

Minutes of 3rd Annual Village Meeting held on
Wednesday 11th June 2008 in
Audlem Public Hall

Present: Mrs K Down (Chairman); 40 residents (approximately); Mrs J White (Clerk).
Speakers: Mrs Catherine Nolan-Burnitt (Headteacher, St James' School)
Insp Bob Hassall (Nantwich Neighbourhood Policing Unit)
Bob Vass (Rural Housing Enabler for East Cheshire)
Bob Cartwright (Audlem Parish Plan)
Chris Mahon (Weaver Valley Regional Park)

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the third Annual Village Meeting. Speakers were introduced:

Mrs Catherine Nolan-Burnitt, Headteacher, St James' School

Mrs Nolan-Burnitt described how, as head teacher, she was pleased to be able to make a difference to the ethos of the school and to the lives of the children. Over the past few years, the school had been extended and classes had grown from 4 to 7. The open plan lay out was now partitioned and the playground had been developed and improved. The curriculum had undergone three key changes – all children now had a weekly French lesson; the ICT syllabus had changed beyond recognition; and specialist sports coaches visited the school every week. Mrs Nolan-Burnitt felt it was important to make children aware of the larger world and so for the school to develop community links. To this end, St James' was designated a Fair Trade establishment with links to a Ugandan school, and supported this charity. Annual residential visits (this year to Normandy) were arranged. Children were encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility by the appointment of head boy/girl and prefects. In concluding her talk, Mrs Nolan-Burnitt said that it was an honour and a privilege to be head teacher at St James'. An Open Day was being planned for late September – everyone was most welcome pay a visit to the school.

Insp Bob Hassall (Nantwich Neighbourhood Policing Unit)

Inspector Hassall's police career started in Crewe & Nantwich but despite his background in CID he still considered himself to be "a bobby" first and foremost. In the past, he had been involved in developing techniques to support neighbourhood policing, e.g. deployment of covert cars and the use of "smart water" to mark household possessions. It would be possible to bring a sample kit to Audlem and perhaps stage a demonstration in The Square if this would be useful. He was now Inspector at Nantwich and, with two sergeants, 17 officers and 4 community support officers, responsible for the reduction of crime and disorder. At the moment, his three priorities were to tackle antisocial behaviour especially in Barony and Weaver wards, to reduce violent crime around the night time economy, and to effect a reduction in the speed of traffic. In response to residents' questions Inspector Hassall agreed that, although the Borough Council was now responsible for parking enforcement, in rural areas it seemed to make sense for the Constabulary to continue with enforcement of both the law and parking regulations. He acknowledged residents' concerns about night-time cover and pointed out that high visibility and neighbourhood involvement were also useful in reducing crime. Shift work, holidays and training made additional demands upon resources. Speeding traffic on the A525 and A529 could now be tackled with the enforceable speed camera purchased thanks to funding from Audlem Parish Council, Willaston Parish Council and Nantwich Town Council.

Bob Vass - Rural Housing Enabler for East Cheshire

Bob Vass's post was initially funded for 9 months by DEFRA and his contract has recently been extended for a further year. His role is to encourage affordable housing in rural areas and he is able to act relatively independently. Bob described the threat to village life if young people were unable to afford a local home: to thrive, communities need to attract people able to contribute to the community – agricultural workers, care workers, teachers, fire officers, etc. Affordable housing (including refurbished and empty properties) is subject to normal planning law and does not involve cheap construction. This was evident from slides showing developments in other areas of the country. Three types of affordable housing were possible: (1) rental; (2) shared ownership, normally with a housing association, with an opportunity for "staircasing" by the purchaser i.e. buying additional shares in the house up to a limit of 80%; (3) covenant / price capping – in this type of housing, the developer is granted permission to build in a particular location provided that a proportion of houses are affordable and are sold under a covenant. Houses are then sold at, say, 70% of market value, and purchasers own them outright. However, when a house is next put up for sale, the price is limited to 70% of the new open market value. Purchases made under (2) and (3) were in perpetuity and agreements would form part of the deeds of the property. Before concluding his presentation, Bob reviewed the results of the recent housing needs survey, which clearly showed a need for affordable housing in the Audlem Ward.

Bob Cartwright - Audlem Parish Plan

Bob gave a progress report on the projects detailed in the Action Plan written 2½ years ago:

- Plans for the sports hall (which had evolved into a youth and community hall) had been drawn up. Next steps were to obtain planning permission and find £1 million in funding.
- An additional visitor attraction in the form of a Thomas Telford Museum was being developed - interpretation boards had already been installed along the canal and materials were being prepared for exhibition at the Mill shop.
- Efforts to de-prime the A525 were on the verge of success. If this could be achieved, satnav systems would be adjusted and would eventually reduce the numbers of HGVs coming through the village.
- The Planning Group had almost completed a Village Design Statement and Landscape Character Assessment and would present it to the community for comment during the autumn. The document, once adopted by the planning authorities, would form the basis for discussion in any planning applications.
- The Parish Plan group had now succeeded in having Audlem included in the Weaver Valley initiative and hoped to bring additional investment to the village.
- British Waterways was supportive of a proposed hydro-electricity scheme. Preliminary investigations suggested sufficient electricity for 60 to 70 homes could be produced and the scheme would be a good example of a local green energy programme.
- Development of the Audlem Vale - although there was agreement to raise the funds by means of a Public Works Loan, the landowner had rejected the Parish Council's offer.
- Communications – newsletters were being published regularly and on time. The village web site www.audlem.org was going from strength to strength with eight or nine thousand people logging on each month and 2500 new stories published so far. The site had campaigned for improved ambulance services, the introduction of a first responder scheme and retention of GP services. The "Welsh Question" had attracted an enormous amount of interest and world-wide publicity for the village.
- As a newly-appointed judge in the Calor Village of the Year Competition (northern region), Bob felt that few villages could beat Audlem as a place to live; however, he pointed out that most winning villages provided allotments and had better play areas. He asked that the Parish Council revisit these issues.

Finally, Bob thanked everyone involved with the Parish Plan for their efforts and persistence.

Chris Mahon (Weaver Valley Regional Park)

After introducing himself, Chris Mahon described the aims involved in the creation of the Weaver Valley Way, i.e. to create a major recreational resource in the region and to provide a focal point for economic, social and environmental regeneration. So far the initiative had resulted in improvements to cuts, locks and tow paths in several areas, including Nantwich Marina. The launch event for the "Floating Garden Festival" had taken place at Audlem on the previous Sunday with "Saturn", a horsedrawn fly boat, moored here. The Weaver Valley Way project had won a share of the £50m "Connect 2" award - this involved plans to revitalise walking and cycling in communities across the UK, creating new routes for local journeys. Crossings and new bridges would be created over busy roads, railway lines and rivers, linking into new networks of local paths free from traffic, thus improving the quality of the living environment. He was interested to know the ownership of land along the old Audlem/Nantwich railway line. Market Towns along the Weaver Valley would be benefiting from NWDA investment of £11 m for their Festival and Events programmes.

Chris asked residents who had not completed questionnaires to please do so - he was keen to obtain views from as many people as possible. An analysis of results would be published. It was pointed out that lack of parking was likely to be a major problem for the village if visitor number increased substantially and Chris indicated that he would include this in his thinking. He suggested that if local projects were incorporated into the larger Weaver Valley Regional Park initiative efforts to attract funding might be more successful.

The Chairman thanked speakers and residents for attending and the meeting closed at 10.00 p.m.

_____ Chairman

_____ Date