

Minutes of the first Annual Village Meeting held on  
Thursday 11th May 2006 in  
Audlem Public Hall

**Present: Cllr R Furber (Chairman); 50 residents (approximately);  
Mrs J White (Clerk); Speakers – Ms Shea O’Neill, Mr Ralph Warburton, Mr  
Andrew Smith, Mr Bob Cartwright.**

The Chairman opened the meeting and thanked everyone for being willing to spend a fine May evening indoors. He then introduced the speakers:

Upper Weaver Valley Project

Ms Shea O’Neill explained that the project, which was recently extended to include Audlem, is being funded initially by the North West Development Authority and the Cheshire and Warrington Tourist Boards. Over the next 20 years, a vibrant network of high quality towns will be created, requiring total funding of approximately £100 million.

The vision is for a recreational playground for mid-Cheshire – smaller than the national parks but more accessible – with 111 kilometres of navigable waterways. Local improvements at Nantwich will involve development of Snow Hill, Swine Market, Mill Island and provide a new swimming pool. There will be a new north/south walking route linking the Sandstone, South Cheshire, Transpenine and Bridgewater Trails, together with an integrated transport system. Task groups are being formed and volunteers are needed.

The benefits for the area include:

- Stronger local economies for this area of Cheshire
- Opportunities for businesses to diversify
- Health benefits for the population
- Preservation of and better access to the cultural heritage
- Reduced pressure on existing national parks
- Better access – 3 million people will have access to the countryside within half an hour

The Audlem Traders’ Association

On behalf of Audlem Traders’ Association, Andrew Smith spoke about the pressure on local shops due to the supermarkets’ stranglehold on the supply chain and their ability to cut prices. Nationally, between January and October 2005 over 700 newsagents closed. Over the past 25 years the number of businesses in Audlem has dwindled and the situation is now critical.

Local businesses are inter-dependent, relying on each other to attract shoppers. The presence of people on the street makes the place look busy and gives the village its air of activity which contributes to its character and charm. A core of services remains at the present and proprietors try to provide for most of people’s daily needs and are mindful of prices. At the moment, the loss of a single shop would encourage more residents to shop in Nantwich or Market Drayton and this would threaten the future of the remaining shops. As a village, we desperately need to retain these core

services. It is a matter of concern that new residents often treat the village as a dormitory suburb, working and shopping elsewhere.

The Traders' Association has already taken advantage of increased tourism by introducing the tourist information point in Williams' Newsagents. It is hoped that Audlem's inclusion in the Upper Weaver Valley project will increase visitor numbers. A leaflet drop is being organised to encourage new householders to shop in Audlem, and efforts will be made to co-ordinate opening hours. If every one of the 100 households in the area spent an extra £5 per week in the village, total turnover would increase by an extra £<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> million per year – enough to secure the future of the outlets and help them to diversify. If residents reduce their spending, it will be a drain on the village and will seriously affect the viability of businesses. Everyone is asked to review their spending habits and spend more in Audlem to keep the shops open.

Andrew reminded everyone to sign the petition against withdrawal of the Post Office Card in 2010. The Card gives Post Offices some security and withdrawal of the service would particularly hit the elderly.

### ADAS

Ralph Warburton described the early days of ADAS, which started in 1969 with a small group of volunteers anxious to care for the character and beauty of the village, to ensure its preservation and protect and improve the amenities. These efforts led to creation of the conservation area – ADAS is still reviews planning applications. ADAS prevented demolition of the cottages between Beamans and the Post Office and the funds raised from the sale were invested. The organisation then became a registered charity with a detailed constitution. The fund created in the early years served ADAS well, but the organisation now relies more on fund raising activities and obtaining grants.

The major event now is the open garden weekend with about 60 gardens open to all comers, combined with the scarecrow competition and silent auction. Children are encouraged to participate by taking part in the annual painting competition - this year's theme is the World Football Cup. Their work will be on display in the Public Hall over the May Bank Holiday weekend.

### ASET

Andrew thanked Audlem Parish Council and Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council for their support of Audlem Proms over the past 6 years. In 2001 income from the Proms was £13,000 – this year it will probably be £18,000. During 2006 ASET expects to bring 2,500 people to Audlem for the Proms and over 4,000 for the Transport Festival which attracts entries from 4 or 5 different counties and Wales.

Efforts are under way to form junior ASET squad and hopefully they will be organising their first event this year.

Andrew closed his talk by thanking everyone for their support and encouraging them to come to this year's events.

### Audlem Parish Plan

As Chair of the Parish Plan Steering Committee, Bob Cartwright thanked Judy Benson, Roland Hill, Mike Hill, Sue Benson, Greville Watts and Kate Parkes - and everyone who had shown an interest in the project. He congratulated all the

volunteers for their enthusiasm and said that the completed Plan had attracted a lot of interest – he and Mike Hill had given presentations to CNBC Parish Conference, Knutsford Town Council, the North West Conference of the Society of Local Council Clerks at Chorley and to various Cheshire Parish Councils. However, a pretty brochure is not enough – the projects must now be pursued. To co-ordinate fund raising efforts for the different working groups a separate finance group had been formed and there are still opportunities to get involved with the projects, which are:

*Indoor sports facility-* A large extension to house a badminton court, fitness suite, changing rooms, storage and relaxation areas. The changing rooms are vital if Audlem is to attract football teams back to the playing field. This is a long term project – target date is 2012 – which will cost up to £1.5 million. An application for a Rural Enterprise Grant of £107,000 (with help from Beverley Hope of Nantwich Now) has been submitted. Funding is also being sought from Cheshire Community Council, Sport England and the Football Foundation. Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council has been asked it will support running costs as they do in other areas.

*Improved footpaths/countryside access* – As part of the Upper Weaver Valley project, a group is working to acquire a fairly large area of land for woodland planting. By providing improved signage and dioramas around the village visitors will be encouraged to circulate around the shops and attractions. New volunteer groups have been formed to pursue footpath and cycleway projects.

*De-priming of A525* – The biggest issue for the village as a whole is the heavy goods traffic on the A525. A small group of volunteers have decided to make representations to the Department of Transport with the backing of Stephen O'Brien MP. Cheshire County Council has been asked to reinstate the bollards in Stafford Street to demonstrate that traffic can only get through by mounting the pavement.

*Village web site* – The web site is thriving and weekly usage has doubled since January. The aim is to produce one new story every day.

*Village Design Statement and Landscape Assessment* – Once adopted by the Borough Council the documents will be important in planning for the future development of Audlem.

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The Chairman thanked the speakers. He noted with regret the absence of youngsters and hoped that they would be represented at the 2007 meeting.

During the Open Forum, residents raised several issues relating to law and order upon which Ken Maple (although off-duty) was able to comment. He reminded residents that the next Community Action Team meeting would be on Wednesday 17th May.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and the meeting closed at 9.25 p.m.

\_\_\_\_\_ Chairman

\_\_\_\_\_ Date