

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL,  
MAIN STREET, HOUGHTON ON THE HILL,  
ON THURSDAY 30<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2015, AT 7.30 PM**

**PRESENT:**

Parish Council Chairman Cllr. Mr. Huw Francis (in the chair)

Mr. S. Derry - Clerk to the Parish Council

66 parishioners including guest speakers County and District Councillor Simon Galton, Steve Goodman – Chairman, Houghton Field Association, Ian Hill, Chairman – Houghton Neighbourhood Planning Working Party, Helen Chadwick, Environmental Co-ordinator, Harborough District Council.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from residents Kathleen Newman and Liz Francis.

**2. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 1 MAY 2014**

The minutes were confirmed and duly signed by the Chairman.

**3. CHAIRMAN'S OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR 2014/15**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked his fellow Councillors for their contributions during the year. He particularly thanked Ann Sleath, Vice-Chairman and Steve Derry, Clerk to the Parish Council.

Communications continued to be effective. Residents could attend the monthly Parish Council meetings and up to date information was available on the Parish Council website, on the notice boards in addition to the Parish Council report which was included in each month's Houghton News. Information was regularly distributed to village groups and organisations and enquiries from residents were processed either directly or by being passed on to other organisations.

The precept for 2014/15 was £21,420 which had been supplemented by transferring £3,650 from reserves and expenditure had been within budget. Grants had been awarded to Park Life, Houghton Field Association, Village Hall, Methodist Chapel and St. Catharine's Church.

A new website had been introduced and, as a result, information was more readily available. Documents could be found quickly using the document management system and news could be fed out automatically to social media if necessary.

Councillors and the Clerk had attended various training courses and meetings over the previous year and continued to keep abreast of developments via

material from Harborough District Council, Leicestershire County Council, Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils and the National Association of Local Councils.

The Annual Village Walk had taken place in October 2014 which had resulted in a number of maintenance issues being referred to the County Council and Seven Locks housing.

All Parishes had been invited to consider devising a Neighbourhood Plan so that residents would be provided with some say in future building development. The Parish Council leafletted the village and held a public meeting in September 2014 and the Neighbourhood Planning Working Party had been formally constituted in February 2015.

The Parish Council, as a statutory consultee, had reviewed 25 planning applications during the year, most of which were straightforward. The application to construct an anaerobic digestion plant at Houghton Lodge Farm was on hold and outline planning permission for the erection of 17 houses and bungalows on Uppingham Road had been permitted in October 2014.

Grass cutting at the Village Hall, St. Catharine's Church and Houghton Field continued to be undertaken by Nurture Landscapes. The Parish Council had joined a consortium which also included the Parish Councils of Thurnby and Bushby, Stoughton and Scraftoft to take over verge grass cutting and maintenance of jitties in the Parish. The contract had been awarded to Turney Landscapes Ltd. and the County Council was making a contribution towards the cost. Harborough District Council continued to cut the grass at St. Catharine's Green and Chapel Close Green.

Councillor Francis concluded by reiterating that the Parish Council would continue to work for the good of the village, to listen to villagers' concerns and act upon them wherever possible. Three Councillors had not stood for election and there were three vacancies which he hoped could be filled soon.

**4. INVITED SPEAKER: COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLOR SIMON GALTON**

Councillor Galton explained that local government was not a protected service and that the County Council needed to make savings of £120m by 2019. Adult Social Care costs were significant although the Council aimed to improve health and social care services for frail older people and other vulnerable groups. The Better Care fund would bring health care professionals together to provide better care closer to home and would prevent unnecessary stays in hospital. The Light Bulb project involving the adult social care service working closely with the health service and district council housing teams would help to reduce expenditure.

The waste and recycling service had also been under severe financial pressure.

The price received for recycled paper had plummeted and the value of recycling credits had fallen. When waste was recycled rather than sent to landfill, the county council made a saving on the cost of disposing of the waste which was then passed on to the district council. These were known as recycling credits. The subsidy in respect of the collection of green waste by the district council was also under threat. Alternatives including reducing the service or charging directly for use were being considered. By 2019 credits for dry waste could be reduced. A major consultation exercise was being undertaken on household waste sites. One possibility was that charges could be introduced for charities such as Age UK that had to dispose of unwanted contributed items.

In contrast, there was good news for street lighting where, under the Invest to Save policy, 33,000 street lights had been converted to LED (light emitting diode) which used 70% less electricity resulting in an annual saving of £2.5m.

Although the status quo was being maintained for road maintenance, the cutting frequency for grass verges was being reduced. Parish Councils had been offered the opportunity to take over the cutting for which the county council would make a contribution. The Parish Council had accepted the offer and was working with three of its neighbouring parishes as a consortium. Turney Landscapes had been successful in a tendering exercise and had undertaken its first cut of the 2015 season which had attracted complements from residents.

Of the £120m of savings which were required, around 50% had been achieved and the incoming government would need to undertake a comprehensive spending review which could have a further significant impact on public spending.

There were major local concerns about secondary school choices. At present Gartree High School and Kibworth Beauchamp College accommodated years 10 to 14 and 14 to 18 respectively. Under proposals children would enter both schools from age 11 meaning that they would be held back a further year at their existing schools.

HDC's local plan set out planning policies in the district for the period to 2031. These included strategic allocations of land to meet future needs and the core strategy had planned for 350 dwellings per annum. The Communities Secretary had, however, commented that HDC should have been providing permission for at least 440 homes a year to meet housing needs. He had said that the Council would have to address the overall shortfall in its five year housing supply. Neighbourhood Plans, which were subject to referendums, were legally binding and, although they could not prevent development, they could shape it. In the locality Billesdon, Broughton Astley and Scraftoft were engaged in the process and Houghton had formed a Working Party. Because of its facilities including the post office, public houses, school and bus services, Houghton could be transferred from the small village category to a key centre.

5.

**INVITED SPEAKER: STEVE GOODMAN, CHAIRMAN – HOUGHTON FIELD ASSOCIATION**

Mr. Goodman had been chairman since 2014 and explained that Houghton Field had been created in the 1960s. He emphasised that it was held in trust and was not owned or managed by any public body and that it had to raise money locally. It had been possible to make improvements to the pavilion including a new cooker, repairs to the building and roof in addition to works to showers and electrical installations. Annual running costs excluding improvements were around £6,500 and annual income was approximately £7,500. The '100' club had raised around £57,000 over the years and other income sources included the bridge club, table tennis, scarecrow festival and annual fireworks event. The Parish Council provided grants in addition to cutting the field grass and the field association enjoyed a flexible working arrangement with the Parish Council. Parklife, which was part of HFA, provided and maintained facilities for the young people of Houghton, had also been awarded grants by the Parish Council. There could not be a reliance on grants, Mr. Goodman explained, and there was a need to increase revenue by approximately £3,000 yearly. A pitch drainage project lasting around five weeks was due to commence soon for which a Sport England grant of £44,000 had been awarded although further funding needed to be secured. Replacement of the pavilion was eventually inevitable and there would be a need to determine its structure and size for which a survey would be undertaken. A new pavilion with additional facilities could also cost more to run. A consequence of an increased population was that more field space would be required. He concluded by inviting residents to become involved in the running of the field in any capacity. Practical help such as litter picking or painting the pavilion was needed and membership of the '100' club would cost only £1 per month.

6. **INVITED SPEAKER: HELEN CHADWICK - ENVIRONMENT CO-ORDINATOR, HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Helen explained what Neighbourhood Planning was, what it involved and how the process could benefit Houghton. It was part of the government's localism agenda and provided an opportunity for parish councils to shape and determine Planning Policy in their locality so that local issues could be addressed. Detailed policies for which local support was an essential element would need to be determined to form a key part of the decision making process. Although plans could be wide ranging covering housing, open space, design, heritage, roads, community assets, infrastructure and community facilities, they needed strategic compliance with the Local Plan and National/European policy.

The stages leading to eventual adoption of the plan were prescribed and initially involved designating the plan area. Harborough District Council's officers had been sympathetic to suggestions to extend the boundary to incorporate land falling within Hungarton parish and discussions were ongoing with Hungarton Parish Council. The stages leading to a six week consultation period involved on-going consultation with parishioners and stakeholders, agreeing a vision, developing an evidence base (e.g. profile; needs assessment; policy conformity; policy development) and finally writing policies.

Formal publication of the plan would be undertaken by Harborough District Council and would precede a further 6 week period followed by independent examination and, finally, a referendum.

The Neighbourhood Planning Working Party had been formally constituted by the Parish Council in February 2015 and explanations of what the Working Party needed to do and how Harborough District Council (HDC) could assist were explained. Grant funding might be needed to support the process. Support required which could be provided by Harborough District Council, might comprise advice, data, provision of maps, attendance at meetings and conformity checks. HDC receives £30,000 for funding support and will receive the draft report, provide comments and publish, pay for independent examination and pay for and arrange the referendum.

7.

**INVITED SPEAKER: IAN HILL – CHAIRMAN, HOUGHTON  
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING WORKING PARTY**

Ian explained that the Neighbourhood Planning system would provide communities with a greater say in shaping development in the locality. The working party comprised 21 residents although more would be welcomed. The working party had considered other alternatives including the 2004 Parish Plan and Village Design Statement. An attraction of Neighbourhood Planning was that it was legally enforceable and could determine where and when development would take place. The NP boundary need not necessarily be the parish boundary although it had to be logical and discussions were ongoing with HDC and Houghton Parish Council to establish the boundary. A timetable had been compiled detailing the main stages leading to a referendum in autumn 2016. Sub groups for specific topic areas had been established for housing, employment, services and facilities, village design, traffic and transport, digital technology, consultation and environment. He emphasised the need to disseminate information to the public and this would be achieved by various means including the dedicated area of the village website, flyers and public meetings. Feedback was encouraged from the community.

8.

**COUNCILLOR HUW FRANCIS**

This was Huw's last Annual Parish Meeting as Chairman of the Parish Council as he had not sought election to the Parish Council from May 2015. Vice Chairman, Ann Sleath, thanked him for his hard work and dedication since becoming chairman in May 2012 and said that whoever succeeded him would find it a hard act to follow.

The meeting closed at 9.14 p.m.

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Chairman  
28 April 2016