

Little Hadham Parish Council

Minutes of the sixth meeting of the Little Hadham Parish Council (2007 – 2011 Session) held on Monday 5th November 2007 at 8:00 p.m. in the Village Hall, Little Hadham.

Present: **Mr M Fairchild** **Chairman**
 Mr N Darken)
 Mr A Morris)
 Mrs C Piccolo) **Councillors**
 Mr J Purvis)
 Mr T Skidmore)
 Mr G Williamson)

Mr B Evans – Clerk, and **40** members of the public including County Cllr Mrs Mary Bayes.

6.1 Absent – None.

6.2 Declarations of interest None.

6.3 Possible locations for gypsy and traveller sites.

The Chairman outlined the current situation – see Appendix 1.

Public session. The meeting was suspended at 8:30 to allow members of the public to ask questions and make comments on agenda items.

Cllr Mrs Bayes said that the Council was right to register its objections to the gypsy and traveller sites now. She would be sending letters of objection. She said that the A120 was already at full capacity and Highways would object to any increase in traffic. Cllr Mrs Bayes said that she knew of other, more suitable sites.

A resident suggested that the Council consult the residents of Cottenham who had had problems with a site. Cllr Mrs Bayes said that many sites were planned for Essex and Cambridgeshire.

A resident asked who would be responsible for the hygiene of the site. The Chairman said that, as he understood it, the normal laws on public health would apply.

A resident asked if the local services could cope with 51 extra residents. The Chairman said the Council would find out.

A resident was concerned that the entrance to Millfield Lane was near the top of a blind summit on the A120.

A resident said EHC might consider that a bypass would solve the traffic problems. The Chairman said the bypass was at least ten years away.

A resident asked about land drainage – the drains at Green Street could not cope now and the Environment Agency say that there is no money for improvements.

A resident asked why the human rights of the gypsies and travellers appeared to have precedent over the rights of others. The Chairman said that gypsies and travellers had been identified as an ethnic minority. The resident said that the East of England Regional Assembly was not elected. The Chairman said that it was effectively a branch of government.

A resident asked if the site was for gypsies and travellers already in the county and was there any evidence that they wanted to use a site here.

The meeting reopened at 8:50

6.4 Possible locations for gypsy and traveller sites.

The Chairman presented a draft letter to EHC and EERA – the letter had been circulated to councillors. See Appendix 2.

Cllr darken asked if the letter mentioned a possible effect on the crime rate. The Chairman said that it did not but it might be a topic for later correspondence. Cllr Morris though there could be more mention of traffic problems. The Chairman proposed that the letter be sent as expressing the Council's views. Agreed.

The meeting closed at 9:00 and reopened at 9:20 following the Planning Committee meeting.

6.5 Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Monday 1st October 2007 having been previously circulated were agreed as accurate. Proposed by Cllr Morris and seconded by Cllr Darken.

6.6 Matters arising from the Council minutes

6.6.1 Developments at Church End Farm and the former Hadham Water site.

Cllr Skidmore said that he had had a meeting with Ms Alison Young of the planning office, together with Cllr Mrs Piccolo and the Clerk, to discuss the future of the site. Ms Young was not aware that the equipment from the water bottling plant had been sold. Ms Young was told of the Council's concerns about development at the site including increases in traffic and the advertising signs on the A120. She said that she would invite the owners of the site to a meeting to discuss their plans.

6.6.2 Consultation on reorganisation of the local health service. Cllr Skidmore said that the PCT had failed to distribute questionnaires to everyone in the parish – he had personally delivered twenty from local residents. Cllr Skidmore proposed that he attend the meeting in Welwyn at which the results of the questionnaire would be published. Agreed.

6.7 Road works

6.7.1 Road repairs. Cllr Morris said that the C15 was due to be patched. It would later be resurfaced. He reported that the A120 pavement from Hadham Hall to the Tesco roundabout had been cleared making walking and cycling safer and more pleasant. The Council was still waiting for Herts Highways to replace the noticeboard by the Nag's Head.

6.7.2 Petition to HCC Roads and Transportation Panel concerning traffic calming measures for the Cradle End, Bury Green, Ford Hill, Chapel Lane and Westland Green roads.

Cllr Morris said that he and Cllr Williamson had presented the petition to the joint highways panel. Cllr Mrs Bayes had also spoken in favour of the petition that included letters from local residents describing near accidents on the roads. Council officials would prepare a report for consideration at the next meeting of the panel in January 2008. Cllr Skidmore said that he would like to register the Council's thanks to Cllrs Morris and Williamson for their efforts. Agreed. From the floor Cllr Mrs Bayes said that the Council had made a good case and she had been in consultation with officers on the matter. She was aware that the roads were classed as low priority for safety measures but she was attempting to change the policy that resulted in this classification.

6.8 Village Hall playground

6.8.1 Hedge cutting for the two playgrounds. Cllr Williamson said that quotes were being obtained for cutting the hedges at the two playgrounds. This would include cutting a 50m length of the village hall playground to a height of about 1.2m. Cllr Williamson proposed that the Clerk should accept the lowest quote. Agreed.

6.8.2 Further works in the village hall playground. Cllr Williamson said that a number of proposals had been made for the area beyond the new playground including a tarmaced area under the basketball net and a five-a-side soccer pitch and/or a tennis court. Any money the Council spent on the playground before March 2008 would be doubled by an EHC Community Grant. He thought that the Council should consult local people on their views and proposed that a questionnaire should be placed in the Newsletter. Agreed.

- 6.9 Fair trade.** Cllr Morris described the workings of the Fair Trade scheme that ensured that farmers were paid a reliable, fair price for their produce. The idea was to try to raise awareness of the scheme in the parish. Cllr Morris agreed to prepare a paper giving details of how the scheme would affect the parish and the Council.
- 6.10 Parish plan** The Chairman said that he was standing down as chairman of the Parish Plan Group – he was to be replaced by Mr Mike Smith – but would remain a committee member. The group was looking at possible events and at the need to review the strategy behind the plan. Many of the plan’s original objectives had been met.
- 6.11 Stansted Airport.** The Chairman said that the enquiry into expansion using the existing runway was complete and the government would give its decision early in 2008. BAA was expected to submit plans for a second runway before the decision. The Chairman said that local support was essential for success in fighting the plans. He noted that a report on the effects of climate change had shown that airports increase the blood pressure of local people.
- 6.12 Chairman’s report.**
- 6.12.1 Consideration of the best use of surplus funds in the budget for this financial year.** The Clerk said that the Council would have a surplus of about £4,500 at the end of the financial year. This included £2,225 insurance paid for damage to the war memorial. It was agreed to consider how best to use the money following the results of the Newsletter questionnaire.
- 6.12.2 Precept for 2008/09** The Chairman said that the Council’s running costs had increased – especially for insurance and grass cutting – and the Council would have to consider a significant increase to the precept at the December meeting. The Clerk would circulate a draft budget to councillors.
- 6.12.3 Request for a donation from the East Herts Citizens’ Advice Service.** The Chairman proposed that a decision be deferred to allow him to find out what EHC was doing. Agreed.
- 6.12.4 Request for a donation for SSE.** The Chairman declared a prejudicial interest as he was on the committee of the SSE. He left the meeting while the matter was discussed. Cllr Morris said that SSE represented the community on airport expansion. If SSE did not exist there would be no one to hold BAA to account. He proposed that the Council made a donation of £100 to SSE. Agreed.
- 6.12.5 Consultation on changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England.** The Chairman said that the deadline had been moved to mid-December and he would prepare a response for the next meeting.
- 6.12.6 Donation to Little Hadham Primary School.** Cllr Morris proposed: The Council to make a donation of £600 to Little Hadham School – £300 delayed payment for 2006/07 and £300 for 2007/08. Agreed. The Clerk said that he had received a letter from the school proposing that the money be spent on a school visit to the Tutankhamen Exhibition at the Dome in London.
- 6.13 Democratic 10 minutes**
The meeting closed at 9:50 p.m.
 A resident asked about a fighting fund for resisting a gypsy and traveller site. The Chairman said that a judgement would have to be made about the best strategy. The Council would hear in January 2008 which sites were to be recommended.
 A resident said that traffic using the Church End site were supposed to use the farm track to the Albury Road and not Church End Lane. However the owners claimed there was not enough room for lorries to turn. The resident thought that, as it was their land, the owners could widen the entrance. Another resident said that people attending the church were being told that they could not park in Church End Lane. If they were going to services like funerals were not in a position to argue. The Chairman said

parking was not prohibited in the lane.

The meeting reopened at 9:55 p.m.

6.14 Clerk's Report

6.14.1 Financial statement

Period ending 5th November 2007

Barclay's Bank C/Acc			£11,513.14
High Rate BP Acc			£5.06
BP Acc			£167.52
Petty cash			£3.86
Total			£11,689.58

Included above

Fulcher & Davies	War memorial flowers		£2.00
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Uncleared cheque

CPRE			£27.00
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To be approved for payment

Mr B Evans	P/Clerk - (Oct)	£318.65	
	Exp (Oct)	£21.91	
	Float	£50.00	£390.56
Mrs K Green	Grass bins (Oct)	£41.85	
	Petrol	£4.75	£46.60
Miss A Windmill	Litter picking (Oct)		£93.65
Little Hadham PCC	Graveyard upkeep		£250.00
Mokut Ltd	2 cuts sept 1 cut Oct		£348.98
HAPTC	Training course		£25.00
Royal British Legion	Remembrance Sunday wreath		£25.00
Little Hadham Village Hall	Extra meetings		£31.38
Total payments			£1,211.17

Total in all accounts and petty cash after payment of this month's bills £10,501.41

6.14.2 Resolved to accept payment of accounts. Agreed.

6.14.3 Resolved to accept accuracy of financial statement. Proposed Cllr Mrs Piccolo, seconded Cllr Williamson. Agreed.

6.14.4 The Clerk said that the budget and precept for 2008/09 would have to be decided at the December meeting.

6.15 Planning matters. The transactions of the Planning Committee were noted.

Correspondence. The Clerk distributed items of correspondence to relevant councillors

Herts Assoc Local History magazine	CP
CVS Broxbourne & E. Herts leaflet on voluntary groups	CP
NALC magazine	MF
NALC guidance on local polls	MF
CMS Newsletter	JP
SSE Newsletter	MF
Biffaward annual report	MF
Herts Building Preservation Trust newsletter	JP
CDA for Herts Newsletter and annual review	MF
HAPTC newsletter	AM/MFMF

6.16 Any other business.

6.16.1 Cllr Williamson asked if the Council was in agreement that he join the Village Hall Management Committee. Agreed. The Chairman asked that Cllr Williamson raise the matters of the village hall gateway and ways of raising funding.

6.17 Date of the next meeting Monday 5th November 2007. [Subsequently changed to Tuesday 6th December 2007]

6.18 The Chairman closed the meeting to the Public and the Press at 10:05 p.m.

Appendix 1

The Chairman's presentation on: Possible locations for gypsy and traveller sites.

The Chairman said the Council had received information from many sources including: the report by consultants Scott Wilson identifying the sites; a meeting with owners of the land identified as potential sites; a meeting with Romehold, whose housing development at BG would be affected; comments from Cllr Mike Carver (the lead member on the EHC committee considering the issue), and Cllr Mike Tindale, Little Hadham rep; the views of local residents and a letter from Oliver Heald MP opposing the potential sites.

The Chairman said the Council believed it should oppose the possibility of a site for gypsies and travellers in Little Hadham ahead of the public consultation in the spring of next year. One reason for taking a firm stand now is that apart from the immediate threat, there will be a continuing need for sites in the future. A new so-called 'small' site could be expanded. EHC has gone out of its way in its Q&A to reassure people that gypsies and travellers were little different from the settled community. The extent to which they have promoted this view is likely to provoke scepticism. However, it will be important for the Council to be seen to respond in a fair and responsible way, relying on factual information and logical argument and at all times acting in the best interests of its own parish while recognising the needs of the wider community. This was the best way to respond to accusations of nymbyism.

East Herts Council, in conjunction with five other councils has published a report identifying potential sites for gypsies and travellers in Northern and Eastern Hertfordshire. Two of the 21 potential sites are in the parish of Little Hadham. Local authorities are obliged under the Housing Act to find accommodation for gypsies and travellers. Independent research concluded that there were insufficient legal and permanent sites and predicted that a total of 45 more permanent and transit pitches would be needed in North and East Herts over the next five years. Beyond 2011, the need was for around 15-20 additional pitches every five years over the next 25 years. EHC says that to put this into context, looking at housing needs, it may have to make provision for up to 12,000 additional new homes up to 2021 in East Herts (excluding Harlow North). The sites, once chosen, would be included in the Local Plan. The Scott Wilson report is a continuation of a consultation begun earlier this year by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA), which identified the need for 1,220 additional pitches in the East of England by 2011.

In response to that, EHC said it preferred expanding existing sites rather than having a number of sites allocated to each district.

The Chairman said the criteria used to select sites included: excluding existing residential areas and employment sites and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and registered parks and gardens; sites should be of an appropriate size in order to respect the scale of the nearest settled community; a buffer (distance, fence/wall, vegetation, topography, road or railway track) should exist between new sites and housing areas; access to a site should not cause traffic hazards; landscaping should be used to make sites more in character with area; land should be relatively level; transit sites would need to be close to main road corridors such as A1(M), A10, A505, A414 (A120 not mentioned); areas were given a preference score of '1' or '2' based on technical judgement, '1' being the most preferable; sites had to be within a 'reasonable' distance of services such as primary and secondary schools (1 km), doctors (1km), and public transport (500 metres); Green Belt areas should be avoided wherever possible.

Guidelines recommend that the average site size should be between 10 and 15 pitches. On average, a site of 15 pitches would involve 26 caravans and 51 people and would be approximately 0.3 hectares in size.

All areas of land identified as potential sites in North and East Herts are privately owned. EHC has compulsory purchase powers to bring land forward to meet identified development needs; 'however there are no plans to do so at this stage,' the report states.

The Chairman said the two potential sites in Little Hadham are: Millfield Lane West, Church End. This is land farmed by Mr and Mrs David Mardell; Millfield Lane East, Church End. This is land farmed by Mr M Harvey.

The Chairman noted that: both potential sites comprise good quality agricultural land; one abuts the landowners' home (Stonehouse Farm); the site at Stonehouse Farm is described as 'relatively flat', whereas the ground slopes quite steeply. This indicates that a field visit may not have been made to at least one of the sites as was supposed to happen.

The Chairman detailed the potential effects of a site on the local community. The report considered a number of potential impacts and states that 'the provision of up to 15 pitches ... is unlikely to place much strain on local infrastructure'. On funding, sites could be provided and funded by the gypsy and traveller community; rented from Herts CC or a housing association, or provided by developers as part of larger market housing developments. On the potential impact on property values, EHC stresses that the report is an independent technical study carried out by consultants for the partnering authorities to consider and does not form part of any Council policy at this time. The suggested potential areas of search are not identified on the Council's Local Plan proposals map and will therefore not show on any Land Charge Searches'.

The Chairman listed some of the arguments against traveller sites in Little Hadham: close proximity to existing settlements in Green Street, Millfield Lane and housing developments at Bury Green resulting in loss of amenity and privacy; the two sites are, as far as can be established, in a Category 3 area where there is a presumption of no development, although they are in a Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt; additional traffic congestion and risk of accidents caused by vehicles exiting on to the A120; a gypsy/traveller site would detract from the rural aspect of this 'informal green belt' that separates Little Hadham from Bishop's Stortford – even with a 'buffer' it would become a scar on the landscape; if the land were acquired, almost certainly under a compulsory purchase order, it would take out of use several acres of good quality agricultural land, some of it used for food production; it would greatly reduce the value of the remaining agricultural land on the two farms to such an extent that they might cease to be commercially viable; it would hugely reduce the value of Stonehouse Farm and its land, which has been in the family for many years; it would be likely to render the land unusable through contamination if, at some time in the future, the site were abandoned and returned to agricultural use; it would further reduce the rural nature of Little Hadham and take it one further step towards urbanisation; it would be likely to have a negative effect on house prices generally in Little Hadham.

The Chairman noted that if a traveller site were to be allowed, the occupants would, as far as we are aware, become parishioners with the same rights as permanent residents.

The Chairman said that the Council was seeking further information including the likely impact on roads, water and sewage, the health centre and the village school, and what consultation has taken place with the traveller community. The Council may question the methodology of the consultants report and the selection criteria.

In opposing the possibility of a site in Little Hadham, the Parish Council already has the support of: the two landowning families concerned; home owners living nearby; Romehold Ltd; Cty Cllr Mary Bayes; Cllr Michael Tindale; Oliver Heald MP.

The Chairman explained what would happen next.

1. A public consultation on 'issues and options', would take place in spring 2008. EHC will not consult on the Scott Wilson report itself. The public would be able to comment on sites during the consultation in spring 2008 and in spring 2009. The consultation would include a sustainability appraisal.
2. EHC would consult on its 'preferred options' for sites, spring/summer 2009.
3. EHC would prepare a document for submission to the Secretary of State for examination by an independent inspector at a public examination.
4. Public examination.
5. Inspector's report with binding recommendations.

6. Adoption by EHC.

The Chairman said that in its discussion this evening, the council would: agree the wording of a letter to EHC lodging its objection to the possibility of a traveller site; consider other matters to be agreed at a future meeting including the need to set up a formal campaign structure with a professional adviser with legal/planning experience; estimate the costs of a formal campaign, including a professional adviser, which would be considerable and would require seeking donations from residents and local businesses; appoint a working group, and consider whether that should comprise parish councillors only and/or involve volunteer members of the community.

Appendix 2

Draft letter to EHC concerning possible sites for gypsies and travellers.

At its meeting on 5 November 2007, Little Hadham Parish Council expressed its opposition to the possibility that two sites in the parish have been identified as potential sites for gypsies and travellers.

While recognising that no decisions have been taken by the six authorities who commissioned the Scott Wilson report and that East Herts Council will not necessarily accept the report's suggestions, this Council wishes to lodge its objections prior to the public consultation next year.

We also wish to obtain clarification on aspects of the report before making a more detailed response. We will be writing to EHC at a later date with those questions.

In the meantime, please note that we feel the potential sites indicated would be totally inappropriate to accommodate gypsies and travellers. It would detract from a belt of unspoilt countryside between Little Hadham and Bishop's Stortford – where, incidentally, the planning authority recently turned down an application for a mobile radio mast because it would spoil the rural environment.

The site would be close to nearby settlements in Millfield Lane and in Green Street, Hadham Hall and new housing under construction in Bury Green.

If land was acquired for the site, it would remove a substantial area of privately-owned high quality agricultural land, some of which is used for food production. It would also reduce the viability of remaining farmland.

We note your assumption that because the potential sites do not appear in the local plan, they would not show up in a land search. The sites are now in the public domain and an estate agent or surveyor would be failing in their duty to a potential purchaser if the possibility – however remote – of a traveller site were not flagged up. There is therefore a risk of blight on property values in the area even during the consultation period.

The consequences for the landowners would be very serious. In one case, the potential site abuts the owners' farmhouse, the value of which may already have been affected.