

NOTES OF THE SECOND NEIGHBOURHOOD MEETING, 20 SEPTEMBER 2010, TO DISCUSS THE CHIMES (AT NIGHT)

The meeting was attended by 14 people, including the Vicar and 2 PCC representatives, Michael Bond (OCRA) and Ian Manning (Vie Residents Association and county councillor).

The vicar introduced the meeting by giving a history of the bells at St Andrew's:

- The tower and spire were built 1340-80. We know that there were at least two bells then.
- Four of the current six bells date from the 17th century.
- The chiming clock was installed in 1921 as a gift from the then owner of Chesterton Hall, Mrs Wragg Gurney.

He then summarised the recent history of discussion about the chimes:

- The issue of disturbance was first raised in 2003 when a new resident in the newly built St Andrew's Park complained about the clock chiming through the night and asking if it could be silenced at night. The developers of St Andrew's Park agreed to foot the bill for installing a mechanism to allow this to happen automatically. The local community was consulted via *Chesterton Chimes*: 44 people responded (by letter, email or phone), all of them against silencing the chimes at night. The complainant then moved and the developers withdrew their support for the scheme. No further action was taken.
- Since the *Vie* development, its community forum has including a continuing debate about the chimes and whether they should be silenced at night. This was drawn to the vicar's attention during 2009 and he responded by outlining the recent history of the previous paragraph.
- Early in 2010 one *Vie* resident wrote to the vicar about the matter, which led to a one-to-one meeting. In view of the obvious distress and sleeplessness caused by the chimes (not experienced during periods when they had been silent), the vicar agreed to raise the matter again with the PCC (church council) and to take public soundings.
- A public meeting was held on 21 June 2010 attended by about 25 local residents. The meeting heard the views of those who were disturbed at night by the chimes, those who found them a comfort at night and others who did not feel strongly either way. The majority of those expressing an opinion were in favour of silencing the chimes at night (or neutral); a suggested compromise, that the quarter-hour chimes be silenced between certain hours (11/12pm and 6/7am) whilst hourly strikes (the 'bongs') should continue, was widely supported at the meeting with no-one speaking against.
- Of 20 emails received either before or after the 21 June meeting, 10 were in favour of silencing the chimes at night (5 *Vie* residents, 5 from St Andrew's Rd/Longworth Ave), 3 complained about the Thursday bellringing practice and 7 wanted to keep the status quo.
- The PCC considered the matter at its meeting of 5 July and agreed to support the installation of a mechanism and to have a trial period of silencing the chimes at night – but asked that a further public meeting be convened to check that the compromise solution had popular support.

An open forum followed. It became clear that there was no-one present who was arguing for the silencing of the chimes, although apologies had been received from two *Vie* residents who

asked that their views would be expressed. Amongst points/comments made were the following:

- The chimes are part of our local history and culture. Two of the *Vie* residents present argued strongly that those moving in should have done so aware of the implications ('residential accommodation has just been built almost next to Big Ben but no-one would dream of suggesting that it should be silenced at night').
- Parts of the *Vie* development may have a particular problem because of its design – effectively amplifying the chimes. In time this may be partly ameliorated by the maturing of trees. Perhaps other measures could be taken to absorb the sound.
- It is difficult to know how to balance the distress caused to a few with the comfort given to rather more.
- For most people this is not a live issue as they sleep during the hours in question, but many are concerned about the 'slippery slope' – yield on this one and what will people ask for next?
- There was no support at the meeting for curtailing the Thursday night practice (7.30-9pm) or ringing for services.

When people were asked to give an opinion, 9 were against the proposal to silence the quarter-hour chimes at night, 3 were prepared to support it and 2 abstained.

The matter will now return to the PCC for further consideration.

NIM, 21.9.10