

# IDRIDGEHAY ALTON AND ASHLEYHAY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 11 May 2016 at 6.30pm St James' Church Idridgehay**

Chair: Councillor Robert Tatler

Clerk: Mrs Ros Hallam (Responsible Financial Officer)

Present: 10 members of the public

## **1. Chair's Overview of the Year**

Cllr Tatler welcomed those present to the Annual Parish Meeting and presented his annual report as summarised below:

There have been no changes in the membership of the council since last year, with two members representing Ashleyhay and five for Idridgehay and Alton. The council has followed its customary pattern of meeting bi-monthly on the second Wednesday, normally at the Village Corn Store, and there have usually been some members of the public in attendance. One extraordinary meeting has been held during the year. Cllr David Taylor regularly attends our meetings in his capacity as our District and County Councillor, and is very active on our behalf. The Community Police Officer attends when she can.

As last year, the three principal matters that the council has dealt with have been planning matters, the Neighbourhood Plan and the Black Swan. Amber Valley notifies the Clerk of all planning applications in the parishes and the council then considers each one on its merits and submits comments that are considered appropriate. We are most anxious to uphold and protect the integrity of the Special Landscape Area, which covers most of the parishes, and likewise the Conservation Area in Idridgehay.

The Extraordinary Meeting of the council was held on August 12th 2015, principally to consider two applications regarding the pig farm just off the Wirksworth Road - the first for an additional storage shed and the second to double the size of the existing pig unit from 500 to 1000 pigs. With a good attendance by members of the public a lively debate ensued. After due deliberation, the council sent a strongly worded letter of objection, pointing out what we believed were very strong reasons for its refusal. To no avail, and unfortunately both applications were approved by Amber Valley's Planning Board on April 18th this year. This is a great disappointment and bad news for the residents and the future of this valley. The residents of Ashleyhay had spearheaded a spirited but ultimately unsuccessful campaign, a considerable number of residents had objected in writing and a number spoke personally against the applications at the Planning Board meeting. It is very disappointing that our request for a site meeting with the members of the Planning Board before their April 18th meeting was turned down, apparently on a technicality.

I am pleased to report much better news as regards The Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan's referendum took place on October 15<sup>th</sup> and passed by 110 votes to 9, with a 31% turnout of the parishes' residents. Formally adopted by Amber Valley shortly afterwards it now forms part of the planning regulations for our parishes. It has taken a considerable amount of time and effort by the members of VIA, to whom we all owe a very large debt. We are told its policies are now being taken into account when planning officers are considering applications in this area. We hope this is the case, and shall be monitoring applications to ascertain that it really is. The Council hopes that with the Neighbourhood Plan in place the end result will be a more sensitive, sustainable and intelligent application of planning policy which will enhance the parish and provide ongoing protection for our very fine landscape in the future.

The third item is the Black Swan, which has lain empty since its closure nearly four years ago. As I reported last year, we had two well-attended meetings in the church and after the second one a steering group was set up to explore the way forward. This met a few times and attempted to make contact with the owner, Crostone Ltd., which proved very frustrating and ultimately fruitless and the Black Swan has since been offered for sale at £375,000, well above any realistic valuation of it as a pub. The Parish Council has consulted with a number of people in the pub trade about opportunities for re-opening as a pub and these are on-going. However, it must be admitted that currently any attempt to get the Black Swan re-opened is, I am sorry to say, in the doldrums.

During the year three parish newsletters have been distributed and the parish website has been updated. We are very grateful to Cllr Ibbett for editing and creating the newsletters and for the work he does in tending the

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website. The snow warden scheme remained in operation, with Hazel and Michael Haslam as wardens and the free supply of grit was again received.

I must again thank our excellent Parish Clerk, Ros Hallam, for the highly efficient and enthusiastic way she does her job and congratulate her on just obtaining her CiCLA qualification, which means she is now even better qualified, and will be able to serve us even better! We are very fortunate to have her and she is a real asset to the council.

To finish, I also want to say how very encouraging it is to see so much support shown by residents, particularly the newer ones, in village events. The VIA group have worked incredibly hard on the Neighbourhood Plan and I'm delighted their efforts were crowned with success. The Village Fete in July was our most successful yet with more volunteers than ever, the Christmas Party at the Corn Store went very well and the Christmas and Spring Fayres in the church were highly successful. There is to be a celebratory Vintage Afternoon Tea in the church on Saturday 11th June to mark the Queen's 90th birthday which I trust will be well attended. The council and the PCC work closely together, with a group of volunteers maintaining the churchyard and others the millennium garden. We may be only a small community, but at least we are all singing from the same hymn sheet!

Cllr Tatler's report is available in full on the IAA PC website at [www.iaa-pc.org.uk](http://www.iaa-pc.org.uk)

## **2. Finance Report for the year ended 31 March 2016**

Mrs Hallam, as Responsible Financial Officer, reported Income had increased as a result of a 5% increase in the Parish Precept but other receipts decreased mainly as funding for the Neighbourhood Plan has now ceased. Grants from Derbyshire County Council paid for maintenance work to the area's footpaths and for the purchase of a projector and screen for community use. The council remains dependent on the Parish Precept for its main source of income having no rental income that other parishes have from say a village hall or allotments.

Expenditure for the year was less due to the completion of the Neighbourhood Plan, reduced training costs and subscriptions. As a result of the warm weather there has been no need to purchase grit. Other fees and overheads are kept on a tight rein and as a result, income exceeded expenditure for the year by £247.

The year ended with a balance of £5,991. After deducting set aside accounts for election costs and other contingencies, this left a surplus of £1,991 which for a small Parish Council, is reasonable.

However, in order to be able to meet expected increased costs as well as possible costs associated with a community bid for the Black Swan, the PC approved a 10% increase in the Precept for 2016/17 at its January meeting earlier this year which amounts to £380.

The Internal Audit for the year to 31 March 2016 has been completed. The External Audit to be completed by Grant Thornton on behalf of the Audit Commission is underway and the completed Annual Return will be at the Parish Council meeting that follows. This will be posted to GT according to the timetable set by them. The Statutory Notice showing when the PC accounts are available for public inspection at the Clerk's office will shortly be on display.

## **3. Black Swan Update**

Cllr Jill Matthews reported that the pub is still an Asset of Community Value and has been on the market for the last 10 months firstly advertised at £405,000 then reduced to its current price of £375,000. The pub has no fixtures and fittings, stripped of all pub equipment and internally is in a sorry state even though this is a Grade II listed building. It has been unoccupied since the summer of 2012. The Parish Council has held 2 public meetings to try to save the pub. A Steering Group met a few times and tried to talk/negotiate with the owner about ways forward to no avail. We have met with a couple of prospective purchasers who have fallen by the wayside for various reasons – mainly price and overage of 60%. One of these potential buyers is local and is still interested. We have mail shot a number of breweries who may be interested and had informal discussions with a large national chain who offered advice and support. From all our feedback from these and other

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contacts in the pub trade and our own workings for a draft business plan, we do not feel the pub is worth anywhere near the asking price and a figure of somewhere in the region of £120K to £160k is more appropriate in its current state and as a pub business. We still feel the Black Swan was purchased by the current owner as a residential development opportunity and a price paid for this accordingly. This was then asset stripped ready for development and the owner is retaining the price so as not to lose money on the purchase or to play the long game and eventually get planning permission for change of use.

We met with the local Council to discuss our concerns and get their views on active marketing as a pub. Whether an ACV or in normal planning applications, AVBC clarified that they would expect the owner to show they had made genuine attempts to sell the building as a pub. The onus would be on the owner to prove this. AVBC were very interested in our view of valuation and the feedback we had received from potential buyers and the trade about its value (and other pub property for sale and comparisons). They agreed and understood that a Parish Council would not have the funds or be an efficient use of public funds to pay for an independent valuation. They felt that if we were to put in a bid at what we considered a realistic price together with the evidence from the trade that we have, that would be a sufficient basis for the offer to the owner. It would show that there was an interest in buying and running the pub as a community asset. On that basis, we have produced a letter ready to send to the commercial agents selling the pub after agreement at the Parish Council meeting following this meeting.

We also learnt from the meeting with AVBC that the pub is only really protected as an ACV for 18 months ending this July. We understand now that during the protected period the asset can be sold to someone else but then ceases to be an ACV. This is really surprising as it seems to leave a loophole that a sale between companies owning property can effectively take away the ACV status which cannot be resurrected with the new owners. The property then becomes subject to normal planning policies for change of use. The only comfort here is that the local council would still expect to see genuine marketing for the property and attempts to sell as a pub before change of use would be allowed.

#### 4. Questions from the Public

Simon Butterworth asked if AVBC were aware of the 60% overage clause attached to the purchase of the Black Swan as this seemed unusually high and was a clear indication that the pub is not being marketed in a realistic manner. Although he was not present at the Planning Board meeting which approved the extension to the pig farm, he had been staggered that its members were unfamiliar with the VIA NDP and had asked if it was a valid document. He asked how they could possibly take decisions being so ill-informed? Cllr Taylor agreed that it was shocking that he was the only member to have read it. As he was currently the interim Chair of the Planning Board, he had told the planning officers that this (and all neighbourhood plans) needed to be taken seriously as the most up-to-date local planning document available. Simon Butterworth suggested that all should have a copy of all neighbourhood plans. Cllr Taylor agreed. Although the applications cannot be reconsidered, he considered there had been a failure to give full consideration to the NDP at the planning board meeting which needs to be followed up first with AVBC and ultimately with the Ombudsman. Cllr Smith said that all the planning board members had the VIA NDP to read when the plan went to the full council meeting for ratification. Simon Butterworth asked Cllr Taylor, as the community's representative, whether he had spoken to the other board members about the VIA NDP. Cllr Taylor said he had but they did not always listen and had been encouraged to ignore Neighbourhood Plans by the Chair. Cllr Taylor said he had called in the new application for the pig farm and asked for a site visit as soon as it was registered. Cllr Tatler said that the Planning Board had been instructed to pass applications if recommended by a planning officer as the council was anxious to avoid potential costs on appeal. The (now ex) Chair of the Planning Board had also been Leader of the Council and on the Finance Committee. Cllr Smith said that costs would only be awarded if the council could be seen to have acted 'unreasonably'.

Councillor Tatler thanked those members of the public for their attendance and contributions closing the meeting at 7.25pm.

Signed ..... Chair ..... Date