

BISHOPSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Parish Assembly Meeting held at 7.00 p.m. on Monday 3rd March 2014 at Bishopstone Parva Village Hall

Those Present: Simon Jenkins (Chair), Lesley Drewett (Clerk), Ian Thompson (Vice Chair), Julian Cooke, Nigel Crisp, Andrew Greenhalgh, Ian Thomas, Stuart McGuigan, Doug Stevens, Karen Griffiths, Cllr Andrew Bennett.

1 Approved Apologies

None.

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None.

The Chair briefly attended prior to the meeting beginning. But, as he had previously notified Council of his decision to resign at this meeting, it was Chaired by the Vice Chair, Cllr Ian Thompson, after the Chair left.

2 Minutes of Last Meeting (Parish Assembly 2013)

The minutes were proposed by Cllr Nigel Crisp and accepted unanimously as a true record of the previous meeting.

3 Financial Statement

The Chair of the finance committee explained that the accounts were in a healthy position. The Parish Council had maintained the reserves over the past twelve months at approximately a year's worth of income at £11,500. SBC had reversed their decision on the Council Tax Support Grant and therefore the precept has been able to be reduced by approximately 4%, despite a decrease in the Council Tax housing base.

4 Chairman's Report 2013/2014

The Chair's report had been sent to Councillors via email and a minor amendment had been made to this. A copy of the report, with the amendment, will be included in the newsletter.

INTRODUCTION

There were no changes to the Parish Council at the elections last year, but at the AGM on 13 May 2013 Karolyn Tapper decided to stand down from the Council, on account of increasing work and family commitments. Karolyn had been on the Council for 10 years and a vote of thanks for her long period of service to the Parish was agreed unanimously. We were very pleased to welcome Kate Griffiths onto the Council in October.

Sadly, there is currently no representation from Russley Park; a vacancy is looming (as reported below) and it would be very good for the Parish as a whole if Russley Park was again to be represented.

I would like to extend my personal thanks to all members of the Parish Council for the time they have put in, and for their attendance and input to our discussions over the last 12 months; the work is voluntary and we all live increasingly busy lives. I would like to thank Lesley Drewett, our Clerk, who has been in post since September 1999 - Lesley's experience and knowledge is crucial to us – and also Andrew Bennett, our Ward Councillor, for his advice and intercessions with Swindon Borough Council on our behalf.

The Parish Council undertakes its business on behalf of all of you – the parishioners of Bishopstone, Hinton Parva and Russley Park; we can only do this effectively if you tell us of your concerns and problems. There is more on the theme of communications later.

HOW DID WE DO AGAINST THE "ACTION PLAN" FOR THE PAST YEAR?

I identified five points for the following year in my report in March 2013:

- *Keep expenditure under control*
- *Work closely with SBC on all planning matters*
- *Monitor the developing Swindon Local Plan for its effect on the Parish*
- *Progress any relevant “Localism” matters*
- *Work with and for all residents of the Parish*

Generally, I believe that we have made a good deal of progress on all of these, and in so doing I think that the Parish Council has succeeded in raising its profile; this has to be good for the Parish and all residents in the future. It has been useful to work more closely than in the past with Wanborough and Liddington Parish Councils; the more that the rural parishes of SBC can work together, the greater the leverage they will have, as there are a number of areas in which our interests are similar. Also, it has been helpful to develop closer working relationships with elected members and officials in key posts at SBC; whilst we may not always agree with what they say, it is my experience in the last year or so that they are genuinely interested in the rural parishes and try to help; the “bigger picture” with which they have to deal brings other pressures. In more detail:

FINANCE

The precept for 2011/12 was £13,480; we reduced this to £12,805 for 2012/13, to £12,670 for 2013/14 and have made a further reduction to £11,852 for the forthcoming year 2014/15. We were helped in this latest reduction by SBC who decided to pass through to Parish Councils, for the first time, the Council Tax Support grant received from Government. We judged these reductions to be in the best interests of parishioners at a difficult time financially, but they are not large sums of money and the Parish Council has little flexibility or spare cash. There is further detail on the precept in the March 2014 edition of the Parish Times. No guarantees can be given at this time about future years.

Local effects

SBC budgets and / or services continue to be cut back as a result of the Government’s “austerity” programme; the Parish Council would always wish to be informed of anybody in the Parish who might need assistance.

PLANNING

Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026

The Examination in Public (EIP) on the Local Plan will commence on Tuesday 29 April at STEAM, over a four week period. If you commented on the draft you should have been informed about the EIP, which is likely to focus on the tests of soundness as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) published on 27 March 2012.

The draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the Eastern Villages (8,000 homes and associated schools, shops and medical centres etc.) was published in June 2013. In late 2012, long before it appeared, we became aware that the housing boundary originally set out in the Local Plan had been moved some 800 metres in a southerly direction to include Redlands Farm and airfield; this is extremely close to Wanborough and will have a major effect on the village. The change had been made to the plan some time before we became aware of it (via the Evening Advertiser) and it had been put through without any consultation with Wanborough Parish Council, or the Wanborough Working Party, with whom we had been working for some time. It was justified by SBC as being a reversion to the 2011 draft Core Strategy. This resulted in a loss of confidence in the good faith of SBC and the consequent abandonment of the WPP. The issue was discussed with the Leader of the Council on two occasions, jointly with the Chairman of Wanborough Parish Council, but the housing boundary stands as it was amended, including Redlands Farm, and is certain to be challenged in the EIP.

Comments became due in January 2014 on a planning application for 2,380 homes at Rowborough / South Marston and an application for c3,000 homes at Lotmead is expected to surface in the spring of 2014 – both part of the Eastern Villages strategy. It is unfortunate, but perhaps not surprising, that such large applications are coming in before SBC has a Local Plan in place, which means that they will find it harder to resist inappropriate development and to ensure the correct degree of infrastructure.

The Parish Council’s comments on the SPD for the Eastern Villages and for the Rowborough / South Marston proposal centred on the lack of funding for the infrastructure that is essential for such large developments; all local Parish Councils are particularly concerned about the capacity of the A420, A419 and M4 Junction 15, all of which are already inadequate at peak

times of the day, and about the flooding problems in the area. We understand that the Government does not plan for the “100 year flooding event”; the trouble is that to most of us it seems that we have had a “100 year event” in 2007, 2012 and this year. There are also major concerns about the “rat-running” through our villages which will be the inevitable result of congestion on the major roads. We have made a contribution to the consortium of Western Vale Villages (WVV) which is working hard on these issues, in conjunction with the Vale of White Horse District Council and Oxfordshire County Council.

Neighbourhood Plan

The concept of the Neighbourhood Plan stems from the Localism Act and the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). We had another look at producing a Neighbourhood Plan last year and decided that it was not necessary. We believe that the protection afforded to the Parish in the current draft of the Local Plan is sufficient to make the production of a Neighbourhood Plan unnecessary.

I make no apology for spending some time on these planning issues; they are extremely important, will affect everybody who lives in the area for many years to come, and will therefore feature on the Parish Council’s agenda in coming months. If you have any queries or wish to know more, please speak to a member of the Parish Council – or better still – come to a meeting!

OTHER LOCAL MATTERS

The Bus!

You must have been on another planet if you were not aware of the bus drama in September and October of 2013.

In early September the Parish Council discovered that it was intended to cancel the No 47 bus, which ran from Lambourn to Swindon Centre and was the only public transport link to and from Swindon for the rural villages. This was a result of SBC deciding to cut the subsidy to Thamesdown Travel which was apparently essential to run the service. SBC had not informed us of this decision. A most impressive leafleting campaign aroused many of the residents of the Parish; a large number of letters and e-mails were sent to Council Members and officials of SBC and a combined delegation from Bishopstone and Wanborough Parishes swamped the Public Question Time item at an SBC Cabinet meeting. One of the Bishopstone residents said to me as we left the Cabinet meeting “I am proud of Bishopstone”.

This was democracy in action and it worked. The No 47 bus service ceased on Saturday 16 October and on the following Monday the new No 90 service commenced, on a route from Hungerford via Lambourn to Swindon. This is run by a private company called GoRide plc; they have smaller buses than the No 47 and after some initial teething problems the service seems to have settled down well. It is vital that it is well used; if it becomes uneconomic, it may cease and we would then be most unlikely to find another company willing to step in.

Road maintenance

The wet winter has (again) damaged many roads and new problems should always be promptly reported to the Clerk.

Village Clean-up

As stated last year, we live in a beautiful part of the country and many people are disgusted by the quantity of bottles, cans and far worse discarded beside our roads. In November 2013, we did something about this with another successful clean-up day and c30 bags of rubbish were collected; many thanks to those who helped. A spring clean-up (before the verges and ditches grow over again) is to be carried out on Sunday 16 March 2014.

It is excellent that this seems to have become an annual feature. In the meantime, you could try taking a shopping bag with you when you are walking and clean up as you go; there is usually plenty worth picking up.

Parish web site

Please remember the Parish web site: <http://bishopstoneandhintonparva.org/>

It utilises modern technology; it is capable of further development and is good news for the Parish long term. It includes pages for local news, the Parochial Church Council, the village halls, the Parish Council’s records, the Gardening Society and other local organisations, and

even up to date news about the local weather. News flashes that are thought to be of general interest are put up on the web site and there is the facility to post comments.

If you have not visited it, please go there and contact Andy Greenhalgh if you have any ideas or comments.

Rural broadband.

The Government initiative to make high speed broadband services available in rural areas is so slow as to be virtually dead at the time of writing. However, if you happen to live in the right place, there are two private companies offering super-fast wireless connections; these have been advertised in the Parish Times but if you want more information please contact Andy Greenhalgh.

Sewage

We have had sewage issues in Hinton Parva and Bishopstone recently. The septic tank In Hinton Parva, to which some 11 properties are connected, had been overflowing into the surrounding fields for some time and we were able to focus the attention of SBC onto it in March 2013. 12 months later, and at the time of writing this report, the replacement tank is almost ready to go live. This has been an essential but expensive (unfunded) project for SBC and thanks are due to them for grasping this nettle.

In Bishopstone a number of properties at the lower end of the village (the Forty area) have regularly suffered from overflows of sewage from the public system. One of the residents concerned has had a particularly bad time, despite having reported the overflows to Thames Water over a ten year period.

Regrettably Thames Water have paid no attention, and a further series of prolonged overflows took place in February / March 2014, leaving some gardens in a disgraceful state. At the time of writing this report, these problems have not been resolved. This is an issue for the Parish Council to take up in the coming year.

Communications

The Parish Council can only operate effectively if you, the residents of the Parish, tell us of your concerns and problems. You can do that in a number of ways:

- Speak or write to a member of the Parish Council; their names and numbers are in every issue of the Parish Times
- Use the web site
- Attend our monthly meetings. This is the best way to communicate any concerns to the Parish Council as a whole; we have to follow government procedures, but we will make it as easy and non-confrontational as possible to have an open and frank discussion.

The Parish Council is not so complacent as to think that everybody is satisfied with what it does. But if you are not satisfied or have any ideas, concerns or worries.....**You must tell us: we welcome your feedback.**

And finally.....

This is my fourth and last report as Chairman on the activities of the Parish Council in the last year, as I am standing down from the post of Chairman and from the Parish Council on conclusion of the Parish Assembly on 3 March. This is because, after over 30 years in the village, we are down-sizing to a smaller house, which is close by, but not in the Parish or even SBC area.

Please welcome Molly and Charlie Smith who have bought our house.

Joanna and I would like to thank all those in Bishopstone and Hinton Parva with whom we have become friends over this long period; we will be very sorry to leave the village.

The Parish Assembly then closed at 8:00 pm.