

HEMINGFORD ABBOTS PARISH COUNCIL

Report to the Hemingford Abbots Annual Parish Meeting on the activities of the Parish Council in the year May 2013 to May 2014

Councillors and Clerk

The year 2013-4 is the second year of this Council's 4 year term. At the Annual Parish Council meeting, the first meeting of the Council in the year, held on 29 May 2013, Cllr John Peters was elected Chairman, Cllr Bridget Flanagan was elected Vice Chairman and with Cllrs Erika Brown, John Chandler, Pearl Muspratt, Denis Rait and Sally Spowart comprising the full Parish Council.

Mrs Carole Pollock remains as the Parish Council Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer.

Contact details for Councillors are appended to this report.

Council Representatives

The Council is fortunate to have a number of volunteers who carry out specific tasks or represent it on outside bodies and we shall hear from them shortly with their reports to this meeting. Our thanks are due to all of them. Particular thanks are due to those retiring; Pearl Muspratt, who retired after the last Annual Parish Meeting as our Representative on the Village Hall Committee and John Bows, Tree Warden who moved away from the village during the course of the year. Their tasks have been taken over by Cllr Denis Rait and by Les Spowart respectively.

Overview

2013-2014 has been another relatively quiet year for Parish Council activity with no major projects of its own currently underway. The continuing routine business of the Council has necessitated the holding of the 10 scheduled monthly meetings, the Council does not normally meet in either August or December, and 4 Extraordinary meetings were called to deal with planning applications within their 21 day response timescale. The number of planning applications considered by the Council during the year has increased from a low point during 2012/13 to more like the numbers coming before the Council in previous years.

Finance

Please be aware that the following comments are based upon the unaudited accounts for the year April 2013 to March 2014

The Precept previously agreed by the Council for the year was £16000 (an increase of 3% from £15500 in 2012/13). Additional income was received from interest on reserves, from Council Tax support from the District Council, a small income from the recycling scheme and reimbursement of the costs of staff and Councillor training.

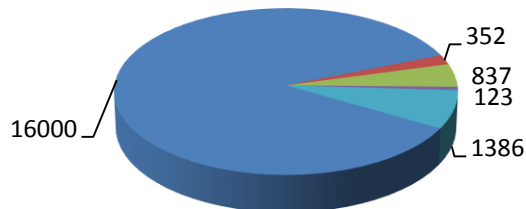
The source of the income and how it was expended is shown on the charts below.

Significant costs in the year were, just over £6000 being the cost of running the Parish Council including the Clerks salary, office expenses including the purchase of some new equipment, meeting room hire and the like and £3000 for the electricity charges and maintenance of street lighting, which sum include some extraordinary cost within this period due to a change in the providers invoicing periods. The costs of publications, that is, the website that the Parish Council provides both for itself and for the whole of the village together with a contribution to the PCC Magazine for the space taken in it, were higher than anticipated due to a 'hacking attack' on the website necessitating corrective action to be taken by the website host.

As has been noted previously, the Parish Council owns the street lights in the village and a 'Sinking Fund' is being built up to cover the cost of replacement of the lights, estimated at around £60,000 when they reach the end of their life. A sum is included within the budget for each year for this purpose and if there is any

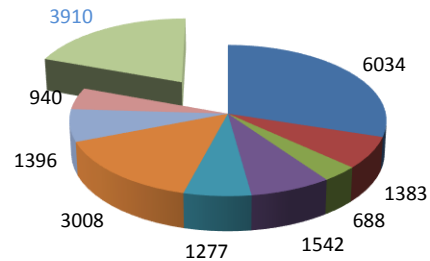
residue of income remaining at year end after ensuring that the required sum equal to the precept is retained in General Reserve to cater for unexpected emergencies, then that residue can, by resolution of the Council, be added to the Sinking Fund. In March the Council resolved to transfer a sum of £1700 to the Fund in addition to the £2210 within the budget. The Fund now stands at £36,708.

Income



- Precept £16000
- Council Tax Support £352
- Interest received £837
- Recycling credit ('Clothes bank') £123
- Training costs reimbursed £1386

Expenditure



- Running costs (Clerk, Room hire, stationery and equipment, audit fees) £6034
- Training costs £1383
- Insurance £688
- Village maintenance £1542
- Playing Field maintenance £1277
- Street lights electricity and maintenance £3008
- Magazine, website £1396
- Peace Memorial Field and Regatta £940
- Retained in Street light Sinking Fund £3910

The precept for the coming year 2014/15 was set at £16000 with no increase over the sum set in 2013/14.. This gives a Band D tax rate of £47.90, which compares favourably with other Parish Councils in the area. The average and median Band D tax for those Parishes within the HDC area who raise a precept of less than £140,000 (i.e excluding the very large Parishes of Brampton, Godmanchester, etc.) is £64.49 and £50.68 respectively. The Hemingford Abbots rate is therefore just 74% of the average rate.

Quality Status

The Parish Council has continued to work towards the achievement of Quality Council Status in order to demonstrate to its electors that the Council is well-run, efficient and is pro-active and engaged with the community. The Council and Clerk are, however, frustrated that new applications for recognition of this status are and have for some time been in abeyance whilst amendments are being made to the scheme. In the meantime it is hoped that the Council will shortly meet the criteria to acquire the General Power of Competence which will greatly extend its power allowing it to do things it has previously been unable to do under its existing powers.

Training

All councillors and the Clerk undertook appropriate development training during the year. This training was organised by our Clerk and the sessions, held in Hemingford Abbots, were opened up to Councillors from neighbouring parishes. By this means and by the application for training grants, the cost to the Parish Council for this training was effectively covered. Our particular thanks are due to our Clerk for her hard work in arranging and administering this process.

Planning

The Parish Council remains a statutory consultee on all planning applications directly affecting the Parish and consideration of the applications continues to provide a steady workload for Councillors. This year has seen 24 full applications being put before the Council for consideration and comment. Of this 24 Full applications; 6 involved Listed Building Consent, 2 were for demolition and rebuild of which 1 was approved and 1 refused. 2 other applications were for a variation of details within or of conditions attached to previously approved applications, 4 applications were in respect of work to trees in the conservation area and a response was also made by the Council to an outline application for development in the parish of Houghton that would have an impact on the visual amenity from this Parish.

Parishioners will recall the public meeting of 09 May 2012 held to gain general endorsement or otherwise of the Parish Council's papers prepared at the request of Huntingdon District Council on the possible amendment of the Hemingfords Conservation Area Character Assessment (HCACA). Following meetings with HDC, the papers were submitted to them in early October 2012 and HDC promised their decision on how they would amend that HCACA by late Spring 2013. No such decision was made. Very regrettably and despite the Parish Council's work being at their request, Huntingdonshire District Council have taken no action in this matter and it is now understood that they propose to take no action.

The Parish Council continues to give its support to the proposal originated by local campaigners to have the whole Ouse Valley, possibly from Paxton Pits in the west to Earith in the east, designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This would afford better protection to the landscape of the Ouse Valley from the encroachment of relentless building development. The listing of the Great Ouse River Valley as a Distinct area within the recent revision by English Nature of the National Character Area profile of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands is encouraging for this aspiration.

Village Maintenance

The parish Council continually pressures the higher tiers of local government to carry out those maintenance activities for which they are responsible such as, for example, highway maintenance. The Council also arranges for carrying out the more mundane repairs and renewals for which it is responsible such as clearing vegetation from road signs, hedge trimming, fencing repairs and the like.

Other Village Activity

The Parish Council again organised an annual 'Litter Pick' and this year it was held on the 9th February and was well supported. Our thanks are due to all the volunteers who turned out on a Sunday morning, dressed themselves in protective clothing and proceeded to fill bin bags reported filling a surprisingly large number of bin bags with a surprising assortment of discarded litter items.

Hemingford Abbots Playing Field

The Parish Council continues as the Administrative Trustee of the Playing Field and as well as arranging for the maintenance of the grass and hedges also arranges for the required independent annual safety inspection of the play equipment and continues to carry out a weekly visual inspection of both the Field and the equipment. The very wet summer in 2013 prevented the grass being cut as often as would be desirable and whilst some cost was thus saved the appearance and grass quality suffered.

The roadside perimeter hedge which had been getting thin is being revitalised by the planting of new hedging 'whips' and our particular thanks are due to our new Tree Warden, Mr Les Spowart, for sourcing and arranging delivery of these whips.

Unfortunately the long running attempts to get the original playground contractor to extend the impact surfacing to the web climber finally failed when that contractor ceased trading and entered administration.

The Council will now need to bear the cost of employing an alternative contractor to bring the surfacing to the correct standard.

Hemingford Peace Memorial Field

The Hemingford Peace Memorial Field, located in Hemingford Grey, is a Charity for the benefit of both villages and one member of its Committee of Management is appointed by Hemingford Abbots. In accordance with the Council's policy a financial donation was made towards the upkeep of the field.

Utilities

The problems of the collapsing sewers in Common Lane appear, at long last, to have been successfully rectified by Anglian Water. The final reinstatement was completed as promised prior to the Date of the village Flower Festival in late June 2013.

In conclusion

The Parish Council carries out its duties throughout the year on behalf of all the electors of the Parish. Councillors are available for 15 minutes prior to the start of each Parish Council meeting should any Parishioner wish to raise with the Council any matter of relevance to the Parish. Parishioners also have an opportunity at the start of every Parish Council meeting to make their contribution to any item on the Agenda of the meeting.

Parish Council meetings are open to all and all are very welcome to attend.

Finally; it has been my privilege to serve as Chairman of the Parish Council during the past year but of course the Council is very much a team effort. Sincere thanks are due to the Vice Chairman, to fellow Councillors and of course to our Clerk, who continues to carry out her work with enthusiasm and efficiency.

John Peters

Chairman, Hemingford Abbots Parish Council

Appendix

Hemingford Abbots Parish Council – Contact details

Clerk to the Council:

To whom any correspondence for the attention of the Council should be addressed

Mrs Carole Pollock
Clerk to the Parish Council
5 Gore Tree Road
Hemingford Grey
HUNTINGDON
PE28 9BP
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T: 01480 464817

Parish Councillors may be contacted as follows:

Erika Brown	01480 465138	
John Chandler	01480 462053	
Bridget Flanagan	01480 465370	Vice-Chairman
Pearl Muspratt	01480 467818	
John Peters	01480 496464	Chairman
Denis Rait	01480 454571	
Sally Spowart	01480 461165	