

**Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of Clare held in Clare Town Hall, Clare
on 10 May 2017 at 7pm**

Present: Cllrs. Paul Bishop (Chair), Margaret Godwin, Phil Gryce, Steve Kimminau, Gayle Mallows, Loveday Perceval-Maxwell, Robin Stone, Bob Verguson, Claire Ebeling (Town Clerk)
County Councillor Mary Evans, Borough Councillor Alaric Pugh and 75 parishioners

1. **Apologies** – Cllr. Chris Marchant

Cllr. Bishop welcomed all.

2. **Minutes of previous Annual Parish Meeting held on 11 May 2016**

The minutes were proposed as correct, seconded and agreed unanimously.

3. **Matters arising from minutes of the previous meeting**

None.

4. **Town Council Chairman's report – Cllr Paul Bishop**

Cllr. Bishop referred to the Annual Report which had been delivered to all Clare residents the previous week. Cllr. Bishop expressed thanks to Councillors,

Cllr. Bishop also wished to thank the Clerk, the RFO, Street Wardens, and Cemetery Officer for their contributions this year and to County Councillor Mary Evans and Borough Councillor Alaric Pugh for their excellent support and guidance.

Cllr. Bishop referred to displays in the hall provided by Land Charter Homes relating to the proposed development in Cavendish Road. He explained that the Town Council and the Clare Society (both statutory consultees) had recently met with the developers to discuss their initial plans and hoped to work closely with them and be instrumental in achieving a suitable infrastructure to cope with the increased traffic etc.

A parishioner asked at what stage the development on Cavendish Road is at and what are the views of the council. Cllr. Bishop responded that the council has not formed a view because there has not yet been a formal planning application, however the Town Council has had pre-application meetings with the developers in order to raise their awareness of potential concerns about highways matters and to ensure an ongoing dialogue.

5. **Presentation of results of the Parish Survey – Cllr. Gayle Mallows**

Cllr. Mallows explained the background to the Community Plan: In 2010, a Community Survey was carried out to collect the views of Clare's residents on a range of areas affecting our community including shops and services, education, housing, leisure, traffic, the environment and sustainability. The results were analysed and a Community Plan was established to investigate issues arising from the survey. These in turn led to the creation of a Town Council Action Plan 2012 to 2016. This was seen as a means by which the council could be proactive, rather than reactive, in determining and addressing the key priorities of parishioners. A full appraisal of that Development Plan can be found at www.clare-suffolk.co.uk

Very few communities carry out such in-depth surveys or produce such strong action plans. Therefore, the Clare Community Plan and subsequent documents have been held in high regard, for example by the Chief Planning Inspector and borough council officers.

Cllr. Mallows reported that the Town Council instigated another survey and plan because the town has moved on in the last 6 years and some priorities have changed; there are new challenges due to national and regional legislation, the change in the economy, the pressure on local services and the need to maintain the essence, vitality and sustainability of Clare whilst changes happen across the region that might impact the town.

Having completed the Action Plan for 2012 to 2016, the Town Council wanted to have a clear picture of parishioners' current views. Survey forms were delivered to every house and business in Clare. The town

was divided into areas so that councillors could collect the forms and most councillors made three return visits, if needed. The information was then analysed and councillors met to discuss the findings and draw up an action plan. These have now formed the basis of a new Town Council Action Plan for 2017 to 2021. The full survey report and the Town Council Action Plan 2017 to 2021 have been published on www.clare-suffolk.co.uk. They are also available at the Library in standard and large print versions.

Cllr. Mallows summarised what has changed since 2010:

- The population has grown with a new housing development on Stoke Road and an additional development planned for Cavendish Road. The successful addition of 11 Housing Association properties at Aragon Court was sponsored by the Town Council.
- Whilst some shops have closed, others have taken their place and we now have over 100 businesses in Clare.
- A new, highly respected secondary school, our primary school continues to flourish and Clare Bears Pre-School gives children a great start to their school career.
- Community spirit has grown as hard working organisations have run some fantastic events, including special times when the whole town came together to celebrate Christmas, the Queen's Jubilee and Magna Carta. A recent and very welcome addition to our community organisations has been the re-establishment of the Clare Community Association.
- Perhaps the most important change for the town has been the transfer of ownership of the Clare Castle Country Park from Suffolk County Council to the Town Council and therefore the people of Clare. This took an immense amount of work by the councillors involved and that work continues today, as the Trustees and volunteers improve and restore the buildings and the green spaces. We thank all involved for their dedication, their energies, their skills and their devotion to this project.

Cllr. Mallows summarised the recent Clare Survey:

- 652 parishioners responded, compared to 932 parishioners in the 2010 survey. 52% were aged 65 years or over, 37% were aged 40 – 64 years and 11% were aged 18-39. This shows a swing of about 8% from the middle to the older age group.
- An additional 119 children live in the households. Of these 38% were aged 12-17 years old, 46% were aged 5-11 years, 16% were aged 0-4 years.
- The responses to the questions asked were collated and action points were put together based on the results:

Questions to young people: Action Point

- to share findings with local organisations to see if requested activities might be incorporated in their plans.

Housing and Development: Action Points

- To investigate establishing a 'Town Master Plan' or 'Neighbourhood Plan' so that Clare's priorities carry greater weight at borough and regional level.
- To lobby for more smaller, low cost and housing association properties for people with links to Clare.

Businesses, Shops and Services: Action Points

- to help developing businesses by working with the New Anglia Growth Hub
- to explore the possibility of expanding work experience for young people
- to lobby to maintain essential services
- to support the development of markets
- to encourage footfall through attracting tourists to Clare
- to improve parking

Tourism: Action Points

- to promote the 'Clare Brand'
- to maintain a high quality website and advertising
- to 'dress' the town e.g. with hanging baskets.

- to make the most of Wool Town initiatives

The Community: Action Point

- To continue to use start-up funding as a mechanism to support local charitable organisations running local events.

Education: Action Points

- to support local schools with their travel plans
- to encourage the establishment of workshops linking providers, locations and times and advertising courses on www.clare-suffolk.co.uk

Leisure, Sport and Footpaths: Action Points

- to use the website to ‘signpost’ activities currently running in Clare
- to encourage the development of activities through discussions with groups and organisations
- to support the Trustees of CCCP in their projects to create activities, especially through their Lottery Bid.

Traffic and Accessibility: Action Points

- To work with SCC and SEBC to improve parking.
- To work with other parishes to lobby for the reduction of HGVs.
- To use Speed Watch and Vehicle Activated Signs to reduce speeding.
- To encourage business owners to improve access.
- To produce ‘Pavements for People’ posters.

Police and Crime Prevention: Action Points:

- to take advice from the police on the benefits of neighbourhood watch and CCTV.
- to monitor footpaths for trip hazards

Communication: Action Point

- To continue to lobby for improved broadband.

6 Annual presentation of Clare Town Council accounts – Maureen Smith, Responsible Finance Officer

A written income and expenditure statement for year ending 31 March 2016 and a balance sheet were circulated. The final accounts were approved. (Copies are available from the Clerk’s office and are published on the Town Council website and in the Annual Report).

The RFO reported that the last financial year saw yet another reduction in the direct grants received from St Edmundsbury Council and the year 2016/17 was the final year. Next year the grants will no longer be payable.

The RFO thanked the local organisations who apply directly to the Town Council for precept funding for their efforts to reduce their requests, ultimately meaning no increase again to the part of the Council Tax relating to Clare.

The RFO also thanked the volunteers who form the Trusts of the Town Council Assets (CHOC, CPFA and the Country Park) for their professionalism and enthusiasm.

Looking forward to the year ahead, the RFO reported that the Town Council hopes that efforts during the summer will bring the parishioners and visitors out into the town. She referred to the success of Clare Community Association’s many events last year and its plans for another fantastic “Party in the Park” on 1st July. She reported that the Town Council plans to dress the town with hanging baskets for the summer.

Cllr. Godwin acknowledged that the local organisations who apply directly to the Town Council for precept funding did a wonderful job again last year in working with the Town Council to reduce their requests. This year’s Council Tax reflects that with a small 0.2% decrease in the part of the bill relating to Clare.

7. **County Councillor's report**

Cllr. Mary Evans presented her report as follows:

Locally, speeding traffic is still a problem. I have been working with the town council to tackle this. We have made an application to highways to have the 30mph on Stoke Road extended and in turn to push the 40mph buffer further out.

The flashing sign we now have in the town collects traffic speed data which we share with the police to get them to come out and run speed traps. To date the data hasn't been shared – both the local police inspector and the new head of the speed enforcement teams are keen to be involved with parishes on speeding so I hope we will get that data shared. I will be meeting the lead officers in speed enforcement this week so we can decide how best to share information.

In my past reports to you I have spoken about my concerns regarding two key county council services – education and highways and the need for us to perform better. I am pleased to report there has been progress over the last 12 months.

Education

Suffolk is now ranked in the top half of all authorities for progress at GCSE level, at 55th out of 151. This is a real improvement since 2014 when Suffolk was ranked 119th for English progress and 108th for maths.

The new assessment called “Progress 8” measures the progress made by all students across a wider range of subjects than previously and is a more comprehensive and accurate measure of progress made by pupils. We are delighted to see that Suffolk pupils have made more progress than the national average last year.

Nearly 90% of the county's schools are rated by OFSTED as good or outstanding and our aim is for all our schools to be at this high level.

At higher level education, the University of Suffolk has now been granted full university status.

However, I do have concerns about funding. The fairer funding formula announced by the Government just before Christmas seemed to be the answer to our long running campaigning in Suffolk for a better deal for rural schools. But it is not – or not yet: We are lobbying government and our MPs.

In a bid to soften the blow on authorities that would lose funding, the increases to those of us set to gain have been limited so Suffolk will benefit by a mere 2.7% and this at a time when costs are going up. To put it another way, before funding reform Suffolk schools were funded at 94% of the average rate, after funding reform they will be funded at 96%, good progress but by no means enough. By contrast Hackney will be funded at 138% of the average - after funding reform. We are calling for a radical re-think of how schools are funded.

I also have serious concerns regarding the funding for early years – which I and others have taken up with our MPs. The Government is extending free nursery entitlement for 3 and 4 years olds from 15 to 30 hours a week in September but I don't think the nurseries and pre-schools are being offered a viable hourly rate. I hope we can put enough pressure on our MPs to get this changed.

Highways

It may not always seem like it – but progress has been made. But I concede it is way too little progress. In my role as chairman of the SCC scrutiny committee I have asked the procurement team to ensure they do learn the necessary lessons from the highways contract.

The head of highways is reforming the service – which is taking too long but is now near completion. The aim is to have a true county wide universal highways service. At the moment there are odd inconsistencies and disparities between the approach say in West Suffolk and on the coast and between Ipswich and Mid-Suffolk.

We are setting up specialist teams to look after key areas of work – drainage, road surfacing and lining etc.

The drainage team is operating and I have been impressed by what they have achieved already in this area. For starters, they have assessed and prioritised the catalogue of outstanding work and, where practical, are

linking in drainage and re-surfacing work. They are going to conduct a thorough overhaul of the Nethergate Street/Ashen Lane junction this summer and are looking at the drainage problems around Callis Street especially around the Cock.

Devolution

As you may recall much time was spent last year on the Government's idea to devolve powers and money to a joint Suffolk/Norfolk and possibly Cambridgeshire authority – with an elected Mayor. In the end the scheme failed as too many of the Norfolk councils objected.

I fully expect some sort of new proposal to be made post the elections. I suspect we will be encouraged to have some sort of unitary authority – whether a whole Suffolk council or a return to the East and West Suffolk councils with which I grew up, I don't know. I think it is worth discussing as it could be more effective and more efficient. I think we could do as good if not a better job with fewer councillors and also with fewer officials. There are odd divisions in what SCC does and the district councils such as St Eds undertake. For example: SCC is responsible for place name signs and St Eds for road and street name plates. SCC keeps roads cleared while ST Eds sweeps pavements. While St Eds collects rubbish from your wheelie bins; it is the county that disposes of it. I believe it would make more sense in these examples if the tasks were done by one set of staff and not two.

On a personal note, it is an honour and privilege to have been re-elected as your county councillor. At the count, Watching my votes piling up was frankly terribly exciting and – enormously humbling. I appreciate the trust that has been put in my and I will do my utmost to serve the people and 24 communities of the Clare division to the best of my ability.

8. Borough Councillor's report

Cllr. Alaric Pugh referred to Cllr. Evans comments on devolution and explained the complication of different authorities with some different and some overlapping responsibilities. He reported that St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Suffolk County Council will work much more closely in the future and are currently looking at ways of working more effectively together and he is confident that things will be done in a more joined up way. He explicated that changes in technology can be harnessed to help things work more effectively both on a large and small scale; some every day mundane and others longer term and more complex.

Cllr. Pugh affirmed his pride in being a voice for Clare, confirming this as his primary function within his role as Borough Councillor. He added that he is pleased to work closely with the Town Council as part of the role. He referred to the tasks he had undertaken today as examples of the wide ranging issues he can be involved in on a daily basis: planning applications; meeting with the police regarding anti-social behaviour; meeting with the locality officer regarding funding; a meeting with a potential residents' association; discussions on future infrastructure needs.

Cllr. Pugh reported that the replacement for Vision 2031 is taking shape and that the intention is that it will not be planning led, but with very much be a locality plan and St Edmundsbury as the planning authority is committed to ensuring that the community is involved. Cllr. Pugh himself stated his commitment to ensuring the voices of Clare are amplified.

9. Update on Clare Castle Country Park – Geoffrey Bray

Mr Bray presented a report as follows:

PUBLIC CONCERNS: Prior to taking over the Park two of the major concerns that were expressed were: Firstly, would the transfer of the Park to Clare result in the Town Council having to support it financially?

I was confident we could run the park without a financial subsidy from the Town Council and this has so far proved to be the case. In the year just ended our figures currently indicate a surplus of around £13,000.

Secondly, would the need, included in our original Business Plan, to raise over £10,000 a year from running money raising events make the raising of money from existing groups in the town more difficult?

In our first two years of operating we have run money-raising events. However bearing in mind the

concerns expressed about siphoning off money from events other groups run our aim has been to reach a stage where that source of income is no longer required. I am pleased to say that the financial situation means that in the coming year we will not be running such events.

Achievements in the year

1. A financial surplus of c£13,000
2. Obtained non HLF grants of £38,000
3. Been awarded an HLF grant in excess of £200,000
4. Apart from general on-going maintenance of what we call the ‘green spaces’ some major projects have been carried out. These have included clearing the motte to bring it back more to its historical nature, the major tree-work on the south side of the moat and opening the café.
5. Major tree-felling and pollarding was also carried out in many areas of the Park in recent months in order to deal with potentially dangerous trees.
6. While Facebook is not everyone’s means of getting information we have been posting regular updates on what we are planning, what we have done and why we are doing it. While this is a useful method of communicating it does take time but we felt it was necessary if only to counter some of the wild speculation and sometimes totally false and untrue rubbish that appears on Facebook sites that others manage.
7. Have maintained our active level of volunteers.
8. Developed six circular walks - Derek Blake will tell about this later.

Plans for the coming year

Generally: We will continue to maintain and improve the Park within the resources we currently have available. A specific non HLF project will be to improve the pay area and playground which will start after the Party in the Park and be completed by the autumn.

HLF: The ‘Development Phase’ of our HLF project will of course take up a significant amount of time.

We have

- appointed a part-time Project Manager to help us manage this phase.
- from 24 expressions of interest we interviewed four architectural practices and have appointed NRAP from Cambridge to develop plans for the CPC, the station platforms and possibly something at the top of the motte.
- ‘Activity and Interpretation’ consultants (Julia Holberry Associates) have been appointed. They are in the middle of a consultation exercise which involves discussions with a wide range of different groups to find out what they would want from the project. At same time they are carrying out a survey that is open to everyone. If you haven’t completed this survey please do so – details are on our website and hard copies will shortly be available too.
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust are carrying out a comprehensive ecological survey of the whole park which will include advice on the de-silting of the moat/ponds.
- The HLF require a detailed Conservation and Management Plan and a Management & Maintenance Plan and consultants have been appointed to help us develop these.
- At the ‘Party in the Park’ on 1st July, and at the Priory craft fair the following week-end, there will be displays of what is being proposed for key aspects of the HLF project. Anyone will be free to discuss and comment on the proposals prior to them being finalised and included in our Phase Two HLF grant application in November. If we are successful with that application we could obtain funds of over £1.5 million to implement the plans.

Unacceptable behaviour: I referred earlier to the untrue rubbish that is sometimes circulated. A recent email to Julia Holberry Associates, one of our key HLF consultants, is a particularly unacceptable example. It included a number of factually untrue statements. I will quote one of the most blatant:

“We wish you to be aware that the current park trustees are aiming to restrict access to your survey to only those who support their views”.

This email was from a Town Councillor, Stephen Kimminau, who had only a day or so earlier attended an Ancient House Museum event, at which Derek Blake, a Trustee of the Park, had spoken. Derek had gone out of his way to say how important it was for as many people as possible to be involved in the consultation process. ‘Fake news’ and ‘Alternative facts’ seem to be the terms that are now used for disseminating

blatantly untrue information – but to recklessly send such false information I think is inexcusable. It not only risked damaging a relationship with a key consultant but could also raise questions about our intentions and integrity with the Heritage Lottery Fund.

This sort of behaviour should be shown up for what it is:

- It is underhand because there was no attempt to check the facts
- It was untrue as the facts are the opposite of what was stated in the email, and
- It could potentially cause serious damage to the town as it could put at risk the additional £1.5m grant we need to get from the HLF at the end of this year to carry out the plans to improve the Park.

Finally, I would like to thank all our volunteers and my fellow trustees for all the time they have put in and the support they have given me. The HLF requires the Trust to devote time to the HLF project and requires us to keep time sheets. One Trustee (and it was not me) in spent 91 hours in one month alone on the HLF project.

I would like to remind you of two principles the Trustees always bear in mind :

1. While we want to make the Park more interesting and attractive we want to retain it as a real country park
2. Other people can run events in the Park but we need to ensure events do not conflict with basic ethos of the Park and the wishes of most people that the Park should be a tranquil area which for most of the time can be peacefully enjoyed.

Overall we receive a lot of encouragement and support. If there are things we are planning to do, or have done, that people don't like, or there are things we have **not done** that they think we should have done, we would ask them to get in touch with us direct. We might not always agree with what they want, or what they want may prove impractical to do, but those who contact us will get a considered reply. This I believe is the most constructive way of handling differences of opinion about the Park which many people feel so passionately about for so many different reasons.

9. **Presentation on Walkers are Welcome from Claire Parker: Green Access Manager, Suffolk County Council**

Derek Blake, Chair of the Clare Walks Group reported that the group was formed in early summer 2016 following the Country Park's successful bid to Suffolk Community Foundation for funding to produce leaflets for circular walks from the Park. The Group comprises 11 people from across the community in Clare, all of whom have a strong interest in walking (including the Chairman of Sudbury Ramblers, Keith Brown, who has provided invaluable advice.

The Group immediately set about deciding on suitable walks, walking them and producing all the information needed (mapping, directions, points of interest, photographs etc.). Following design and printing, 6 leaflets have been available since March this year detailing a variety of walks starting in the Country Park. The leaflets are downloadable from two websites (below) and hard copies may be obtained from Platform 1 and the Library.

www.clarecastlecountrypark.co.uk

www.clarewalks.co.uk

A summary leaflet is also available, which will go to tourist information centres. In addition, a large noticeboard map will be produced to be located in the Country Park.

Mr Blake reported that the group has gone on to instigate monthly Saturday morning walks from the car park, and these have proved very popular. The post-Christmas walk was enjoyed by 52 people and the most recent walk, to Houghton Hall, in March had 30. The walks will be varied this year by introducing some linear walks as well as the 6 circular walks, including the Bury to Clare and Magna Carta Walks. All are welcome.

The group is also part of the Suffolk Walking Festival (for which tickets sold out despite increasing the numbers, proving that there is real demand for walking in the area). The association brought the Clare Walks Group to the attention of Suffolk County Council who recommended they became part of *Walkers are Welcome* via the Green Access team at Suffolk County Council. Clare Town Council agreed at its meeting in November to apply to become a Walkers are Welcome Town and the Clare Walks Group are assisting with the Town's application.

Mr Blake introduced Claire Parker, Green Access Manager at Suffolk County Council.

Ms Parker thanked the town for welcoming her and explained that Walkers Are Welcome is a national initiative that accredits towns that meet 6 key criteria, and is designed both to attract walkers and boost the Town's economy.

With over 3500 miles of public footpaths, bridleways and byways, many with the most stunning and uplifting countryside views, Suffolk County Council feels that Suffolk has something to shout about and is supporting a number of local towns and villages to become fully accredited Walkers are Welcome destinations.

The Walkers are Welcome scheme is a community led initiative which aims to encourage local communities to:

- Be attractive destinations for walkers, with top quality information
- Offer local people and visitors excellent walking opportunities
- Ensure footpaths and facilities are maintained, improved & well signposted
- Contribute to local tourism plans & regeneration
- Promote the health benefits of walking and increase participation

To find out more about the scheme, further information can be found at walkersarewelcome.org.uk

There were no further questions and the meeting closed at 8.50pm.

DRAFT