

- If the Council are responsible for Hadlow Road Station, why is it so tatty at the moment?
Simon acknowledged that some work would be beneficial. He said some finances had been agreed to improve the signal box and viewing platform but then it was found that there was extensive dry rot so the cost was a lot more than had been envisaged. The additional £10,000 needed could not be found from this year's budget. He has asked if the viewing platform could at least be improved. Simon asked people to let him know what they were particularly unhappy about and this can be part of a plan going forward and noted that an external group should be able to attract additional funds to improve the station. Members commented that the sign on the platform particularly needed restoring.

- Where would a carriage be put?

Chris said this could be decided by the group but one option would be on the railway track.

- What about security for the carriage?

Simon commented that since CCTV has been installed, there has been very little vandalism. However, it is something that the group would have to consider.

Finally Chris commented that there were going to be two performances of 'Over By Christmas' the following day at the station, followed by a ploughman's lunch in aid of the Festival Society in the Memorial Hall.

6.2 Bus Service

Myles Hogg explained the background to the recent loss of the 22 bus service. CWaC was informed by Stagecoach that they were going to introduce the X22 service which runs from Heswall to Chester but cuts out villages including Willaston in February 2014. They also undercut the fares charged by the 22 service. Because there has been deregulation of the bus service since 1985, the Council could have no influence on this but when they were told that the 22 was ceasing, they asked Stagecoach if they could provide some services through the villages. However, Stagecoach are adamant that this is not financially viable. Helms had been subsidised £56,000 a year by the Council

to run the 22 service on Saturdays but said it was uneconomical to continue to run it as they were losing 50% of the revenue.

Myles then paid tribute to Carol Mercer who has been doing a lot of work contacting people and pulling together a petition of 500 names.

The Council has also approached Aintree Coachline who run the 272 service with concerns that it is not reliable. They have promised to improve this service so that it will reliably connect with other buses that enable people to get to Chester.

There are alternative services for some people. The Plus Bus is a door-to-door service for people over the age of 80 or registered disabled and the Cheshire Community Car Scheme has 30 volunteers who use their own cars to transport people. Myles has visited everyone that has contacted him to explain these alternatives. Myles then said that he was investigating a minibus, subsidised by his Councillor's fund for the first year, which will go from Willaston to Chester and back once a week. He is working with Carol to see who would like to use this and the best times.

Finally Myles commented on the proposed bus shelter on the Green which had been discussed at the last meeting. Unfortunately the cheapest wooden shelter of a reasonable standard would have cost £10,000 and it had not been possible to get a quote for a sandstone one. Therefore WR&CS has shelved this plan for the time being.

Following Myles' presentation a number of questions/comments were made:

- Peggy Jones explained in detail how the lack of the 22 bus service affects her. She is over 90 years old and not very mobile and has relied on the service to visit her sister with dementia in Chester. If she now has to use taxis, this will cost her £23 a time. She called on people not to sit back and accept this but to fight it. She also commented that she only heard the service was going to cease by chance and WR&CS need to be more effective in getting information out.
- Not everyone is aware that buses no longer stop in Hadlow Road as the notice is still there.
- Carol Mercer commented that one of the reasons the service was lost was tickets did not say people went to Willaston. Myles said that this has been raised with Helms and they were assured that this did not affect the usage figures.
- There was also a question about whether people with bus passes were counted. Myles confirmed that Helms received £3.80 from the Council for everyone using a bus pass so it was in their interest to ensure that they were counted accurately. However, it was thought that drivers did not always note this.
- It was suggested that details about the remaining bus services should be put in the Parish Magazine. Sue Unsworth also offered to deliver people copies of the summary of our meetings that we put on the village notice boards if they gave her their names. It is also possible to have an email notification of when they are on our website.

6.3 Play Area

Sarah Shannon gave an update on the play area appeal. The group has raised just over £60,000 through community donations and larger grants from the CWaC Rural Fund and WREN. This means that improvements to the play area will take place in the spring. These will include:

- Moving the gate, improving fencing and installing a path and mound area;
- Mounding and a tunnel for the slide;
- New bark for the climbing unit;
- A new cantilevered swing, infant swings and junior swings;
- Goal posts;
- Log seats for children and benches for adults;
- Bulbs

A Landscape Architect has been appointed to finalise the detailed plans, oversee the tendering process and oversee the company appointed to do the work. The play area is likely to be closed for a few weeks in spring 2015 whilst the work takes place.

In the meantime, fundraising will continue for stage two.

Following Sarah's presentation, Martin Collins congratulated Sarah and the working group on what had been achieved. There was a question about future maintenance of the play area and Sarah confirmed that this would be done by CWaC.

7. Progress Updates

There were then some short updates on items that had been discussed at the last AGM.

7.1. Speed Restrictions

Myles reported that a group was formed two years ago to press for a 20mph restriction throughout Willaston. At the time, we did not meet the government regulations as the average speed was not high enough and there were too few incidents. So the group agreed to limit restrictions to Neston Road. The council agreed to this on three conditions:

- a. That there was a local desire for this. To establish this, the group knocked on doors of homes affected and showed that 90% of people supported the proposals;
- b. The installation costs could be paid for. This came out of Myles' councillor budget.
- c. There is a group of people who will go out with the PCSO to monitor the speed. As a result of the Community Plan questionnaire, additional volunteers have been recruited who the police are willing to work with.

Myles commented that the signage has taken a long time to be properly done but it is all in place now. A speed survey was done before it was installed and another will be done to see the effect the restriction has, including along Mill Lane. Before installation, the average speed was 34mph.

7.2 Parking on the Green

Barry Vowles reported that parking is a regular issue that the WR&CS discusses and it came up strongly in the WDCP. We had suggested having a three-hour parking restriction on the Green, a disabled parking space and also a one-way system and the Council put this out for consultation. The one-way system was strongly opposed and dropped. The three hour time restriction was also opposed by many businesses and several residents. Officers from WR&CS spent some time talking to businesses about the issue and the biggest problem was that they needed places for staff to park. Therefore, we have decided not to go ahead with this for the time and think again about what can be done, looking at potential alternative solutions. The disabled parking space will be going ahead and will be the first available space off Neston Road.

Following Barry's update, some questions and comments were made:

- Could a disabled parking space be put outside the shops?

Myles commented that he had looked at this a few years ago but it required two of the current parking spaces to be used which wasn't acceptable to local businesses.

- The need to enforce the time restrictions on Neston Road.

Myles commented that he could put pressure on the Council to do this but warned that last time the majority of people ticketed were from the village. People confirmed that they felt there should be regular enforcement.

- The possibility of putting parking meters along Neston Road.
- Issues about the Garage parking cars around the village.
- A comment that there is a problem with parking all over the village and the issue needs to be addressed in its entirety, rather than patches put on that just move the problem.

7.3 Willaston District Community Plan (WDCP)

Barry then described the progress in developing WDCP. The plan was finalised this year and a summary was delivered to every house and business in Willaston. Copies were also sent to relevant people in the Council, police etc. The summary identifies 42 actions and some of the key ones are already being taken forward. Others are harder to implement however. WR&CS has developed a 'traffic light' summary of this and explanation when there are difficulties. Once this is finalised, it will be put on the website.

Barry said that for many of the actions to be taken forward, we need volunteers to help. We have a list of 100 names who we email when volunteer opportunities in the village are identified and we will add to this if anyone else is interested.

8. Open Session

There was then the opportunity for people to raise any other issues.

8.1 Post Office. Chris commented that there is currently a consultation about moving the Post Office into Martins. The services will be predominantly the same and opening hours will be extended. People are being asked to respond by 22nd October and there is information in the Post Office and Martins.

8.2 Peggy Jones expressed disappointment that more was not being done to save the bus service and said she felt her contribution had been glossed over. Others commented that a lot had been done but the options are limited.

8.3 Jane Townsend said that one action in the WDCP was to encourage horse riders to by-pass the village. She had looked at accessing the Wirral Way via Damhead Lane but needs to have a dialogue with Leahurst who own the land. She asked if anyone has any links to Leahurst to let her know.

8.4 Carol asked about the option of having a Parish Council. Chris confirmed that CWaC is currently going around unparished areas to consult on this. We are on the list but don't know when we will be reached. A parish council would be able to raise a surcharge on the Council Tax so would have more funds but the local population would have to pay for it. It would also be elected in the same way that other councillors are elected.

8.5 There was a question about joining East and West Cheshire. Myles explained that this was something the leader of East Cheshire Council had mooted without any consultation. He didn't think that there was much appetite for a formal amalgamation, though there are lots of options for working together co-operatively.

8.6 Keith O'Connor offered to mend the fencing on the corner of Heath Lane and Hooton Road, if we can get permission from the landowners.

9. Close of Meeting

Chris Hampshire closed the meeting by thanking all the committee and organisation members for their work during the year. He then thanked everyone for coming along and invited them to join us in some cheese and wine.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm.

These Minutes are subject to ratification.
Sarah Shannon
Secretary

Date of the next AGM: 7.30pm, Friday 25th September 2015, in the Memorial Hall.

See the latest from Willaston Residents' & Countryside Society by visiting the Society's website:
<http://www.willastoninwirralresidents.org> or the AboutMyArea website:
<http://www.aboutmyarea.co.uk/Cheshire/Neston/CH64/Villages-in-CH64/Willaston>

Email Willaston Residents' & Countryside Society through the 'Contact' page on the Society's website, the link on the AboutMyArea website's WR&CS page or directly to admin@willastoninwirralresidents.org.
Write to the Society c/o 11 The Courtyard, Willaston CH64 2UT