

**MINUTES OF THE PARISH MEETING OF
SHOCKLACH OVIATT AND DISTRICT PARISH COUNCIL
HELD IN SHOCKLACH PRIMARY SCHOOL
ON THURSDAY, 19 MAY, 2011 AT 7.30 P.M..**

PRESENT:

Cllr Kathy MacKenzie (Chair)
Cllr Jim Blake
Cllr Marcus Chaloner
Cllr Lou Macchi (partial attendance)
Cllr Mark Piggott
Cllr Jo Shone

In attendance: approximately 21 members of the public including Sue Clisham, Head Teacher of Shocklach Primary School and six children.

Apologies: Cllr Lou Macchi.

Cllr Kathy MacKenzie began by welcoming the guest speakers, Rachel Price from the Cheshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Ben Gregory from the British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC). She thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and proceeded to inform those present that, over the past twelve months, the Parish Council had:

- considered eleven consultation documents;
- considered twelve planning applications;
- provided Christmas parcels for two special residents, thanks to generous fund-raising by The Bull;
- continued the campaign for a weight/width restriction which was making slow progress;
- carried out traffic speed surveys with residents which had resulted in the Police sending out 173 letters to speeding motorists; Cllr Kathy MacKenzie said that more volunteers were always required;

Cllr Kathy MacKenzie informed those present:

- that Tilston Post Office would re-open on the afternoon of Monday, 23rd May;
- that SODPC's preferred charity, to which donations were made each year, was the North West Air Ambulance;
- that there were two parish councillor vacancies in Horton and two in Caldecott.

Sue Clisham then introduced the children from Shocklach school who were to report back to the rest of the school on the evening's proceedings. The subject of the two talks would have particular relevance to the School's "Country Living" magazine which was in the process of being compiled.

Cllr Kathy MacKenzie then introduced Rachel Price.

Rachel explained that FWAG was a national charity with a presence in every county. Each FWAG was supported by a local steering group of farmers and partners. The

Cheshire FWAG is based at Reaseheath College. Each group provides advice in the form of one-to-one visits to farms/by telephone/newsletters/training days/talks to groups/attendance at shows.

Shocklach has seventeen members in the area and ten applications have been processed for Environmental Stewardship schemes at both entry level and higher level.

FWAG also set up the 2008 Shocklach Hedgerow Survey and is involved with barn owl and water vole surveys.

Hedgerows generally

- 1 They are an important landscape feature.
- 2 They are historically important.
- 3 They are important wildlife habitats for dormice, pipistrelle bats, butterflies and birds.
- 4 They are important for stock management and shelter.
- 5 They prevent soil erosion.
- 6 They take up greenhouse gases and store carbon dioxide.
- 7 They are a source of fuel.
- 8 They are a source of fruit for jams and wine.

Shocklach survey 2008

104 hedges were surveyed representing approximately 18.18km of hedges.

99% were shrubby or shrubby with a line of trees.

The survey showed that the hedges are a valuable network with many connections and are in very good condition.

They had higher than the national average number of hedgerow trees.

29% were species-rich and some had up to 9 species along their length. A rough estimate is that each species represents 100 years so some hedges are very old indeed.

FWAG is working closely with farmers to improve hedges. They are encouraged to cut hedges every two years instead of every year. This is because there are more flowers and fruit on the second year's growth which, in turn, supports more wildlife.

It is illegal to cut farm hedges between 1 March and 31 July. The best time is January when most of the flowers and fruit have gone.

Farmers are encouraged to leave rough edges to hedges which encourage wildlife and to plant up gaps and lay old hedges.

River Dee SSSI

This is nationally important and protected by law. There are otters in Worthenbury Brook and, in the Dee, water voles, Atlantic salmon, kingfishers, herons and many species of dragon- and damselflies.

Flood Plain Grazing Marsh

This is located on land adjacent to Shocklach Hall and Dog Kennel Farm and is a BAP (Biodiversity Action Plan) habitat.

Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs)

These are located at Shocklach Meadows and Churchyard and at Manor Farm. They are all semi-improved ancient hay meadows, very few of which remain in Cheshire.

Barn Owls

There is a good population of breeding barn owls along the River Dee corridor and farmers are encouraged to put up owl boxes and to include "buffer zones" along field edges.

Historic Environment

Shocklach has one of the best historic environments in Cheshire and includes ancient and mediaeval field systems. These are dated as before 16AD and form only 16% of Cheshire's countryside.

Ridge and Furrow

Shocklach has good, well-preserved examples of these.

Rachel then handed over to Ben Gregory.

Ben informed those present that BASC was well represented in Cheshire. Gamekeepers do a great deal for conservation and land management and BASC wanted to build upon this. The result was the "Green Shoots Project" which started in Cheshire in 2000 and is now represented in 28% of the country. Two initiatives undertaken so far have been a hedgerow survey in conjunction with the Cheshire Landscape Trust and a water vole project on the River Gowy in association with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust. Water voles are the fastest declining mammal in the UK with the cause partially attributed to mink.

The project which Ben wished to concentrate on, however, was the Southwest Cheshire Dormouse Project featuring the Hazel Dormouse. These animals weigh approximately 20 gm in summer and are 6-9cm long. They live in deciduous woodland and bushy hedgerows. They hibernate in winter and go into a deep sleep during poor weather in the summer.

At present, there is one population in Cheshire which was released into the Wych Valley (prior to this, the last record of wild dormice in Cheshire was in 1910). A nest which was possibly that of a dormouse was found in Tilston in 2005.

The Southwest Cheshire Dormouse Project aims to link the Wych Valley population to Cheshire, thereby helping the dormouse to spread. This population is towards its northernmost range (although there is a population in Cumbria) and a line of hedgerows with nearby fox coverts has been established which goes through Shocklach towards Peckforton. Dormice don't travel along the ground if they can help it so a network of woodland, hedges and fox coverts is very important.

It is intended that there will be more hedgerow and woodland surveys in and around Shocklach which will lead to habitat restoration and creation. Monitoring for dormice will be done as these surveys take place.

Pete Grant

Can you help the dormice to spread or are they left to their own devices?

Ben

They are left to their own devices but it is recognized that this will be a very slow and uncertain process. BASC are unwilling to bring in another population from elsewhere but, on the other hand, if the Wych Valley population doesn't spread, in-breeding will become a problem and the population may collapse. The project is to continue for two years but it is hoped that it will continue beyond then.

Jan Green

How long do they live, what size litters do they have and what are their main predators?

Ben

They have one litter a year with 4-6 young but only 1-2 survive. Contrary to popular belief, mild winters are a problem because the animals do not hibernate and fatten up. They wake up when there is little food and often die. They live for 3-4 years. The main predators are cats.

Cllr Kathy MacKenzie thanked the speakers and all those present and invited everyone to join the Parish Council for refreshments.