

GUILDEN SUTTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in St John's Church Room on Monday 14 May 2001.

Chairman: Cllr M P Gartland.

Apologies: City Councillor B J Bailey, S Armstrong Esq Parish Paths Warden.

Present: Councillors Arditti, Armitage, Astbury, Fisher, Gartland, Hughes, Paterson, Whitehouse.

In attendance: Two members of the public.

1 Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 15 May, 2000 were proposed by Councillor Arditti, seconded by Councillor Astbury and agreed as a correct record.

2 Annual reports

In his annual report, the Chairman said that as always, 2000/01, the first year of the new millennium, had been an extremely busy period for the parish council on behalf of the local community.

There had been one change to the council's membership with Councillor Anna Patten resigning on leaving the parish. Following extensive advertising of the vacancy, including the opportunity for people to claim an election, the council had been pleased to co-opt Mrs Patricia Margaret Paterson at its meeting in April, 2001. Councillor Paterson would serve as a co-opted member for the remainder of the current quadrennial which expired in May, 2003.

After a number of years, Mr J Skelding had resigned as the council's representative on the City Council's cycle working party. The council had been most grateful to Mr Skelding for representing the parish in this way.

Monthly meetings had been held throughout the year, apart from August, together with site meetings. There had been extensive consultations on planning applications which had taken a great deal of time as a number of sensitive proposals had arisen. The council had continued to meet senior officers of Chester City Council to discuss a range of matters including planning and community safety.

The council had also arranged three highly successful public meetings during the winter to discuss the play area, Homewatch and local policing and the proposed pipeline through the Gowy valley as part of a larger scheme from Birch Heath to Mickle Trafford. These had been thought to be valuable and the council would welcome suggestions from the electorate as to other issues which might be aired in this way.

A period of public speaking time had been introduced prior to meetings of the council which enabled members of the electorate to put forward views directly to members.

The council had continued in membership of a wide range of outside bodies including the Cheshire Community Council, the CPRE, the Mid Cheshire Footpath Society, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and the Cheshire Association of Town and Parish Councils for which Guilden Sutton had again provided both the Chairman (Councillor Armitage) and Honorary Secretary (the Clerk) of the Chester Area Meeting. The council had been pleased to congratulate Councillor Armitage on his election as vice-chairman of the County Association while he continued to serve as a member of the association's executive committee, chairman of the policy committee and as a representative to the Chester District Public Transport liaison committee. Councillor Armitage was also vice chairman of the Rural Transport Partnership.

Councillor Fisher had continued as the council's nominee on the governing body of the primary school and Councillor Gartland as the council's representative on the Village Hall Management Committee. The council was pleased that a visit by the chairman of the governors had offered the prospect of improved relationships between the council and the governors. Members of the council, particularly Councillor Armitage, had played an active role in supporting the Millennium Group.

Members and the Clerk had also attended a wide range of conferences and meetings held by Cheshire County Council, Chester City Council, Cheshire Community Council, the Cheshire Planning Forum, the CPRE and the Cheshire Association of Town and 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.

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. The council believed that continued vigilance to protect

the Green Belt was essential, particularly in the light of continued representations to the City Council for land at Guilden Sutton Lane to be allocated as a business park.

There had also been consultations on a wide variety of strategic issues which in one way or another affected the parish including the new Cheshire local transport plan and possible policies for the future of waste-disposal in the county.

The council had not hesitated to make representations to the Government in support of concerns within the community. The council had been pleased to have assurances from Mrs C M Russell MP as to the future business prospects of rural post offices and the future of parish councils in the democratic process. The council had been disappointed that it had been unable to persuade the Government to grant parish councils a statutory right to make representations on applications for goods vehicle operating centre licences given the impact of such operations on the local road network. The reason given was that as the whole country was not parished, this would lead to inconsistency.

Contrary to a press report in the previous year that the Government was proposing to abolish parish councils, the long awaited Rural White Paper offered the prospect of increased powers for those councils which wished to take these up. During the year, the council had also responded to consultations on a proposed model code of conduct for elected members.

On finance, the council had continued with its 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 other costs had also increased but in 2001/02 the budget had been held at £10,760, the same figure as in the previous year. The council had been increasing its precept to more closely match income and expenditure and the precept for 2001/02 had been set at £9,925 compared with £9,545 in 2000/01, with the additional commitments being funded from the remaining reserves. The increase in the precept of four per cent was thought to be below the national average.

At present, the precept was approximately £1.25 per month for an average band D house in the parish. The council believed this represented good value for money but remained fully committed to spending council taxpayers' money wisely and to securing grants towards expenditure wherever this was possible. In 2000/01 the council had been particularly successful, working with external organisations such as the City Council and WREN, in attracting grant approvals or externally funded improvements worth almost £8,000.

A wide range of issues had been dealt with during the year. The council was very aware of its responsibility to speak out for local interest, for example in responding to consultations and this was reflected in its 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. It was also worth noting that the council was consulted on planning applications on or near the parish boundaries where these would affect Guilden Sutton.

The council had referred at the previous year annual parish meeting to the new regulations concerning the council's audit which were introduced in 1997. Along with many other councils of a similar size, members continued to believe these were unnecessarily complex when applied to expenditure at the council's level. This had been raised nationally in view of the substantially increased audit fees which had resulted. These had amounted to almost £700 in Guilden Sutton's case for 1998/99, representing seven per cent of the total budget, compared with 0.1 per cent for local government as a whole.

As a result, as had been reported the previous year, a pilot scheme had been introduced allowing the council to select its own auditors subject to competitive tendering.

The outcome was expected to be a significant reduction in the council's audit fee. This was expected to reduce again in the future with the very welcome news that the more rigorous requirements falling on smaller councils had now been lifted. The Chairman wished to stress that the return to the previous system affected only the detail in which the final accounts were presented and not the testing of the probity of the council's financial procedures.

A number of local highway matters had arisen during the year. The council remainder disappointed that a number of motorists exiting Guilden Sutton Lane at the junction with the A 41 ignored the intention that the gap in the central reservation was suitable to allow only one vehicle at a time to turn right into the main road, causing problems for themselves, approaching traffic and the vehicle already waiting. The council hoped that all motorists using the junction would see the sense of exercising a little patience given the previous accident record.

The first phase had been completed of a long awaited improvement to the footway from Fox Cover to Church Lane, designed, financed and carried out at a cost of £1,200 by the City Council and supported by the parish council. Future landscaping work was to be undertaken at modest cost to the parish.

Street lighting faults had continued to be reported and the council would be pleased to hear from residents if they encountered any difficulty in reporting these themselves to the street lighting authority.

Representations had been need to the Dee Valley Group as to the frequency of bursts on Wicker Lane.

Members maintained a close interest in local bus services and Councillor Mrs Astbury had continued as the local bus user contact. The future of the Sunday bus service through the parish remained in doubt and in view of low patronage and high journey costs it was likely it would be discontinued at some point. This would be disappointing to the council and to City Councillor John Boughton who both strongly supported the initiative and had urged all local residents to patronise the service as it's future lay solely on a 'use it or lose it' basis.

The council was pleased the parish playing field, which was rented from a private landowner, continued to be a valuable village amenity. There were hopes of providing a basketball net for youths. Measures to deal with an infestation of moles would need to be considered.

Guiden Sutton remainder deficient in all aspects of open space provision and any improvement in the position hinged crucially on land becoming available. The council would be pleased to hear from landowners who might be able to help. The City Council would then be able to assist with help and advice as to the funding of any scheme.

The children's play area had also continued to be popular. Regular safety inspections were carried out both by RoSPA and by the City Council which dealt with any repairs or maintenance which might be necessary at the parish council's expense. The council was 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.

A number of possible initiatives existed to improve the playground and the surrounding area and Councillor Arditti and prior to her resignation Councillor Patten had been reviewing options. The council was pleased to report that a landfill tax credit grant had been obtained towards the cost of safety surfacing. The council had also been greatly encouraged by the enthusiastic support of interested parents and their splendid fund raising in aid of the play area.

Litter continued to be a problem and the council's contractor was paid to give the play area weekly attention. A litter bin was available very close by and the council hoped this would 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. The Parish Paths Warden, Mr Stephen Armstrong, was to be congratulated on their achievements. Unfortunately, all public footpath within the parish had been closed as a result of the foot and mouth emergency although the Chairman was pleased that following representations to the Public Rights of Way Unit, a risk assessment had been carried out on footpath No. 2 and the path have been reopened.

The council had, in the past, expressed its pleasure that action was being taken to protect and improve Cheshire's fast disappearing ponds under a scheme organised by Liverpool J M University.

Councillor Michael Gartland acted as Parish Pond Warden although it was feared the project may have ended due to lack of funding.

The council believed that trees played a vital part in the village environment and would wish to thank Councillor Gartland, who was also the Parish Tree Warden, for his efforts.

The council's newsletter continued to appear, normally on a monthly basis and members would be pleased to hear comments as to its value in helping the council's communications within the parish.

Due to its proximity to the urban area, the parish suffered from a great deal of indiscriminate dumping of refuse, particularly in Belle Vue Lane and Guilden Sutton Lane. This continued to be a serious concern and the council was grateful to City Councillor Brian Bailey and the City Council for their help in having litter removed on an all too regular basis.

Tipping in the dingle at the rear of Oaklands continued to be a concern. Such action was deprecated by the council which believed that residents should appreciate the good environment the village was fortunate to enjoy.

The parish had again entered the Cheshire Best Kept Village Competition and 'clean sweep' campaigns had been held monthly from April to September with the help of the City Council which had provided collection sacks and litter pickers.

The council had been disappointed at the outcome. Although marks had been no worse than average, the parish had not succeeded in its class. A number of aspects needed to be improved and given an increase in the proportion of

the marks to be allocated to community involvement, the council had withdrawn from the competition in 2001 to allow the position to be assessed.

The council remained concerned at the degree of dog fouling with in the village, particularly on the footpath leading to the primary school, the dingle footpath, Heath Bank and Church Lane. This was a totally unnecessary problem and the council hoped that the small minority of dog owners concerned would feel more able to play their part in tackling the problem. The penalties for dog fouling had been increased and the legislation made more comprehensive which the council welcomed. It was disappointing that the closure of local footpaths had led to residents walking their dogs on the parish playing field which was used by children and young people who should not expect to have to contend with fouling.

So far as the policing of the parish had been concerned, the council had been most grateful to PC Richard Tack for his involvement and support. PC Tack was in frequent contact with the council which enabled concerns to be raised and dealt with appropriately. Guilden Sutton was seen as a relatively peaceful village although there had been isolated instances of anti social behaviour in the vicinity of the play area and the Village Hall car park. The memorial garden had suffered one instance of vandalism.

The possibility of sewage problems affected Oaklands had remained under review although no further serious instances have been brought to the council's attention.

The council was pleased the Millennium Group, which its supported, had played such an active and successful role in ensuring the millennium had been marked in an appropriate manner. On behalf of the council, Councillor Fisher had arranged for the contribution of a panel to the millennial hanging. Items of street furniture had been refurbished to improve the village environment and to mark the millennium. The council had supported the millennium fete and later in the year the community carol singing and a roll had been produced of all chairmen and vice-chairmen of the council since its inception in 1895.

The council continued to embrace information technology. A significant proportion of the Clerk's contact with the city and county councils and other organisations and individuals was carried out through e-mail and under the leadership of Councillor Fisher, the council's Internet site had been further developed and offered an ever increasing range of information about the council and the community.

Civic duties had included the laying of the customary wreath on Remembrance Sunday in memory of the fallen although attendance at the Rt

Worshipful the Lord Mayor's Civic Service had not unfortunately been possible. The Council had also assisted in the local administration of the Lord Mayor's Christmas Parcel Appeal.

The council would wish to thank the city and county councils, the local city and county councillors and Mrs C M Russell MP for their help and support during the year.

The council would particularly wish to thank County Councillor Neil Fitton who was not seeking re-election and had sent their best wishes for the future. The Chairman also paid tribute to the council for its 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.

Reporting on local planning, Councillor Hughes said 23 new planning applications had been considered by the council during the year, compared with 24 in the previous year when there had been an above average number of consultations on neighbouring proposals in adjoining parishes.

The council had dealt with all of these keenly and assiduously and had always endeavoured to consult the applicant and adjoining occupiers. Observations were reported to the next parish council meeting, where the period for consultation allowed, enabling a full discussion by members to take place. If this was not possible, a discussion with one or more other members as a minimum was the rule, before a decision was made on the comments to be made to the City Council. The outcome, in any event, was always reported to the full council.

The parish council was very aware of its responsibilities on local planning issues and had decided that important or contentious applications should be considered and discussed by as many members as possible where this could not be achieved at a meeting of the full council. It was not thought to be fair or reasonable for a small number of members to take the responsibility for putting the council's views forward in these cases.

In addition, the council constantly reviewed its practices for dealing with applications to ensure these were as thorough and fair as possible.

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 determination, usually to be confirmed by officers using delegated powers. The following applications had been dealt with during the year. Unless otherwise indicated, the council had raised no objection and the application had been approved by the City Council:

99/1336 change of condition attached to planning approval, The Lodge, School Lane. The council had consistently opposed this application which would have removed a condition concerning the occupation for residential purposes of an outbuilding. The council believed the proposal would have led to over intensive use of the site which had sub standard access to the highway. The application had been refused by the planning authority which had led to an appeal. This had been dismissed on the grounds of substandard access.

00/121 demolition of dwelling and erection of replacement at Roseville, Belle Vue Lane. This proposal had involved the demolition of an existing bungalow and its replacement by a large dwelling to which the council had objected due to its impact on the street scene and on adjoining properties. An amended application had been received which had sought to address the council's concerns but the objection had been maintained. The proposal had been approved by the City Council's planning board although the parish council believed the amendment had moved in the applicant's favour.

As a result, the Development Control Manager had been invited to attend a meeting of the council to discuss the process which had been followed in this particular instance. A further application 00/920 had provided for a porch and elevational alterations. The council believed the proposal should be reduced in scale. Approval had also been sought for a conservatory under application 00/1299. In this case, the planning authority had been requested to indicate that no further extensions would be permitted.

00/310 new pitched roof to replace flat roof to garage, 4 Cinder Lane.

Cheshire County Council Engineering Service, Guilden Sutton depot. A proposal had been put forward by the highway authority contractor to stockpile inert materials for recycling which would be crushed on site. Quantities of 1,500 tonnes would have been involved. An objection had been raised due to the proximity of the depot to residential dwellings and the effect on of their amenity due to dust and noise. The proposal had not progressed.

00/531 new on course toilet to replace existing at Vicars Cross Golf Club.

00/541 two storey side extension, 11 Fox Cover.

00/577 two storey extension and erection of new bungalow, Heathfield, Guilden Sutton Lane. An objection had been raised on the basis of inappropriate development in the Green Belt. No objection had been raised to an amended proposal to delete the proposed bungalow.

00/733 demolition of double garage and erection of games room, Ashbourne House, Hare Lane.

00/744 certificate of lawful development for conversion of a stable to a dwelling, The Lodge, School Lane. An objection had been raised on the basis of over intensive development and a sub standard access.

00/916 two storey extension, porch and detached garage, 10 Arrowcroft Road.

00/932 rear extension and extension and modification to front study, 5 Guilden Green.

Proposed gas pipeline, Birch Heath - Mickle Trafford. The council had been consulted on the need for an environmental impact assessment. Members had agreed a full assessment was not required but a range of conditions had been sought to mitigate the impact of the development on residents of Wicker Lane.

00/1110 two storey side extension, Fieldway, Hare Lane.

00/1135 combination conservatory, 6 Cinder Lane.

00/11512 storey side extension, Frogmore Cottage, Church Lane. No objection had been raised to the proposed extension although an objection had been put forward to a large window in the gable. No objection had been made to an amended proposal.

Orange, addition of 3 No. antennas and new equipment cabin, Cheshire County Council Engineering Service depot, Guilden Sutton Lane. An objection had been raised on the basis of visual amenity. The planning authority had been informed that an industrial location was preferred to a residential area. The inability of the planning authority to consider health issues had been noted.

00/1109 removal of condition tying land and dwelling as one unit, Tile Farm, Wicker Lane. The removal of the condition had been sought by the applicant to provide flexibility in view of the difficulties facing agriculture. The council believed strongly the condition should remain. Should circumstances arise which suggested the agreement should be varied, members believed the matter should be considered on its merits at the time. It was noted that such changes had been within planning guidance since 1990. A decision was awaited.

00/1345 proposals for the provision of a toilet in place of a brick lean to shed, a new emergency exit and internal alterations at St John's Church had been supported.

00/1463 conservatory, 4 Cinder Lane.

00/1530 retention of 100 centimetre satellite receiving dish, 119 Oaklands.

00/1578 conservatory, 5 Fox Cover.

01/133 Two storey extension and rear conservatory, 3 Heath Bank.

A number of enforcement issues had been considered by the council during the year and appropriate action taken.

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 as members frequently felt that reasonable opinions were disregarded.

Guiden Sutton had taken the lead in seeking an improved understanding with the planning authority and significant progress had been achieved although more work remained to be done.

During the year concerns had arisen in respect of one application and the Development Control Manager had met with the council to discuss these, as minuted above.

Concerns at planning controls on agricultural contracting activities had also been raised from which it had emerged that action could only be taken on the basis of evidence of significant change. Other more minor questions had been pursued with the planning officers concerned.

The majority of applications had been straightforward and readily agreed with the planning authority. Councillor Hughes believed there were areas where continued dialogue was important to ensure an understanding of the background.

Publications considered by the council on local planning related matters had included:

A planning guide for householders (DETR)

Planning Enforcement (Chester City Council)

Planning and Development Handbook (Chester City Council)

Building Control Handbook (Chester City Council)

Reporting on strategic planning, Councillor Armitage said a review was awaited of Green Belt boundaries in the county to accommodate development after 2011 and possibly before. Continued vigilance would be essential to protect the local environment given the pressure for development to the East of Chester. Significantly, papers deposited as part of consultation on the Chester District Local Plan continued to argue for a business park on Guilden Sutton Lane.

The Local Plan was the first plan to be produced by the City Council for the whole of Chester district. The parish council had again been keen to protect the Green Belt and the distinctive character of Guilden Sutton which still followed the intentions laid down in the original development plan of the late 1960s.

This recognised the rural environment of the village and the council continued to be anxious that the land between Guilden Sutton and Chester should not be developed with the parish being subsumed into the greater urban Chester built up area. This point had been made strongly to both the county and city councils on all appropriate occasions and would continue to be pressed. It was particularly relevant in view of the continuing representations as to the allocation of land on Guilden Sutton Lane for a business park.

The Local Plan, which was at present being considered by a public inquiry, contained new proposals for controlling development in villages such as Guilden Sutton. These had the support of the parish council and would limit development to no more than one or two dwellings on otherwise built up frontages. As reported the previous year, areas of open space within the village which should be specifically protected had also been put forward and the council was pleased that generally its proposals had been accepted by the City Council, for example the parish playing field on Guilden Sutton Lane.

A notable exception was the orchard on School Lane which it was proposed should be excluded from protection as an important green space. This had been vigorously resisted at the public inquiry. An application for development there had already been refused.

The plan contained proposals for future policies to promote cycling. Although the council was keen to see safe cycling routes from Guilden Sutton to Chester and Upton County High School, members were less clear about their

support for measures to provide cycling routes through the rural area, including the possible upgrading of public footpaths. A proposal to develop a route from Guilden Sutton across the Gowy Valley, which had been opposed by the landowners concerned, had been deleted from the plan.

So far as the urban area was concerned, the council was anxious to link Guilden Sutton first to the Mickle Trafford - Deeside Transport System and then to Upton High School. The former would require the creation of a new cycleway to Mickle Trafford and members were hopeful that this scheme would be possible, starting at Park Farm on Guilden Sutton Lane. A recent discussion with the County Council's cycling officer had suggested that funding for this scheme remained a possibility. The latter would most probably be achieved by means of an access from the cycleway at Mannings Lane South.

The public inquiry into the plan had recently resumed and was expected to conclude by September. The inspector would then report and the plan was due to be adopted in Summer 2002.

There had been little progress with the Cheshire Replacement Waste Local Plan.

The County Council was obliged to form a plan for the disposal of the ever increasing volumes of waste produced by society and was currently consulting to gather peoples' views as to the way forward. The parish council was keen to see more recycling in order to reduce the volume of waste going to landfill.

Of more concern was a draft proposal emerging from regional planning guidance which would allow development of a so called 'Southern Crescent', which included part of Chester district, to override policies for the protection of the Green Belt. This had been opposed and was being carefully monitored.

Strategic Planning reports received by the council during the year for consultation or information had included:

Environment Agency Local Plan for the River Dee

Chester District Local Plan

Cheshire Replacement Waste Local Plan

Draft regional planning guidance for the north-west.

Referring to leisure services, Councillor Arditti said a number of possible initiatives existed to improve the children's playground and the surrounding area and the council had been reviewing options. Further work had been carried out as an initial step to open up the front aspect of the playground.

The council had decided the priority was to replace the safety surfacing with wet pour and to replace the front boundary fencing and gate together with the possible replacement of two small items of equipment. The overall cost had been estimated at £15,000 and an application for grant had been made under the landfill tax credit scheme. This had resulted in a net offer of £5,000 to cover the cost of the safety surfacing. In addition, a further grant of £1,000, for which the council was extremely grateful, had been forthcoming from the City Council. There remained a shortfall to cover the cost of installing the new surface and this was the subject of negotiation.

The council had welcomed the renewed involvement of parents. Following an incident of antisocial behaviour in the play area which had led to some concerns, the council had been pleased that with the co-operation of the head teacher it had been possible to communicate with parents as to the council's intentions and later to circulate a questionnaire about the future of the play area, the results of which had been analysed.

A site meeting had been held with the City Council and Police representatives, including City Councillor B J Bailey, to discuss community safety issues and a public meeting had also been held. The involvement of parents had resulted in an excellent fund raising effort by them raising almost £500 towards the play area, exceeding their target of £350. This was to be matched by the Council.

Concerns as to the under age consumption of alcohol in the play area had been referred to the police. The possibility of a CCTV camera was also being explored. A suggestion that the adjoining footway lighting should be switched off had not been acceptable to the street lighting authority. The lighting of the remainder of the path to the rear of Orchard Croft to increase foot fall past the play area was also being explored. The height of the boundary hedge to the rear of the Village Hall had also been reduced to open up the area .

The annual safety inspection was now carried out by RoSPA. This was backed by Chester City Council inspections and by a weekly visual inspection by the parish council.

There was concern the parish playing field was increasingly being used for the exercising of dogs following the closure of local footpaths due to the foot and mouth emergency and an appropriate notice had been displayed and

disappointingly removed. The City Council's dog warden had also been asked to patrol.

The goal posts, which had been refurbished, had been assessed to ensure they complied with health and safety requirements. The council hoped it would be possible to provide a basketball net for youths and the agreement of the landowner had been obtained.

The field was affected by mole activity and it might be necessary to seek the advice of the City Council to eradicate this. Part of the roadside boundary hedge and fencing had suffered impact damage as a result of a road traffic accident. This had been reinstated at no expense to the council but the third party.

The council continued to be grateful to Mr Stephen Armstrong, the Parish Paths Warden, for the splendid work being carried out by the Footpaths Group.

All public footpaths in the parish had been closed by the Public Rights of Way Unit as a result of the foot and mouth emergency. Footpath No. 2, at the rear of the Oaklands estate, had been reopened following a risk assessment.

The deposit of manure close to but not on a footpath had been raised with the land owner.

Publications considered during the year had included:

Mid Cheshire Footpath Society annual report

Cheshire Signpost.

Referring to public transport, Councillor Mrs Astbury reported she had continued as Local Bus User Contact.

The hourly Sunday bus service to and from Chester, introduced on an experimental basis in 1998 by diverting the C 84 service to the Potteries through the village, continued to run despite indications it would be ceased in due course due to low patronage.

Improved destination information had been sought as to the 1710 ex Chester Bus Exchange which although serving the village was shown as a service to Kelsall to which it proceeded forward. The council had been formed by Chester City Transport that this would not be possible due to space limitations on the destination indicators at present in use.

The council endeavoured to obtain accurate timetable information about services to and from the village although it was not consulted by the operators and the position was not as clear as it desired. During the previous year, bus stop poles in the parish had been renewed and it was disappointing that the County Council had only rein stated the timetable information in recent months despite several requests to do so. A summary of local services was to appear in the newsletter.

The council had been particularly concerned at the deregistration as a commercial service of the 1310 ex Chester Bus Exchange by Chester City Transport. Robust representations had been put forward by the council and local passengers had been contacted to do likewise. The service was at present being operated under an emergency contract, again by Chester City Transport and tenders were being invited for its permanent replacement. This was strongly supported by the parish council given the village only enjoyed an hourly service.

During the year, the punctuality of the 0850 ex Guilden Sutton had been raised together with inadequate passenger information concerning the Ince/ Elton - Chester Business Park service which passed through the parish.

It had been noted the dial a ride service had been transferred to Chester City Transport.

Councillor Armitage and the Clerk had separately been invited to participate in an audit of the County Transport Co-ordination Service by the Audit Commission.

The council was fortunate to be represented on the Chester District Public Transport liaison committee by Councillor Armitage which allowed concerns to be raised with County and City Council members and with Transport Co-ordination officers.

Public Transport reports received by the council during the year for consultation or information had included:

Chester District Public Transport liaison committee - agenda and minutes.

Chester District Rural Community car scheme

Chester District dial a ride service.

Reporting on local highway issues, Councillor Fisher said the A41/Guilden Sutton Lane local safety scheme had succeeded in reducing the number of

road traffic accidents at this difficult junction although they had not been eliminated entirely. Concern had been expressed at the actions of a minority of drivers emerging from Guilden Sutton Lane when the space in the central reservation was already occupied by a waiting vehicle. This was a totally unnecessary manoeuvre and placed both waiting and approaching traffic at risk.

The replacement in the previous autumn of the gas main on Guilden Sutton Lane and School Lane had greatly exercised the council due to the lack of advance consultation and the standard of reinstatement following the completion of the work. Both these aspects had been vigorously pursued with Transco and had led to a successful emergency motion from the council to the annual meeting of the Cheshire Association of Town and Parish Councils. This had called for advance consultation with and information to the parish council and frontagers where works were carried out by the former public utilities and by the highway authority.

Concern remained at the location of the posting box opposite the former primary school which, it was thought, had been displaced as a temporary measure. Strong representations had been made to Royal Mail for it to be returned to its original position adjoining the lay-by in order to avoid the traffic hazards which had ensued. Following a site meeting, the council was pleased this had been achieved.

The further deterioration in the condition of the carriageway and verges were in Wicker Lane and Station Lane had continued to concern the council and a site meeting had been sought with the District Maintenance Engineer.

The parking of minibuses in Arrowcroft Road collecting pupils attending out of school clubs continued to be monitored and had been notified to the police. Damage to the footway caused by vehicles over riding the kerb had been raised with the District Maintenance Engineer.

The request to the highway authority for the provision of chevron signs at the entrance to The Byatts remained outstanding. New or replacement street nameplates had been secured at a number of locations.

The County Council minor improvements programme continued to include works at Wicker Lane in the vicinity of the golf club together with a realignment at the junction of Wicker Lane and Church Lane and at the junction of Wicker Lane and School Lane although these remained a low priority.

The council was pleased that funding had enabled maintenance to Guilden Sutton Lane and that School Lane was to be surfaced dressed in a

2001/2002.

The environment of the village had been enhanced by the refurbishment of items of street furniture including public seats and signposts.

Following concerns expressed by a resident, minor traffic management measures had been installed at the junctions of Hill Top Road and Oaklands and Hill Top Road and the Village Hall car park to slow the speed of traffic. The speed of traffic on Oaklands had been referred to the police. With the co-operation of the Wilding Business Estate, which had been greatly appreciated, similar measures were to be provided at the access to the estate approaching Guilden Sutton Lane for the same reasons.

Obstruction to the footway in Church Lane caused by parked cars had been referred to the police and action taken.

Larger direction signs were being sought to the Village Hall to assist visitors from outside the parish.

Representations had been made to the Dee Valley Group as to the frequency of bursts on Wicker Lane.

The council had been consulted by the County Council on the new Cheshire Local Transport Plan which set out future policies and priorities for transport in the county and had attended a seminar thereon. The Council supported the view that there should be two distinct road networks, one comprising motorways and trunk roads, the other roads within the rural area where speed limits should generally be 40 mph and 30 mph through communities.

The agenda and minutes of the highways and transportation local joint committee for Chester were considered by the council. The council was fortunate that City Councillor J R Boughton was a spokesman on this committee and able to raise matters on its behalf.

Highways and transportation reports received by the council during the year for consultation or information had included:

Cheshire Local Transport Plan

Drink Drive Campaign

Speeding Campaign

Strategic maintenance rolling programme 2000/01 - local proposals

Winter gritting routes

Reporting on finance, the Responsible Financial Officer said the council had continued with its 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 other costs had increased but in 2001/02 the budget had been held at £10,760, the same figure as for the previous year. The council had been increasing its precept to more closely match income and expenditure and the precept for 2001/02 had been set at £9,925 compared with £9,545 in 2000/01, with the additional commitments being funded from the remaining reserves. The increase in the precept of four per cent was thought to be below the national average.

At present the precept was approximately £1.25 per month for an average band D house in the parish. The council believed this represented good value for money but remained fully committed to spending council taxpayers' money wisely and to securing grants towards expenditure wherever this was possible. In a 2000/01 the council had been particularly successful, working with external organisations such as the City Council and WREN, in attracting grant approvals or externally funded improvements worth almost £8,000.

These comprised:

Landfill tax credit £5,000 (net) - allocated to the play area

Chester City Council £1,000 - allocated to the play area

Chester City Council £250 - allocated to the Parochial Church Council

Chester City Council £1,200 - value of works, Fox Cover/Church Lane.

In addition the council would receive a grant of the order of £450 towards the lengthsman service and recovered all VAT.

The council was pleased to have received a donation of almost £500 from interested parents in connection with improvements to the play area.

The council had referred at the 2000 annual parish meeting to the new regulations concerning the audit which had been introduced in 1997. Along with many other councils of a similar size, members continued to believe these were unnecessarily complex when applied to expenditure at the level incurred by the council. This had been raised nationally in view of the substantially increased audit fees which had resulted. These had amounted to almost £700 in Guiden Sutton's case for 1998/99, representing seven per

cent of the total budget, compared with 0.1 per cent for local government as a whole.

As a result, a pilot scheme had been introduced allowing the council to select its own auditors subject to competitive tendering. The outcome would be a significant reduction in the audit fee. This was expected to reduce again with the very welcome news that efforts by the Cheshire Association of Town and Parish Councils at county level and nationally to secure a reduction in audit fees had been successful. The more rigorous requirements falling on smaller councils such as Guilden Sutton had been lifted by the Government with effect from 1st April, 2001. The return to the previous system affected only the detail in which the final accounts were presented and not the testing of the probity of the council's financial procedures.

In line with policy, requests for funding from the WRVS, the Fire Services Charities and the Llangollen International Eisteddfod had been refused.

Financial documents considered by the council during the year had included:

Chester City Council community grant aid 2000/2001

Chester City Council - maintenance of churchyards

Cheshire Community Council - Rural Opportunities Fund

Heritage Lottery Fund

Raising money from Trusts

Audit Commission - discussion document

The council's budget had been agreed as follows:

Head	budget	budget
	2000/01	2001/02
CATPCs Subscription	220	220
CPRE	20	20
Cheshire Community Council	35	40
Mid Cheshire Footpath Society	10	10
BTCV	25	25

Cheshire Best Kept Village competition	25	25
Salaries	2600	2600
Postages	210	210
Photocopies	225	250
Stationery	75	75
Telephone	50	50
Mileage	50	100
Rates	675	675
Insurance	455	480
Play Area Inspection	75	65
Audis	650	500
Grounds maintenance	725	750
Lengthsman	625	950
Playing field rent	550	550
Footpath Group grant	350	350
Newsletter	375	375
Pond's group grant	50	50
Room hire	20	20
Memorial Garden	50	50
Play area capital	1000	1000
St John's PCC	250	250
CATPCS annual meeting	15	20
Bulbs	100	75
Contingency	750	975
Millennium	500	0
Total	10760	10760
Precept	9545	9925

Reporting on environmental service issues, Councillor Whitehouse said a wide range of matters had arisen.

Concern continued to be expressed at the degree of dog fouling within the parish and particularly on footpath No. 2 and the access to the primary school. This was to be deprecated. An additional bin for the reception of canine faeces was to be provided at the hollows.

The council had continued to support the work of the Cheshire Landscape Trust which administered the Parish Tree Warden scheme from which the parish benefited.

Further mass planting of daffodils had taken place. A photographic record of existing planting had been compiled in order to identify where further planting could most usefully take place. In the coming autumn, planting would be concentrated on Guilden Sutton Lane.

The council continued to support the aims of the Pond Life Project with Councillor Gartland acting as Parish Pond Warden although the existence of the project was in some doubt due to lack of funding.

The City Council amenity cleansing scheduled was supplemented as necessary by a locally appointed contractor who also scavenged the playing field, play area and other public areas on a regular basis.

During the year the council had agreed to fund an additional 30 minutes scavenging each week following a request from the Community Association for assistance in helping to ensure the Village Hall car park and surrounds were maintained to a higher standard.

Concerns as to the amount of rubbish and litter in the parish and the condition of a number of bins had led to an extremely successful site meeting with City Council officers. The council had been most grateful for their continued support in tackling this difficult problem. Guilden Sutton Lane, the surrounds of the highway depot and adjoining industrial premises and Belle Vue Lane remained badly affected.

It was disappointing that the dingle at the rear of the Oaklands estate continued to suffer from tipping and that a 'no tipping' sign had been removed. This was to be replaced.

Porters Hill had suffered particularly from the fall in an extremely wet autumn and the City Council had been requested to deal with this and other paths in the parish.

The council had been pleased that action by City Councillor J R Boughton, which had included a site meeting, had led to measures to

deal with the pollution which had led to an unacceptable condition concerning the ditch on the north side of Belle Vue Lane.

The council had been consulted on the transfer of the justices licence at Select, Summerfield road. No objection had been raised subject to the enforcement of no under-age sales of alcohol or tobacco.

Publications the relating to environmental services issues considered during the year had included:

Dog fouling, advisory leaflet.

Reporting on trees and hedges, the Parish Tree Warden said the council had continued to support the Cheshire Landscape Trust. Publicity had appeared in the newsletter as to the need for occupiers to trim overhanging trees and hedges.

Referring to local government issues, Councillor Gartland said the council had maintained close contact with the Cheshire Association of Town and Parish Councils, Chester City Council, Cheshire County Council and Cheshire Community Council.

(a) Cheshire Association of Town and Parish Councils. The council had congratulated Councillor Armitage on his election as vice-chairman of the County Association of Town and Parish Councils. Councillor Armitage continued as a member of the executive committee and chairman of the policy committee. He was also chairman of the Chester Area Meeting of which the Clerk was Honorary Secretary and the association's representative to the Chester district public transport liaison committee.

Councillor Gartland referred to the efforts to secure a reduction in audit fees and to the council's successful promotion of an emergency motion at the association's annual meeting.

Publications and other documents received by the council during the year had included:

Local Council Review

Briefing - best value

Newsletter

Tidy Britain

(b) Chester City Council. The council had been grateful to City Councillors B J Bailey and J R Boughton and to City Council officers for their support and co-operation. The council had been represented at the annual Parish Partnership Reception and members and the Clerk had attended meetings of the local panel covering the parish established as part of the City Council's 'new ways of working'.

Ward members had attended meetings of the council and site meetings. Officer attendance had included Mr D Cotterill, Development Control Manager, Mr S Jones, Policy Development Manager and Mr A Baird, Services Manager.

The council had responded to consultations with respect to:

Housing allocation policy and points scheme

Rural Housing Survey 2000

and had attended the Chester in Partnership community participation day.

City Council reports not previously referred to which had been received by the Council during the year for consultation or information had included:

Local panel 6 - Agenda and Minutes

Council - Agenda and Minutes

Chester in Partnership rural forums - questionnaire

Chester News

Past Uncovered

Chester Archaeology annual report

Cheshire Community History and Heritage News

Housing transfer

Housing News

Parish Bulletin

Economic Bulletin

Draft economic development statement 2000/01

Chester in Bloom/North West in Bloom

Annual Report

Performance indicators 1999/2000

Policy on street nameplates design

Chester International Links Association News

Walled Towns Friendship Circle Newsletter

Park and Ride service details

Ragwort - Advisory Information

Ecosert Project

Northern Marches Leader+ Project

(c) Cheshire County Council. Councillor Gartland said the council had been grateful to County Councillor Fitton and County Council officers for their continued support and co-operation.

The council had been represented at the annual Town and Parish Councils conference.

Disquiet had been expressed as to the value of the County Council's consultation on its new political structures.

The council had been represented at a budget consultation meeting.

Concern had been expressed at the ceasing of the WRVS meals on wheels service operated on behalf of social services.

County Council reports and other documents not previously referred to which had been received by the council during the year for consultation or information had included:

Draft economic development statement

Chester Matters

Cheshire Environment

Community consultation Strategy

Cycling Festival

Cheshire and Chester Archives and Local Studies Newsletter

Statement of Accounts 1999/2000

Cheshire Economic Alliance Newsletter

LA 21 3rd annual report

Quality of Life survey

Travelwise choices

Engineering Service best value review

Waste Management best value review

Road Safety Matters

Cheshire directory of economic information sources 2000

(d) Cheshire Community Council. The council had congratulated Councillor Armitage on his election as vice-chairman of the rural transport partnership.

The council had been represented at a seminar on Village Design Statements and had been granted observed status to the project.

Reports and documents received for consideration had included:

Community News and views

Cheshire Cauldron

Village Appraisal briefing

Affordable Rural Housing briefing

LA 21 briefing

Village Design Statements briefing

Rural Life Conference

The council had responded to consultations on a proposed a model code of conduct for elected members.

Councillor Whitehouse reported the parish had again entered the Cheshire Best Kept Village competition and clean sweep campaigns had been held monthly from April to September with the help of the City Council which had provided collection sacks and litter pickers.

The council had been disappointed at the outcome. Although marks were no worse than average, the parish did not succeed in its class. There were a number of aspects which needed to be improved and given an increase in the proportion of marks to be allocated to community involvement, the council had withdrawn from the competition in 2001 to allow the position to be assessed.

The Clerk reported the council had considered the following health issues:

Chester and Ellesmere Port Community Health Council annual report

Proposals for the abolition of the Chester and the Ellesmere Port Community Health Council.

Councillor Whitehouse reported the council had continued in membership of the CPRE. Documents considered had included:

Chester District annual report

Cheshire branch annual report

CPRE Voice

Referring to policing, the Clerk reported the council had had frequent and valuable contact with PC Richard Tack who was responsible for Christleton ward and was part of a team based at the Mickle Trafford police house. A number of issues had been put to PC Tack during the year. An extremely successful public meeting had been held to promote Homewatch and to discuss local policing issues.

The council had monitored proposals for a centralised custody suite to serve West Cheshire and would oppose any application for the facility to be located within the Green Belt. This approach had the support of Mrs C M Russell MP and the City Council's Development Control Manager.

Policing reports received by the council during the year for consultation or information had included:

Cheshire Police Forum Agenda and Minutes

Cheshire Police Authority annual report

Cheshire Police annual report

Cheshire Policing Plan 2000/01

Policing Standards 2000/01

Lay visiting scheme

Local policing objectives

Councillor Fisher reported the council have been consulted on the Cheshire Fire Brigade draft performance plan 2000/01.

Other documents received had included:

Access to information scheme

Cheshire Fire Authority annual report 1999/2000

Cheshire Fire Brigade annual report 1999/2000

Community Safety Strategy

Following the conclusion of the council's annual reports, the chairman invited comments from members of the public. Mrs Fisher expressed the view that the Annual Parish Meeting should be held in the council's normal venue and that it should have been possible for the council to arrange a meeting in the Village Hall. Councillor Armitage agreed the date of the Annual Parish Meeting should be varied to enable this to be done. The Chairman gave an assurance that the matter would be taken into account when the date for the annual parish meeting in 2002 was set.