



**Hulme Walfield  
and Somerford Booths**  
Parish Council

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup>  
May 2023 at 7.00pm at Westlow Mere Fisheries Meeting Room.**

**Present:** Cllr. Vic Brown (Chairman), Cllr. Mark Hill (Vice Chairman), Cllr. John Spence, Cllr. Mark Wakerly

Peter Aston, Chair of Congleton Partnership

8 members of the public

**1. Welcome and Introduction**

The Chairman, Cllr. Vic Brown welcomed everyone and introduced the speaker.

**2. To approve the minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting Held on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2022.**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2022 be approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

**3. Presentation by Peter Aston, Chair of Congleton Partnership: ‘Feeding the Soul.’**

Mr. Aston thanked Cllr. Brown for his kind invitation to speak as part of the meeting. Mr. Aston shared that the recent arrival of Ukrainian guests in the surrounding area had drawn into focus the importance of volunteering – Mr. Aston had previously thought all nations had a culture of volunteering but was surprised that the Ukrainian guests were unfamiliar with the concept.

He shared about the journey of the Old Sawmill Café – originally, this began as a home-run apple pressing operation, pressing windfalls from members of the local community, which eventually needed space and expanded into the Old Sawmill (a Victorian building, which was refurbished in the 1990s due to a fire). Following Covid, and Covid ‘bubbles’, Mr. Aston became involved in a piece of work, run by Congleton Town Council, focussed on helping those who were isolated and vulnerable. A local lunch club, which was run by two local Churches, needed a larger space, so that they could run the club, while following social distancing. Mr. Aston offered the Old Sawmill as a space, and by July 2020, was delivering food and helping 30 people.

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Signed

Dated

Congleton Town Council offered to subsidise the food, and mentioned the lunch club to anyone relevant who called their Covid helpline. By the end of the year, over 90 people were attending lunch club.

This led to a wider team of volunteers, who did everything from peeling carrots, to baking flapjacks. Only once you see 100 meals being prepared do you gain a sense of what a large task this is.

The next step, as lockdown was continued, was offering deliveries of meals to those who were unable to attend the lunch club. The delivery process began as a simple drop off of food (a door knock and passing the food over) but it quickly became much more; it became a lifeline for those who were struggling with isolation during Covid, with requests ranging from arranging shopping, to collecting prescriptions, to simply talking over a cup of tea.

A common mindset of volunteering is that you go in, complete the task, and then go home once it's done. The volunteers delivering the food found that it was very different from any other role, finding that the support they were offering was just as valuable as the food they delivered. Mr. Aston began to describe this process as 'food for the soul', for both the volunteers and those they were helping.

As Chair of Congleton Partnership, Mr. Aston is now involved with managing the engineering teams at the weir, rewilding the local forests and much more. At the inception of the NHS, life expectation after finishing work was 3 years, with the average age of death being 68. Over the last 70 years, this has changed, with retirees now expecting to live for 25 years or longer; for many of them, volunteering gives them a second lease of life. Volunteers that Mr. Aston has currently range from 17 to retirees. Many of the younger people wish to gain experience or have mental health issues; many of the older people wish to gain more experience or give something back during their retirement.

There is a great amount of work to be done, society is getting more complicated and more pressured and by 'feeding the soul', we all have a contribution to make.

There was a period of questions and answers following the presentation.

- One member of the public remarked that her love of gardening has been something that she has been able to use while volunteering and she really enjoys the experience.
- A question was asked regarding the origin of the packaging that was used. Mr. Aston shared some of the challenges; packaging must be robust, easy to use and (after a few near misses when unsuitable packaging was microwaved!) safe.
- Following a question about how the food is transported, Mr. Aston shared some of his experiences claiming grants from Cheshire East.

- A member of the public asked about the current role of the Old Sawmill. Mr. Aston shared that it is now a community hub, offering space to a range of organisations including the U3A, exercise classes, dementia friends among others.
- Cllr. Brown asked if there was any advice that Mr. Aston could give to councillors to try and encourage public participation. Mr. Aston shared that you need to listen to residents and reach out to them, allow a central body such as CVS or the Congleton Partnership, to manage the volunteering opportunities and then encourage referrals. The more choice that's offered, the more people will engage. Treat volunteering as 'dating agency' and allow people to find what works for them.

#### **4. Chairman's Report - Councillor Vic. Brown**

The Chairman gave his annual report to the meeting which reviewed the council's activities, achievements, and challenges over the past year. The full report can be viewed in Appendix 2 below.

One member of the public asked about challenges the Chairman expects in 2023/2024. The Chairman answered briefly and mentioned some planning matters, speed limits, footpath management and offering something beneficial to the community of Somerford Booths specifically.

A remark was made, by a member of the public, that new councillors are needed to support the local area. The Chair agreed and said that this would be particularly important as the council evolves over the next three or four years.

## APPENDIX 1

### Unaudited Accounts 01-April-2022 to 31-March-2023

#### Receipts

Precept Payment	£	11,500.00
Bank Interest	£	2.47
VAT Refund	£	268.57
	<b>£</b>	<b>11,771.04</b>

#### Payments

Salary & Expenses	£	5,237.97
Training	£	85.00
Memberships	£	236.40
Professional Fees	£	493.32
Communication	£	1,771.61
Donations		
Meetings	£	49.69
Community Projects	£	425.00
Fixed Assets		
Banking Charges	£	102.00
	<b>£</b>	<b>8,400.99</b>
<b>Excess of Receipts over Payments</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>3,370.05</b>

Balance at 01-April-2021	£	28,834.99
Excess of Receipts over Payments	Plus	£ 3,370.05
Less Spend From General Reserves	Less	£ -
Less Spend From Earmarked Reserves	Less	£ 3,839.18
<b>Balance of Accounts at 31-March-2022</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>28,365.86</b>

General Reserves (inc. Current Account)	£	6,622.04
Earmarked Reserves	£	21,743.82
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>28,365.86</b>

Represented By		
Current Account	£	28,365.86
	<b>£</b>	<b>28,365.86</b>

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Signed

Dated

## APPENDIX 2

### Chairman's Report

I am pleased to report a successful, if challenging year. At the outset I wish to thank my fellow Councillors and our former Clerk, Emma Bambrook for their support and hard work. All have demonstrated the importance of working as a strong, proactive team and I am most appreciative of their contributions.

We started the year with the welcomed news that much of Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths Parish was not to be absorbed within the administrative unit of Congleton Town. We argued, successfully that the needs of our residents were better served by a rural-facing Parish and that the proposal was premature as most of the new residential development in this area had yet to be constructed. A series of cordial and constructive meetings followed with the Chief Executive of Congleton Town Council and several Congleton TC Members in which it was agreed that we would work collaboratively and await the next formal review, possibly 5 or more years from now.

The unwelcome news that Congleton was to lose its Recycling Depot (Sep 2021) saw myself and Cllr Hill (Vice Chair) making several representations to committees of Cheshire East. We were greatly assisted in this by Cllr Robert Douglas (Congleton TC). This work resulted in the setting up of a Cheshire East Working Group to investigate possible future locations and costs for a new site in Congleton. A report is expected during 2023, but it seems unlikely that any provision will be committed until April 2024 at the earliest.

During the year, the Parish Council has worked closely with the resident's campaign to protect Giantswood Lane from a significant increase of traffic due to new residential developments proposed for Mount Pleasant Farm, adjacent land off Barn Road and the current Redrow (Roundhill Gardens) site. In all, these developments will see well over 1500 new houses constructed in Hulme Walfield. A public meeting was arranged with the developers of Mount Pleasant Farm (Castle Green) together with formal consultations and presentations with other developers including Redrow.

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Verbal agreement was reached that access onto Giantswood Lane would only be for emergency vehicles. This is a notable achievement by the Parish Council and the Friends of Giantswood Lane, and I am most grateful for FOGWL's hard work in promoting and monitoring this situation. A revised application is expected from Castle Green in the next few weeks. A senior representative of Castle Green has given verbal assurance that there will be no direct access.

Despite the substantial amount of new housing to be constructed, the Parish Council considered it important to consider the extent of any housing need in its joint parish area. In June 2023, it commissioned Cheshire Community Action to conduct a rural housing need survey on its behalf to try and identify any un-met need in its rural area. This report has now been completed and will be discussed at the June 2023 meeting.

As part of its commitment to engagement with new parish residents, Councillors helped organise and fund a special event to mark the Queens Platinum Jubilee, together with some of the residents of Alderley Gate. The weather was kind, and, despite some administrative challenges, the event went off well, with funds raised to support the Congleton Mayors Fund and the food bank operated by New Life Church.

At this point particular mention must be made to the work of Vice Chairman Cllr Hill who has worked tirelessly to resolve practical issues for Alderley Gate residents, in negotiation with Redrow. This has required a substantial number of hours in meetings with the construction teams, to minimise disruption to residents. Despite his hard work, a small number of residents were exceptionally negative about his work and the contribution of the Parish Council.

The Parish Council reminded these individuals that there must always be a degree of formality and politeness in communication between residents and itself. It rejected a request to do this through Facebook, but left it open for concerned individuals to raise issues directly with individual Councillors, through the Clerk, by attending Public Meetings or even standing at the May 2023 election. Since then, it has published a new Zero Tolerance Policy (Jan 2023). This policy does not seek to diminish any individual's right to free speech or their right to criticise the work of either the collective council or individual councillors. It does however aim to ensure that any such views are expressed in an appropriate and non-threatening or non-abusive manner. An open period is available at all Parish Council meetings. As is standard practice, the time for this is limited, but will always be considered for extension at the Chairman's direction.

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Enhancement and protection of the rural environment is an integral part of the Council's work. Arising out of discussions with Alderley Gate residents and Giantswood Lane residents, a scheme was drawn up to make provision for a small orchard, new parish noticeboard, additional trees planters and new seats on the well-used footpath from Giantswood Lane and Manchester Road. The first phase of this has now been completed, and further work is planned as funds allow. The Parish Council has also worked with residents and Cheshire East Highways to maintain hedgerows on Giantswood Lane and to clear blocked culverts. A proposal to install new boundary markers was also considered but rejected on grounds of cost and practicality.

The Council is still waiting to hear if it will be granted a sum of money from developers to improve the public footpath from Rood Hill through to Giantswood Lane. Provision has been made for an additional sum of money from its reserved funds to be contributed for this project, subject to the s106 payment and agreement with the landowners.

In October this year the Council debated and approved a sum of money and a matched-funding scheme over a period of 6 months to support the work of the StoreHouse project run by New Life Church. This project supports those who are experiencing real financial hardship due to the substantial increases in food, fuel and energy costs of the last year. Though operating in the wider Congleton area, it is open to all residents of the parish, and so was considered worthy of support, and allowable through the extended Power of Competence provisions of the Localism Act.

Care in the Community was also recognised through joint work between Cllr Spence (Police Liaison) and a resident of Alderley Gate. This has now resulted in the formation of a new Neighbourhood Watch scheme which has roughly 40 participating families. Sadly, we lost the valued support of PCSO Sue Holt. A new replacement PCSO has recently been appointed though the area of coverage is now larger than before. This is an important link between the Parish and the Police, and it is hoped that equivalent positive links can soon be re-established.

Finally, the parish has been involved in several speed and highway safety issues. Though the new Wolstenholme Elmy Way (Link Road) has brought some benefits through reduced through traffic, there have been several safety, noise and speeding issues. The matters seem to be progressing slowly and will be further investigated if not resolved shortly. An agreed statement has also been produced to support the campaign of 20mph limits on all new estate roads. While the principal of this has been accepted by Cheshire East, implementation has been exceedingly slow. We will continue

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to press for this on all existing and proposed residential estates in the Parish, together with other speed reductions measures.

Looking ahead, I hope residents will recognise that their Parish Council always has their issues and needs at the forefront of its thinking. I do want to encourage two things.

Firstly, that residents of the area will be prepared to offer their time and consider co-option as new Parish Councillors. 4 Councillors (Wakerely, Spence, Hill and Brown) were elected un-opposed at the recent May elections. We have provision for 9 Councillors in all and it is important that we find people to represent the views of both our rural community and those coming to live in our 1500 plus new houses to be built over the next 4 years. Co-option of new members will be considered at our July meeting. Anyone considering offering their time and talents should contact myself or our excellent new Clerk, Lizzie Worrall, in the first instance for an informal discussion.

Secondly, we will be exploring how we can get better engagement with our residents over local issues. We do our work for you, and it is important that we hear your views. We do recognise that not everyone has the time or inclination to turn out on a cold, dark and possibly wet evening in November. Many people now have access to online connections using ZOOM, but, the Government has not given approval for parishes to conduct business by this method, despite allowing it during the Covid pandemic. We will continue to publish our periodic Newsletter, distributed free to all residents but welcome any new ideas and how better public engagement can be achieved. This will be particularly important as we welcome our 3000 plus new residents to Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths.