

GUILDEN SUTTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the annual parish meeting held on Monday
19 May, 1997

in St John's Church Room.

Present: Councillors Antrobus, Armitage, Fisher, Gartland, Hughes, Patten, Whitehouse.

In attendance: County Councillor N J Fitton, City Councillor J R Boughton, Ms J Burns (Parish Friend).

Apologies: Councillor Mrs Astbury, City Councillor B J Bailey, A Winstanley Esq., Parish Ponds Warden, S Armstrong Esq., Parish Paths Warden.

In the absence of the Chairman of the Council, Councillor Mrs P Astbury, due to an indisposition, it was agreed the Vice Chairman, Councillor R M Armitage, should take the chair.

Annual report

The Clerk said that before commencing her report, the Chairman would have wished to refer to the sad death during the year of former Councillor Hugh Percy Plant. Councillor Plant had a long and distinguished record of service to the Council and to the community and the Council had placed on record their appreciation of his service to the parish both as a Member of the Council and in other capacities.

As always, 1996/97 has been an extremely busy year for the Parish Council on behalf of the local community.

Monthly meetings had been held throughout the year, apart from August, together with site meetings. There had been extensive consultations on planning applications and the Council had met senior planning officers to discuss aspects of development control together with the draft Chester District Local Plan.

The Council had continued in membership of a wide range of outside bodies including the Cheshire Community Council, the CPRE, the Mid Cheshire Footpaths Society, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and the Cheshire Association of Parish Councils for which Guilden Sutton had again provided both the Chairman and Honorary Secretary of the Chester Area Meeting. The Council were also represented on the governing body of the primary school by Councillor Armitage and on the village hall management committee by Councillor Gartland.

Members had been active in attending conferences and meetings held by Cheshire County Council, Chester City Council, Cheshire Community Council and the Cheshire Association of Parish Councils. These meetings brought

valuable information to the parish to assist the Council in the conduct of its business and enabled Members to make useful contacts with Members and officers of other authorities.

At this stage she would have wished to welcome to the meeting City Councillor John Boughton, Guilden Sutton's newly elected County Councillor Neil Fitton and Jane Burns who had been appointed Parish Friend for Guilden Sutton by Cheshire County Council to assist with County Council matters. The County Council were anxious to improve their relationships with parishes and this was welcomed.

A number of significant issues had been under consideration or review. These included the new Local Plan for the whole of the Chester District with its proposal for new policies to control development in Green Belt villages such as Guilden Sutton, which was to be fully included in the Green Belt for the first time and the County Council's Structure Plan, which would guide planning in the county up to 2011.

Members had also considered the Cheshire Replacement Minerals Plan, the County's Transport Policies and Programme, a strategy for sustainable transport, the Cheshire Children's Services plan, the County's Community Care Plan and arrangements for consultations on waste management applications.

A number of national documents on aspects of planning had been reviewed and the Council had objected to a proposal which would allow the extension of private gardens into the countryside without the need for planning permission.

On finance, the Council had continued with their policy of deficit budgeting to return balances to the community. Annual expenditure had been rising in recent years as additional services and facilities had been provided and in 1997/98 was expected to exceed £7,000.

The Council had been increasing their precept to more closely match income and expenditure and to avoid an unduly large increase in their proportion of the council tax as reserves were exhausted. To achieve this, the precept for 1997/98 had been set at £5,650, compared with £4,600 in 1996/97 which was expected to result in modest reserves at the end of the financial year in the region of £2,000.

At present, the Parish precept was approximately £9 per year for an average house in the parish. The Council believed this represented good value for money but remained fully committed to spending council tax payers money wisely and to securing grants towards expenditure wherever this was possible.

The Council had revised their banking arrangements and had consolidated their four existing accounts into a single account with the Bank of Scotland which was expected to bring significant administrative and efficiency benefits.

Generally, a wide range of issues had been dealt with during the year. The Council were very aware of their responsibility to speak out for local interests, for example in responding to the consultations previously mentioned and this was reflected in their very detailed monthly agenda. All issues, both large and small,

were considered equally.

With local planning, a number of difficult issues had arisen and the Council had, as always, taken a great deal of care to ensure that all aspects were carefully considered and fairly discussed before a decision was reached. Councillor Hughes would report on this aspect.

Towards the end of 1995/96, concerns had been raised as to the possible need for enforcement action in Wildings Yard. Activities in the yard had troubled adjoining occupiers over a long period and the planning authority were in contact with the solicitors to Wilding Estates to clarify the tenancies within the yard, prior to detailed discussions as to compliance with planning approvals. A disappointing response had been received and this would also be reported by Councillor Hughes.

The outstanding application by a Hertfordshire based civil engineering contractor for a goods vehicle operating centre licence at Wildings Yard for 15 HGVs had been withdrawn as forecast at this meeting last year although the unit continued to be occupied by the company and the Council had continued to keep in close touch with the situation.

It was understood, however, that construction of the 50 place day nursery for which planning approval had been granted on the site would commence in the near future.

The Council continued to be concerned that the legislation did not permit them to make direct representations so far as applications for goods vehicle operating centre licences were concerned and a resolution by the Council had been accepted by the Cheshire Association of Parish Councils. It appeared unlikely at that time that the Government would agree to amend the legislation and the Council would be making further representations to the new administration.

A number of local road matters had arisen during the year. To deal with the rising number of injury accidents at or near the junction of Guilden Sutton Lane and the A 41, improved safety measures had been progressed by the Council and City Councillors B J Bailey and J R Boughton. Action proposed by the highway authority, now being implemented, involved a ban on right turning traffic into Guilden Sutton Lane and a reduction in the size of the gap in the central reservation to allow only one vehicle at a time to turn right into the main road.

It was recognised these measures may involve local motorists in a degree of inconvenience but the Council were fully persuaded they were necessary in the interests of improved safety.

On Guilden Sutton Lane itself, the Council had long held the view there should be a 30mph limit from the A 41 to the village, particularly in view of the amount of turning traffic into drives and the access to Wildings Yard, the parking of vehicles at the roadside, the poor visibility when approaching Heath Bank from the diverted length of road and difficulties with turning movements executed by HGVs at Willow Cottage to gain access to and from the industrial premises.

It was hoped the Council's campaign, which during the year had included a

further site meeting with the highway authority, was now succeeding as a proposal for a 40 mph limit was to be considered by the City Council.

There had been progress during the year with the proposed bypass for the A 51 at Littleton although only in so far as the scheme had now been finally deferred by the Government. However, the road was known to be in need of major maintenance and reconstruction where it passed through the built up area and the Council had pressed to be kept informed of the project due to its possible impact on traffic using roads in Guilden Sutton during the period of any contract. This scheme would be separate from the work recently carried out on the length of road from the golf club to Stamford Bridge.

The implementation or otherwise of proposed highway improvements which had been submitted to the County Council was awaited, particularly the resurfacing of Arrowcroft Road and Moorcroft Crescent.

The Council had pressed ahead with improved street lighting for the parish and four new lights had been installed on the unlit length of Wicker Lane opposite The Vicarage which did not have a footway. The suggestion that the footway adjoining the dell would benefit from a single light remains to be resolved as the cost may be prohibitive. Faults affecting local lights are reported on a regular basis.

Members maintained a close interest in local bus services. The Chairman had continued as the local bus user contact and her report would appear later and Councillor Armitage as a member of the Chester District Public Transport Liaison Committee representing the Cheshire Association of Parish Councils.

Efforts to secure improvements to the environment were seen to be important and it was regretted it had not been possible to proceed with proposed tree planting at a number of locations within the parish.

Concerns remained at the standard and condition of the landscaping provided in Guilden Sutton Lane and at Heath Bank as part of A 55 improvement scheme, particularly regarding the eradication of pernicious weeds and this continued to be kept under review.

The Council were pleased the parish playing field continued to be a well used and valuable village amenity.

The assessment of open space needs by the City Council, which had indicated that Guilden Sutton was deficient in all aspects, had again been raised in an attempt to make progress.

The children's play area also continued to be popular. Regular safety inspections were carried out both by the Council's insurers and by the City Council which dealt with any repairs or maintenance which may be necessary at the Parish Council's expense. The Council are very grateful to the City Council for offering this help. Members of the Council also carried out a basic weekly visual inspection of the play area.

It was unfortunate, however, there had again been little or no interest from

parents in helping with the day to day management of the play area as had originally been envisaged and this was a continuing disappointment. Litter continued to be a problem and the Council were indebted to Councillor Hughes for his efforts to keep the play area as tidy as possible. All Members of the Council now removed litter on a rota basis. A litter bin was available very close by and the Council would hope to encourage children and their parents to dispose of their litter in this manner.

Public footpaths were seen by the Council as an important part of village life and Members were very pleased at the great deal of hard work which was carried out by the voluntary Parish Footpaths Group under the national Parish Paths Partnership scheme. The Parish Paths Warden, Mr Stephen Armstrong, was to be congratulated on their achievements.

The Council were also pleased that action was being taken to protect and improve Cheshire's fast disappearing ponds under a scheme organised by Liverpool John Moores University. The Parish Pond Warden for Guilden Sutton, Mr Andrew Winstanley, was also to be congratulated on his sterling efforts within the village.

Trees played a vital part in the village environment and the Chairman would wish to record the Council's thanks to the Parish Tree Warden, Councillor Mrs B M Antrobus, for her efforts.

There was disappointment that no further progress had been possible with the long awaited improvements to the access to the primary school from Hill Top Road and this had again been raised with the City Council.

During the year, a grant was agreed to the Parochial Church Council towards their not inconsiderable expenditure on graveyard maintenance costs.

The notice board provided opposite the Summerfield Road shops continued to be well used and the Council were grateful to Mr Williams of Select for kindly agreeing to hold the keys. The board was available for use by any local organisation for non commercial purposes. The Council's monthly newsletter appeared on a regular basis and the Council would be pleased to receive comments as to its value in helping the Council's communications within the parish.

The Council had welcomed the fact it had at last been possible to make significant progress with the transfer of the dell from the developer to the City Council as Members were anxious that all the land concerned should remain in public ownership. The boundaries of the respective ownership's were being resolved by the City Council and MANWEB.

The Council had been pleased to offer the City Council a contract to provide a lengthsman service. The work carried out was additional to the scheduled cleansing within the parish by the City which also made a grant towards the costs incurred by the Parish Council in providing this service. In 1997/98, following further competitive tendering, this work was be carried out by a local contractor.

For the first time for a number of years, the Council had entered the Cheshire Best Kept Village Competition. To help the competition, clean sweep campaigns were held in May, June and July with the help of the City Council which provided collection bags and kindly agreed to remove any litter collected. The results had been extremely encouraging and the Council had again entered the competition.
pm04

A meeting had been held with local groups to discuss the competition and details had been circulated to a wide range of local organisations, landowners, industrial and commercial interests seeking their support. Clean sweeps were being held on the first Saturday of each month starting at 10.00am at the parish car park and it was hoped these would be well supported.

The Council remained concerned at the degree of dog fouling within the village, particularly on the footpaths leading to the primary school. This was a totally unnecessary problem and the Council would hope that the small minority of dog owners concerned would feel more able to play their part in tackling the problem.

Tipping in the dingle at the rear of Oaklands continued to be a concern and the Council had provided 'no tipping' signs at two locations to deter offenders. Such action was deprecated by the Council which believed that residents should appreciate the good environment the village was fortunate to enjoy.

Action was awaited by the City Council on the provision of new litter bins at Fox Cover adjoining the amenity area and Guilden Sutton Lane adjoining the parish playing field. Existing bins at Wicker Lane and adjoining the play area had been replaced.

Following competitive tenders, the existing grounds maintenance contractor had been re-appointed to deal with most of the grounds maintenance in the Parish, including grass cutting of the playing field.

The police officer for the parish, PC Pye, had been welcomed to a meeting of the Council at which a number of policing matters had been discussed. PC Pye also kept in regular touch should Members have any concerns. The Cheshire Policing Plan for 1996/97 had been considered by the Council.

The memorial garden continued to be a matter of congratulation to those concerned and the Council were extremely grateful for their care and their time.

Twelve months ago, it had been reported the Parish had twice been troubled by incursions of itinerants at the former Manor Farm where the disposal of the property by the Highways Agency had been delayed by legal complications as to the access. Happily, this had been resolved and no further incursions had taken place.

Action had been taken with the assistance of City Councillor Boughton to identify the possibility of sewage problems affecting Oaklands and the position remained under review.

Finally, the Council were conscious of the approach of the Millennium and would welcome suggestions as to how this may be marked in the Parish.

In conclusion the Chairman would wish to thank the City and County Councils and the local City and County Councillors for their help and support during the year. She also wished to pay tribute to the Council for their hard work during the last 12 months and believed the parish was fortunate that Members had felt able to come forward with their time to serve the community.

Local Planning

Reporting on local planning, Councillor Hughes said 26 new planning applications had been received by the Council during the year including five in adjoining parishes. This was a significant increase of one quarter on the previous year.

The Council had dealt with all of these keenly and assiduously and had always consulted the applicant and adjoining occupiers. Observations were reported to the next parish council meeting, where possible, where a full discussion by Members could take place. If this was not possible due to time considerations, a discussion with the Chairman was the norm, together with one or more other Members, before a decision was made on the comments to be made to the City Council.

The Parish Council was very aware of its responsibilities on local planning issues and had decided that all important or contentious applications should be considered and discussed by as wide an audience of Members as possible. It was not thought to be fair or reasonable for a single Member to take the responsibility for putting forward the Council's views on his or her own in these cases.

Many of the applications received by the Council were straightforward and did not have implications beyond their own area. These were commented on by the Council and passed to the City Council for their determination, usually to be confirmed by officers under their delegated powers. In his report, Councillor Hughes wished to draw attention to some of the more unusual applications which had given Members more food for thought.

The Council had been concerned about the size and implications of an application for a garage and stable block at Belle Vue Bungalow, Belle Vue Lane and had objected to the proposals. However, the Council had been reassured that the planning authority had satisfied themselves as to the intentions of the applicant and had confirmed the stringency of the conditions. including the withdrawal of permitted development rights, the demolition of smaller structures and the prospect of any future application for residential use.

An application for a kitchen extension at the Bird in Hand had given Members concerns as to possible increased business activity and on environmental health grounds. A Section 106 Agreement had been sought to limit any further development. The Council had been grateful to City Councillor Boughton in supporting the need for a more efficient means of odour control and to maintain it to a satisfactory standard. The application had been approved.

The proposals for a children's day nursery in Wildings Yard had exercised the Council throughout the year. Although the Council had not objected to the

application, they had expressed strong concerns especially as to the shared access, the sub standard junction and the inability of Guilden Sutton Lane to carry the increased number of vehicles expected. The Council's observations had appeared to be side stepped to some extent as they had been deemed to relate in part to areas not forming part of the highway while Guilden Sutton Lane was said to be properly signed and lined. This response had been thought to be disappointing in the least.

Whilst these concerns had not been addressed directly, it appeared that with the help of City Councillor Boughton there may be progress on the provision of a 40 mph speed limit on Guilden Sutton Lane which would greatly assist conditions at this junction. However, the position was somewhat confused because of a suggestion of a possible application for a change of use to business purposes which the Council were seeking to clarify.

Activities in Wildings Yard had troubled adjoining occupiers for some time and towards the end of 1995/96, the possible need for enforcement action had been raised with the City Council prior to detailed discussions as to compliance with planning approvals.

A detailed audit of tenancies had been carried out by an enforcement officer but this had concluded that all the existing uses had acquired the benefit of planning permission because they had been established for over 10 years. This was, to say the least, an extremely disappointing reply from the City Council although Councillor Hughes believed it would be uncharitable to suggest that the way to avoid taking action was to delay matters until they had been regularised with the passing of time.

A further long standing difficulty which continued to trouble the Council from year to year was the anachronistic position at McKenzie King/Topaz where a manufacturing facility was located in an urban area. This site gave problems for reasons of retrospective planning applications, nuisance to adjoining occupiers and environmental pollution. The companies had developed the habit of making retrospective planning applications to attempt to regularise further development which had taken place from time to time.

While retrospective planning applications were not illegal in themselves, and in spite of the planning authority maintaining that all applications, whether retrospective or not, were considered on the same basis, it was difficult to believe that some of the considerations made here had not been dealt with on the basis of arriving at a consensus between the wishes of the applicant and the rules the planners had to follow. It certainly appeared to the layman that the applicant benefited from making his applications with hindsight.

A planting scheme to deter the parking of HGVs outside the factory to make life slightly more acceptable to local residents had been put forward and agreed but had not been able to be progressed. An alternative scheme for the provision of verge markers was still awaited.

The Council had been surprised to find a short time ago that the City Council had advised the company to apply for retrospective planning permission for yet another series of unplanned developments, particularly in view of the fact that a

Section 106 Agreement had been concluded with the applicant to limit any further development. The Council's reaction had been one of strong disappointment that the company had been recommended to do this by the planning authority, given the previous advice of the enforcement officer and the City Council's legal services that any development should be subject to prior consultation and approval.

The Council later discovered, after discussions with the Development Control Manager, that the Section 106 Agreement had not precluded development elsewhere on the site. The Council felt it had been under informed by the planning authority and therefore under a false impression as to the position, possibly caused by a copy of the Section 106 Agreement not having been provided by the City Council at an earlier stage. It had been decided to write to the Chief Executive of the City Council to express concern as Members felt very aggrieved by this.

An application had been received for a liquid fertiliser storage lagoon at Tile Farm. The Council had been minded to object on the grounds of the scale of the proposal, the generation of additional traffic and the inadequacy of the highway. Members also had detailed reservations about the proposal and the piecemeal approach and scale of eventual future development. The City Council were now awaiting further information before coming back to the Parish Council and then to the Planning sub committee due to the controversial nature of the application and clear implications beyond Tile Farm.

This application had been one of the matters raised when the Development Control Manager had attended a meeting of the Council. The discussion had covered a wide range of items related to planning in the village and in the wider area. The Development Control Manager had been made forcibly aware of Members' concerns on a number of topics and his advice had also been sought in other areas.

Councillor Hughes believed that planning was by far the most contentious issue which the Council had to comment upon and represented the most significant area of discussion between the City Council and parish councils in Chester. Improved communication between the planning authority and parishes on planning matters would lead to a better overall relationship between the two.

The Council had been grateful to the planning authority for informing the Council during the year of neighbouring applications close to the parish boundary. Councillor Hughes hoped his report had not been too downbeat in its comments as the majority of applications were straightforward and readily agreed with the planning authority. But there were areas where continued dialogue was important to ensure an understanding of the background.

Cheshire Best Kept Village Competition

Reporting on the 1996 entry into the Cheshire Best Kept Village Competition, Councillor Whitehouse said this had been the first entry for a number of years and had gained an encouraging seventh place out of 13 entries in its class.
pm07

No aspect or area had been marked below 'good' with a number of features being rated 'very good'. Top marks had been awarded to the standard of floral displays, private gardens and hedges.

This result reflected the hard work put in by a great many people and organisations within the village in ensuring that overall the village was well cared for during the Spring and Summer months. Whilst there was obviously room for improvement, and litter continued to be a point of concern, this had been a good start.

It was hoped there would be improvements in all areas in the 1997 competition and a series of clean sweeps had already started, being held on the first Saturday of each month.

Strategic planning

Commenting on strategic planning, Councillor Armitage said proposed policies in the County Council's new structure plan to guide development in the county up to 2011 were expected to be examined in public in the Autumn while the City Council's draft local plan for the whole of the Chester district was also reaching its consultation stages. The Council were keen to protect the Green Belt and were anxious that the land between Guilden Sutton and Chester should not be developed with the parish being subsumed into the greater urban Chester envelope. This point had been made to both the County and City Councils. The City Council's Forward Planning Manager had also visited the Council to discuss the implications of the new proposals for controlling further development in villages such as Guilden Sutton. These had the support of the Council and would limit development to no more than one or two dwellings on otherwise built up frontages. Areas of open space which should be specifically protected had also been put forward although it was not known at this stage which had been accepted.

Guilden Sutton CE (Cont) Primary School

Presenting his report as a governor of Guilden Sutton CE (Controlled) Primary School, Councillor Armitage said there had been good progress during the year with excellent results in the national tests which confirmed the view which he believed all Members had that Guilden Sutton school was a good school, that it had excellent academic achievements and that the 11 year olds when they left school either to Upton or Christleton were always in the forefront of the new classes they joined there.

The school had last week held a memorial concert for Hugh Plant. This had been a very splendid occasion with some of the older pupils combining with the Chester Schools Concert Band to give a very nice concert which had been well received by 150 people. It was a well planned evening which was appreciated by everybody who was there.

Local Bus User Contact

Presenting Councillor Mrs Astbury's report as local bus user contact, the Clerk said that during the year the council had raised a number of matters relating to bus services although there had been very few if any complaints. No complaints

could be recalled so far as school bus services were concerned. The Council had tried unsuccessfully to have a new service provided at 3.30pm in term time to fill the gap between 2.30pm and 4.30pm. But due to a bus war in Warrington the County Council had run out of cash and therefore no money was available to fund the service.

The Council had also complained to Chester City Transport through City Councillor Boughton at the dirty condition both inside and out of a number of the buses serving Guilden Sutton. The Council had been disappointed to learn that similar complaints had been made elsewhere concerning City Transport buses and looked forward to an improvement. Members felt there was absolutely no point at all in trying to encourage people to use the buses with ever increasing fares if they were not pleasant to travel in and it was hoped that Councillor Boughton had forcibly made this point upon the chairman of the company. An application had been made for a rural transport information point which it was hoped would be successful.

Highways

Reporting on highways matters, Councillor Fisher said the Council had been concerned at the application for a goods vehicle operating centre licence for 15 vehicles at Wildings Yard which had been withdrawn following protests. Not all residents had been aware of the application. The lack of direct representational rights for parish councils had been pursued through a successful motion to the annual meeting of the Cheshire Association of Parish Councils and further approaches had been made to the Government. At the moment the Council had no right to make representations unless they were directly affected.

The Council had continued to be concerned at developments at Tile Farm and the planning and highway authorities had been advised of the effects of granting planning permissions, particularly where unsuitable local roads would be used by large agricultural vehicles. This had been a major problem on Wicker Lane with the verges being destroyed, a gas main being fractured at the corner of Wicker Lane and School Lane and also a wall damaged by a large agricultural vehicle. The roads were not constructed to cater for such very large vehicles which, apart from anything else, totally obstructed the road in both directions due to their size.

An unsuccessful request had been made for an extension of the speed limit on the A51 beyond Wicker Lane to help emerging traffic. The major maintenance scheme from the golf club to Stamford Bridge had been completed. Reconstruction of the length through Littleton was still awaited following a decision by the previous Government to abandon the proposed bypass. This bypass had been a matter of some interest as it was to be a new road although there was uncertainty as to whether it would pass through Guilden Sutton parish or the far side of the A51. The Council had taken a neutral position.

The local safety scheme at the junction of the A41 and Guilden Sutton Lane had been approved by the City Council and installed after 20 years of campaigning. A meeting had been held with Great Boughton parish council which was unhappy about the proposals for Green Lane East and the value of the scheme.

Guilden Sutton parish council had remained convinced this was a very dangerous junction and the great amount of glass which was always apparent at the junction was an indication of the number of small and sometimes quite serious accidents which occurred there.

A meeting had been held with the highway authority to discuss a range of concerns affecting Guilden Sutton Lane. The Council believed there should be further whitelining, there was a particular problem near Heath Bank where because of the alignment of the road traffic experienced poor visibility, particularly for cars travelling fast towards the centre of the road. There had been problems with vehicles turning at Willow Cottage to access the industrial premises. These could be completely blind to drivers approaching from the diversion who could meet a vehicle literally stopped in the centre of the road.

Revised signing had been provided at the junction of Heath Bank and Guilden Sutton Lane where there had been several instances of misdirected HGVs having to turn round in difficult circumstances given the narrowness of the road. A request had also been made for replacement verge markers on Heath Bank as the originals had rotted.

The Council continued to campaign for a reduced speed limit on Guilden Sutton Lane, particularly with the problem of slow turning vehicles at The Willows and with the proposed new nursery. There were real concerns about the speed of traffic on the road and a 40 mph limit had now been proposed, again following 20 years of campaigning.

Councillor Armitage said this proposal was to be considered by the City Council Highways, Transport and Road Safety sub committee later in the week.

Councillor Fisher said previous campaigns had been unsuccessful on the basis there had been no fatal or serious road traffic accidents and therefore a limit was inappropriate. A number of minor accidents had occurred at Heath Bank and the risk of a serious accident was considerable.

The Council was seeking the resurfacing of Moorcroft Crescent and Arrowcroft Road where the surfaces had broken up.

Footways had been salted during the winter and the Council had asked if the footway from Fox Cover to Church Lane could be included in the schedules for the future. It was thought the steps could be very dangerous during adverse weather conditions.

Parish Tree Warden

Councillor Mrs Antrobus, Parish Tree Warden, said the Council had continued to keep in close touch with the Cheshire Tree Warden scheme. Regrettably it had not been possible for the Council to progress the offer of trees by a local resident, due to difficulties in locating suitable sites. The Council had been concerned as to the severe pruning of an Oak which it was understood was the subject of a Tree Preservation Order although inquiries had suggested the appropriate Order had not been served by the City Council which was seeking to remedy the situation.

Parish Paths Warden

Mr Stephen Armstrong, Parish Paths Warden said the Footpaths Group had continued to hold meetings over the year and had fielded regular Saturday morning working parties as part of its programme of inspection and maintenance of parish footpaths. He was pleased to report that the footpaths seem to be increasingly well used and were generally in quite reasonable condition. Work by the landowners and a reasonably dry winter had contributed to this.

The main improvements which the Group had been able to make were the tarmac surfacing of the Belle Vue Lane end of the dingle path (Footpath No 2) and the installation of a kissing gate to replace the stile at the Guilden Sutton Lane end of the green lane (Footpath No 7).

The Group would like to gradually replace a number of other stiles by kissing gates to make the paths more easily accessible to more of the community. It was hoped to do this in co-operation with the local landowners, some of whom did have reservations about the safety of stock.

The Group also saw it as part of their job to encourage responsible use by the public of the paths, along with consideration for the landowners and other users. The Group continued to be disappointed by the attitude of a minority who allowed their dogs to foul the paths and those who threw garden refuse over their back fences.

The Group was making progress with its project to publish a guide to the parish's paths. The parish paths liaison officer from the County Council's public rights of way unit was to visit a meeting of the Group in the near future with proposals from their cartographic artist and to assist in completing the copy and layout.

The Group were in the final year of the Parish Paths Partnership Scheme and future funding from the County Council would be on the merits of each project undertaken. Mr Armstrong said he wished to thank both the Parish and County Councils for their continuing help and support.

Parish Ponds Warden

Mr A Winstanley, Parish Pond Warden, reported the significant activity during the year had been the continuation of work on ponds adjacent to the green lane.

With the help of the Mersey Basin Trust in the form of a small grant, the pond immediately to the side of the footpath had been mechanically excavated. The ditch leading to the pond had been cleared and it was hoped this would promote better flow of water to the pond. Despite the dry weather, it had retained water throughout the year.

A number of native plants were being introduced together with suitable species of pond life. The surrounding area had been sown with a selection of native pond and woodland plants but further work and a considerable amount of patience was needed.

Thanks to the goodwill and interest of Mr John Willis, the pond close to the path but in his field was receiving similar treatment and Mr Willis had invested considerable time and effort in clearing surrounding bushes to allow in light although it remained to be seen if the water would support life.

It was intended to further examine a number of local ponds for evidence of life over the coming year although this was governed by access and the time available.

This concluded the report of the Council's activities and those of related groups.

Open Forum

Answering a question from Councillor Gartland as to class sizes at the primary school, Councillor Armitage said there were some class sizes which were larger than the Governors would have hoped. One class of 41 would in fact have two teachers and the other infant classes, which were 32 and 34, would each have a classroom assistant. Forty six per cent of the children were out of zone. The school was required to take up to 32 children in each class whether they wished to or not. Any children residing within the zone had to be taken in as well so the class sizes had grown as reception classes started at 32 and there were more children moving into the village than moved away from the village. Numbers in the first two years of the junior school tended to be quite high. There was then a balancing factor as a number of children moved to The Kings School and The Queens School. Guilden Sutton lost between three and four a year at that stage so numbers in the final two years tended to be slightly lower.

The manifesto of the new Government had indicated that infant class sizes would be reduced to no more than 30 and this had featured in the Queen's Speech but without a great deal of detail as to how this was to be done.

Councillor Armitage hoped the governors would press for a fairly prompt reduction of the intake, certainly for future years so the school could refuse out of zone applications if the level had reached certainly 30, perhaps even 28 to allow for the fact it was building up. He would hope that something could be done on these lines and that the new Secretary of State, who had to give his approval, would find the proposals acceptable. However the proposals had yet to be made and the outcome must be awaited.

Responding to a question from Councillor Fisher as to additional funding, Councillor Armitage said the school had seven classes and seven teachers plus the head. It would be wrong to describe the Head as a non teaching head as he did teach each of the classes at some time during most weeks. If he were to take a class for three mornings a week and one of the teachers need only be employed part time, there would be some savings in cost to the disbenefit of the children. This could be one way in which savings could be made. The fact the school had three classroom assistants plus a part time teacher who would be working at the school from September 1997 meant that for much of the time the children were not in classes of greater than 30.

The Governors were also looking to see if the internal accommodation at the school could be used in a better way to provide perhaps two smaller areas for

teaching groups of 12 to 14 children so that classes could be split at some time during the day and have another teaching area in which to take a proportion of the class.

pm11

He confirmed to Councillor Patten in response to a question that building work would be required to do anything worthwhile but this would probably be carried out within the existing structure of the school. A range of options were being considered.

City Councillor Boughton indicated the prospectus was now available for the proposed new day nursery and the plans would proceed. He was also hopeful that the Chester District Public Transport Liaison Committee would consider the possibility of the diversion of existing services to provide a Sunday service to the parish.

In conclusion, Councillor Armitage said the valuable work of the Parish Friend was much appreciated and thanked Members and others in attendance. The meeting closed at 8.12pm.