

**MINUTES OF DUCKLINGTON
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY 20 APRIL 2010
IN THE VILLAGE HALL, DUCKLINGTON AT 7.30 PM**

1. Present:

Parish Councillors:

Edmund Strange (Chairman)
Adrian Armitage
Richard Border
Peter Godwin
Brian Hicks
Graham Lenton
Glyn Rees

Helen Sandhu (Clerk)
Don Seale – OCC Councillor
Squadron Leader Neil Cooper – RAF Brize Norton
Martin Layer – Smiths of Bletchington
Lucy Binnie – working for Smiths of Bletchington
Geoff Feasey – Challenge North Leigh project
26 members of the public

2. Apologies:

Peter Almgill – Parish Councillor
Steven Hayward – WODC Councillor

3. Welcome

Edmund Strange, Chairman of the Parish Council, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

4. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting on 11 May 2009

The Minutes were signed by the Chairman.

5. Presentation by RAF Brize Norton

Squadron Leader Neil Cooper gave a presentation about current and future operations at RAF Brize Norton. The priority of the station is to support operations overseas. There are currently 13 VC10s, 9 Tristars and 6 C17 aircraft. Foreign charter planes including Antonovs are also used when there are insufficient RAF aircraft available. 10 years ago there were double the number of VC10s and these will continue to be reduced in number. There has been a gradual change in the mix of resources run from Brize Norton – there are now more auxiliary squadrons providing manpower to support flying operations.

A substantial building programme is ongoing. A large area of extra concrete has been laid to accommodate more aircraft, including the new aircraft which is due to come into service. This includes the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft (FSTA) – which does not yet have an official operational name – the first delivery of this aircraft is expected mid-2011 with 14 (maximum) due to be based at RAF Brize Norton by December 2018. The Airbus A330 will also come online – these will be leased aircraft, with the risk of unserviceability, etc therefore sitting with the provider and not the RAF. These will be used to replace the

VC10s. The noise footprint of the A330 is much better than the VC10 and they are more capable, efficient and cost effective than the VC10s – being larger than the VC10 fewer aircraft movements will be required to deliver the same amount of work. The new A400M is subject to some delay. If and when it is delivered it will be very capable and will be used to supplement the C130 fleet. Delivery of the A400M is delayed currently to 2013, there will hopefully be a maximum of 22 of these aircraft delivered eventually. The number of VC10s is expected to fall to 4 by 2013 with them being out of service completely by the end of that year. There are currently 28 aircraft plus charter planes operated from RAF Brize Norton. In 2018 it is expected that there will be 24 C130, 7 C17, 22 A400M, and 14 A330 plus charter planes with no VC10 or Tristar. However a lot of these would be expected to be deployed off base at any given time.

As Programme Future Brize moves forward there are a lot of new buildings being built and a lot of old buildings being demolished. The 1960s-built base is being updated to provide a modern infrastructure, improving the base's capability to deliver its services. There will be an increase in service personnel at the base as the expansion takes place and personnel are moved from RAF Lyneham. It is expected that there will be 6095 service personnel by October 2012 with this number falling back to 5093 by 2017 – not many more than are based there now. This does not include non-service personnel. Additional accommodation is being built to house 860 extra service personnel who will live on the station. It is anticipated that 1369 families (an increase from the previous capacity of 1065) will live in Carterton. RAF Brize Norton therefore needs to find/build more accommodation to house them. The increase in the number of service personnel living locally will also have an impact on local schools, dental and medical services. RAF Brize Norton is aware of this but values its local connections and seeks to have a positive impact on the community. One example of this is the activities which take place to raise money for national and local charities.

In terms of the noise footprint, Ducklington will always be under the flight path because of where it is located. The noise footprint generated by the newer aircraft will be narrower, but Ducklington will remain under the approach path for the main runway. It is hard to know how many more aircraft movements there may be, but if there are it will be by modern aircraft which are more efficient and produce less noise than the existing older planes. As many of the additional aircraft will be deployed off-base it is expected that the impact of the changes at RAF Brize Norton will be positive.

Q: Is there a height limit below which the aircraft cannot fly – how low are they allowed to go?

A: Aircraft generally approach the runway at 1000ft.

Q: Sometimes planes come in lower over Ducklington and then open up their engines again to get back up to the required height – why is this?

A: This is probably because of an increase in local training – there has had to be an increase in local training because of limited tasking. This will hopefully decrease, especially as the VC10 fleet is reduced.

Parish Councillor Glyn Rees added that the C17 pilots have to practice the special approaches which they are required to carry out overseas where they sometimes need to approach at heights of around 600ft to avoid anti-aircraft weapons. This looks lower still because of the size of the aircraft.

Sqd Ldr Neil Cooper added that the Station Commander takes a very dim view of personnel not being respectful in terms of the noise footprint that their flights generate – pilots are expected to make a positive effort to avoid excess noise over the local villages.

Q: The aircraft seem to approach the runway from slightly different directions which changes the houses they fly over. Who determines the line of approach to the runway – it would be better if the line could be varied?

A: Different approaches have to be practiced, therefore the line of approach will vary. The approach is determined by training need, but the intention is for the noise to be spread within this constraint as much as possible.

Follow up Q: Who actually determines the approach – the pilot or the approach tower?

A: It depends on the nature of the sortie - if it is routine it will be an instrument-led approach which will be a straight line to the runway, but if it is a training sortie it will depend on the type of training being done and is not in the control of the pilot.

Q: RAF Brize Norton is a training base – how much traffic in the future will relate to operations and how much to training?

A: This will depend on the nature of the operations that the base is involved in. Providing training in simulators is cheaper so more training will be done in them in the future, but there will still be a need to do some real training. The split in activity will also depend on what future aircraft are delivered and this is still not certain.

Q: Does training take place in the week or at the weekends?

A: Training flights are planned to take place during the week as far as possible.

6. Presentation by Smiths of Bletchington Ltd – Gill Mill

Martin Layer, Planning and Estates Manager, gave a presentation about activities at Gill Mill.

Gill Mill was officially opened in June 1990 by Smiths of Bletchington, a family run firm. Gill Mill is the only sand and gravel quarry they operate. There is also a concrete product factory on site, a bagging plant for aggregates for the retail consumer and a recycling facility which recovers aggregates from demolished buildings. The site provides 40 rural jobs and is a key supplier in the area.

The current planning permission for the site runs out in 2020 but the reserves are diminishing at a faster rate – it is expected that they will be exhausted within the next 5/6 years. To extend the life of the operation Smiths is now looking to make a new planning application on new land to tap into a new source of sand and gravel.

Smiths progressively restores the areas which have been quarried. Historically this has been with the creation of lakes, but as restoration practices have moved on and given the concerns that there are about the potential risk of bird strike from flocking birds within 13km of a major airspace (RAF Brize Norton locally) restoration will not be to large expanses of open water in the future. Future restoration will be to a mixture of uses – nature reserves, some with public access, and agriculture.

Mr Layer then showed the meeting a map of the area covered by the proposed new planning application. The new area of land covered by the application is land either owned by Smiths or over which they have legal control. The land covers the whole area across the back of Ducklington up to the A40. All of this land was nominated to the County Council as a potential source of minerals when they asked for companies to

nominate minerals excavation sites in 2005. Smiths know that there is sand and gravel under this land. The whole area will be subject to the planning permission but the actual area which will be dug will be much smaller. The company is in a pre-consultation phase of this application – an Environmental Assessment will be done, with a public exhibition in Autumn 2010, leading up to the application being submitted in 2011. People can find out further information at the Smiths website – www.smithsbletchington.co.uk – click on the Community Zone and then “Gill Mill.” All data and reports will be made available for everyone to view on the website. The website will also have a feedback form.

Mr Layer then spoke about Ducklington Mead SSSI. The protection of the Mead is important to Smiths – they have commissioned work from the Floodplain Meadows Partnership which is part of the Open University, to look at the eco-system of the field. They are building up an evidence base to understand how the field works. A field “walk and talk” day is being planned for June. This will be a technical talk to which the public will be invited (date yet to be arranged).

Rushy Common Nature Reserve, a 60 acre wetland nature reserve will hopefully be open from Autumn 2010. This is a designed reserve with a number of interesting features including bird hides and lakes with circular walks, some of which are surfaced for wheelchair users.

Visits to the quarry can always be arranged for anyone interested in seeing what happens on site.

Q: If the planning permission is granted will the volume of traffic increase?

A: No – the output of the quarry depends on the processing plant which will not be increased, so the traffic level will remain the same.

Q: Will expanding the recycling plant create more traffic?

A: Recycling is very important and is being rightly promoted by the County Council. There is also a big financial incentive to recycle materials rather than digging new. Smiths are expanding this activity by developing a “washed” recycling plant.

NB: Martin Layer subsequently advised that he misheard this question at the meeting and provided a follow-up answer dealing with the question about whether the expansion of materials recycling at the site will cause an increase in traffic. This has been added as an appendix to the minutes.

Q: Will the quarry ever become a landfill site?

A: No – permission would never be granted to put putrescible material into the river valley. Inert waste (clay, etc, dug out from building excavations) can be used but no other type of waste.

Mr Layer ended by introducing Lucy Binnie, a planning consultant who has been contracted to assist with the work involved with the new planning application.

7. Ducklington Parish Council

Edmund Strainge, Chairman of the Parish Council provided an update on the work of the Parish Council.

Councillors: This is an election year for the Council but there won't be a poll because there were only 8 nominations for the 9 positions, following the resignation of Catherine

Maddison. The Parish Council will need to co-opt an additional member; anyone interested in applying should contact the Clerk.

Problems in the Village: There has been a lot of vandalism and criminal damage over the past year. A property in Church Street has had its windows and doors damaged at night; there has been theft and damage at the allotments – the Parish Council is going to try to help with that by installing new fencing; there has been damage to parked cars at Fritillary Mews on several occasions; a car was abandoned in the car park and then set alight damaging the tennis court fence and floodlight; bases for the mobile vehicle activated sign (VAS) are being installed – one has already been done by The Moors and a further one will be installed at the Standlake Road entrance to the village – the VAS has been put at The Moors twice and on both occasions it has been vandalised. Mr Strange asked that if anyone sees or hears about any similar problems they report them to the Police. These incidences are logged and the number recorded is used to assess what level of Police attention the village needs.

Positive achievements: The Parish Council has had two new streetlights and a dog bin installed on Standlake Road towards Fritillary Mews. The Parish Council is working with the County Council to get lines put on the road near Fritillary Mews to restrict the amount of on-street parking there which is causing problems.

Parking on Standlake Road: The amount of on-street parking at the weekend when sporting activities take place can cause problems – the Parish Council is trying to help but there are limited parking opportunities within the village.

Highways: The 30mph zone was extended to the edge of the village on Standlake Road. Highways has done some tree work on the A415 bypass recently. The Parish Council hopes that they will also do something to improve the ditches which should prevent flooding on the sportsfield and at Fritillary Mews. The Parish Council has been concerned for some time about the safety of the footpath by the Old Rectory as it is very narrow. Highways has agreed that something needs to be done but the date when it will happen keeps slipping. Highways has promised to put up new signage to discourage HGVs from coming into the village but this has also not yet been done.

Play areas: The Parish Council has carried out maintenance as the need arises; work has been done on the safer surfacing tiles recently. Some of the Parish Councillors have started to help with the monthly safety checks.

Website: The new Parish Council website will be launched later in the meeting – Mr Strange expressed his thanks to Councillor Peter Almgill for his work on this.

Mr Strange ended his presentation by thanking his fellow Councillors for their help and support and the Clerk for her work.

Q: Where have the ducks gone?

A: One of the people who feeds them has been unable to do so recently so some of the ducks seem to have gone away (temporarily).

Q: (from a resident of Moors Close) There is no sign at the bottom of Moors Close to show that it is a cul-de-sac. There seems to have been an increase in the number of vehicles coming into the road and turning round to leave again. Some maps seem to suggest that you can get to Beanhill Road through Moors Close which isn't the case.

A: The Parish Council will take this issue up.

8. Parish Council Accounts

Helen Sandhu, Clerk to the Parish Council spoke about the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2009, the most recent set of audited accounts. Total income for the year was £45,272 which included £19,293 received for an insurance claim following flooding at the pavilion in 2007. Aside from this the main income of the Parish Council comes from the precept which is collected with residents' Council Tax. Total expenditure was £37,859. The largest area of expenditure relates to the sport and recreation facilities in the village. The Parish Council increased the total precept by £3,000 to £21,000 from 2009/10 as it is accumulating a grant to contribute to the new pavilion which the Sports Club aims to build.

At 31 March 2009 the Parish Council had cash reserves of £28,875 which includes the grant which has been built up for the new pavilion so far and money needed to cover unexpected future expenses and to meet the Parish Council's operational requirements.

9. Oxfordshire County Council

Ducklington's County Councillor Don Seale spoke about matters relating to Oxfordshire County Council. Mr Seale started his presentation by paying tribute to the Parish Councillors and the Clerk – he said that he enjoys coming to the Parish Council meetings as they are always very business-like and friendly.

Quarrying: Oxfordshire County Council is doing a study to look at where quarrying should take place to meet the building need to satisfy housing demand. The argument is now centering around the choice of whether to extend the life of existing quarries or to explore completely new areas. One factor being taken into consideration is how far lorries should travel from the quarry to the customer. There is local building demand, particularly with the plans to expand Carterton.

Finances: The budget for 2010/11 is settled, with no large problems being predicted despite the reduction in the tax base caused by the slow-down in the house building programme which had not been anticipated. The impact of the Government's free personal care programme is currently calculated as an additional £2.5 million, although this is for existing clients only. Once there is greater public knowledge of the scheme it is anticipated that more people who currently make their own private care arrangements will apply for funding – this could bring the total bill to £10 million per year. There has been a large increase in child referrals, costing a lot more this year, following the Baby P case. Extra costs will also arise following a recent court case where it was decided that councils must provide housing to 16 and 17 year olds. The County Council is trying to produce efficiency savings of £27.8 million in 2010/11 and of this only £2.5 million will represent cuts in services. The County Council is aiming to protect certain services, particularly social services, children's safeguarding and the fire service.

Social care for the elderly and vulnerable: The Government has produced papers detailing its intention to improve social care for elderly and vulnerable people. It has however delayed the implementation of this because of the financial implications and the application of any changes has now been delayed until the end of the next Parliament, in 4-5 years' time. The plans include free domiciliary care, the Parliamentary Bill for which has almost been passed. The impression has been given that everyone will be entitled to free help to stay at home, but what has not been explained clearly is that only those who need help with all aspects of personal care (including getting in and out of bed, dressing, eating, bathing and using the toilet) will actually be entitled to this help. There will be a tight squeeze on NHS funding whoever wins the General Election. This will have a knock-on effect on social services.

Ducklington Primary School: Most people will know that Ducklington school was put into special measures following an Ofsted inspection. Don Seale said that in his opinion the Ofsted verdict was unnecessarily harsh – Ducklington is an extremely good school with good staff and a good Headteacher. The children are happy and come out well educated and well behaved which shows that it is a good school.

Q: I would rather that the money used to produce and send the County Council magazine "In Touch" to all households was used for something else, such as filling potholes.

A: The criticism is noted and accepted.

Q: There is going to be more housing locally. Whose responsibility is it to improve the roads and junctions? The extra people living in the new housing will not have local jobs and so will need to travel out of the area to work.

A: This is a good question. The County Council view is that improvements to the infrastructure should be paid for and carried out first but the Central Government view is that new housing should be built first and then the necessary changes to the infrastructure identified. Responsibility for local infrastructure is varied – the main trunk roads are the responsibility of Central Government, with the County Council having certain responsibilities for improving junctions and more minor roads – a grant is received from Central Government every year for road and transport improvements but it is never enough to do all that is necessary. The County Council doesn't have enough money to repair all of the potholes – Mr Seale acknowledged that the roads are in a disgraceful state. He observed that roads in other counties are not as bad as those in Oxfordshire, even in more northern counties where the weather is more harsh. It will be some years ahead before we have the road infrastructure needed to cope with the additional housing. If the Cogges Link Road is taken as an example – this has been the subject of studies, applications and court cases for years – the developers were required to contribute a large sum of money for the road, but all of this money has now been spent on the planning process with nothing left to build the actual road.

10. Ducklington Village Pond

Parish Councillor Graham Lenton spoke about the village pond. A lot of local people attended the Open Pond Meeting on 25 February. The meeting was called because of the concerns there were when the pond dried up in the summer of 2009. The Parish Council engaged a pond expert to review the pond and prepare a report. He explained that there were two options – either to work towards a more environmental pond or to keep it as a duck pond. The feeling at the meeting on 25 February was that it should be kept as a duck pond, although a number of people wanted to see the number of ducks reduced. The only way to do this is to reduce the amount of artificial feeding which takes place, but it is not clear how that could be achieved. There seem to be fewer ducks at the moment but the belief is that they are off breeding in various local gardens.

The pond expert recommended that two filter beds are built where the run-off pipes from the road flow towards the pond. The filter beds will be constructed with stones and additional planting and will hopefully reduce the volume of muck coming into the pond from the road, but the ducks themselves do produce a lot of the muck. The Parish Council is also planning to let the grass around the back of the pond grow longer so that the surroundings are more natural. The filter beds will be dug out in October/November 2010 and planted in spring 2011.

Smiths have agreed to install a borehole to monitor the water level at the pond. This will be situated close to the seat at the corner of the church grounds.

Q: Is the Parish Council going to clean the pond out?

A: No – the pond expert says that this is not necessary and that if the pond is cleaned out it would cause other problems.

11. New Parish Council Website

Parish Councillor Graham Lenton presented this item on behalf of Parish Councillor Peter Almgill who was not able to attend the meeting. Mr Almgill has developed the new Ducklington Parish Council website which can be found at www.ducklingtonparishcouncil.org.uk.

Copies of Parish Council meeting minutes and village newsletters can be found at the website. There is a news page and diary giving information on local activities. Information about the services provided by the Parish Council and links to local organisations are also on the site.

12. Ducklington Open Gardens

Ruth Edy spoke about this event which will take place on the weekend of 12 and 13 June. The hope is that it will feel like a whole village event; all of the different organisations in the village have been contacted and asked to get involved. There will be refreshments and a plant stall during the day and evening events on both Saturday and Sunday. There is still time for people to add their garden to the list.

13. St Bartholomew's Church

Ruth Edy spoke on behalf of St Bartholomew's Church. She said that the Church would like to thank the village for its support – a lot of people came to the Open Day on Frittillary Sunday and people also support the Church by being an official "friend". This brings in very welcome money which is used to maintain the fabric of the church to ensure that it is here as an important building in the village for generations to come. Mrs Edy encouraged people to attend the classical guitar concert on 8 May being given by Raymond Burley, a classical guitarist who lives in the village and is gifting his performance. The money from the ticket sales will go into the fabric fund. Events at the church are advertised in the village newsletter and feedback from local residents is always welcome.

14. Ducklington and Hardwick with Yelford Charity

Edmund Strainge, one of the charity's trustees, told the meeting that this charity was still in operation and has approximately £3,000 a year to administer and distribute. Grants are given to help the elderly with heating bills and grants are also given to school leavers for books if they are going onto further study or for equipment they might need to carry out an apprenticeship. Applications for grants should be made to Joyce Parry, the Clerk of the charity.

15. Energy Saving

Mrs Yaffa Azaz, a resident of Ducklington, introduced Mr Geoff Feasey to the meeting. Mr Feasey started a very successful energy saving project in North Leigh.

Mr Feasey then spoke about the principles of energy saving, stating that there are two questions to ask: 1) Are we all facing an energy problem? 2) What could Ducklington do about it?

There are at least five problems which indicate that action should be taken to reduce energy consumption, the main one being climate change. Some people dispute whether this is real – a summary of the current science is available on the Challenge North Leigh website www.challengenorthleigh.org. Even if people are sceptical they should consider whether it would be more wise to assume that it is happening and take action, than to ignore it. Two other problems which require us to reduce energy consumption include global population increase and resource depletion – hydrocarbons are expected to run out in the lifetime of people who have already been born. The fourth problem is that Britain is not putting money aside to replace its ageing power stations which will reduce its capacity to generate electricity and the final problem is that the governments of the world are loathe to tackle the problem, meaning that if it is to be tackled action must start at the local level.

The second question is what could Ducklington do about this? Obviously it cannot solve the problems of the world single-handed but local people could help by using energy more efficiently, particularly electrical energy. This is the step that North Leigh took 5 years ago. There are clear advantages to people taking this type of action locally – it will help the climate; it makes bills cheaper; if a whole group of villages/communities starts saving energy and meeting a 10% energy reduction target it may make the Government feel that it can start to tackle the bigger problems; and if a large section of a country reduces its energy consumption it will set a good example on a world scale to other countries which are more energy profligate.

If people believe that Ducklington should launch an energy efficiency project they wouldn't be alone - there is a lot of help and advice available, including from the Oxford University Environmental Change Institute, Scottish & Southern Energy and the Energy Saving Trust. The tricky thing is to find a local leader for the project.

Q: *What were the results of the North Leigh project?*

A: *The project was started 5 years ago because of concerns that if the climate change disbelievers are wrong then terrible things will happen. It was decided to keep the project simple, to deal with electricity consumption first, although any project could be extended to include other types of energy used. Fun activities such as fetes, swap shops and picnics were organised to make people aware of the project and to get them involved. The challenge was to save 10% of the village's electrical energy consumption, comparing usage in 2009 with that in 2008. This was monitored by usage at the substation. The prize was a £20,000 grant to the village if it succeeded. The trick was to work out how to motivate people to save energy – there are lots of suggestions for this on the website. The project is being professionally analysed now and it should lead to some of the lessons learned being applied throughout the country. There were two similar projects, one in Scotland and one in Wales, running at the same time. The Scottish project was also successful although the Welsh one wasn't. The project in North Leigh was successful, earning £20,000 for the village, although Mr Feasey said that he wouldn't like to think that people had only got involved for the money and he hopes that energy consumption doesn't go up now that it is over.*

Q: Did you look at reducing gas consumption too?

A: The project started off by looking at gas and other heating materials too, but ultimately as the project took off it was reduced to electricity consumption only, to keep it simple.

16. Other matters raised by the public

A local resident expressed their concern about the danger of the A40 sliproad from Cheltenham onto the A415 – people can't see in advance if there is queuing traffic. Edmund Strainge said that the Parish Council has been talking to Highways about the issues of this junction for years. The Parish Council was encouraged to continue these discussions with Highways.

17. Closing Comments

Edmund Strainge thanked everyone for coming and hoped that the evening had been of interest. He especially thanked all those who had contributed to the evening.

The meeting closed at 9.45pm.

Signeddated.....

Follow up answer from Martin Layer of Smiths of Bletchington in response to the question he was asked about whether the materials recycling activities at Gill Mill will increase the amount of vehicle movements at the site (see page 4):

“When fully operational we do expect (and indeed hope) there to be an increase in sales of our recycled materials but we believe that these will be of the order of about 20 additional movements a day (in and out). We don't actually have any limits on traffic movements from the quarry and although sales have over the past few years been averaging at around 350,000 tonnes a year we have, only a couple of years ago, gone over 450,000 tonnes without any problems. This ties in to the earlier question put to me on traffic to which I gave the assurance that our proposals for an extension will be a continuation of the current ongoing day to day activities at the quarry-there is no dramatic escalation of any activity proposed.”

DRAFT