

PIRTON PARISH COUNCIL

The monthly meeting of Pirton Parish Council was held on
Thursday 10th April 2008
at Pirton Village Hall.

Present:

Mrs Diane Bailey
Mr Michael Goddard
Mrs Rosemary Hamilton McLeod
Mrs Margaret Johnson
Mr Steven Kitchiner
Mr Rodney Marshall
Mr David Saunders (Chairman)
Mrs Jennifer Smart (Clerk)
Mr James Vaughan
Mrs Pamela Waters (vice-Chairman)

Apologies for Absence:

County Councillor Mr Nigel Brook
District Councillor Claire Strong

Absent:

Mr James Vaughan

Also present:

Mr M Payne
Mr G Lewis

060.08 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Payne attended the meeting to discuss with the Parish Council his recent planning application for 4 Walnut Tree Road, to which Councillors had objected because they felt the proposed extension was too large and would be out of keeping with the existing listed building, and that the proposed slate roof was too high and was inappropriate. Mr Payne pointed out that the application was not for a conservatory but for a garden room, and that the plans had been carefully drawn up by an architect after a great deal of thought to ensure that the garden room would be in keeping with the property and the environment. Furthermore, Mr Payne did not feel that the view from the Bury would be spoiled by the proposed extension, as it would be hidden partly by buildings in a neighbouring garden, and also by tree growth in summer. The Planning Officer had stated that "By reason of its inappropriate design, form and excessive footprint, the garden room proposed would be out of keeping with the character of the dwelling and would harm the character and appearance of the Conservation Area". Mr Payne stated that he would be taking the case to Appeal and would ask NHDC and Pirton Parish Council to look again at the plans and proposed materials, and mentioned that he would welcome any Councillor who wished to do so to visit his property and discuss the matter further with him. The clerk was asked to bring the original planning application to the next meeting so that it could be re-assessed.

Mr Payne left the meeting

061.08 PARISH COUNCIL WEBSITE

This item was brought forward on the agenda as Mr G Lewis was attending the meeting to discuss the proposed website with Councillors.

Mr Marshall had investigated a number of websites, but felt they had been too complicated, and had spoken to local resident, Greg Lewis, who was attending the meeting to show Councillors some possible designs for a website that he could set up on behalf of the Parish Council. It was agreed that it was important that it was clear that it was the Parish Council's own website and that it contained the views of the Parish Council. The website would need to be regularly updated and it was expected that it would grow as the Parish Council thought of more items suitable for inclusion. Councillors liked Mr Lewis's ideas, and he was asked to develop them further and bring them back to the next meeting so that Councillors could make some firm decisions on the issue at that time.

Mr Lewis left the meeting

062.08 INSURANCE

It was agreed to bring this item forward on the agenda as Mr Marshall, a member of the Summer Fair sub-committee, would be leaving the meeting early. Mr Marshall asked the clerk to ascertain whether or not the Parish Council's insurance would cover a Tug of War at the Summer Fair.

063.08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no Declarations of Interest in items on the agenda, although Mrs Hamilton McLeod signed the Declaration of Interest book later in the meeting – see under minute 074.08

064.08 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COUNCIL MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2008 were confirmed and signed.

065.08 OUTSTANDING ITEMS

Coleman's Close – Section 106

There was nothing new to report on the handover. However, as this was expected to have taken place by now, the Parish Council's contractor had started cutting the Middle Green grass as he had been requested to do in the Autumn, but Wimpey had also instructed their contractor to cut the grass, and there was some confusion when he had begun to cut it and was asked by the Parish Council's contractor not to do so. Since then, the Grounds Maintenance Manager for Wimpey had agreed to ask his contractor not to cut Middle Green any more. Mr Simmons had asked if he could remove dead trees and some lower branches from other trees on Middle Green and carry out a general tidy up, which Councillors agreed he should do.

Grants

The clerk had not yet had time to investigate possible funding sources for the re-marking of the MUGA.

066.08 **FINANCE**

Bank accounts as at 7th April 2008:

Business Premium Account	£21,036.38
Community Account	<u>£1,003.41</u>
	£22,039.79
Contingency Account	<u>£10,662.15</u>
	£32,701.94

Monies received since last meeting:

Interest – BPA	£74.46
Interest – Contingency	£39.00

Payments totalling **£3,925.90** as detailed on the monthly Finance Statement would be made in full. This amount included the following Annual Grants:

Joycare - £600
St Mary's Church (grass-cutting) - £850
1st Pirton Brownies - £150
1st Pirton Rainbows - £150
Pirton Playgroup - £150
Pirton Toddler Group - £150
Pirton Methodist Church (Welcome to Pirton Evening) - £50

As had been agreed prior to budget meeting in November, it was **RESOLVED** that the clerk would now order a new Dog Waste Bin to replace the broken one in Hambridge Way, £200 having been budgeted for this purpose.

067.08 **REQUESTS FOR FUNDING**

There were no requests for funding.

068.08 **HIGHWAYS**

It was mentioned that the hedge outside the house at the Royal Oak Lane end of High Street had grown so far out over the road that visibility was severely restricted at this dangerous junction. Sheridans were believed to be the letting agents and would be asked to ensure the hedge was cut back.

069.08 **SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS**

There were no sub-committee reports. Minutes of the Summer Fair sub-committee meeting held on 28th February were confirmed and signed.

070.08 **PLANNING**

School Craft House – the clerk was asked to contact the owners to ask them to brick up the doors and windows as the wooden door has been repeatedly forced open.

Applications

Walnut Tree Farm – 08/00331/1HH

Full Permission Householder: Extension to carport to provide additional storage space

Councillors had no objection to this application, provided neighbours had been consulted and had not objected.

12 Priors Hill – 08/00655/1TCA

Remove one sycamore tree

The clerk was still waiting to hear from **Mary Caldwell** of NHDC Planning Department with a suitable date for a special meeting on Planning Issues and Training with Councillors.

Decisions

**Barns to North West of Burge End Farmhouse, Burge End Lane
– 08/00194/1 & 08/00197/1LB**

Full Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent – Conversion and extension of former agricultural buildings to form single dwelling. Internal and external alterations - withdrawn.

Copsford, West Lane – 07/02997/1HH

Full Permission Householder: Conversion and extension of bungalow to form two storey dwelling with detached double garage to front of dwelling incorporating changes in levels to front garden and drive -withdrawn.

071.08 POTENTIAL GYPSY SITE

The Chairman reported that he had heard a few weeks earlier of a possible change of direction on Gypsy Sites by the District Council, following a change of government policy, and that Parish Councils from the six rural sites remaining on the list of potential Gypsy Sites were to be invited to a Cabinet meeting on April 8th to listen to the debate regarding gypsy sites in the area.

Accordingly, several Parish Councillors attended the meeting, along with the members of the Pirton Action Group. There were also representatives from some of the other affected villages. The Chairman gave a résumé of this meeting as follows:

“At the start of the meeting Action Group member Steve Goodman gave an excellent presentation to Cabinet members on behalf of Pirton and Holwell, pointing out flaws in the Scott Wilson report; the fact that Gypsies have no wish to live in rural communities and that the proposed development west of Stevenage would better meet the Gypsies’ requirements as well as complying with the recent new guidance issued by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA).

Under an agenda item later at the same meeting, District Councillor Thake (Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport) noted that there was no demonstrable need for the fifteen pitches required by EERA, said that Scott Wilson was flawed and that changes to Government guidelines directed sites to be attached to major developments, **“particularly when opportunities present themselves in respect of new major developments” (draft policy H4 issued by EERA in Feb 2008)** In essence he asked the Cabinet to recognise that Government guidelines had changed since the start of the consultation procedure, and that the criteria for selection should be based on proximity to facilities such as schools, shops and medical facilities, and that it was best to make additional provision for sites as part of major new developments. Bearing the above in mind he proposed:-

“That the Council take into account the emerging regional planning policies on Gypsy and Traveller Site location and the strong preference that the emerging regional policy has for locating such uses in areas of major development, and that in the consideration of responses to representations in respect of the Council’s Local Development Framework consultation documents (SNAP and Land Allocations) officers will have regard to the preference for such uses to be located in areas of major development”

This was unanimously agreed by cabinet. When questioned, Councillor Thake agreed that this would have the effect of ruling out the six rural sites which are currently being considered. District Councillor Claire Strong, who represents Pirton, urged that these six sites be removed from the list immediately; however the Chairman advised that this ran the risk of undermining the whole consultation process and might lead to problems with the Planning Inspector, as the District Council had to show that it had taken account of all the evidence before making a decision, and this was confirmed by Mr Scholes (Head of Planning and Building Control) who stated that If the six sites were removed immediately, the process might have to start all over again.

Councillor Thake stated that “our duty is to all the residents of Hertfordshire, including the travelling community” and that the rural sites would not meet the needs of this community. There was discussion about the length of time it would take to eliminate the rural sites and the Chairman agreed that resources would be provided to ensure that Council Officers brought a recommendation to the Council for consideration at the next meeting on 24th June.

Councillor Strong and Councillor Gibbs pressed the point about excluding the six rural sites immediately. Councillor Strong said none met the requirements of the new criteria, and none met the needs of the Gypsies and Travellers. She suggested using a vote to ‘guillotine’ the rural sites. However, the Chairman said that it would be better to maintain the integrity of the current process, but to bring developments to the North and West of Stevenage into the area of search -- and to focus on these areas after a decision to include them at an appropriate Council meeting.

There was discussion about the length of time it would take to eliminate the rural sites and noted that the process could run until November. However, it was recognised that this would be unsatisfactory and the Chairman agreed that resources would be provided to ensure that Council Officers brought a recommendation to the Council for consideration at the next (24th June) meeting. It was, he said, a “reasonable assumption” that the six sites would be removed at that stage and that sites close to major new developments would be included in the area of search. However, there is no guarantee that this will happen and Government guidance could change again before a final decision is made. Nevertheless, this was thought to be a significant move in the right direction for the rural villages”.

This was felt by Pirton and Holwell to be a very satisfactory outcome. While it might be unrealistic to expect the Cabinet to ‘guillotine’ the six rural sites, the intervention by Councillor Strong had the positive effect of injecting a sense of urgency and the Chairman was obviously taking into account the large volume of protest letters, and the presentation by Steve Goodman. However, no decision could be taken until the June meeting of the Council, by which time Council Officers would have assessed the responses to the consultation process and could include areas to the North and West of Stevenage in the area of search.

The Parish Council and Action Group would meet again the following week to plan the next steps, which would probably include another general circulation letter informing residents of the current position, and the possibility of making a full presentation to cabinet in due course. Consideration might also be given to the possibility of complaining about the way NHDC had handled the issue.

The clerk was asked to write to Councillor Strong to thank her for her help and support.

072.08 **PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER**

The Chairman hoped to have made some progress on this by the next meeting.

073.08 **PARISH PLAN AND ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUTH**

Mrs Bailey was asked to prepare a brief report on the proposed Parish Plan to be read out at the forthcoming Annual Parish Meeting. There was some discussion about the possibility of setting up a Youth Council, bearing in mind the problems currently being caused in the village by youths; Councillors discussed how they might persuade the youths causing the trouble to come forward to speak to them. Various other possibilities were also discussed, such as writing to all residents urging them to be more vigilant. It was agreed that it is important not to blame the wrong youths for crimes committed in the village just because they happen to be seen together and are noisy. It was mentioned that the Parish Council had discussed providing a facility such as a Youth Shelter and that crime has gone down in areas where shelters have been provided, although it was difficult to know the best situation for one in Pirton. It was reported that the Police are taking the attempted arson very seriously. Mrs Johnson offered to draft a letter that could be sent to all residents, which she would email to all Councillors for their comments. It was again suggested that a separate part of the Parish Plan should be aimed at youths

074.08 **GENERAL PARISH MATTERS**

Maypole – Mr Marshall reported that the Maypole had now been installed and plans had been made for it to be used on Mayday, although the painting might not be complete by then.

Telephones – the clerk was still awaiting a reply from BT about the loss of service.

Environmental Health – it has been noticed that some rubbish has been dumped on the field behind houses in Danefield Road and Councillors considered the best action to take.

Vandalism – there had been a recent escalation of crime in Pirton, including the siphoning of petrol from cars through holes bored in the petrol caps, attempts to set fire to the Village Hall and the Portacabin behind the hall. The telephone kiosk seemed to have become a gathering point for the youths thought to be responsible for some of these crimes, but although some residents would like to see the removal of the telephone kiosk, it was agreed that it fulfils a very useful function.

Additional streetlight in Davis Crescent - a resident of Davis Crescent had asked a Parish Councillor for assistance when her requests to Highways to repair the one streetlight had been ignored. The Councillor had suggested that the Parish Council ask for a second light there, which the resident thought would be welcomed by

everyone living there. Councillors agreed that the residents should be consulted and the clerk was asked to prepare a brief questionnaire for residents, and also to find out how to request an extra light.

The Fox Public House – Councillors expressed their disappointment that the Fox had closed again, and hoped that it would soon re-open. Mrs Hamilton McLeod then stated that she was a partner in a small consortium of residents who were hoping to take over the running of the pub very shortly. Although this was not an agenda item, Mrs Hamilton McLeod signed the Declaration of Interests register.

Post Office closures - it was not yet known if Pirton Post Office was to be scheduled for closure, but agreed that it was important to try to keep it open by writing appropriately. The Chairman would find out the current situation.

075.08 **CORRESPONDENCE**

The clerk had received notification from HAPTC of training on Chairmanship skills on Wednesday 4th June, which Mr Saunders and Mrs Waters would attend.

The clerk had also received an invitation to the Southern Rural Area Inter-Parish meeting in Codicote on Wednesday 11th June, and was asked to remind Councillors of this the week before the meeting.

076.08 **REPORTS**

Recreation Ground and Sports & Social Club

The recent Quiz Night had been a success. The licence had not yet been studied with a view to possible changes.

Play Area

Nothing new to report on quotes for replacement metal gates.

Bury Trust

Nothing new to report

077.08 **VILLAGE UPDATES**

Environment - North Herts Landfill

There would be a meeting the following Monday

Pirton School

The new member of staff was now in post.

Village Hall

Nothing new to report

Youth Matters

The clerk reported that Mr Woodward had still not banked the replacement Grant cheque for the Youth Club. Mr Saunders would speak to him.

Parish Paths Partnership

A meeting was in the process of being organised

Tree Warden and PEAP

The Tree Warden reported that it was the wrong time of the year to plant trees, and that new trees for the grass verge at the Royal Oak Lane end of West Lane should not be planted until the autumn.

Neighbourhood Watch

Nothing new to report

Rands Trust

Nothing new to report

078.08 ITEMS FOR CIRCULATION

Blue Circulation Box:-

HAPTC Newsletters – February & March

CMS News - spring

Chiltern Society – Views, letter 4th April and Leaflets

Letter from Bedford Group of Drainage Boards - February

CPRE Newsletter – 2nd April

Peter Lilley Surgery dates

Clerks & Councils Direct - March

CPRE – Houses & Gardens 2008

CPRE Countryside Voice - spring

News of the Woods - spring

East & North Herts NHS Trust re consultation

Brochure from the Local Channel

CPRE Fieldwork – March

Town & Parish Standard Letter – March

Letter re: NATS

NHDC Members' Information – weeks ending 7, 14, 21, 28 March, 4 April

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Council Meeting will be the Annual Parish Meeting on Thursday 8th May 2008 at 7.30pm, followed by the Annual Meeting of the Council at approximately 8.15pm.