

THE PARISH OF EASTINGTON

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 15th May 2012 in the Eastington Methodist Church

1. In attendance were Cllrs Niblett (Chair), Allen, Bullock, Edis-Bates, Edwards, Evans, Greenaway and Simmons; Mary Gribble (Clerk); Robert Powell (Responsible Financial Officer); and 20 members of the public. Apologies were accepted from District Councillor Stephens, and those sending in written reports. Apologies for lateness due to work commitments were accepted from Cllr Evans.

2. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

3. The Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting were signed as a fair record.

4. Beth Cheyne from Stroud and District Citizens Advice Bureau gave an interesting presentation on the work of the CAB. She explained that the CAB is a charity which aims to help people be giving free confidential advice on areas such as debt, employment, housing. They have 8 paid staff and about 60 volunteers serving the Stroud area.

They have specialists available for divorce and legal issues. CAB do not give legal advice, but do advise how to get a fixed-price interview and how to prepare for that. The CAB has influence on government policies, and recently helped shape the tax credit system into a more user-friendly system. In the last year, they helped 3326 households, the age group 35-49 being the greatest users.

Beth explained that they fundraise actively. Stroud District Council helps to fund their work, unusually for District Council. She thanked Eastington Parish Council for its continued support and recommended CAB to anyone wishing to do voluntary work.

Chair thanked Beth for her enlightening talk.

5. Eastington Parish Council Committee Reports for the year 2011-12:

Planning: Cllr Jill Simmons

The planning committee has carefully studied the applications over the last year. The difference between 'FUL' and 'HHOLD' applications was explained. There have been varied applications, including installation of solar panels on the roofs of outbuildings on a Grade II listed building, work on William Morris House, and an application for 13 houses in New Town.

Footpaths: Cllr Bill Edwards

3 more kissing gates have been installed. Cllr Edwards has contacted the people who indicated an interest in helping with footpath maintenance, and asked that any problems are reported to him. He confirmed that a footpath exists if it is on the definitive map, even if it has been blocked or not walked for years. Bill would like to get maps printed, or a large map on a display board.

Roads and Transport: Cllr Andrew Niblett

Chair thanked ex-councillors Nigel Souster and Chris Hill for their work in recent years on roads issues in Eastington. He ran through the list of issues that Nigel had been working on, and advised that the new Roads and Transport Committee will be building on this work, as well as looking at the responses in the parish plan questionnaires. The damaged house on Spring Hill, and the car in the hedge in Bath Road are recent examples of excessive speed in the area. Other issues include heavy traffic through the village centre, upkeep of pavements, pothole repair, M5 road noise, parking at the shops and Churchend.

Beth Cheyne advised that if a car splashes a pedestrian the driver may be prosecuted for driving without due care and attention. Chair added that reporting 'near misses' to commercial firms should result in the firm investigating the claim.

Alison Loveridge called for a crossing or a 'lollipop lady' where the school children cross the road by the village hall. Chair replied that the parish council has tried to get this, but a lollipop lady could not be recruited, and the cost of a road crossing is beyond the means of the parish council.

Finance: Robert Powell

The main income for the Parish Council is the Precept and income from the burial ground, this year just over £34,000. The main expenditure is on ground maintenance of the village greens, burial ground, churchyard and OHMG. Loan repayments and salaries are the other major expenses. The Parish Council has approximately £33,000 in reserves in hand, an amount advised by the auditors. It is feared that the Parish Council may have to pick up and fund services dropped by the District and County Councils.

Richard James asked if some of the grass cutting currently undertaken by the Parish Council could be undertaken by volunteers. Chair confirmed this has happened in the past, and people that could look after various areas may come forward. Cllr Simmons commented that the Parish Council has a duty to maintain the Churchyard.

Signed

Chairman/Responsible Officer

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5. Reports from village organisations:

Eastington School: Malcolm Strang

There are 145 children, 6 staff and 6 teaching assistants at the school, which is rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted. There is a waiting list for most years. Links have been strengthened with Charles Dickens School in Southwark, and a school in Kenya which are of great mutual benefit. The children in Kenya have planted a tree for each pupil at Eastington School, and call it 'Eastington Forest'.

The school is working on community cohesion and community participation. The children are encouraged to become 'geo-detectives' – digging deeper and lingering longer on subjects that interest them, to make learning more relevant for their lives.

Malcolm learned today that the school's entry in the national competition 'Cooking for the Queen' has got through the last 16. If they are successful in getting through the next stage they will go to London and actually cook for and serve the Queen.

The school is a 'Rights Respecting' school, a project working with UNICEF to help pupils understand human rights and responsibilities.

Cotswold Canal Trust: Ken Burgin

The progress on the canal restoration was illustrated by photographs, including the work on the Ocean swing bridge, Ryeford double lock, Wallbridge upper lock and the Capel Mill diversion. The Dudbridge lock hydro project is underway, Marling School are involved in this.

It is likely that a resubmission to the Heritage Lottery Fund will be made in November. These funds will help with the re-instatement of the Ocean railway bridge (it is hoped this can be done during the shut-down in Easter 2014).

The CCT water transfer proposal is gaining ground. This relatively cheap scheme will help solve the South East's water shortage problem.

There are currently around 200 active volunteers – more are always welcome.

Eastington Methodist Church: Ken Burgin

Noel Sharp has been Minister since 2008. It is a busy village church with many activities including Kidzone, the youth club, music group, youth Alpha, 'tea and a chat', toddler group, outings and residentials. Outreach work includes 'Into the Book' at school assemblies and the 'Hymn and a Prayer' at Broadfields.

The Eastington Community Orchard Group: Tom Low

Tom showed a series of photographs illustrating the activities and progress over the year. There are now 34 trees, mostly Gloucestershire varieties, as well as the soft fruit.

The Apple Days were a great success. 1¼ tons of apples were picked from 27 local gardens, to which the ECO Group is indebted to the youth group. Almost 700 bottles of juice were produced, generating a profit in the region of £1000.

Hard landscaping includes a path dug out by Alan Loveridge to a high level of professionalism. Kevin Dalby, Orchard Warden, is working on a giant compass project, which will be an attractive area for children. The magnificent entrance arch was donated by Tim Potts. Gary Dingle is building oak gates to go inside the arch, and also making oak benches. The Rotary Club is funding the benches.

Members enjoyed a grafting course at Days Orchard. The grafting skills learnt will save money in future orchards.

Don't Strangle Stroud: Richard James

Richard reported that since it started in November 2011, the group convened to oppose the Core Strategy proposed by Stroud District Council has expanded and contracted as needed. This proposal is seen as an invasion of our vibrant community. DSS believe that the Core Strategy has fallen, and that SDC will be working on a revision.

Figures produced by Mike Evans are compelling evidence that the housing numbers proposed by SDC are excessive. DSS calls for houses to meet the needs of older people; the challenge is to find space to accommodate this by building a modest number of homes in our community.

Keep Eastington Rural: Tom Low

Tom thanked DSS for their amazing effort. KER has been working with DSS, and has produced an "Over 65's" report offering a response to the growth in the population over 65. Tom commented that the results of the recent parish plan survey show that 90% of those responding want 100 or less new homes in the next 15 years.

Signed

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Land use: Colin Studholme

Colin showed maps to illustrate the changes in land use in the area since the 1973 survey. The land use survey map of 1973 shows a large number of scattered orchards, an area of ancient woodland, and fields for grazing. The 2009 survey shows a dramatic change. There has been a 70% loss of orchards and their associated wildlife, an 800% increase in arable fields which brings problems such as the silting of rivers, and the ancient woodland has been fragmented.

Another survey will be carried out this summer. This survey will have a huge potential to help in the defence of unwanted planning.

Playgroup: Mandy Owen

Mandy was pleased to report that the Playgroup achieved an "outstanding" rating in November 2011. Playgroup is open Monday to Thursday 9am – 3pm and can take a maximum of 20 children. Finances are stable, strict spending controls having been introduced. Recent fund-raising activities including a Pampered Chef party, and head shave by the barman at the Old Badger. Playgroup has also raised funds for the Meningitis Trust, and is making bunting for the village Jubilee party. Mandy thanked the village for supporting Playgroup.

Eastington Youth Group: Tony Darkes

Tony reported on a varied first year's activities. The EYG ran the fete, which was very successful and raised funds for the group. They will be running this year's fete, and are helping to organise the village Jubilee party. They continue to carry out regular litter picks. The EYG involvement in the Apple Days was enjoyed. The "Youth Bus" calls each week – as well as providing activities such as archery, the bus takes them to Stroud Youth Club. Tony thanked the village for supporting the EYG.

Eastington Community Centre: Mark Cousins

Mark commented that the Community Centre is now 2½ years old, and is going from strength to strength. It is fully booked weekday evenings (Zumba, Martial Arts, Aerobics, Yoga) and the weekends are becoming increasingly busy with weddings and Christenings. Sport continues to flourish. Stroud Youth football team are planning to bring two teams next year, and may bring funding from the FA for extended changing facilities. The improvements to the car park have transformed the venue - white lining and lighting for the car park is the next step.

The Bluebell Club: Anne Shill (written report)

Bluebell Club has a varied programme of talks – glow worms, hedgehogs, the Cathedral flower festival have been highlights this year. The links with the school are strong - the visit from the children at Christmas is an annual event that is much enjoyed. Bluebells meet on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday at the village hall.

Village Hall: David Storey (written report)

The Eastington Village Hall Charity continues to fulfil an important role within the Parish of Eastington – it being regularly used by the Brownies, Slimming World, Dog Training, Keep Fit, Musicians and the Bluebells. In addition the Hall is used for birthday parties, polling, dances and recently to record a play for radio, when the recording technician described the suitability of the Hall as 'perfect'.

Parish Plan: Clare Watkins (written report)

The majority of the input from the public meetings and the parish plan questionnaire have been collated. The next step is to add background information on the geography and history of the parish, agree the presentation and layout, and transfer the analysis to written content. Clare thanked Zeta printing the questionnaires, Jan Low for an outstanding job of inputting the data and analysing it, and the volunteers for distributing and collecting the questionnaires.

The Eastington Allotment Society: Sarah Underdown (written report)

At the AGM in November the current officers stood down. The new committee is chaired by Sarah, the secretary is Muriel Bullock and the treasurer is Rob Parnell. The purchase of a polytunnel has been agreed, and extra land for allotments and the siting of the polytunnel was agreed by the parish council. TEAS are part of the GRCC's study on the allotment movement. Areas to be addressed are the gate lock and the entrance to the site.

AOB: None

Andrew thanked everyone for their contributions, commenting that it was wonderful to hear of so many good things going on in Eastington, and closed the meeting at 9:35pm. Refreshments were served by Beck Burgin of the Methodist Church

Signed Date

Chairman/Responsible Officer