

ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING
convened by
GREAT CHESTERFORD PARISH COUNCIL
Wednesday 16th March 2011, at 7.30pm
in the Community Centre

Present for PC: Joanna Francis – Chairman
 Sharon Triccerri
 Sorrel Gordon-Foxwell
 Shirley Clark
 David Hall
 Tim Fowell
 Julie Redfern – also Uttlesford District Councillor

Elaine Culling – Clerk

Present Other: Robert Chambers – Essex County Councillor
 Ulrike Maccariello – Development Manager, Hastoe Housing Association
 Henry Weir – Headmaster of Great Chesterford C of E School
 John Luke – Chair of School Governors
 Anita Irving – Chesterfords' Youth Club
 Charles Gjertsen – Community Centre
 60 members of the public

1. Chairman's Introduction

The **Chairman** welcomed everyone to the meeting introducing herself, members of the Parish Council, **Cllr Redfern** as both Parish Councillor and our District Councillor, and **Robert Chambers** as our County Councillor.

2. Minutes of the 2010 Annual Parish Meeting

The minutes of the 2010 Annual Parish Meeting were approved.

3. Affordable Housing for Great Chesterford

The **Chairman** explained that about 10 years ago a Housing Needs Survey was carried out in the village which had identified the need for 10-12 houses of an affordable nature. At that time though no land was available.

In 2009 the Parish Council invited Hastoe to investigate the possibility of an Affordable scheme again, and this time it was agreed that a site must be secured before undertaking another Housing Needs Survey.

The **Chairman** now introduced **Ulrike Maccariello** who was attending on behalf of the Hastoe Housing Association.

Ulrike explained that Hastoe was a medium sized Housing Association based in Little Chesterford, that it operated in the bottom half of the country managing 4000 properties half of which were located in rural areas. They considered themselves a rural specialist and were high on environmental sustainability.

On average rural housing costs 12 times the average salary meaning that local people could often not afford to buy. However each local authority has a Rural Exception Policy which allows for some 'Affordable Housing' to be built on rural land outside the development limit if sufficient local need can be shown. A legal agreement is entered into with the local authority to ensure that the properties remain affordable; this is achieved by keeping them for rent or shared ownership only.

'Local people' means that either they already live in the village, have a strong family connection, are permanently employed in the village or provide an essential local service.

Having been instructed by the Parish Council to investigate whether a site might now be both available and suitable, Hastoe carried out a site appraisal, liaising with Uttlesford District Council. Four possible sites were identified, and one of the landowners agreed in principle to the selling of part of their land to enable an Affordable Housing Scheme to be built.

With a site secured there is now the need to carry out a fresh Housing Needs Survey and arrangements are in place to have this delivered to every property in both Great and Little Chesterford with the next edition of the Chesterford Broadsheet.

The results of this survey will indicate the need in both parishes and determine the size and nature of any development. At this point both the Parish and District Councils will be consulted again, an architect will be appointed to produce some drawings and Hastoe will consult with residents further.

Q. This seems like a lot of work before any real need has been established.

A. *It was agreed that it was better to locate a site before carrying out the Housing Needs Survey as 10 years ago hopes had been raised that a scheme would be developed and then no suitable site could be found.*

Q. Does the survey consider the existing infrastructure.

A. *No. however this would form part of any planning application.*

Q. Why develop a 'Greenfield' site rather than a 'Brownfield' site.

A. *A 'Brownfield' site would attract open market housing of which only up to 40% would be affordable, the sale of which would not be restricted to the local people. A 'Greenfield' site in comparison is 100% affordable and is for local people.*

Q. How much land are we talking about.

A. *This very much depends on housing need; assuming a maximum of 15 dwellings about one and a half acres would be required.*

Q. Which side of Ash Green would the development be.

A. *The field side.*

Q. Exactly which piece of land.

A. *The land adjacent to Ash Green on the field side.*

Robert Chambers stood at this point to suggest that those with worries should look at an existing site such as the one at Langley Lower Green. **Ulrike** added that she had left some brochures at the rear of the hall showing pictures and information relating to some of their recent developments.

Q. Why not develop the Greenhouse site.

A. *Because this is within the village development limit and as such would go to the open market.*

Q. How much of any housing development on the Greenhouse site would be affordable.

A. *Up to 40%, however this would not be restricted to local people. Any Hastoe development would be for local people and the village would have much more control over the sort of development it would be.*

Q. Does this control extend to parking provision, landscaping and play area provision.

A. *Yes, in conjunction with the Parish Council. Hastoe also have regard to building sustainable developments.*

Q. There are already a large number of families in this part of the village and the B1383, despite its 30mph limit, is considered a dangerous road to both cross and walk along. Does the Parish Council intend to provide a pedestrian crossing.

A. *This could be investigated.*

Robert Chambers stood at this point to emphasise that he could help with securing a pedestrian crossing should it be decided that one was required.

Q. How do you balance the need for housing with the capacity at the village school, especially in light of the recent appeal that was upheld for Littlebury children

A. *Hastoe will consult with the school regarding any development.*

Henry Weir stood at this point to emphasise that although the Littlebury appeal had been upheld that this did not set a precedent. In addition although full now, no one could know the trend for pupils going forward.

Ulrike added that until the results of the Housing Needs Survey is know it was not possible to say whether demand would be from single people, couples, families or the elderly.

Q. Are people actually leaving the village due to a lack of affordable housing, and if so will they really return is some is built.

A. *An affordable housing scheme will only be developed at Chesterford if the Housing Needs Survey shows there is a demand.*

Ulrike added that with regard to a number of similar developments throughout the district a survey of local residents carried out both before and after the developments had shown that they were viewed very positively.

Q. How many other villages are facing a similar situation with regard to affordable housing.

A. *Most other villages in Uttlesford are investigating schemes of their own.*

Q. Has a development ever been built where none of the properties have been taken by locals.

A. *No.*

A resident stood at this point to explain that the Greenhouse site had not been developed for housing as it was designated as industrial land. This could probably be change though and was likely to change in the future. However Great Chesterford is the only key village in the district without any affordable housing, and indeed the last development of any significance was over 20 years ago. People should not be frightened of this development as no village can stand still.

The **Chairman** brought this session to a close and thanked **Ulrike** for attending.

4. Village School

The **Chairman** introduced **Henry Weir** and **John Luke** who were both attending on behalf of Great Chesterford C of E School in order to talk about the proposed change to Academy Status.

Henry Weir explained that the change to Academy status would free the school from local authority rule; it would still remain a church based school, it would not become selective and it would not grow whilst it remained on its current site. It would enable the school to consider what is best for its pupils and give it the control to provide it.

As part of this process the school is consulting with the parish councils of Great Chesterford, Little Chesterford and Littlebury. Staff at the school have already been consulted and have given their support.

John Luke added that the change was both strategic and defensive.

Strategic as the Government sees Academy status as the future, and as such is gradually withdrawing funding from the local authorities. By becoming an Academy now the school has the advantage of gaining autonomy, allowing it to focus on the educational needs of its pupils.

Defensive as funding will be given directly to the school allowing it to provide opportunities for the staff to grow, for example by working with schools that are more challenged by providing help.

There will be no impact on pupil intake as the school will still be subject to admission rules and Ofsted inspections.

R.A. Butler in Saffron Walden is already an Academy school and it is understood that County High is considering the change also.

There is a further meeting to be held at the school should anyone wish to know more.

Q. Is it true that the Government will ‘claw back’ any financial benefits.

A. *It is true that at the moment if there is more than a 7% surplus at the end of the year, then the Government ‘claws back’ the excess.*

Q. It is known that the teaching unions are opposed to Academy Status. Can you guarantee that you will be liable for anything that happens in the future.

A. *As Governors we are already liable.*

Q. With a full school roll and doctors lists, how can this not be an impediment to any proposed new housing development.

A. *Money towards new school places is usually provided by a developer to the school via the local authority. It is not known at this stage if, in future, this money would come direct to the school.*

Robert Chambers stood at this point to state that he had spoken to Stephen Castle, Cabinet Member for Education and the 2012 Games, about the need to build a new school in Great Chesterford. He added that he fully supported the move to Academy status as it provided more control over what education a child received.

John Luke stated that his understanding was that all school places would need to be exhausted in both Great Chesterford and Saffron Walden before any new school could be built.

Q. If major capital expenditure is required how will this be funded.

A. *Direct from the Department of Education.*

Q. The local authority currently monitors any special needs requirements, what guarantees are there that these requirements will still be met.

A. *Academies are still required to cater for Special Needs and will be subject to independent checking.*

Q. Will Special Needs children be excluded.

A. *No, in fact by becoming an Academy the school will be able to spend more on Special Needs should this be required.*

A resident stood at this point to confirm that the school responds to children of all needs.

5. Community Centre

The **Chairman** explained that the Parish Council and Community Centre were completely separate and that to date title to the Community Centre had been held by 3 individual village residents.

The Parish Council has now been asked to take the place of the 3 residents and become the Custodian Trustee of the centre. The Parish Council has agreed in principle and the motion will now go to the Community Centre AGM for agreement. Assuming this to be the case, the Parish Council will formally agree to this change at the council meeting due to be held on Wednesday 6th April 2011.

At this point the **Chairman** introduced **Charles Gjertsen** who was attending on behalf of the Community Centre.

Charles explained that he has been on the Community Centre's management Committee for 15 years and had been involved in the initial construction of the building.

Recent changes have seen the loss of 2 key customers alongside an increase in running costs. To compound matters one of the boilers recently failed necessitating the purchase of a new one.

With the need to raise more revenue a development plan had been produced part of which involves a marketing drive aimed to increase the centre's use.

Accordingly the centre is currently in the process of appointing a Business Development and Bookings Manger, who will work alongside the Premises Manager.

A Status Report was independently produced which highlighted the need to smarten the premises up; as a result some redecoration has taken place and the exterior has been pressure washed.

As part of the change in Custodian Trustee there has been the need to amend the original 1954 deed.

The centre is run by a small management committee that meets approximately 6 times a year. Residents are asked to consider whether they would be willing to join.

The **Chairman** thanked **Charles** for attending and added that if people wished to get involved but did not want to be on a committee then other help was also needed, for example with fundraising.

6. Youth Club

The **Chairman** introduced **Anita Irving** who was attending on behalf of the **Chesterfords Youth Club**.

Anita started by stating that after one year they had grown to such a point that they now had their own logo.

The Club has a committee of 8 members who look after the finance and regulatory side, and a team of over 25 helpers who attend the Friday evening sessions. They have an arrangement with the Community Centre in which they pay half of the door takings as rent, a model that might work for other clubs.

Any child can attend from the term in which they are 10 up to the age of 16. Attendance numbers are very healthy at 50 children or more, and recent grant allocations have enabled the club to buy sports equipment, film making equipment, a games console and a number of bean bags.

Recent highlights have included the putting on of a vampire play with the help of a local drama group, an archery night and a jewellery making night.

Older members often go on to become helpers as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme.

The club would welcome any help, especially in the areas of art or sport.

Finally **Anita** wished to acknowledge the hard work of both Anthony and Susan Hobson, both of whom had been key in the success of the club.

7. PC Updates

a. Recent Snow.

Cllr Redfern explained that she had been out and about in the village a week after the recent heavy snowfall and was surprised to find how treacherous the village footpaths still were. Acknowledging that Essex County Council was unlikely to be gritting them the proposal is that the Parish Council purchase a manual gritter for use by a team of volunteers.

b. Village Shop

Cllr Redfern also outlined the decline in the use of the village shop and the concern that we should all have, as if it failed this would be a huge loss to the village. A letter is in the process of being delivered to all properties asking how they can increase footfall and it was important that as many people respond to this as possible.

c. Village Googlegroup

Finally **Cllr Redfern** mentioned the village googlegroup and encouraged everyone who is interested in what goes on in the village, or affects the village, to join. Going forward it will also be used to circulate offers at the Village Shop.

A resident stood at this point in order to echo support for the Village Shop. He explained that Littlebury had been in a similar position in recent times and unfortunately its Village Shop had been unable to survive.

d. Multi-Sports/Play Area

Cllr Gordon-Foxwell explained that to date there had been no decision regarding the Lottery Grant to update the Multi-Sports area.

With thanks to **Susan Ross** grants of £13,000 have been secured towards the cost of new equipment at the Play Area.

Accordingly it had now been decided to proceed in 2 phases:

Phase 1 will involve the purchase of a large circular picnic table and a large cantilever basket swing suitable for use by both able and disabled children.

Phase 2 will depend on securing further grants.

e. Forthcoming Parish Council Elections

The **Clerk** explained that there had probably been a Parish Council in Great Chesterford for over a hundred years, however she had been unable to ascertain when there had last been a contested election.

Election time was here again and anyone wishing to know more should speak to her later.

f. Community Speed Watch

Cllr Fowell announced that a training facility had now been secured and that he was looking for half a dozen volunteers to form a local group. It was envisaged that the training will take place on a Saturday in May.

At the moment just the Newmarket/London Road had been identified as a suitable site for checking speeds, however there may be others and residents are asked to come forward with their suggestions. Any site would need to be assessed by the police beforehand though.

Q. Can the group report the use of a mobile phone by drivers as well.

A. Robert Chambers stood at this point to confirm that you could.

8. General Q&A session

Q. With the proposed new affordable housing site could the Parish Council investigate the establishment of a footpath behind the houses on London Road, to link that area of the village to the centre, thus avoiding the main road.

A. Cllr Redfern stood at this point to ask the resident whether he would work with the **Chairman** in trying to achieve this. The resident agreed.

The resident also pointed out that it was important to retain the Greenhouse site as an industrial site as Great Chesterford had always been a place of work as well as a place to live.

Q. What can be done about the increasing amounts of dog mess left both on the Recreation Ground and around the village.

A. The Clerk stated that it was difficult to know how to change the mindset of some of its dog owning inhabitants. A resident stood to report on a previous campaign which had proved successful in reducing the incidence of dog mess. It was agreed that she would work with the questioner on a similar campaign going forward.

The **Chairman** advised that dog bags were available free of charge from the Wednesday Afternoon Tea Sessions, and it was suggested by a resident that perhaps some be left at the Village Shop as well.

Cllr Redfern stood at this point to thank all those who had joined in the recent litter pick and added that it was hoped to hold these twice a year in the future.

9. Chairman's Concluding Remarks

The **Chairman** thanked everyone for attending and added that they were welcome to attend any of the Parish Council meetings, the next one being due to take place on Wednesday 6th April 2011.

All minutes and reports are available to read on the village website.

Meeting closed at 9.15pm.

Signed (Chairman).....

Date: March 2012