

CROXLEY GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD IN EXPLORE CHURCH HALL, FULLER WAY, CROXLEY GREEN, WD3 3PJ
ON THURSDAY 26 APRIL 2012 at 8.00pm

Present: Chairman of the Meeting - Cllr Bennett, David Allison – Clerk to the Council
Chairman of the Parish Council Amanda Taft – Administrative Officer

Present - 78 People

- AP59/12 The Chairman welcomes members of the press and public
The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present to the Annual Parish Meeting. He requested that everyone present sign the attendance list if they had not already done so and he also advised those present on the procedure in the event of fire.
- AP60/12 Minutes of the Parish Meeting held on 28 April 2011
The Clerk advised those present that in accordance with good practice, the Minutes of the last Parish Meeting had already been signed off on 30 June 2011 (CC927/11), that being the first full Council meeting following the preparation of the Minutes after the 2011 Annual Parish Meeting.
- AP61/12 Matters Arising
There were no matters arising.
- AP62/12 To receive the Chairman's Report
Cllr Bennett as Chairman of the Council, delivered the Chairman's Report for the year, see attached.
- AP63/12 To receive the following Committee Reports
AP63.1/12 Planning & Development Committee
Cllr Wynne-Jones, as Chairman of the Committee, delivered his report for the year, see attached.
AP63.2/12 Environment & Amenity Committee
Cllr Seeley, as Chairman of the Committee, delivered her report for the year, see attached.
AP63.3/12 Finance & Administration Committee
Cllr Bennett as Chairman of the Committee, delivered his report for the year, see attached.
- AP64/12 Abolition/Retention of Croxley Green Parish Council
The Chairman introduced this item (which had been put forward by Cllr Ridley) and invited anybody who wished to express their opinions to do so. He asked that speakers give their name and advise whether they represent a group or are giving their own views.
The Chairman said that there was misleading information in Cllr Ridley's supporting paper and pointed out that there had not been untoward activity regarding Parish Council dealings with either the Croxley Green Society or the Croxley Green Residents' Association. He clarified that Cllr Martin's father had been made president for life of the Croxley Green Society and Cllr Shafe's husband acted as their independent auditor and therefore it was not necessary for Cllr Martin or Shafe to declare an interest in any matters relating to the Croxley Green Society.

Regarding Cllr Ridley's question as to why the Parish Council gave £4,500 to the Croxley Green Society, the Chairman informed those present that Cllr Ridley had been at the meeting when the decision was made.

Seventeen people spoke; 16 were in support of retaining the Parish Council and only one person supported abolishing the Parish Council.

Speaker 1 praised Parish Council initiatives such as the Queen's Jubilee Picnic in the Park, the New Year's Eve firework display and Flowers 4 Croxley. It was also pointed out that the rangers had removed an overhanging tree within one day of it being reported despite requests to Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) for over three years. Praise was also given for the general hard work of the Parish Council and Councillors. The speaker ended by stating that if Cllr Ridley put as much effort into being positive as he does into carrying on his negative vendetta, he would be an asset to the village.

Speaker 2 supported Cllr Ridley's proposals believing that the abolition of the Parish Council would result in a £150,000 - £200,000 saving. It was also pointed out that the speaker had had a meeting with the Clerk some years ago to which he had not received a reply. It was added that there was an error in the accounts a couple of years ago and the speaker asked why a 3.3% increase in the precept was approved. The speaker also felt that employing two rangers together with the expense of the equipment for maintaining the Green was not justified. Criticism was offered about the Clerk's £1,200 car allowance when the Land Rover could be used and generally the responsibilities of the Parish Council could be absorbed by TRDC.

[Post meeting note: the Parish Council's accounts are audited by an internal and external auditor and fully comply with the financial regulations for Local Authorities].

Cllr Ridley stood up to speak at this point but the Chairman said that he would like to hear the views of those present.

Speaker 3 felt that the Parish Council did an excellent job in Croxley Green and its initiatives were valued. The speaker said that the precept for Croxley Green was good value and the assumption that residents would save money was wrong as un-Parished areas are billed with Special Expenses (which in Rickmansworth is £65.87 per household). The speaker also believed that TRDC would not pick up the initiatives currently provided by the Parish Council.

Speaker 4 stated that Cllr Ridley owed Cllrs Martin and Shafe an apology for the misleading information provided in his supporting paper. The speaker felt that Cllr Ridley was a negative man who rarely comes up with anything positive.

Speaker 5 advised that he was a resident of South Ward and stated that Cllr Ridley was not representing him and was only a Councillor as nobody else stood for election. The speaker added that he felt Cllr Ridley had no interest in the Parish Council and believed there should be a motion asking Cllr Ridley to resign.

The Chairman asked Cllr Ridley how he felt about this and Cllr Ridley said that he had come up with the initiative of promoting biodiversity and Cllr Surgeries. Cllr Ridley added that he was giving residents the chance to keep or get rid of the Parish Council advising that lots of people had said to him that the Parish Council should be abolished.

Speaker 6 said he had always been a supporter of the Parish Council as it does a worthwhile job. He added that with the new Localism Bill there were lots of advantages for the Parish Council and Parish Councils were becoming increasingly important in how we govern ourselves. As a newly elected Cllr, the speaker advised that he talks to lots of people about many things and if he receives any complaints at all it is about one Cllr and the fact that he should be removed from his position. However, it was felt that sometimes Cllr Ridley comes up with an interesting initiative and if this is the case, support is given although often these initiatives cost money. The speaker summarised by stating that the District Council has no more money to spare and this money saving concept was false; it would cost more.

Speaker 7 was also a resident of South Ward who resented Cllr Ridley's comments about the Parish Council and Councillors. It was felt that Cllr Ridley was tedious, bombastic and vitriolic and was not acting within the Code of Conduct and should be bound by it.

Speaker 8 advised he was a Parish Councillor for South Ward as well as a District Councillor. He informed those present that it was a nonsensical notion that TRDC could step in and pick up the cost of the role of the Parish Council as they just did not have the money. It was pointed out that the Parish Council currently funds two Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) dedicated to Croxley Green, on a buy-one-get-one-free basis. TRDC would not pick up the cost for this as they just do not have the resources. The bus shelters at Scots Hill would fall into disrepair, Stones Orchard and the Green would be cut but there would be no litter picking; some services just would not get done. The speaker concluded that there are currently suggestions for Rickmansworth to have a Town or Parish Council as the move is towards localism to allow communities to make decisions at local level.

Speaker 9 felt that the Parish Council did an excellent job; it brings the community together at the extremely popular annual events and that is what makes Croxley Green such a special place. We should not be wasting our time and our money discussing the abolition of the Parish Council.

Speaker 10, a resident of Cherwell Close spoke in support of the Parish Council's Friday bus stating that it provides a lifeline to so many of Croxley's senior residents, many of whom would be unable to travel on public transport and would thus be effectively isolated. Also, it was stressed that the Parish Council's annual senior citizen's outing is for many, the only holiday they have all year.

Speaker 11 said that Cllr Ridley had wanted to 'test the water' and asked if he now got the flavour of exactly how much support there is for the Parish Council. It was added that the Parish Council was more important now than ever with the potential for Croxley Green to have its own Neighbourhood Plan. It was also mentioned that whereas the District Council is political, the Parish Council has the advantage of independence from politics.

Speaker 12, the Manager of Chalmers Court who is responsible for approximately 75 seniors said that although there are other transport alternatives available, many of their residents have problems using telephones and without the Parish Council's Friday bus service, they just would be isolated.

Speaker 13 said that although not a resident of Croxley Green, she was on the Committee for the Revels and thought that Croxley Green is a fantastic, beautiful village with a fantastic support network. Without the Parish Council, she felt that Croxley Green would lose its community feel. She added that she would like to live in Croxley and there does not seem to be a logical reason why not to have the Parish Council.

Speaker 14 felt that it would be silly to get rid of the Parish Council and all the facilities it provides for £47.33 per annum. It was pointed out that without the Parish Council the dog waste bins would not be emptied so often and also that residents would pay for PCSOs through Special Expenses but would not see them very often. It was also highlighted that in the quest to decide on the retention or abolition of the Parish Council most people who had bothered to come out were in favour of retention. A referendum would cost the residents a huge amount of money; money which would have to be redirected from other projects and would not even result in the abolition of the Parish Council; it would be a pointless waste of time.

Speaker 16 felt that Cllr Ridley's proposal for a poll had been shot down. The speaker continued that whereas the Parish Council looks after residents' needs and cares, TRDC was too big to devote the same attention to detail. Those present were also advised that the Senior Citizen's outing had been the annual holiday for the speakers great aunt and had been greatly appreciated.

Speaker 17 said that the Parish Council was so important and was needed as the local voice on matters such as Croxley Rail Link and the proposed new school.

The Chairman asked Cllr Ridley if he was happy to proceed as he was calling for a referendum which would cost thousands of pounds yet would have no basis in law. Cllr Ridley replied that if that was what people decided, then yes. The Chairman reminded Cllr Ridley that this was not a matter for a vote and in order to call a poll Cllr Ridley needed to have the support of ten local electors. The Chairman then asked Cllr Ridley if he had the support of ten electors but only four raised their hands. Cllr Ridley acknowledged that his proposal for a poll would fail.

The Chairman thanked those present for attending the meeting and for their support in this matter.

The Chairman was asked how something like this could be stopped from happening again and Cllr Ridley was asked by a resident if he was now going to resign. Cllr Ridley said no. It was asked if there could be a show of hands for those in favour of retaining the Parish Council and a count 64 people raised their hands.

AP65/12

To consider any other interest in the Parish

The Chairman asked if anybody had any other matter they wished to raise. Cllr Ridley asked if the Parish Council would be doing anything about the drought. The Chairman advised Cllr Ridley that he could submit a paper if he had anything to propose and that he would need to follow through with any proposal.

It was asked what the situation was with the part-demolished school at Yorke Road as it was an eyesore and a health and safety hazard. A District Councillor advised that there was no update as no planning application had been submitted. The school has been listed in TRDC's Local Development Framework as being of local importance although it is not a Listed Building and the intention is that it should be converted rather than demolished. It was pointed out that when consulted, Hertfordshire Highways tend to give no comment when Croxley Green really needs them to say that more development is not needed.

AP66/12

Closure

There being no further business the Chairman closed the meeting at 9.37pm.



Chairman's Report

Annual Parish Meeting – Thursday 26 April 2012

Ladies and gentleman, I have pleasure in presenting my Report as Chairman of the Parish Council. As you are also be aware, you had a new, democratically elected, council last year, formed after the Elections in May. Following the elections a vacancy still remained in Croxley Green South Ward. Representations were made by your Council to TRDC, resulting in a By Election being held in July to complete the compliment of 16 Councillors. For information, your Parish Council is non party political. Your Council has now settled in extremely well engaging with the community and taking projects forward.

Links with the community continue to be built, both through joint projects and through grants and subscriptions to local organisations. The Community Plan is progressing very well in conjunction with the Croxley Green Residents' Association. In another joint venture with the Croxley Green Residents' Association we are developing the Parish Boundary Walk and later we hope to be establishing "a Christmas Tree and Carol singing event" outside of the library in December. The all weather Cricket Pitch at the Guild of Sport should be completed shortly, we were able to assist this project with a grant of £2500. The Revels on The Green had another highly successful year followed in September, for the first time by Croxfest, which also proved a great success. We have been able to support both of these events this year with a subscription £5,500.

The Christmas illuminations continue to give Croxley Green the "festive" feel in the run up to Christmas. This was of course followed closely by the well established New Year's Eve firework display, with music, which has continued to attract thousands of residents. Your Council have of course made provision in this year's budget so that these highly popular attractions may continue. But don't forget the firework display doesn't just happen. Detailed planning is undertaken in the office prior to the event and on the day a dedicated group of volunteers undertake the various setting up and marshalling tasks, without whom the event would not take place, so a very special thank you to them.

Our financing of the PCSOs continues, giving a reassuring presence for many of our residents. Responsible dog ownership continues to be encouraged with the provision of "poo" bags and the many dedicated bins around Croxley. Following the success of the improvements to the Barton Way recreation ground your Council has put further funding of £5000 aside to assist with the improvements to Baldwins Lane play area in conjunction with TRDC, when they are in a position to proceed.

As previous senior citizens' day trips have been so popular we decided to fund two coaches for the trip to Clacton-on-Sea this year, so if this is applicable to you, do get your application in for the draw to secure your place. And don't forget the "Friday Bus" that gives our senior citizens the opportunity to get out and about.

Our Rangers, Jamie and Mark, continue to preserve the unique character of The Green and Stones Orchard and our well tended footpaths and I thank them for their commitment and hard work. They also assist the local primary schools with their gardening clubs. And did you know that the children from our local schools also take part in "Junior Council"? Take a look at the back page of The Parish Pump. The Rangers also assist another group of volunteers working hard with the Parish Council, Flowers 4 Croxley, they maintain various flower beds and flower troughs throughout Croxley Green. (Don't forget to plant your red white and blue flowers for this Jubilee/Olympic year).

Our office continues to run smoothly and efficiently and I give my thanks to Mr Clerk and Amanda for their hard work to achieve this.

The tradition of fund raising for the "Chairman's Charities" has been extremely rewarding for the charities concerned this year. Various events have been held throughout the year: a Treasure Hunt, a raffle at the Craft Taster Day, a Second Hand Book Sale, a Quiz Night with raffle and, for the very first time, a very successful Cake Sale!! In total we have raised £1,623 to be shared between The Stroke Association (Croxley Green) and Home Start Watford & Three Rivers. Thank you to everyone who has supported these events throughout the year both in helping to organise them and in attending them.

Parish Council Surgeries have started at the library as a pilot scheme. They will be held on 12 May, 9 June and 14 July between 10am and 12 noon. If you have issues or concerns about Croxley Green please call in to chat to a Councillor.

You may have seen recently that to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee we are organising a "Picnic in the Park" at Barton Way Recreation Park on Monday 4 June. Full details will be available on our website although I suspect there will be some advertising soon!

If only I had enough time to give you the detailed picture of all the things that **your** Parish Council is doing for and with our community. Thank you to all the volunteers that freely give up their time in order to enrich the lives of others within Croxley. Finally, a very special thank you to the Councillors of Croxley Green Parish Council. Thank you for freely giving your time and expertise in order to formulate and drive initiatives forward for the benefit of Croxley Green residents.

Thank you.

Nik Bennett (Chairman)



Planning & Development Committee Report

Annual Parish Meeting – Thursday 26 April 2012

Your Planning and Development Committee has had an almost complete reshuffle since last year and this is reflected in the immense amount of interesting initiatives we have taken since last May. First of all of course we have processed at our twice monthly meetings over three hundred planning applications for businesses, domestic premises and a variety of other types of projects. The volume reflects the fact that our village is looked upon as a great place to live and grow up in and is thriving.

We have also been heavily involved in the projected Croxley Community Plan with which two of our members Cllr Jordan and Cllr Mitchell have been particularly associated. This is intended to give all residents their say in deciding what they want to see for the future in the Planning and Development of Croxley Green and our committee will do our best to help work towards ensuring this aim. It has been agreed to subscribe to the online survey site Survey Monkey and as soon as the questionnaires for the residents have been finalised it will be uploaded.

We have also worked on the status of the Yorke road site which is such a historic feature of our village. It is at present in the hands of the planning officer for TRDC - Mr Steve Farrell. The siting of a new secondary school in Croxley is among the many possible developments that has exercised our committee, particularly as regards a future increase in the volume of traffic in our already crowded highways. Parking is already a big problem in our village. The security problems of part time street lighting particularly in the area around the station and in New Road was introduced by Cllr Getkahn and attention has been drawn to Herts CC about our concerns in this matter.

With the Jubilee celebrations soon to take place our committee member Cllr Martin has negotiated with Three Rivers about the position of the Queen Elisabeth Jubilee Oak which will be planted this year.

Finally a big thank you to Cllr Jordan and Cllr Isard Brown for their chairmanship of this committee for two months while I was away overseas. As you can see the P and D committee is not just about bricks and mortar but encompasses a whole spectrum of our village life. We meet twice a month throughout the year including August. I commend this report to the Council.

David Wynne-Jones (Chairman)

Barry Grant, Chairman of the Residents' Association spoke briefly about the Community Plan which is a joint project of both the Parish Council and the Residents' Association. He advised that it was an opportunity for everyone in Croxley Green to voice their opinion through a questionnaire which would hopefully be ready by this Autumn. Residents will be consulted on matters such as open spaces, roads, leisure facilities and healthcare etc. Currently the Community Plan Working Group are looking at key issues in order to create draft questions which are relevant. He further advised that this will eventually help with the development of a Neighbourhood Plan which would allow the community to shape new development.



Environment & Amenity Committee Report

Annual Parish Meeting – Thursday 26 April 2012

The monthly meetings of the E&A committee which takes place the 1st Tuesday of each month, have been focussed on two or three controversial subjects during the past year. Of particular concern has been the site of the new school and the Croxley Rail link and the impact that these projects will have on our environment and wildlife.

When you receive your copy of the Parish Pump, I urge you to read the articles by local schoolchildren expressing their concerns as to whether there will be any green spaces left when they grow up and if these concerns are not addressed by this committee and Council it may well happen.

I make no apology in reminding you that dog bags are free from the Council Offices and Library, and yes we do spend a fair amount of your money on dog bags but some dog owners still need reminding. Our Rangers litter pick around the village and keep an eye on any damage to the Green. We are fortunate that several members of the public are also very quick to report any problems.

Another concern was the destruction of trees by London Underground on the Met Line banks, and we have contacted them with our strong objections.

I take this opportunity to thank the members of the E&A committee for their support and hard work during the past year.

Cllr Hazel Seeley (Chairman)



Finance and Administration Committee Report

Annual Parish Meeting – Thursday 26 April 2012

Ladies and gentleman, I have pleasure in presenting my report as Chairman of the Finance and Administration Committee:-

As I have already mentioned, this new Council came together in May and July of last year. The new members have settled in extremely well to both the Council and the Committees. The F & A is made up of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council, the Environment & Amenity and the Planning & Development Committees.

As you would expect, one of the major tasks for this Committee is in connection with the implementation and monitoring of the Council's budget. Perhaps a little explanation here would be useful here. Unlike District and County Councils, the income of Parish Councils, which we derive from the Council Tax payers of Croxley Green, is not capped by the Government. This means that your Parish Council can approach the budget from a different aspect to those that have their income capped. In practice, however, one must always be aware of the general economic climate and the financial circumstances of the parishioners that we serve, when setting the budget. The net result of our deliberations this year resulted in an increase in our precept, the money collected, on our behalf by Three Rivers District Council, from Council Tax payers in Croxley Green. The increase of £13,042 gave a total precept £258,242. But to put this into context, a Band D property in Croxley Green will now pay £47-33 **per year** (91 pence **per week**), an increase of 3.34% for all of the services provided by your Parish Council. Excellent value for money when you look at what you get, genuine care and maintenance of The Green, Stones Orchard and our footpaths, Police Community Support Officers, NYE Fireworks on The Green, Community Hall, Parish Pump Newsletter, Grants to encourage local groups, you all know what we do. These are the services that enhance our community and make Croxley Green so special. It is all too easy to look at the cost of a service provided and think "if we didn't do this we could save the money", but what is the actual value to us as a community? Would we actually be financially better off? Or, would there actually be a bigger loss to our community wellbeing?

The committee also oversee the policies and procedures of the Council. During the year the governance of the Parish Council has been updated with the adoption and implementation by Council of the latest version of Standing Orders, the rules that govern all aspects of the Parish Councils procedures. These and all other financial and administrative aspects of your Parish Council can be found on our website.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the members of the Finance & Administrations Committee and to Mr Clerk and Amanda for their hard work throughout the year.

Nik Bennett (Chairman)