

NEWSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL.

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held in the Summit Room of Newstead Miners Welfare Community Centre on Wednesday 2nd May 2007.

1. **Present:** Cllrs. P.A. Wise (Chairman), J. Booth, P. Bateman, P. Burnham, W. Evans and R. Milliken.
2. **Apologies for absence :** Cllr D. Carless
3. **Declarations of interest:** There were no declarations of interests.
4. **Inquiry by the Commission for Rural Communities – Strengthening the Role of Rural Councillors.**
 - 4.1 **Question – What are the most important ways that rural councillors currently successfully help their local communities have a say and influence over local decisions?**

Members made the following observations:-

 1. Meetings with residents are held on specific issues e.g. policing, major planning applications.
 2. Personal contact with residents is vitally important and information is passed by word of mouth around the village.
 3. Public speaking time is always available at Parish Council meetings.
 4. Questionnaires are used for major consultations. They are handed out and collected in by councillors.
 5. Partnership groups such as residents associations and liaison groups tend to discuss the same issues with little or no authority to carry out decisions.
 - 4.2 **Question – Which partnerships and relationships are most important for a rural councillor to be effective?**

Members made the following observations:-

 1. Parish councillors are known by the residents and are involved in many groups within the Parish.
 2. It was thought that the Parish Council is effective but the Borough Council is not.
 3. The Parish Council is non-political and is seen as such by residents so councillors are not tied to any political philosophy.
 - 4.3 **Question – What do you think are the most significant barriers or constraints that get in the way of rural councillors performing an effective local community leadership role?**

Members made the following observations:-

 1. There is insufficient leadership from national, regional and county organisations. Parish councillors are consulted over matters which concern the local community but too often it is felt that their opinions are ignored by the higher authority. Consultation is seen as a necessary chore and the documents are usually extensive and often written in such a manner as to confuse. Councillors believe that changes are rarely made to consultation documents after the period of consultation making them a paper exercise only.
 2. The powers that are given to Parish Councils is limited and should be extended as Parish councillors are nearest to the local residents as they live in the community.
 3. It was thought that an invitation to local Borough councillors who represent urban wards would be beneficial to their understanding of rural issues.

4. Ultimately it is the Government of the day who would be responsible for making any changes to the present set up.

4.4 What do you consider to be the other important ways that rural communities influence local decisions? In what circumstances would you choose to use these ways, rather than going through your local councillor?

Members made the following observations:-

1. Action groups have been formed in the area recently to fight specific issues e.g. Green Belt Action Group 5 and the Friends of Annesley Lagoons.
2. It was pointed out that local councillors headed both groups.
3. Despite the overwhelming support of the local community the influence on the decisions was not very effective as other factors were considered to be more important than local opinion.

4.5 Question – Describe the role you would like to see rural councillors play in the future. What would you like rural councillors to do more or less of? Or do differently?

Members made the following observations:-

1. It was thought that new powers should be given to the councillors who are closest to the residents.
2. Borough Council officers should be made to listen and to understand the needs of rural communities.
3. More effective training of Parish councillors should be undertaken at times to suit them as they are usually in full time employment and are also volunteer councillors with no financial rewards.
4. Councillors were unsure of the proposals of the Government White Paper on Rural Communities.

4.6 It was thought that these questions should have been put to local residents not only to Parish councillors. The questions are loaded and are set in such a way so as to get the answers that the author wants. It is believed that this is playing lip service to the consultation procedure.

5. Items that the Chairman considered urgent.

5.1 Two planning applications were discussed.

2007/0279 Old Vicarage, Newstead Abbey Park – No objections

2007/0296 The Old Forge, Newstead Abbey Park – No objections

5.2 The maintenance of the Old Cemetery as a meadow would be discussed at the next Parish Council meeting as Steve Waters would not be available in the future.

5.3 The problem of Japanese Knotweed continues at the Old Cemetery.

5.4 A dustbin has been left outside the Youth Centre and is now being filled.

6. Closure and date of next meeting.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 9.00pm. The next meeting of the Parish Council will be on Wednesday 9th May 2007 commencing at 7.30pm. The Annual Parish meeting and the Annual General meeting will be held on the same evening.

