

**Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of Clare held in Clare Town Hall, Clare
on 29 April 2015 at 7pm**

Present: Cllr. Paul Bishop (Chair), Claire Ebeling (Town Clerk)
and approximately 25 parishioners

1. **Apologies** – None received.
Cllr. Bishop welcomed all.

2. **Minutes of previous Annual Parish Meeting held on 6 May 2014**
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, 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 acknowledged the loss of a key member of the council when Leslie Warmington died earlier this year. He will be greatly missed on the Council and in Clare.

Cllr. Bishop stated that the elections coming up in May will mean the end of the current Town Council and the loss of Keith Haisman and Derek Blake who will be standing down. He thanked them for their significant contribution to the council and the town.

Cllr. Bishop referred to the transfer of Clare Castle Country Park from Suffolk County Council as the dominant issue for the council this year and was pleased to report that the park had been handed over to Clare Castle Country Park Trust; with thanks to Cllr. Haisman and Cllr Blake who have led the negotiations on behalf of Clare Town Council.

Cllr. Bishop wished to acknowledge the Hastoe affordable housing development as another project that has come to a positive conclusion with residents moving in May. This project is a direct result of the Town Council's work on the Clare Community Plan back in 2010 which highlighted the need for affordable housing units reserved for people with close links to Clare.

Cllr. Bishop thanked the many Clare organisations and community groups that help to make Clare a vibrant and enjoyable place to live.

5. **Annual presentation of Clare Town Council accounts – Cllr. Margaret Godwin**

Cllr. Godwin thanked the RFO, Maureen Smith, for her work in the past year and particularly following a faultless audit.

A written income and expenditure statement for year ending 31 March 2015 and a balance sheet were circulated. (Copies are available from the Clerk). The final accounts were proposed, seconded and approved.

Cllr. Godwin expressed thanks to unpaid volunteers who work to raise funds for groups in Clare.

Cllr. Godwin reported that local council grants continue to reduce by over £5,000 per year, meaning that the precept funding has been reduced but despite this there has been a 0% increase to council tax.

Cllr. Godwin referred to the additional houses recently built in Clare and reported that although this has increased the tax base, it unfortunately does not mean that the Town Council grant from St Eds will follow until next April.

6. County Councillor's report

Cllr. Mary Evans presented her report as follows:

A year ago we spent much of this meeting agonising over the threat that the construction traffic for the wind turbine was going to be rammed through Clare. Working with the county council's highways planning team we averted that threat. All the materials and parts were carted to the site safely and the beast as we know is up and working.

The other issue on which we spent a great deal of time was the transfer of the country park from the county council to the people of Clare. So the park has now been transferred, with a very generous financial settlement.

I am delighted the park is now being managed by the trustees – not just because of the drop in the number of emails I now get but because I have always believed the park would be better run from here by the people who know it and cherish it rather than being run from Ipswich.

The other recurring issue in Clare of course is the matter of HGVs. We have just held the long awaited lorry survey to determine whether HGVS are coming through Clare because of they have business in the town and surrounding area or because they are taking a shortcut from Felixstowe Port onto the M11 and motorway network. SCC hired in a specialist company to run an automatic number recognitions survey along the A1092 – funded from my highways budget and costing about £14,000. The survey took place on Monday and Tuesday 13/14 April and the roads through Clare were very quiet. No advance warning was given to residents so it is extremely unlikely that hauliers had any prior knowledge and deliberately avoided the town. The results are being analysed and I will share them with you when I get them.

I spent about 5 hours in Clare on the Monday of the survey monitoring the traffic at The Bell junction and of the HGVs coming through a significant proportion looked as if they had business in and around the town for example a large removal van, and an Adnams lorry heading towards The Cock.

I know there is a feeling in the town that following last summer's resurfacing programme lorry numbers have reduced. This summer we have the opportunity to really find out what happens when the A1092 and where the traffic goes as I am sorry to report Cavendish Road will be closed from mid-July for about 6 weeks while the gas main is replaced. National Grid will be making sure everyone is fully informed before the works starts. Letters are going out to residents, meetings will be held with businesses and residents. The gas main in Church Street will also be replaced but that can be done under two way traffic lights – so won't be as disruptive.

One of the arguments the senior highways team has continually made against a TRO in Clare to limit the size of vehicles coming through is that there are no suitable alternative routes. Well, I will be approaching parish councils to the north and South of Clare to ask them to monitor traffic levels from mid-July to September to see if Lorries start trying to cut through the back lanes or whether they take the detours around the A roads – proving there is a suitable alternative route to the A1092. The lorry route map for Suffolk has been amended. It is proposed that it should carry the specific advice. At some locations such as Clare, Lavenham and Coddensham routes pass through historic villages where drivers should take extra care and, where possible, avoid.

Turning to SCC generally, last year I spoke in my annual report of the need for Suffolk County Council to do better in education and in highways. I am pleased to say there have been improvements in both areas – not maybe as fast and as far as I would wish to see but progress has been made. Nikki Edwards, who joined SCC, last summer as deputy director for education has galvanised our education team and we are much quicker off the mark now in stepping in when schools need help. At last Suffolk is working its way back up the school league tables.

The appointment of the Fire Chief Mark Hardingham last summer to head up the highways team has been critical in tackling the problems that developed in the operation of the highways contract. His experience as a leader, from a discipline working to command and control, enabled him to gain a rapid and thorough insight and understanding of the problems – and begin to tackle them. A large backlog of about 800 small scale works had built up – projects that take place in local communities

including those annoying small jobs that have been overlooked like reflector discs on the oak bollards on Nethergate Street. Please can someone assure me that this has actually been done today. A big effort has been made to clear the lists – about 50 are still outstanding. And a new system for ordering these works, with a set timescale for completion has been set up to prevent any slippage again.

We also have the new online fault reporting system which is proving efficient and effective.

The highways team in West Suffolk is now up to full strength. It has been hard to retain and recruit staff, which has added to the difficulties. In addition Matthew Riches has returned to the county council from our contractors KMG and has taken up a newly created part time position in the West Area office working with county councillors and local communities on the delivery of the local schemes.

As we are all aware speeding is a constant problem in our rural communities. Locally I have been working across the parishes in the Clare division to organise the deployment of Vehicle Activated Signs. This project has again taken longer than I ever anticipated to complete. The first two signs were delivered this afternoon and I hope more – including those for Clare will be in situ soon.

One of my duties at SCC is to chair the councillor group concerned with the roll out of high-speed broadband in our rural communities. The first phase of the Suffolk Better Broadband Programme will be completed this summer and will reach 85% of the population. In the autumn we will see exactly who is covered when under the second phase. BT engineers are currently working out the order in which they will deliver the second phase and I have yet to get any advice from them as to how it will be done in this area. However I can assure you that Suffolk will meet the Government's target of ensuring by the end of this year everyone will have access to speeds of a minimum of 2mbs. We have yet to finalise how this will be offered – most likely householders will have to apply for the free connection. When this is decided, I will, of course inform the parish council.

When you do get a new fibre optic cabinet delivering high-speed broadband, I trust that as many of you as possible will sign up to high-speed broadband. Under the contract there is a cash claw back from BT once a trigger point is reached of 20% take up of high-speed broadband. In Suffolk we are one of the few contract areas to reach the trigger point and we expect to get back about £2million from BT by the end of this year which will be invested back into the programme to spread the rollout of high-speed broadband further across our county.

We have had a change of leadership at the county council in the past week. Decisions and announcements about which councillors will take what roles have yet to be made. I just very much hope I am allowed to retain the chairmanship of the broadband group. I believe that the provision of good high-speed broadband and strong mobile reception are desperately important to areas like this and I want to be in a position to ensure we in this corner of Suffolk are not forgotten.

7. **Borough Councillor's report**

Cllr. Alaric Pugh presented his report as follows:

I am still enjoying giving up my time to fight for Clare's interests at the St Edmundsbury administrative table. For the last four years I have attended almost every Town Council meeting and nearly every relevant Borough Council Meeting. My family has a tradition of public service. I would like to continue to bring my business skills into use to do it.

This past year there has seen an exciting small change in the relationship between St Edmundsbury Borough Councillors and residents of Wards like Clare. Of course, some things have stayed the same - we have worked hard to reorganise and modernise services so that there has been no Council Tax increase for a further year. Many of our services such as markets, parking, finance and personnel have won awards and are regarded as setting national standards.

But the big change came this time last year with the introduction of Locality Budgets. It is a new way of ensuring that some rural grants money is distributed to places where it can be applied to the most benefit of local communities. It can't be given to town and parish councils only to community organisations, which is what I have done in Clare.

This year I have given my Locality money to the trustees of the Country Park for start-up resources, to an historic signage project with the Ancient House Museum, to CHOC to install wi-fi in the Town Hall, to the Clare Magna Carta Festival and to the Lights Committee for energy-saving improvements to the Christmas Lights. These are all projects which will bring benefits to the largest possible number of people.

In addition to constructive use of these grants I have been involved in the usual mixture of planning permissions, housing need cases, business support requests, issues such as the closure of Clare Police Station, the Country Park, speeding and dangerous traffic and of course things like mud on the road, and blocked drains.

What's been happening at St Eds? The services we provide cover:

Parks and gardens	Arts and Leisure services
Planning and planning enforcement	Housing issues
Strategic tourism	Business support and inward investment
Markets	Off street parking
Waste collection and waste services.	

As Cabinet Member for Economic Growth I am proud of having developed our area's capacity to support dramatic local growth in businesses, jobs and skills provision. I have launched West Suffolk's first Inward Investment fact pack and am delivering a Masterplan for Haverhill Town Centre. We are also working on two business parks, new infrastructure, a new Waste hub and additional Public Services 'villages'. As a Council we have set three new priorities to replace all others:

- Economic growth
- Housing
- Families and communities - this one is very new for Borough Councils and is still developing.

I have taken an interest in providing activities, skills and jobs for young people in West Suffolk as vice-chair of One Haverhill and in other roles and I hope to be in a position to develop this work further. Thanks to all for giving me the chance to have a go at what I have tried to do so far.

8. Update on Clare Castle Country Park – Geoffrey Bray and Keith Haisman

Mr Haisman presented a short report summarising developments since the public consultation last summer (which received overwhelming support) and culminating in the signing over of the Country Park a few weeks ago when a 30 year lease was signed with the Trust.

Mr Bray added the following points:

1. The Country Park Trust do their best to keep everyone informed, which can be difficult, but there are 300 people on the email mailing list who receive regular updates. Please contact Mr Bray if you wish to be added to the mailing list.
2. It is hoped that the changes in the park are seen to be an improvement. The park has been neglected in recent years and there is much to be done. There is some conflict to be dealt with: for example the bank behind the playing field has been cleared but not everyone agrees with it - English Heritage wanted this to be done. The Outer Bailey is well wooded, if it was cleared you could see the whole of the Outer Bailey but some people prefer that the trees remain. Similarly, some would like a railway on the site but others would object to the loss of trees and wildlife.
3. In terms of volunteers, 115 have signed up but of those, 65 people have actually attended. Others are helping behind the scenes and there is plenty to be done.

On 18th May John Smithson will be presenting a talk on running a park. Mr Bray reported that the Trust has developed an excellent relationship with the parks team at St Edmundsbury Borough Council who have been very supportive and given their time at no charge.

Relationships have also been developing with Historic England, from whom encouraging support has been received. Also, the Suffolk Wildlife Trust is very keen to support the Trust and has volunteered a letter of support.

Mr Bray reported that a huge amount of work is being done to complete appendices as part of a bid for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund will have been completed by the end of June. The aim of the Trust is to make Clare a more interesting place to live, work in and visit.

Mr Haisman reported that building work will begin on 26th May for 3 months.

A member of the public asked if an update on the river could be provided. Mr Bray responded that the river does not belong to the park.

Cllr. Parsley congratulated the Town Council and trustees on the success of their work to achieve the signing over of the park. He raised a concern regarding the change to the charges in the country park car park and expressed disappointment given that he had been involved in campaigning for the free parking up to 11am in the past. He asked the trustees to consider retaining the 2 hours of free parking to benefit the people and businesses of Clare.

Mr Bray responded that the income from the car park accounts for approximately 50% of the running costs of the park and so an increase will have an impact. He explained that surveys had been carried out and they found that of the people who use the car park, only 50% are from Clare. He added that checks had also been carried out on the number of parking spaces available on the Market Hill and on average 3.5 spaces were available at any one time, so it was concluded that there *is* free parking available elsewhere if people really do not want to pay. He explained that 95% of the parking is paid for by people who do not live in Clare and that the people of Clare do not want the Town Council to pick up the bill.

With reference to the Clare businesses, Mr Bray reported that only 6 businesses responded to the survey and only one of them mentioned parking.

A parishioner referred to apparent anti-social behavior in the park and suggested that volunteer days for young people might help deter this by encouraging a sense of ownership. Mr Bray responded that this is one of the ideas that Trustee, Gary Brown is currently looking into.

A parishioner referred to a survey carried out by the Town Council in the past and stated that he believed the findings then contradicted the findings of the recent Country Park survey. He suggested that there is a risk that people will choose to drive into Sudbury to shop, where there is free parking.

A parishioner enquired how the HLF grant will be managed if the bid is successful. Mr Bray explained that the HLF grant is for specific things and is paid in instalments.

A parishioner asked if the Trust runs into a deficit, will the Town Council be required to step in. Mr Haisman replied that the Trust is there to manage the park. In the worst case scenario, if there were insufficient funds, the Trust would manage the park as Suffolk County Council did in recent years – by only spending enough to keep it ticking over. He emphasised that he did not think the deficit situation is likely to happen – all the risks have been looked at extensively and the trustees are confident that running into a deficit is a very unlikely possibility.

There were no further questions and the meeting closed at 8.06pm.