

Willaston Residents' and Countryside Society

Minutes of the AGM held on 25th September 2015 in Willaston Memorial Hall

Approximately 34 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) and introduced the new PCSO. He then held a minute's silence in memory of two former Chairs – Mary Doherty and Ray Wilton.

Apologies had been received from Jane Townsend, Vicky Spraggon, and Hilary Morris.

2. Minutes of the AGM held on Friday 26th September 2014

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 Keith Butcher and seconded by Hilary Davis. By a show of hands, the minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

3. Election of Organisational Representatives, Officers and Resident Representatives

Chris explained the role of WR&CS. All the members are volunteers and we meet every two months to discuss issues affecting the village, represent the views of Willaston residents and obtain funding for 'minor works'.

3.1 Election of Officers

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

Vicky Spraggon had expressed her willingness to stand for the role of Vice-Chair. There being no other nominations, she was proposed by Sue Unsworth, seconded by Debs Jerrett and agreed by all present.

Sarah Shannon has indicated her willingness to continue in the role of Secretary. There being no other nominations, she was proposed by Keith Butcher, seconded by Jim Goodwin and agreed by all present.

3.2 Resident Representatives

Chris explained that a number of residents are elected onto the committee for three years. Leanne Kershaw has completed her three year cycle. Although Leanne no longer lives in the village, she has a long family history within the village. Leanne was proposed by Keith Butcher, seconded by Sheila Smith and agreed by all present.

There were no other nominations made from the floor.

3.3 Election of Society Representatives

Chris explained that all societies are invited to send a representative to meetings. During the year, Friends of Hadlow Road Station has been formed and Willaston Toddler Group has also been approached and agreed to have a representative on the committee.

Colin Jerrett proposed, Pat James seconded and all present agreed that Friends of Hadlow Road Station should be added as a member.

Sue Unsworth proposed, Fiona Ennys seconded and all present agreed that Willaston Toddler Group should be added as a member.

4. Constitution

Two amendments to the constitution were discussed.

a. Retirement of Officers. The proposed re-wording was as follows:

'Officers will be expected to serve for a period of three years, after which the Office will be open to election. The retiring officer may, if he/she wishes, see re-election at the Society's AGM.'

The re-wording was proposed for adoption by Roger James, seconded by Colin Jerrett and agreed by all present.

b. Meetings. The proposed re-wording was as follows:

'The Committee will meet every other month. Meeting dates will be determined by The Committee.'

The re-wording was proposed for adoption by Rob King, seconded by Fiona Ennys and agreed by all present.

5. Chair's Report

Chris outlined some of the activities that had been undertaken over the past year that were not being presented on later in the agenda.

A new disabled parking space has been put on the edge of the Village Green. This is being well used by blue badge holders and enforcement has taken place against the few people mis-using it.

The Post Office re-located to Martins. We had a representative from the Post Office attend our meeting twice to explain the proposals and listen to concerns. The promised disability access has not yet been provided and following enquiries Chris established that the Post Office thought this work had already been done. They have promised to undertake it shortly.

A newsletter has been sent to all homes within the village twice this year, funded by the New Homes Bonus grant.

Unfortunately the X22 bus service ceased coming through the village this year. Cllr Hogg provided a Community Transport bus on a trial basis to Chester once a week but a maximum of six people used it so it proved not to be viable economically. The X22 service is now provided by a different company but despite requests, they also refuse to come through the village. Unfortunately because bus services are deregulated, it is difficult to do anything about this.

Our website unfortunately was off line for several months but has now been refreshed and is running again. Chris thanked Sarah Shannon for her work on this.

Chris explained that one role of WR&CS is to seed new organisations in the village. The need to improve Hadlow Road Station was identified in the Willaston District Community Plan as a priority. The Residents' Society put in the initial work to establish an independent organisation which is set up as a community resource, not a commercial enterprise. The Friends of Hadlow Road Station is now fully operational with a separate constitution, elected officers, around 50 active members and agreed short, medium and long-term objectives that can be viewed on the WR&CS website.. The initial focus is on visual improvements. The Signal Box has been renovated and there will be an opening event on Sunday 27th September. Other events planned include a Santa's Grotto in December and celebrations of 150 years in 2016.

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, go to the website: www.willastoninwirralresidents.org.

Carol Mercer then asked about the buses. She said that the 272 is no longer running on a Saturday and it had been receiving Council support of £56,000 a year to do so. Cllr Myles Hogg explained that the Council subsidises bus routes across the Cheshire West and Chester (CWaC) area by around £800,000 a year. Unfortunately, the usage of the 272 bus on Saturdays was very low and the subsidy could no longer be justified. That money is being used to subsidise routes with higher passenger numbers.

6. Annual Accounts and Treasurer's Report

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

The Current Account funds our core work. This shows a grant of £567.36 which was received from Merseyside and West Cheshire Ramblers to fund new way marker posts. There is £46.15 remaining from this money, as well as £34 left from a grants from Cllr Myles Hogg and CWaC which are also restricted to footpath improvements. There is also a grant of £840 from CWaC New Homes Bonus Fund for newsletters, of which there is £352 remaining. A transfer of £600 was also received from the Willaston Lottery account.

In terms of payments, the balance of the Willaston District Community Plan funding was transferred to the newly formed Friends of Hadlow Road Station to help get this organisation established.

Overall, the Current Account had credits of £2745.95, payments of £1542.30 and carries forward a balance of £1203.65.

The Play Area Account received several donations and paid out most of the money received for stage one improvements, leaving a balance of £10.

The Fundraising Account shows the income relating to the Willaston Lottery. This is our main source of money and Hilary said that the new lottery starts in September and we have received over £1500 in ticket sales, which is more than before at this stage. We are allowed to keep 40% of the takings to support village activities and prize money will increase with additional ticket holders. We were able to transfer £600 to the Current Account in 2015. The Lottery Account ended with a balance of £536.46.

Hilary then stated that the accounts have been audited by Nigel Pratten as an honest record and said that the accounts will be on the WR&CS website for inspection.

Myles then explained about the New Homes Bonus. This is a fund brought in by the Government to encourage Councils to build new homes so payments are made to CWaC for every new home in the area. CWaC has agreed that 20% of this funding should go to the relevant ward. £2,117 was awarded for Willaston and Thornton ward in 2013-14 for housing that includes Elizabeth's Cottages, Buckley Court and others. Myles consulted residents in both wards and it was agreed that this funding should provide newsletters in Willaston with the remainder going to refurbish the phone box at Hadlow Road Station. There is New Homes bonus funding for 2014-5 that is now available on top of Myles' Councillors' funding.

Pat James commented that the footpath from the Recreation Ground to the Mill could be improved.

The accounts were proposed by Colin Jerrett and seconded by Sue Unsworth. By a show of hands, they were accepted as a true record.

7. Presentations

There then followed a number of presentations on work done by WR&CS.

7.1 Play Area

Sarah Shannon gave an update on the play area appeal. The first stage improvements were completed in June. These included:

- Moving the gate, improving fencing and installing a path;
- Installation of a tunnel through a mound;

- Installation of a new cantilevered swing and infant swings;
- Goal posts;
- Log seats for children and benches for adults;
- Replacement of the old climbing unit with one suitable for infants.

Some parents had raised issues over the sand under the cantilever swing and the quality of the footpath. However, the site has twice been inspected by RoSPA and they have identified no safety concerns. Therefore, there is no intention to change these. However, we would like to set up a team of volunteers to do basic maintenance on a rota basis in the play area.

To continue to improve the area, we have asked groups of children to help plant bulbs over the Autumn.

The focus for stage two will be on providing additional play equipment mainly aimed at older children. These potentially include junior swings, a large climbing unit, a roundabout and a concrete table tennis table. Before finalising this plan however, we will be holding a village-wide consultation event in the next few weeks. We estimate that we will need to raise approximately £35,000 - £45,000.

Chris thanked Sarah for all the work she had done on this and presented her with some flowers.

7.2 Planning

Barry Vowles, the Planning Officer for WR&CS explained that local planning applications are a regular item on our meeting agendas. Our main aim is to protect the Green Belt and the Conservation Area within Willaston. We are normally supportive to people who wish to make minor changes.

The Government have put in a new planning framework from which CWaC has developed and adopted a new Local Plan that includes Willaston's agreed local plan. This forms the basis for assessment of any planning application and recognises Willaston as a village within the Green Belt.

Over the past year, there have been a small number of contentious developments that we have opposed and the majority have been rejected.

Chris thanked Barry for all his work on planning issues.

7.3 Footpaths

Jane Townsend, the Footpaths Officer was not able to attend the meeting so Barry presented an update of the work that she had done. There have been a number of grants to enable us to replace styles with kissing gates throughout the area. These are much easier for older or disabled residents.

The Willaston Village Walks leaflet has been updated with colour coding and way mark posts have been installed to indicate the routes. Barry thanked people who had helped, including the Rangers and Scouts groups.

We have also been investigating how to improve the access to the Wirral Way from Damhead Lane for horse riders. We hoped that an agreement could be made with Leahurst but unfortunately they have declined due to risk of infection and disease.

A number of volunteers have trimmed trees and plants that obstruct footpaths and Jane also liaises regularly with CWaC about issues that arise. Volunteers are needed to 'adopt' footpaths and keep them passable.

Fiona Ennys asked about permissions for the way mark posts and it was confirmed that these are gained, either from CWaC or the relevant land owner prior to new posts being put in.

Chris commented that this is the time of year when hedges should be trimmed and asked owners to check if their hedges are overhanging a footpath, particularly on Hooton Road. He explained that if houses are reported to us with overhanging hedges, we will initially write a polite letter to point out their obligation and ask them for their co-operation. Normally this leads to action but if nothing is

done, then we inform the Council who send a more official letter and who ultimately will charge for doing the work if the owner does not comply. Myles confirmed that this applies to any blockage of the footpath – hedges, trees, plants etc.

7.4 Get Involved!

Chris then outlined a number of volunteer opportunities that people could take on if interested:

- WR&CS needs a webmaster for the new website.
- WR&CS has a litter picking group which meets every few weeks.
- The Johnston Recreation Ground Advisory Committee needs new members.
- The Memorial Hall Committee needs a new Treasurer.
- There are a range of roles required by the Festival Society for the next Festival in 2018.

8. Open Session

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

Keith Butcher thanked Myles for all the work he does for Willaston. He stated that he knows Myles is a man of integrity who works hard for the community.

Roger James thanked the WR&CS committee for the work they do. He said the group has a new lease of life and the village should be proud of their contribution.

Pat James asked about the proposed disabled access to Martins. Chris explained that this was something considered by the Post Office to be key to their decision as to whether they moved to Martins or not, which is why we are chasing them up. Sheila Smith commented that some people in wheelchairs are currently having to ask people to go in for them, whilst they wait outside.

Carol Mercer asked about the one-way system recently implemented in Quarry Road for three months whilst the Western Link work is taking place. Myles confirmed that a depot has been installed on the corner and it was deemed too dangerous for two-way traffic whilst work is being done locally. It was noted that the hedge needs trimming by the sign and there is no advance notice on the A540 to say you can't turn left into Quarry Road. Myles agreed to raise this with the Highways Department.

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 8.55pm.

These Minutes are subject to ratification.
Sarah Shannon
Secretary

Date of the next AGM: 7.30pm, Friday 30th September 2016, 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.

Write to the Society c/o 11 The Courtyard, Willaston CH64 2UT