

BISHOPSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes of Parish Assembly Meeting
held at 7.30 p.m.
on Monday 11th May 2015
at Hinton Parva Parva Village Hall**

Those Present: Ian Thompson (Chair), Lesley Drewett (Clerk), Julian Cooke, Nigel Crisp, Val Brodin, Tom Green, Cllr Andrew Bennett.

1 Approved Apologies

Stuart McGuigan, Doug Stevens, Ian Thomas, Andy Greenhalgh.

Apologies

None.

2 Minutes of Last Meeting (Parish Assembly 2014)

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

Cllr Bennett informed Cllrs that the appointment of Mike Veale, the new Chief Constable, had been endorsed that day.

3 Financial Statement

The Chair of the finance committee explained that that, over the year, the reserves had reduced by £500, but are still healthy. The annual budget is c. £12,000. The Parish Council had not increased the Council Tax for the second year running. Over the year, investments were made in a defibrillator, information board and dog bins. Grants were made to both village halls and the Ridgeway Link as well as a contribution to the Western Vale Consortium. Other expenditure covered improvements to the website and maintaining verges, churchyards and the pond.

4 Chairman's Report 2014/2015

The Chair had forwarded his report to Councillors before the meeting and, as there were no members of the public in attendance, he did not need to read it aloud. It is reproduced here for information and will be included in the "Parish Times".

The resignation from the Parish Council of Simon Jenkins, the former Chair, in March 2014 was followed by that of Kate Griffiths in May 2014 for family reasons. Simon's contribution was acknowledged in the Parish Times last year but I would also like to place on the record my thanks to Kate for her valuable contribution, albeit she was only a council member for a relatively short time. The two vacancies were filled by Val Brodin from Hinton Parva (June 2014) and Tom Green from Bishopstone (September 2014) meaning that the council now has a more balanced representation from the two villages. It would be beneficial to have a representative from Russley Park once again should a future vacancy arise.

I would like to record my thanks to all members of the council for their support and encouragement since I reluctantly took on the role of Chair from May 2014. An impartial observer at one of our meetings described the council ethos as "collegiate" and I would hope that that spirit of inclusiveness and mutual support could continue into the future.

Thanks are also due to our Clerk, Lesley Drewett, who now has over 15 years of experience in keeping proceedings on the straight and narrow and her advice and support are much valued. Finally, our ward councillor Andrew Bennett has been extremely helpful and supportive, in particular in any dealings with Swindon Borough Council where inside knowledge and contacts can be of immense value. As I write, Andrew is the Swindon Mayor designate for the coming municipal year and I sincerely wish him well as he dons the robes and chain.

Signed:

Date:

Planning and Traffic Matters

As a Parish Council, our formal powers are extremely limited and often the council's role is restricted to one of seeking to apply pressure on the powers that be on behalf of village residents. For example, although we are consulted by Swindon Borough on all planning applications, we do not enjoy any powers of veto. We do, however, continue to work hard to preserve the integrity of the conservation areas and have also taken a robust line in relation to any proposed developments outside the agreed "rural settlement boundary" for each of the villages. (This is the envelope as defined in the Swindon Local Plan outside of which there is a presumption against further housing development). It is gratifying that Swindon planners have thus far been supportive in maintaining this position and as stated in last year's report, it is the principal reason why the Parish Council has determined that formulating a "Neighbourhood Plan" would be of little advantage. That said, the position will continue to be kept under review.

In relation to broader planning matters, the Swindon Eastern Development continues to be a matter of major concern. Although the future housing development is a *fait accompli*, as ever the devil is in the detail. Whilst the south eastern boundary for the additional housing does not directly impact on our villages, the development is nevertheless likely to create problems in other ways, not least in terms of generating additional traffic. There is also the increased danger of "rat-running" as the A420 becomes more congested and also as a consequence of the imminent improvement works at the White Hart and Gables Cross (Police Station) junctions. A related issue is the extent to which additional traffic from new housing development is allowed to access the Wanborough Road with all that that implies. We will continue to maintain a close watch on developments and lend support to neighbouring villages that are likely to be similarly, or indeed more, affected. We will also lobby hard for further traffic calming measures should there be evidence of increased traffic danger. Sustained pressure from the council has already resulted in some agreed additional precautionary measures to be implemented on Bodyhorse Hill in Hinton Parva.

In the context of traffic calming, the past year has seen some preparatory work for what is termed "Community Speedwatch". This is an initiative led by the Police whereby volunteers can be trained in the use of hand-held speed cameras and traffic speeds recorded at appropriate places. In the early part of this year, traffic speeds were monitored at key locations on the Icknield Way (rubber strips across the road) and the data has demonstrated that implementing the "speedwatch" activity can be justified. Recorded offenders receive a warning from the Police in the first instance. A number of councillors are currently booked onto the next training course and other villagers are welcome to join in; contact a parish councillor in the first instance.

Sewage Problems

It is extremely gratifying to be able to report that the long-standing problems with sewage overflows at The Forty in Bishopstone are at last within sight of being resolved. This has been an example of where, despite the lack of any formal powers, the Parish Council has been able to "punch above its weight". The council effectively took on the cause of affected residents and was able to encourage the direct involvement not only of our Borough councillor but also our local M.P. As a result of persistent nagging and evidence gathering on the part of the council, Thames Water finally took the course of least resistance and agreed to install a new sewer link directly to the pumping station. My thanks are due to those councillors who were particularly instrumental in applying the required pressure and making this happen.

... Signed:

Date:

Broadband

Another success for the council over the past year has been bringing high-speed broadband access to the parish. The credit for this must go to Cllr. Andy Greenhalgh who had extensive discussions/negotiations with a private company, UK Broadband, which was already providing Swindon Borough Council with a private high-speed wireless network across the urban area. The company was persuaded to investigate using their existing network of masts around Swindon to provide access for our villages and it actually went live earlier in 2015. The major constraint, however, was that the roof of the receiving property had to have a line of sight to an existing mast. Nevertheless, a number of residents were able to take advantage of the service. The good news is that, given the proven success of this service to date, Swindon Borough Council, supported with some government funding, are now subsidising UK Broadband to add an additional 20 or so masts to their network, thereby enabling much wider coverage across the borough as a whole including the rural areas. It is anticipated that one of the new masts will be within our parish to the benefit of most if not all residents.

Other Issues

It is gratifying that the council has also been able to make a contribution over the past year in a number of minor but, in terms of the quality of village life, quite significant areas. Not least, the installation of a dog bin at the western gateway in Bishopstone has had a noticeable impact on the amount of doggy deposits soiling the permissive path! The council also funded the installation of the Information Board adjacent to the pond on its western edge and on a more practical level, arranged for the installation of the defibrillator at the village hall and the associated training of volunteers. In March, the council arranged for another village clean-up and thanks must go to Swindon Borough Council for their help both in providing the equipment and subsequently taking away the mountain of rubbish that was retrieved from the hedgerows; I think even they were surprised at the quantity when they came to collect it! My thanks go to those who cheerfully turned out to help, especially our younger residents who took to the task with gusto.

In terms of finance, the council's reserves are healthy and the village element of the council tax has been held for 2015/16 at the same level as last year.

The village(s) website is now well-established and continues to be enhanced including over the past year a guide to selected walks around the parish – do check it out at:

<http://bishopstoneandhintonparva.org>

Finally, it is worth reporting that the Go-Ride No. 90 bus service continues to operate and appears to be well-used (albeit on occasion demand exceeds supply). I don't wish to rehearse the story of the withdrawal at short notice of the former No. 47 service but long may the No. 90 continue.

Looking Forward...

Probably the most important issue for the village in the coming year will be the development proposals for the Royal Oak and True Heart. A planning application is imminent at the time of writing and the Parish Council will be keen to receive the views of residents on this.

In conclusion, I would encourage residents to pass on any concerns to any member of the council. Names and telephone contacts are published in every edition of the Parish Times.

The meeting closed at 7:37 pm.

Signed:

Date: