



UPTON BY CHESTER AND DISTRICT PARISH COUNCIL

Upton Pavilion
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Minutes of the Upton by Chester and District Annual Assembly held on Monday 22nd April 2024 at 6.00 pm, at Upton Pavilion, Wealstone Lane, Upton, Chester.

Present: Cllr J Ebo, Cllr I M Gibson, Cllr Y B Gibson, Cllr H Jackson, Cllr A Lingard, Cllr R Lee, Cllr S Stanley (Chair), Cllr H Wilman

Also present: CPSO Eva Williams, Mr Chris Ablett (Chester Zoo), Ms Teresa Whale (Upton by Chester W.I.) and members of the public.

Minutes by Cllr Ian Gibson in the absence of the Clerk

The Parish Council held an Annual Upton Assembly on the evening of 22nd April. This is one of the occasions when all of the people of parish have the opportunity to have the activities of the council reported to them, can ask what the council actually does, how it spends the money from the Annual Precept and, more importantly, what the councillors are planning to do in the coming year to develop and improve the parish. Additionally it is an opportunity to hear from other local organisations and groups.

The last set of local elections, in May 2023, gave us an almost total change in who was on the Parish Council in Upton. So, much of the last twelve months has been a learning experience for all of us, with lots of finding of feet. We started with a number of gaps in representation but have now, through co-option, brought our numbers up to 13 – we are allowed sixteen councillors so have room for three more volunteers: if anyone would like to help out, just get in touch. We are supported by a small group of staff who run the practical bits of operating our playing fields and public open spaces and manage the administration and finance.

Parish councils are the “grass roots of democracy” and Upton is no exception as most of what we do is about our public open spaces, the QE II playing field and playground, bowling green and our all-weather tennis courts, the Chemistry Pits, and smaller open areas which include the Village Pump, featured in our last victory in the “ Best-Kept Village” competition which we are intent on winning again in the coming years.

Upton differs from most Cheshire villages as we are more of an extended suburb of the city rather than a single unified community. This is both a weakness and a strength; the council

intends with help and assistance from all of us to create a thriving community – a proper place to live- and to bring people together creating a real sense of community.

An important part of the bringing together will be the efforts made by us to reach out, improve relationships and communication with our community, our local organisations and enterprises in the village and beyond: our schools, the Countess of Chester hospital, the Zoo, voluntary organisations, sports clubs and societies. Part of these important efforts will include working to address those things that disturb us as a community, including speeding, parking problems across the village especially in the Bache and Weston Grove, and the incidents of anti-social behaviour in our open spaces, which belong to all of us and should be safe!

Not to forget the un-ending, or is it un-plumbable, potholes all over the place – the responsibility of Cheshire West and Chester (CWaC) Council but we have three Parish councillors, also sitting as Councillors on the local authority, who are very receptive to our appeals for help.

All of these services, staff and facilities need paying for – except for your Parish councillors who are unpaid, despite what some people think. And this involves a Precept which is part of the annual Council Tax charge. The parish council is actually quite cheap to run – our charge is less than 55% of the English average and less than £1 a week for each Band D household.

And what does your local parish council do with all the money? We keep a careful eye on planning applications as statutory consultees, holding accountable CWaC council who are the decision makers. We maintain and operate all of the activities on our playing fields, tennis courts and bowling green: and subsidise the activities where we can. We are starting a programme of development at the QE II field in Wealstone Lane to improve the playing field, improve the drainage, refurbish parts of the Pavilion and smarten-up the area generally.

Subject to consulting with residents, we would like to develop the facilities at the Chemistry Pits: looking to put in a children's playground and activity area and do work to improve the drainage so as to get rid of the swamp that usually arrives from October onwards.

We want to continue to provide the Annual Fun Day at the QEII fields, the well-appreciated Carols at the Pavilion, improve our Internet presence so that it's easier to find out what we are doing and what is available by way of events and activities, to beef up our Facebook presence for the council and the Pavilion services: and not forgetting the physical communications by way of our newsletters.

In addition to this, we want to make more use of our Community Small Grants programme. This can give grants of up to £1,000 to local voluntary organisations to support and expand their activities. The fund is available so come and see if you can use it!

We are all proud of our Zoo, the best in Europe and third in the world, only outshone by Toronto and San Diego in world rankings. We were joined by Chris Ablett, who showed us the error of many of us in thinking that the Zoo's conservation work was with exotic creatures in faraway places. The Zoo has been running a set of projects since 2018 developing "Nature Networks" locally – across the area from south of the city and reaching right past Ellesmere Port up through the Wirral creating local habitats and environments, over 40 to date, for our own local flora and fauna: with Bee Hotels, wet areas and wild flower meadows in an expansion of the original

Nature Recovery Corridor across lots of previously sterile and unloved sites. Chris is working with our parish council on protecting and enhancing the wildlife on and around our playing fields, and he also showed us as individuals how we might get involved as volunteers.

Teresa Whale from Upton W.I. gave us an insider's view of the organisation: plenty to learn, contribute to the community and enjoy, as well as the W.I. lobbying the government on behalf of the "silent majority", as a highly trusted and the largest women's organisation in the UK

We rounded off the Assembly with an energetic Open Forum that got some active and important local issues aired and discussed. These included issues around speeding, the work of the local Speedwatch Group, tidying up Lodge Gardens (owned and managed by CWaC Council) and the Parish Council's plans for an improved website, putting them firmly in the councillors' minds as opportunities for future action as we move further into 2024.

Sue Stanley

Chair, Upton-by-Chester and District Parish Council

27th April 2024