

MINUTES OF COTTERED ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN COTTERED VILLAGE HALL ON TUESDAY 13 MAY 2014 AT 8.00 PM

Present Bryan Pitman (Chair), District Cllr Jim Ranger, Sgt Duncan Wallace (Hertfordshire Police), David Charles; John Harwood-Bee; Terry McGrath; Brian Murchie; and 20 members of the public

Officer attending Marty Kilby (Parish Clerk)

Before the meeting commenced the Chairman, Cllr Bryan Pitman, reminded everyone that the meetings of the parish are recorded to enable accuracy of minute taking.

1. APOLOGIES

County Councillor Rose Cheswright; Parish Cllr Francis Ridley.

2. MINUTES OF MEETING

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 14 May 2013 were signed as a correct record.

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman (Cllr Bryan Pitman) gave the following report

Meetings

A total of 6 formal Parish Council Meetings were held during the year, but when required these were interspersed with progress and site inspection meetings. In addition to these meetings one or more councillors and often the Clerk, attended various seminars, courses and meetings in order to keep abreast of changing legislation and local issues around our area. The main issues dealt with by the Parish Council during the past year fell into the following categories: -

Planning Applications

During the year the PC considered a total of 11 Planning Applications, the majority of which were found to be acceptable. One of the most important applications was for a large development to the north of Buntingford, situated between the old and the new A10. Although this area is adjacent to Buntingford, it is within the parish of Cottered and Throcking. Under existing arrangements the construction of a new dwelling results in a payment to the local Parish or Town Council and as the proposal has now been approved providing the present arrangements continue Cottered and Throcking should receive a significant financial windfall.

EHDC District Plan

Under the new Planning Laws every Local Planning Authority (LPA) is required to produce a planning strategy guiding development up to 2031. East Herts District Council (EHDC) has now produced its draft District Plan and is currently seeking public consultation regarding the document. The closing date for the consultation is Thursday 22nd May. As a consequence of the new laws, local communities are allowed to write documents know as Neighbourhood Plans, defining what the community wants in the way of future developments. Whilst these plans must comply with the policies of the District Plan it is intended that once the Plan is approved it should influence the decisions of the LPA, in our case EHDC. Six Parish Councils, including Cottered, that surround Buntingford have combined with Buntingford Town Council in an effort to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for the area. A Stakeholders Forum has been created whose task is to write the Plan. The Cottered Stakeholders are Neville Chuck, Roger Gomm and Bryan Pitman. A questionnaire is currently being distributed around the Buntingford area, seeking residents views on future developments and this information will be reflected in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Traffic Parking

As we are only too aware, traffic flow, speeding and accidents along the A507 continue to be a source of concern. Our local MP Oliver Heald together with our County and District Councillors have all become involved with Hertfordshire Highways in seeking improvements.

Lack of parking spaces continues to be a problem, especial in Peasecroft. One suggestion being investigated by the Parish Council is to restrict parking to one side of the road. A much more revolutionary suggestion would be to extend the Peasecroft road into Brook End Lane and perhaps make the road one way. However these are only suggestions, but everyone's views about them would be appreciated.

Village Housekeeping

Once the six Parish Councillors are elected all six automatically become Trustees of a village trust, which is responsible for looking after the village greens. This trust is registered with the Charities Commission and is confusingly designated The Cottered Recreation Ground charity, albeit it is not associated with the recreation ground which is directly owned by the Parish Council. This year the PC has made administrative changes to clearly segregate the activities of the PC from the activities and duties of the Trust. The Trust will be holding a new annual meeting in October. One important PC's responsibility is litter picking and we have been very fortunate in having Eddie Hayden perform this important role for years. However Eddie has now retired and we all thank him for his long service. Thanks are also due to all those volunteers who have recently been consistently performing the litter picking work. We have just appointed Nigel Bentley to the permanent litter picking role

Continuity

The Parish Councillors are very fortunate in having a hardworking part time Clerk who we thank for guiding us through a busy year. The PC is also very thankful for other help it receives from many others, such as the past internal audits carried out by Bill Pooley, Village Green repairs by Andrew Thomson and all those that give their time and materials in order to maintain various aspects of the village.

The Councillors convey their sincere thanks to all those that have helped throughout the year in striving to ensure that the village remains a pleasant and peaceful place in which to live.

4. COUNTY COUNCILLOR ROSEMARY CHESWRIGHT

CCllr Rose Cheswright was unable to attend the meeting and sent her apologies.

5. DISTRICT COUNCILLOR JIM RANGER

District Councillor Jim Ranger reported to the meeting. The District Council had been under great pressure to both cut Council tax but also maintain all the services. For 3 years there has been no increase in Council Tax, and East Herts Council has been both efficient and careful not to overspend. Because of good management there are still capital and revenue grants available to rural local communities. In order to keep costs under control EHC has joined with Stevenage to work closely and share backroom staff so that staff are shared for various duties, such as council tax collection. EHC are particularly proud of the improvement in collection of refuse and recycling. The District Plan has taken a lot of attention which overall means the government has asked East Herts to provide 15,000 new homes over the next 20 years. This means 550 new homes every year. There is currently a gap in the provision so consideration might have to be given to building the suggested Harlow North development. Relating to Cottered & Throcking, the current thinking is that a maximum of 5 houses would need to be provided. The Neighbourhood Plan is extremely important because within this plan consideration can be given to the style, number and design of any development. The questionnaires that will be circulated are very important and it is important that everyone in the area completes these. The District Plan will be adopted around the end of 2015, early 2016. A current difficulty is that developers are submitting applications for building before the District Plan is adopted, and even though the District Council might refuse such applications, when they go to appeal the Secretary of State allows them, even though the applications are not within the suggested concept of the yet to be adopted District and Neighbourhood Plans.

There were no questions for DC Jim Ranger.

6. HERTFORDSHIRE POLICE - SGT DUNCAN WALLACE

Sgt Duncan Wallace gave an update on the neighbourhood policing policy. He reported that crime incidents had increased to 31 recorded incidents for the previous year, against 14 for the year before. The figures broke down into 11 burglaries, 9 theft of fuel, and 3 thefts from motor vehicles, meaning there were 23 acquisitive crimes for the past year. Prevention of motorcycle accidents continued to be a significant issue. Collaboration with neighbouring police forces in Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire had been the subject of a shared

commitment towards neighbourhood policing, particularly over inter-county issues. At present the Buntingford area has 5 officers and 7 PCSOs - who did an enormous amount of legwork for the police officers. The OWL network is to be extended to include parish clerks. Crime in Cottered is down, apart from fuel theft (from unsecured home oil tanks) and acquisitive crime.

There were no questions. The Chairman thanked Sgt Wallace for attending and Cllr John Harwood-Bee thanked Sgt Wallace for the help given by the police relating to theft from his premises.

7 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The unaudited financial statement for the year ending 31 March 2014 was available for inspection (kept on file with the minutes)

8. LOCAL GROUP REPORTS

The following local village groups gave reports and updates.

8.1. Hertfordshire Guide Centre

The leadership of the Guide Centre had recently changed and no current report was available.

8.2. Bell Ringing Captain - Neville Chuck

Neville Chuck reported on the bell ringing and bells, and added a plea for more people to become bell ringers. On Saturday 7 June the Northern District of Bellringers will ring at Cottered Church between 6.30 and 7.00 pm. Plans are in hand to get the bell frames repainted later in the year.

8.3. Cottered and Throcking News - Neville Chuck

The Cottered & Throcking News continues to be a useful communication for the people of the parish and this also includes a number of ex-residents. The annual subscription of £4 will be due next month. A number of villagers have taken to writing articles for the magazine, for which they were thanked. Jenny Thomson continues to do an excellent job of formatting the photographs and text of the magazine.

8.4. Cottered Village Hall Trust - Colin Bayles

You may be struck by similarities between this report and last year's. I am Colin Bayles. I am chairman of the management committee. This is the hall. We manage it. My colleague committee members are dedicated, hard-working, long-serving and rarely recognised or thanked for what they do. I take this opportunity to recognize again, you may be struck by similarities between this report and last year's – but there are some important differences.

First the similarities -

I am Colin Bayles. I am chairman of the management committee. This is the hall. We manage it. In 1962 a charitable trust was created to hold and manage the hall. We now operate within the framework of that trust. Our registered charity number is 302358 and we report to the Charity Commission. Our goal, spelled out in the 1963 declaration of trust, is to provide "a Village Hall for the use of the inhabitants of Cottered and the neighbourhood".

My colleague committee members are dedicated, hard-working, long-serving and rarely recognised or thanked for what they do. I take this opportunity to recognise and thank them now. Our AGM was on 24th April. That is a public meeting and all residents of the village and neighbourhood are entitled to attend. Management committee members, officers and representatives of local organizations were elected and appointed for the year 2014/2015.

To East Herts Council and Jim Ranger we send the message that although we do have our differences over the licensing regime we are immensely grateful for the 100% rate relief.

Now – three important differences from last year's report.

The changing rooms have at last been repaired, refurbished and improved. Subject only to snagging, the work was completed a little before last Christmas and we are very pleased with the result. The cost was around £25,000 and could have been a good deal more if our builder had not been so understanding and so knowledgeable about VAT. Our new year's resolution is to see that they are now kept meticulously clean and tidy.

We have been joined by a new letting secretary, Ashleigh de Cordova. I thank her for coming to our rescue when all our pleas for help had until then fallen on deaf ears. I also underline how grateful we are to our outgoing (but never retiring) letting secretary Tina Reed for her long, uncompromising and very successful watch. She remains on the committee.

In consultation with the Village Hall Club we have made adjustments to the system for channeling surplus funds from the bar into the general management account, aimed at achieving dependability and transparency.

And I finish with another similarity.

Partly – but not only – because of the refurbishment we are very seriously strapped for cash. Please help by hiring the hall yourselves, by recommending it and by supporting our fund-raising events and/or by making a bequest, donation or loan.

8.5. Cottered Village Club - Colin Bayles

Similarities to last year's report may be even more striking here. At the moment I am chairman of the club committee.

The club was established in 2002, not long after the opening of this new hall. Its object is to "use Cottered Village Hall and to lend support to the trustees of the hall ... in the development and promotion of the use of its facilities". All profits made by the club are paid to the trustees of the hall. The club will hold its annual general meeting shortly. Membership is open to all and still costs only £1 per year. The club holds a Club Premises Certificate which authorises and regulates the operation of the bar and the supply of alcohol in the hall.

I have referred in the village hall report to adjustments made in the past year to our system for contributing financially from bar surpluses to the overall running of the hall.

8.6. Cottered Village Festival - John Harwood-Bee

Anybody who was in Cottered on Sunday 23rd June last year will be aware of how successful Village Day was. Thanks to the remarkable effect of having the Japanese Gardens featured on BBC Gardeners World combined with the excellent weather, Cottered hosted its most successful Village Day in recent years. We estimate that in excess of 4,000 people visited during the day. The inaugural Cottered Dog Show was a success and will be repeated this year. The 750 Motor Club rally continues to be a great draw as do the other gardens in the village. Many organisations and stall holders reported record takings and thanks to the significant generosity of the Rowlands family at Garden House and Mr & Mrs Snell at Lower Farm, other organisations benefitted from their donations. Altogether a very successful year. For 2014 three stalwart members of the committee have decided to step down. We should like to express our sincere thanks and best wishes to Bill Bennett and Terry McGrath who together have handled the Car Boot sale for more years than we care to remember and to Jeremy Stephens, Co Chairman of the committee and organiser of the 750 Motor Club Rally who over the years has made a significant contribution to the ongoing success of the village festival. We hope we can rely on their continued expertise and guidance should we need it.

Village Day is on Sunday 22nd June this year and we hope we shall have another good turnout. We have more stalls, more cars we hope, a bigger dog show and of course the beautiful gardens as well as a range of other entertainment including a performance by our new village choir the Cottered Voices. The 2014 programme should be delivered door to door in the week before the event.

For information about features or stalls or to offer assistance on the day please speak to me or to Roger Hayes.

8.7. Cottered Golf Society - John Harwood-Bee

The society had a very successful 11th year in 2013 managing to stage six tournaments at different courses in the region. A total of 26 teams challenged for the various trophies. In addition, groups of members took advantage of some special offer deals to play at other prestigious courses. Such was the standard achieved that four members of the Cavaliers shared the honour of 'Golfer of The Year'. Each event is followed by a prize giving and social evening much enjoyed by all who participate. For 2014 we have four remaining tournaments on the calendar, in May, July, August and October. The membership list is currently full but if anybody would like to play as a guest please speak to David Broxup or myself.

8.8. Cottered Village Appreciation Society - John Harwood-Bee

CVAS continues its role as a volunteer organisation ready to help with projects in and around the village and to offer support with manpower when requested. In the past year Volunteers have helped with, amongst other things, the upkeep of the churchyard, the cleaning of road signs and assisting with Village Day. Since 2010 the society has organised the village entry into the Hertfordshire Best Village Campaign with some success having achieved an award of some description every year since then. This year, as in 2013, the campaign has changed and is now the Rural Living Awards. Whilst anybody is entitled to enter a project, the Appreciation Society continues to submit entries in a variety of categories. This year the entries have to be submitted by 30th May and so if anybody wishes to have more information on the awards or would like help with submitting a project, please speak to David Broxup or myself. Between October last year and early April this year, society volunteers have been responsible for keeping the village tidy by maintaining the weekly litter picking whilst Eddie Hayden was recovering from knee surgery.

I should like to express my personal thanks to all those who volunteered for the litter picking duties and who kept the village tidy and up to the high standard created by Eddie. Thanks especially to Frances Halsey, Linda Roy, Michael Morris and Roger Gomm who covered certain areas continuously throughout the period. We are always grateful for help and so if anybody would like to be added to the volunteers list please speak to me or to David Broxup.

JHB

8.9 - Royal British Legion - John Harwood-Bee

Despite the sad loss of several key members in recent years the branch continues to survive. Although not having enough active members to warrant holding regular meetings, the branch still organises a very successful Poppy Appeal and is actively represented at the annual Remembrance Service where the branch standard is presented and the garden of remembrance placed in the churchyard. Cottered branch is regularly represented at Legion Group meetings by our Chairman Bill Bennett and Secretary John Harwood-Bee. During the 2013 Poppy Appeal the branch managed to collect £1427 from our house to house appeal. This is a remarkable achievement and a great credit to the generosity of the residents of the village. We hope to run a fund raising event later in the year, details of which will be in Cottered and Throcking News, on the website and on the notice boards. There are some 1914 centenary events planned by other branches and we have details for those wishing to participate. And we can always do with more members.

8.10. Football Club - Allen Chamberlain

A report was not available.

8.11. Friends of Cottered Church - Alan Smith

A relatively quiet year for the Friends - as the decision was taken to have only a small presence at Village Day in the form of the Tombola stall - it was felt that for other stalls a certain respite was required to enable a) Human batteries to be recharged and b) Stocks for stalls like bric a brac to be rebuilt. Kathy has already detailed our fund raising activities and expenditures for 2013.

The Friends hope to have a larger presence at Village Day 2014, it is also worthy of note that Friends were offered considerable donations from the gardens open on Village Day but these were declined with the request that these donations be made to Parish Church Council as they had more immediate needs for funds that Friends could not help with as they were not related to the physical upkeep or improvement of the church and churchyard.

I would like to take the opportunity of thanking Anne and Julian Bishopp for hosting the Xmas get together whilst Lower Farm barn is unavailable - provisional arrangements have been made for 2014 get together to be at Warren Farmhouse courtesy of Barry and Erika Price. In addition the Friends have already performed a Murder Mystery Play which assisted greatly in raising of funds and will in late September be putting on a Silent Auction in the Village Hall

My thanks to all the loyal hardworking members of Friends and their continued efforts to raise funds and to all those who attend our events and thus assist in raising funds

8.12 - Carpet Bowls - Eddie and Jo Hayden

The Carpet Bowls Club has been running now for 12 years and continues to be a very good social and competitive evening. We meet every Monday at 8.00 pm at the Village Hall and have a membership of 25. New members are always welcome. We had our Christmas party

dinner at The Bull, with entertainment by our very own Peta Morriss, which was also enjoyed by the other diners at The Bull. Our special thanks to Peta. Our Christmas raffle raised £120 which we donated to the Garden House Hospice, Letchworth.

8.13 - Horticultural Society - Julian Bishop

The first Committee meeting in 2013 was held on the 9th January when I was re-elected as Chairman for 2014 supported by the substantially the same committee as 2013 except for John Stearns and Janet Stephens who have resigned. We are grateful for their outstanding contribution to the Society over many years. Membership remains at a satisfactory level and our finances are sound with subscriptions remaining at £3 per person or £5 per family.

Starting from this Parish Council last May, there has been a full programme of events starting with:-

May 17th A talk by the proprietors of Priorswood Nursery. As for the previous speaker meeting, the event was not as well attended as we had hoped but those who went enjoyed the presentation, particularly the Northern humour. Beautiful clematis were available to buy. Mine almost died due to a lack of attention, but has recovered this Spring.

June 21st. A Garden Ramble hosted by Janet Stephens and Janet Westerman for the Japanese Garden and finishing at Ingrid Snell's. Three different, but lovely gardens. An enjoyable chatty evening ending with a showing of that week's Gardeners World in Ingrid's barn featuring The Japanese Garden.

June 24th Village day dawned bright and sunny and as a result of the television exposure of the Japanese Garden the village was flooded with visitors to the great benefit of attractions and stallholders, including our open gardens, plant stall and Ingrid's Teas at Lower Farm. Our thanks are due again to Mr and Mrs Snell and Mr and Mrs Leach for allowing us to 'open' their gardens. We assisted with the gate to the Japanese Gardens that as a result of the television exposure had a record number of visitors. We are very grateful for the Snell's donation to the Society from the monies raised from their teas. As a result of the financial success of the Village Day the Society has been able to purchase four new tables for the village hall that are available for all to use.

July 10th. The summer outing to Kew Gardens was less well supported than in recent years. It was a very good day and for those who had not been for many a year, much new or improved to see.

September 7th. Our Annual Show. Entries seemed very slow to arrive and until late in the morning the show looked poorly supported. However the late rush raised the number of entries to 290, 12 more than 2012. Vegetable and flower exhibits were up by a considerable amount but domestic and art entries were low in number. Overall, standards were generally high. For a great many years the prizes have been presented by Councillor Jane Pitman but she has retired from office and unable to be with us. The Committee has recognised her support by a gift of Van Hage garden vouchers that she was very pleased to receive. The Society has recognised her years of service by making her an Honorary Vice President of the Society. The show the prizes were presented by Councillor Rosemary Cheswright and we are very grateful. and hope she will come again.

The year closed with our Annual General meeting in November where the Committee were re-elected en-bloc with the new year starting with a talk on beekeeping on the 9th May. We have a full programme of events for the rest of the year and will be present at Village Day with open gardens, teas and a plant stall

8.14 - Luncheon Club - Cilla Grist (read by PC Chairman Bryan Pitman)

There is not much to report this year. Attendance has remained in the mid 30s and we are still keeping the cost to £3 for a two course meal with tea or coffee. Highlights from this year's menu were Steve Aukland's spicy beef casserole and pheasant casserole where the pheasants were donated by Adrian Wyatt and prepared for cooking by Peter Thody.

Our thanks go to the Bowls Club who set up and laid all the tables for us the night before. Also thanks to all those who helped clear away, wash up, and put away all the tables and chairs on the day. Our maximum membership is 40 so we would still like to welcome a few more to our gatherings.

8.15 - Parish Paths Partnership - Roger Gomm

The Parish is signed up to a partnership with the County Council for the maintenance of the surface of those footpaths which don't run across private land, and of stiles, gates, bridges and waymarker posts. A great deal of work was done by the County in the parish before the reduction in budget and the halving of the County Hall staff, and we are still feeling the benefit of this. But surfaces are beginning to break down and waymarker posts beginning to rot.

The gales of the autumn brought down quite a large number of trees, obstructing footpaths, but in the main these were quickly cleared by local people whose logs stores thereby benefited, and by the contractors who clear the green lanes. Some extremely wet weather flooded some paths and turned others to black treacle. Subsequently strong winds have dried the ground so that where it has been poached by horses the surface can be unpleasant to walk on. Local farmers are usually pretty good at clearing the paths crossing their crop fields. My impression is that they have been rather tardy this year. It is oil seed rape which is the most obstructive crop: it soaks your legs when wet, falls across footpaths and gabs hold of your ankles later in the year.

There are three points which are important on the footpath net work, perhaps more, which regularly get overgrown, and for which neither the County nor local landowners take responsibility. It would be a good idea to raise a small local working party to clear these annually.

The footpaths are shown on the local ordnance survey map, and that information is also available on the Ordnance Survey web site, but the best source is the so-called 'definitive map' available on the Herts County Council web site: Go to 'Hertsdirect' and search for 'Rights of Way'.

8.16 - Cottered Ramblers - Roger Gomm

Cottered Ramblers convene at 2.00 pm in the Village Hall car park on the first Sunday of the month, September to June, for leisurely walks of between 3 and 4 miles. Walks are usually within the parish, but sometimes further afield.

8.17 - Petanque - Margaret Leathem

Our Petanque club is still thriving so much so we now have two teams playing at the club one on Thursdays and a new one on Mondays. we have already hosted a large regional competition at the end of April which was a great success enjoyed by everyone not only by the good weather but the lovely setting as well.

9. OPEN DISCUSSION

Roger Gomm reported to the meeting that the Mobile Library Service visits the Village Hall car park every other Friday at 12 noon (the black bin day). Parishioners were urged to use the library service or, if there is not enough interest, we were in danger of its being withdrawn.

Julian Bishopp reminded the meeting that there was a plant sale this Saturday 10.00 - 12.00 noon in his garden, with proceeds going to Children with Cancer.

A parishioner asked about the new homes bonus. Cllr Jim Ranger explained that the 'new homes bonus' was an amount that East Herts Council receive from Central Government and it relates to property numbers that come within the rating system. EHC pass on to parish and town councils in their district 25% of the amount they receive from Central Government, and each year's award that they receive is for 6 years.

There being no other questions, the Chairman thanked the Police, the District Councillor, the parish councillors, and everyone for attending and giving their reports.

The meeting closed at 9.13 pm.

Chairman

Date