

KNEBWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of Meeting of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 3 May 2023 at Knebworth Village Hall at 8.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors Roger Willcocks (Chairman), Adrienne Charter, Charlotte Cosson, Steve Hemingway, Alexander Hurwitz, Paul Jobling, Colin Stringer and Paul Ward

In attendance: Tracy Lawson (Clerk) plus 35 members of the public

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| 1. | <p>Apologies</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Mr Godfrey, Mr Farr and Mrs Nash.</p> |
| 2. | <p>Chairman's Welcome</p> <p>Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Knebworth's Annual Parish Meeting. My name is Roger Willcocks and I'm the Chairman of Knebworth Parish Council.</p> <p>Thank you very much for coming out to see us this evening.</p> <p>This meeting is held each year to discuss what's happening in and around Knebworth and for the Parish Council to let local residents know what the Council has been doing for the past year.</p> <p>It's arranged by the Parish Council but it's not a Parish Council meeting.</p> |
| 3. | <p>Minutes</p> <p>Proposed by Mr Hemingway, seconded by Mrs Charter Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 4 May 2022 be approved as a true record.</p> |
| 4. | <p>Chairman's Report</p> <p>Let me introduce your Parish Council members:</p> <p>Adrienne Charter, Alexander Hurwitz, Charlotte Cosson, Colin Stringer (Chairman of the Amenities Committee and Deputy Chairman of the Council), Jeremy Godfrey, Lisa Nash, Paul Jobling, Paul Ward (Chairman of the Planning Committee), Phil Farr and Steve Hemingway.</p> <p>The members of the Parish Council are elected, but unpaid, volunteers, Most of us also have a full-time job. Our main responsibility is the wise spending of that small part of your council tax we get each year (it's about four percent), out of which we have to maintain the recreation grounds and the pavilion,, the village hall, the toilet in the car park, and various other bits and pieces, such as the</p> |

Christmas lights. Two years ago we added the allotments to our list of assets and three years ago we bought the Station Pub which pays for itself.

The Parish Council is consulted on planning matters, and we sometimes pay for professional assistance, but we are not the Local Planning Authority; planning decisions for Knebworth are made by North Herts Council, previously known as North Herts District Council.

Councillors are elected every four years; the last election was a year ago, so this council still has three years to run.

Our job as councillors is mainly to listen and advise; we have a Clerk who is the person who actually gets things done.

In January, our Clerk of twenty-eight years, Claire Graham, retired and the Council held a thank-you dinner at the Station Pub. I'd like to thank Claire for her tireless work over many years and wish her well for the future.

The new incumbent is Tracy Lawson; she has an almost vertical learning curve ahead of her.

Looking back at last year's minutes, I said the planning inspector's decision on the North Herts Local Plan was due within weeks. But I said that the year before too. It finally happened; the Local Plan was approved in November last year.

Now the Local Plan has been adopted, the Green Belt protection for the land immediately to the east and west of the village has been removed.

I explained at last year's meeting that an outline planning application for 230 homes on site KB4 (to the east of Knebworth) had been submitted to North Herts in November 2021. Nothing more seems to have happened there; in fact it's all gone very quiet.

Some development is inevitable, both to the east and the west of the village. But until a full planning application is submitted, when there will be an opportunity for public comment, any drawings and plans are purely speculative. The actual proposal could be completely different.

In the meantime there is a complex discussion taking place between the developers, North Herts Council and Herts County Council, in an attempt to figure out the best way to deal with existing and future traffic issues across the village.

This is a negotiation, not a done deal, and the Parish Council is working hard to make sure it has a place at the table.

The Neighbourhood Plan, which contains Knebworth-specific development policies, is an important part of all this. It was also adopted last year. Paul will say a bit more about it later.

The Station Pub opened just over three years ago, just in time for it to be closed for the COVID pandemic. The Parish Council owns the building and is responsible for its maintenance, but it is leased to a commercial landlord who runs it as a business. It pays for itself.

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| | <p>Early this year the Parish Council replaced all the pub's downstairs windows, which has made the building much warmer and pretty much cured its condensation issues. This wasn't cheap but it will make the building much more energy efficient and pleasant to use.</p> <p>The emergency exit from the conservatory has been relocated, allowing level access into the garden area. There is still some work needed to create step-free access from the conservatory; that should be completed in a few weeks' time.</p> <p>And ownership of the footpath from Park Lane to Deanscroft, which was created as part of the development of the pub garden, has been transferred to the Parish Council.</p> <p>The Council arranged and funded the road closure for the 11th November Armistice Day Parade and expects to do so again this year. It continues to look at options to renovate the War Memorial and has commissioned a survey and is waiting for the report.</p> <p>Other issues</p> <p>Trains - not only have the fast trains, which ran before the epidemic, not reappeared, but the evening service from Kings Cross will be reduced to just one train per hour in a few weeks' time.</p> <p>North Herts are looking, with Thameslink, at options for improving Knebworth Station - they want to create a detailed and costed plan for lifts to the platforms. They will use these plans to apply for funding but creating the plans also costs money - so at the moment they are looking for funding for that.</p> <p>They have also said they will look at the feasibility of extending the underpass through to Kerr Close to create an eastern access to the station, which would mean pedestrians would not need to pass under the road bridge.</p> <p>And finally, the Parish Council has set up a grant fund for local organisations and clubs. In the past year it has helped Friends of Knebworth School, Knebworth Community Library, Knebworth Scout and Guide Group, and Knebworth Twins Club with funding for specific projects.</p> |
| 5. | <p>Committee Updates</p> |
| 5.1 | <p>Amenities Committee - Colin Stringer</p> <p>Village Hall</p> <p>With things now having returned to normal, we have seen a steady increase in Hall bookings, with some new hirers, as well the regulars, such as the weekly <i>Link Up</i> meals club and <i>Splitz</i>, the dance group.</p> <p>Due to a number of members moving away from the village, KATS, the drama group, have scaled down their activities and it now seems unlikely that we will see any live drama on the hall stage for a while, which is a real shame, after many decades of regular performances. The Knebworth Community Chorus continues,</p> |

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| | <p>however, and their next concert, themed appropriately on <i>Nature in Summer</i>, and featuring a local professional clarinet-player, is scheduled for Saturday 1 July. During the year we have had to carry out repairs to a structural beam, above the main entrance, and the toilets and kitchen have been given a new lick of paint.</p> <p>Recreation Grounds</p> <p>As I have reported in the <i>Parish Magazine</i>, the play area was subject to an arson attack last year and, unfortunately, the insurance company was particularly dilatory in settling the claim. This meant that the area was out of commission for the whole of the summer but I am glad to report that the work was finally approved and carried out in the Autumn.</p> <p>At the end of the year, we had another concerted effort to clear the pond and I am delighted to report that it looks better than it has for many years. The moorhens certainly seem to think so, as they are nesting once again and we may have more residents on the pond in the coming days.</p> <p>The football club have not yet erected their new storage area for goal-posts, and other equipment, nor have they put up the posts along the road to ensure that nobody parks on the grass. This should all be completed soon.</p> <p>Allotments</p> <p>There is still a waiting list for plots and, as reported last year, the Parish Council will continue to seek opportunities to increase the number of allotments available in the village, either by way of an extension to the existing site or in a new, more suitable location.</p> <p>We had a very constructive meeting with plot-holders in mid-February at which the main topic was, as always, the provision of water to the site. Subsequent to this meeting, I had a very fruitful meeting with a resident in Watton Road, whose property neighbours the allotment site. As a result of this an agreement has now been signed with him to allow the two 1,000 litre tanks, at the North of the site, to be filled on a regular basis.</p> <p>.</p> |
| 5.2 | <p>Planning and Environment Committee – Paul Ward</p> <p>Welcome – it’s been another busy year on the planning front with some significant changes in the pipeline for the parish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will cover <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ what we do and highlight applications impacting the parish, ○ progress on the Local Plan from North Herts District Council and the new housing proposals, ○ Explain what we are doing now on our separate Neighbourhood Plan for the parish. |

- Talk about other relevant consultations from the District and County authorities – notably the Local Cycling and Walking In Plan – LCWIP.

What the Planning and Environment Committee Does

North Herts Council is the Local Planning Authority. They decide upon planning applications. They also developed the Local Plan overall for the district with all the housing proposals in it for expansion. The Parish Council does not. We are consulted like everyone else is. We are a statutory consultee on planning applications, so we have a degree of influence and “soft power”.

The planning applications we saw over the year range from many smaller residential property improvements through to large commercial developments. We listen carefully to what neighbours and other local residents tell us. If there are no objections from neighbours, and we see no obvious breach of planning guidelines in an application we are unlikely to raise objections. We are available to be contacted, and all of our meetings are open to the public if they wish to present their views in person. I’m glad to say that we’ve seen an increase in public participation in our meetings over the last year with applicants and concerned residents coming to explain matters to us. I’d encourage people to do that.

What has been going on over the last year?

I’m going to start with the things with biggest overall impact.

North Hertfordshire District - Local Plan update

It is the most significant and controversial planning matter impacting us. It is a plan for future development to 2031 drawn up by the District Council. The Local Plan was approved last November. Development will be allowed within a re-defined settlement boundary around the main village i.e. Knebworth has been expanded by changing the Green Belt boundary to allow for more housing. The Local Plan allocates land for approximately 600 new houses plus a new primary school. This is on top of any existing developments.

- Old Knebworth is identified limited in-filling only.
- The rest of the parish remains designated Green Belt.
- There are three main sites.
 - KB1 – west behind Deards End Lane
 - KB2 – west, behind Gypsy Lane: homes & primary school

- KB4 – east of the village, homes and secondary school allocation

The Parish Council has been talking to the land owners and developers in order to understand their plans better. We hope to influence them. This is one of the reasons our Neighbourhood Plan is important. Site KB4 to the East is now subject to a formal planning application, which is still in progress. We objected to the proposals last year due to this and other issues such as the impact on Swangleys Road and the school. Sites KB1 and KB2 were subject to informal consultation by the developers last year but no planning applications have been made yet as far as we know.

Our Neighbourhood Plan

I'm very pleased to say that just after our last Parish Annual Meeting, the referendum that we held on our Neighbourhood Plan was overwhelmingly approved by you, with an 83.9% vote of support, that's 1,449 people. Thanks to everyone who took the time to vote and all the volunteers that have worked on it for years. This means that officially "the plan has come into force as part of the statutory development plan for the area" and we can have more influence on future development. Planning officers must take it into account when assessing any planning applications in the parish.

However, prior to it being approved there were some policies that we had to remove from our Neighbourhood Plan on request of the Planning Inspector that reviewed it. These primarily related to traffic & transport, and education. We have now started a process to review our new Neighbourhood Plan with the intention of making limited changes to add back in some of the topics we wanted to cover, but learning from the advice of the Planning Inspector.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

The County and District councils together ran a public consultation last year from September to November on a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan – known as the LCWIP. The Parish Council has been raising awareness of this as there are some significant implications for Knebworth, as well as the towns. This includes the B197 and some other local roads, with intent to improve access for walking and cycling facilities for our community. But it will impact some vehicle routes, making them closed to vehicles and may reduce some parking. The changes, totalling several million pounds of investment if they all went ahead, include segregated cycle lanes, junction improvements,

traffic calming, traffic lights for crossings and traffic under the railway station bridge, “modal filters” to stop vehicles at the top of Pondcroft Rd and Gun Lane, plus pavement improvements. We encouraged people to engage in the consultation and a lot of people did. We also organised a specific meeting here in the Village Hall which was very well attended, for representatives from the District and County to be asked questions. For example, the officers did confirm that the proposals have taken into account the population increases from the Local Plan new housing.

The Parish Council also fed back its views *[from our consultation response]*.

- In principle we support changes to promote walking and cycling as sustainable modes of transport, as already reflected in our Neighbourhood Plan policy KBT1.
- We are also in support of reduction in the speed limits on the B197 at either end of the village.
- However we have significant concerns about impacting the commercial viability of the village centre retail environment, reflected in our Neighbourhood Plan policy KBLE3.
- Therefore we did not support changes to the following without further analysis of the impact:
 - Changes to the parking arrangements in the 'high street'
 - Signals at the Walton Road/Stevenage Road roundabout
- We would like to see more specific work undertaken and evidence produced to identify specific expected cumulative issues in the village due to the additional load of these sites, including the primary school, in line with the site KB1,2,4 requirements.

We are continuing to talk to the team running the LCWIP to work with them as their ideas develop further and take some action. Nothing is agreed yet. For example, the local shop keepers on London Road recently did their own survey of who was using the shops and this is useful data that we are sharing with the District council. Whilst a lot of people will have subjective views on what should or should not be done, we need as many facts as we can get to help those in charge of highways budgets make sensible overall decisions.

Other planning matters

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| | <p>We have been asked on a couple of occasions this year to support petitions from local residents on specific transport topics. One has been on closing Deards End Lane to through traffic, the other about widening London Road in the village centre to reduce congestion.</p> <p>At the moment the Parish Council has taken the view that we could not support these proposals. This is primarily because acting on any one aspect of traffic management in isolation has unintended consequences e.g. for other roads and residents. Without understanding the whole plans from the Highways team it is difficult for the Parish Council to make a balanced judgement on such matters in the interests of all residents in the parish. We also do not know what is technically and economically feasible. We are, however, working with District and County to understand what their overall proposals are going to be on the above matters such as the new houses and the cycling/walking changes, and will respond accordingly.</p> <p>I won't go into detail on the lists of planning applications we have commented on this year. But progress on a few is worth noting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The build of the housing at the Odyssey health club is proceeding. ○ We have not heard yet what the next steps are for KB4 after it received numerous objections – planning has still not been determined. ○ A new building for flats and shop units by the butcher on London Road is almost complete – known as the “sand yard”. ○ A new building to re-use the old water reservoir on Park Lane towards Old Knebworth is progressing. <p>Overall it is a busy time and we are expecting to see significant proposals coming forward in the next year. We will continue to do our best to raise awareness of these and represent the whole local community.</p> |
| 6. | <p>Questions</p> <p>Mr Fothergill: regarding the Odyssey Development, is it a roundabout or a T junction on the B197? The developers and the parish council need to be aware that there is an ancient milestone situated where the junction is proposed and could be destroyed.</p> |

Cllr Ward: The plans show a roundabout. Can you show us where the milestone is?

Mr Fothergill: It's near the exit from the site.

Mr Sprigge: Meetings used to have a police presence and would present a report and would be filtered down through parish councils.

Cllr Willcocks: The police have been invited to the meetings and they have always declined.

CCllr Thake: Police reports do happen. At one parish council meeting they presented a report which consisted of 22 separate categories on crime. It was a fifteen-minute presentation and there was no reference to matters being resolved. If that's all they could report on, then the police could just send the report to the clerk. I will continue to rail against it, what is the point of stats if they don't tell you the outcome.

Mr Titmarsh: Planning in the centre of the village, opposite the old Barclays Bank building. The shops have been flooded over a number of years. I visited the lagoon with Lisa Nash, councillor. It was full of bushes and debris. It should be cleared regularly. I believe this is what is causing the problem and shop keepers need the support of the parish council to resolve the problem.

Cllr Willcocks: The lagoon is the responsibility of Herts Highways.

CCllr Thake: Herts County Council proposed removing the double yellow lines on Park Lane. How was the decision made to have them and why do we need them when there are less commuters?

CCllr Thake: A proposal was put forward to extend double yellow lines in Park Lane and to remove some further west to maintain parking spaces. However, this was not supported. I complained to Herts highways about the speed on Park Lane, and was told that nothing will happen until someone gets killed.

Mrs Rogers: Removal of lines on Park Lane outside houses with the speed of vehicles would be dangerous

Cllr Willcocks: The Council has spoken to Thameslink and NHC about lift access on the railway station. They also said they would investigate parking again but it has all gone very quiet again. Traffic reviews will be undertaken with all the new developments.

Paul Ward: Regarding parking the Parish Council has proposed to North Herts District council that it would subsidise 30 minutes free parking in St Martins road Car park. North Herts has made no comment on the proposal.

Mr Sprigge: Section 106 developer benefits were mentioned in the Parish News. Is the District Council considering changing from S106 to Community Infrastructure Levy.

Cllr Ward: Section 106 are funds which mitigate the impact of development on the community. Community infrastructure levy is a flat rate chargeable per dwelling. NHDC has not adopted it yet. When planning applications come forward the Parish Council submit community scheme which would benefit from funding.

Cllr Willcocks: S106 is a problem. The Council has to pre-cost projects to present to NHDC and provide supporting evidence.

Mr Hall: S106 has come up over the years. I have never heard of any money coming in.

Cllr Willcocks: Knebworth has not had any in the last few years.

Cllr Ward: The reality is that the Council has to work with developers and NHDC to obtain funding.

Mr Adams: The repairs to playground wooden equipment, which was torched, have been completed. Does the Parish Council intended to put plans in place to protect this valuable asset?

Cllr Stringer: The Parish Council is looking at CCTV.

Mr Adams: Has the Council considered a fence around the play equipment that could be locked at night, like the one at the tennis courts?

Cllr Willcocks: Thank you for your suggestion.

Cllr Stringer: Part of the wooden fence has been replaced by a metal and the proposal is to replace all the fence when funds become available.

Mr Fothergill: Can the chairman assure me that the Parish Council will apply for the road closure for the Remembrance Service?

Cllr Willcocks: I stated this in my opening speech.

Mr Sprigge: The 300 bus service has disappeared and the 301 bus service is not optimal. Is there anything that can be done to improve the service?

Cllr Thake: Since deregulation the council has no influence over bus routes.

Bus operators make excuses that they don't have enough drivers, etc. I shall put forward a proposal for a more regular service.

Mr Hill: Is it the intention to slow traffic down with potholes? Pothole should be filled in and not left to slow people down. It is dangerous for cyclists. The potholes have been highlighted with yellow lines around them.

Cllr Thake: In Hertfordshire there are 5,000km of road, excluding motorways and 5,000 miles of footways. £55m has been spent on highways to date and it has filled 75% of the potholes last year. To do the job properly there needs to be road closures which takes 6-18 weeks and £18,000 for each road closure.

Temporary repairs are done because of insurance claims. There should be changes at County. The current situation isn't great and I shall follow this up.

Cllr Willcocks: Thanked the public for attending the meeting

There being no further business. The meeting closed at 9pm.