

Minutes of Annual Village Meeting held on
Thursday 24th May 2007 in
Audlem Public Hall

Present: Cllr R Furber (Chairman); 60 residents (approximately); Mrs J White (Clerk); Speakers – Ms Lucy Johnson, Dr Russell Muirhead, Mr Bob Cartwright, Mr Andrew Smith.

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

Lucy Johnson - "Visit Chester & Cheshire"

Ms Johnson explained that "Visit Chester & Cheshire" represented the Tourism Board for Cheshire and Warrington. She had recently moved into offices at Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council and was working between the two organisations to improve infrastructure, attract business and promote tourism. Business support services were offered (development, training, promotion) and Cheshire was being marketed as the location for the "indulgence experience" (5 star hotels, food and drink festivals, historic houses and gardens). Next year, which would be Cheshire Year of the Gardens the area would also provide a gateway to the Capital of Culture. Lucy asked that businesses and organisations wishing to be involved in the Year of the Gardens contact her at Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council. Tourism was now worth £140 million to the Crewe and Nantwich area and the aim was to increase its worth to £2 billion by 2015, with 27,000 jobs in the sector. Finally she asked to be kept up to date with developments and events in Audlem so that good support could be provided by her organisation.

Dr Russell Muirhead - Audlem Medical Practice

Dr Muirhead described the NHS as an organisation in constant revolution, with the last 10 years showing a year-on-year rise in an increasingly complex workload. Although all staff at the Practice were now part time, capacity had increased with doctors providing 10% more clinical sessions and nurses running 5 disease management sessions. Dr Muirhead thanked those patients who allowed students to be present at consultations – this provided valuable training and the students enjoyed contact with patients.

Because primary care accounted for 90% of the workload in the NHS for 10% of the cost, GPs were being encouraged to deliver more services at present carried out by consultants, such as routine follow-ups. Funding would follow patients and would be used to develop other services locally. Other changes would see a move towards contracting, with private companies seeking NHS work and GPs perhaps unable to deliver a service because they had not won the contract. Public consultation would become more frequent and the practice would be working out how to consult with patients more effectively.

Dr Muirhead then answered a range of questions from the audience relating to test results, mobile physiotherapy unit, out of hours services, etc.

Bob Cartwright – Parish Plan

In the 16 months since publication of the plan, there has been encouraging progress with projects and Bob could count several good reasons to be cheerful – the Lord Combermere is a credit to the village and will soon be providing accommodation; numbers of shops have increased with the opening of a pet shop and a tourist information centre; The Salad Bowl is set to expand; Audlem Mill has re-opened; the Co-op is to move into new premises; the Scout and Guide Hall has been modernised; and the Public Hall has been transformed thanks to the dedicated efforts of its committee members.

Update on Parish Plan projects:

Planning: Mr Greville Watts spoke from the floor to confirm that a Village Design Statement and a Landscape Character Assessment were now being put together. Acknowledging help from the Director of Cheshire Landscape Trust, he said that the group hoped to complete their work in 6 or 9 months. There would be full consultation before the document was finalised and then it would be submitted to the planning authority for adoption as a supplementary planning document. Once adopted, it would provide leverage in discussions about

future development. The group would be happy to be joined by anyone with expertise in vernacular village architecture, landscape history or flora and fauna.

Newsletter: Thanks to Margaret Roberts, the newsletter had been a success story and now ran to 4 issues per year, with a directory of village organisations included in the spring issue.

www.audlem.org: The web site, which was launched in 2005, aims to run a new story every day – there had been 1535 so far. Ninety businesses now advertised on the site and, as the 5 local papers checked it regularly, it had been invaluable in winning publicity for issues important to the village, e.g. retention of Audlem's fire tender, ambulance response times and Audlem's inclusion in the Weaver Valley/Weaver Way projects.

Audlem Vale – The proposal is to purchase approximately 44 acres of land and provide community access to an area of beauty and tranquillity. The public footpath would be improved and a woodland created. Because of the difficulty in obtaining grants for land purchase it is proposed, subject to the outcome of a village referendum, to raise a loan with the Public Works Loans Board. Repayment of the loan would add approximately £5 to the annual Council Tax bill for each household for the duration of the loan period.

Sports facility – This is a long term plan to make additional sports and community facilities available at the Public Hall by 2012. The first step is to commission drawing so that planning permission can be sought. Although some funding has been found, the group is finding it difficult to obtain grants.

Tourism - A unique Thomas Telford Museum is proposed for Audlem Wharf, focusing on the Canal Shop, the locks and possibly a moored boat. Audlem's canal and lock system were Telford's last projects – he died before they were opened. The museum would provide a centre for visitors and educational groups, who would then visit other village attractions whilst in Audlem.

Bob said that the Parish Council had recently reiterated its wholehearted support for the above three projects. He asked the audience to indicate support as funding and progress were heavily dependent on public backing and residents' active participation. The meeting expressed enthusiastic support for the projects.

A525: Progress was slow, but Stephen O'Brien's had given his support and work was continuing.

Andrew Smith - Audlem Traders' Association

Andrew said that Audlem Traders' Association were cautiously optimistic about the future. The Association was a small informal group, meeting irregularly to help each other promote Audlem businesses and secure their future. Audlem and Cheshire as a whole were lucky in that Cheshire Community Council had been supportive and proactive. The Council had initiated various campaigns aimed at sustaining village life through local village shops, which are seen as the glue that binds communities together. Andrew and Judy Benson had met with local MP Stephen O'Brien to discuss problems with him.

In response to a question about Post Office closures, Andrew said that Stephen O'Brien had promised support and has spoken in Parliament on the proposed post offices closures. In the next 18 months, 2,500 post offices will close, although it is not yet known which ones. The consultation period had already started and more information will be obtained in June at a meeting to take place in Crewe. The first closures will be in January 2008 and will hopefully not include Audlem. Andrew thanked everyone who helped with the campaign six months ago – he and his family had been overwhelmed by local support. There were 4 million names on the petition which was eventually delivered to Downing Street.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and the meeting closed at 9.00 p.m.

_____ Chairman

_____ Date