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WINCHELSEA ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Saturday, 10th May 2008
New Hall, Winchelsea

1 Welcome

The meeting opened at 10:30am. The Chairman (Richard Comotto) welcomed residents and guests to the fifth Town Meeting.

2 Those in attendance

Anna & Trevor Aisher, Gillian Alexander, George & Mrs Bailey (National Trust), Anita & Simon Bevan, Hazel Bevis, Jane Brown, Donald & Peta Cameron-Clarke, Sue Chetwood (Bowls Club), John Chilton, Cllr Ben Chishick, Jenny Chishick, Don Clarke, Catherine Comotto, Cllr Richard Comotto (chairman), Richard Dallimore, Robert Davis, Sue & Tony Davis, Pat Dawes, Christine & Mike de Smith, Paul Dickinson, John Dunk, Carol Eldridge, Berni Fiddimore (Rye Town Council), John Freeman, John & Robbie Gooders, Angela Hill, Judith Hogg, PCSO Neil Holden, Sheila Horobin, Denis & June Hyson, Tony & Lis Jasper, Christine & Angus Johnson, Philip Kent, Sandra MacKenzie-Smith, Alan McKinna, Chris Mears, Peter & Theresa McMullin, Jo & Mike Melvin, David Merrifield, David Morris, Tina Neaves, Suzi Nicholson, Frank & Margaret Noah, Howard Norton, Joyce O'Ferrall, Jean & Martin Owen, David Page, Sally Palmer, Melvyn Pett, Alan & Jill Pope, John Priestley, Daphne Robertson, Anne Rumsey, Isabelle Sambrook, Denise Shemeld, Elizabeth Smith, John & Annie Spencer, David Stevens, Jane Sullivan, Cllr Mike Terry, Steve Turner, Wilma Van Stratum, Tony Wesson, Paul Williams, Brian Williamson (Rother District Council), Lawrence & Felicity Youlten, Mike Zysemil. (Total counted = 84).

3 Apologies for absence

Ellenor & Ted Handley, Sue & Tony Moore, Jacki Morris, Elizabeth Parsons, Deborah Terry.

4 Minutes of the last meeting

The Chairman explained that the minutes had been made available on the Winchelsea website since May last year and a copy was posted on a display board in the meeting. As no decisions are taken by the Annual Meeting, the minutes were for reference only. Amendments could therefore be made at any time.

There were no amendments to the minutes at this time.

5 Matters Arising

5.1 Accuracy of statements by Chairman

The Chairman noted that Mrs Chetwood disputed the accuracy of figures he had quoted from the Icklesham Parish Council budget for 2007/08, as well as the truth of a statement in response to a question that a parish councillor had sat on the Planning Committee after having been convicted of a breach of planning law. Copies of the 2007/08 budget and of the relevant Parish Council minutes,

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which demonstrated the accuracy of the Chairman's statements, had been posted on the Little Shop noticeboard straight after the meeting last year, and were posted on a display board in the meeting.

5.2 Invitations to clubs and societies to the Community Exhibition

Mrs Cameron-Clarke had claimed at last year's meeting that an invitation to the Community Exhibition had not been sent to the Second Wednesday Society. The Chairman noted that a member of the Society had subsequently confirmed that an invitation had in fact been received but not passed on.

5.3 Rubbish and recycling arrangements for Winchelsea

The Chairman explained that the citadel area of the town would shortly be moved to new refuse collection and recycling arrangements. The area would retain the weekly collection of residual rubbish in black bags, but that recyclables would have to be collected in "rip bags", one for paper, and one for cans and bottles. These were non-disposable waste bags that would be provided by the Council. Refuse collectors would rip them open to empty the contents into their collection vehicle. The scheme was expected to start in late June.

6 Neighbourhood Watch

The Chairman summarised the activity of the Winchelsea NBW over the year and analysed local crime patterns. He highlighted the continued concentration of crime along the A259(T), C298 and Rookery & Back Lanes, These were the roads with the main traffic problems, which confirmed the car-borne nature of much crime.

Attention was also drawn to an outbreak of graffiti last year. There are two main suspects. All the graffiti had been recorded and, if someone was caught, it would be possible to charge them for a large number of previous graffiti.

Some roads in the town still needed street co-ordinators. This included Tanyard Lane and the Strand, which were the roads most seriously exposed to crime.

Funding had been secured for a Help Card to be given to each household. The Card was intended to encourage residents to report crime and suspicious activity by explaining what to do when they see an incident which is or may be a crime. There will also be a list of useful local telephone numbers on the back of the Card, including those of the police and other emergency services, local councils, doctors and hospitals. The Help Card was designed by Winchelsea Neighbourhood Watch with the assistance of the local Neighbourhood Police Team and the Rother District Crime Reduction Officer. Funding had been raised from the Rother Community Safety Fund and the Parish Council.

Residents were alerted to the risk of opportunist thefts in the summer, thefts of metal and tools, and thefts of laptops from schools.

The Chairman noted the success of neighbourhood policing both in tackling crime and reassuring communities. He also welcomed the decision of the police to re-introduce a Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator for Rother.

Richard Comotto was re-elected as chief co-ordinator for Winchelsea Neighbourhood Watch.

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7 Local PCSO

Residents were introduced to PCSO Neil Holden, who has joined PCSO Lee Miles.

8 Proposal for a No Cold Calling Zone

The origin and purpose of NCCZ was explained. The meeting overwhelmingly supported the proposal, which will be put out for consultation to the whole community.

9 Winchelsea Speed Watch

The Chairman reported that Community Speed Watch was due to start in Winchelsea on 20th May. There were 39 volunteers, who were currently being trained. Funding had been raised from police grants and donations from residents. He stressed that the scheme was about dissuading drivers from speeding, not reducing traffic flow through the citadel and onto the A259.

The Chairman dismissed the accusation of vigilanteism. David Morris explained why he was participating. Although he did not live on a road directly affected by speeding, he was concerned at the impact on the town as a whole and noted the success of the scheme in Ringmer.

Mrs Cameron-Clarke asked why Community Speed Watch was not being deployed on the A259. The Chairman replied that the Highways Agency was responsible for the A259, as it was a trunk road, and would not permit anyone other than its agent to conduct speed surveys on such roads.

10 Winchelsea Emergency Plan

The Chairman reported that the Winchelsea Plan had been finalised and was about to be launched. He introduced the six Emergency Response Wardens: himself, Carol Eldridge, Denis Hyson, Philip Kent, Chris Mears and Howard Norton. Howard Norton is also a Flood Warden.

The Winchelsea Emergency Group would be circulating a Emergency Information card to each household describing what basic preparations could be made for a civil emergency, what to do in such an emergency, and the role of the Group. There would be a special version of the Card for Station Road, The Strand and Tanyard Lane, given that they faced a risk of flooding.

Brian Williamson, Assistant Emergency Planning Officer at Rother District Council, explained the national background to Emergency Plans and the role of local plans.

It was suggested that the Plan be tested. This was being considered.

11 Winchelsea Town Plan

The Chairman emphasized again the increasing importance being attached to Parish Plans by various levels of government. He summarized progress on behalf of the Steering Committee.

It was expected that the draft chapter on traffic and transport would be put before the Steering Committee during the summer and then put out to full public consultation.

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It was also hoped that the new Winchelsea Conservation Society would take ownership of and develop the Town Design Statement.

It was planned to hold special consultations with areas that feel themselves excluded from the town, starting, on 31st May, with Station Road, The Strand and Tanyard Lane.

14 Presentation by the Chairman of the Winchelsea Conservation Society

The Chairman of the newly-formed Conservation Society urged residents to join up.

15 Proposals to preserve the grass verges

The Chairman asked the meeting to consider possible solutions for two roads: Back Lane (east) and Rookery Lanes; and Back Lane (west).

The investigation of a bye-law for Back and Rookery Lanes had prompted suggestions from the District and County Councils that wooden posts be used to protect the verges. Concerns were expressed about whether posts would obstruct grass cutting, and whether they would represent suburbanization. Many speakers preferred kerbing, although this was a type of suburbanization. The matter will be put to wider consultation, although residents of Station Road supported a proposal for an experimental scheme in that road.

In the western section of Back Lane, the suggestion that the northern verge be cut back in places to provide parking bays was supported by one resident, but opposed by another, who feared that it would attract permanent parking. Both residents will be consulted before a scheme is proposed.

16 Presentations from local organisations

Local organisations were invited to make two-minute presentations about their activities. Presentations were made by the Winchelsea Archaeological Society (Richard Comotto); Winchelsea Bowls Club and the Friends of Rye Memorial Care Centre (John Priestley) and Winchelsea Literary Society (Howard Norton).

17 National Trust

George Bailey (local Property Manager) outlined the work that the Trust was carrying out in Winchelsea.

18 The future of the former Tea Tree and sub-post office buildings

Cllr Terry read out a statement from Mr & Mrs Rumsey. This promised that a planning application would be submitted in June and that work will start in August. A restaurant, run as part of the Thackeray's chain, will open by Christmas.

Pat Dawes expressed concern at the loss of a tea room in Winchelsea. There was some disagreement about whether the meeting should discuss a private business. The meeting applauded the intention of the New Inn to serve teas in the future.

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Peta Cameron-Clarke, Frank Noah and John Spencer argued that Mr & Mrs Rumsey should be entitled to attend the Town Meeting as of right given that they had property in the town, had made donations to various bodies in the town, and paid business rates, which (it was claimed) supported the parish council. The Chairman explained that the Town Meeting was convened by ward councillors to consult with their electorate and was therefore restricted to those eligible to register to vote in ward elections. The Rumseys were not resident and were therefore not eligible to register for a vote. Councillors simply did not have the authority to consult with electors from other wards. Mr & Mrs Rumsey would be invited (as on this occasion), if there was an item on the agenda concerning their business interests. The Chairman also explained that business rates do not get paid to the parish council. The Chairman's position was endorsed by Cllrs. Chishick and Terry. There was a lively discussion on this issue.

19 New Inn

The new co-proprietor of the New Inn, David Stevens, was introduced and said a few words about the business.

20 Update on the proposal for a separate Parish Council

The Chairman summarised recent developments. In a Parish Poll called by residents in July, 65% voted in Winchelsea in favour of a separate parish. A review of the proposal had been submitted by officers to the Licensing and General Purposes Committee of the District Council in November 2006. Extraordinarily, no recommendation was made in to the Committee. The Parish of Winchelsea Action Group had proposed and the Committee accepted that the matter be deferred until after the publication of a government white paper on local government reform. The issue would obviously feature in the forthcoming parish council election.

The Chairman noted that the District Council review had concluded that Winchelsea “would undoubtedly reflect a small, distinctive and recognisable community of interest with its own sense of identity and it is also likely that effective and convenient local government would thereby be secured” and would thus meet government criteria for a parish. It had also confirmed that Winchelsea would be financially viable as a separate parish. There were two remaining objections: the suggestion that other wards should have a veto on Winchelsea; and concern that removing Winchelsea from Icklesham Parish would make the rump of the parish look odd on the map. The Chairman felt that the idea of giving a veto over Winchelsea to other wards was a new way of handling any sort of democratic devolution and that the idea that cartographic neatness mattered more than democratic representation was simply ludicrous.

Cllr. Glazier suggested that the Chairman's summary reflected the latter's bias, but was unable to point to any omissions from the conclusion of the District Council's report.

21 Conclusion

Due to time constraints, the meeting was closed without completing the scheduled business. Councillors will be circulating an annual report, which will summarise the issues concerning the Parish Council which were to be discussed.