

**DRAFT MINUTES OF DUCKLINGTON
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY 10 MAY 2011
IN THE VILLAGE HALL, DUCKLINGTON AT 7.30 PM**

1. Present:

Parish Councillors:

Edmund Strainge (Chairman)
Peter Almgill
Adrian Armitage
Peter Godwin
Graham Lenton
Catherine Maddison
Glyn Rees

Helen Sandhu (Clerk)
Don Seale – Oxfordshire County Councillor
Steve Hayward – West Oxfordshire District Councillor
Wing Commander Mike Gardner – RAF Brize Norton
Ian Clarke, Area Steward, Oxfordshire Highways
Martin Layer – Smiths of Bletchington
Lucy Binnie – Land & Mineral Management Ltd (working with Smiths of Bletchington)
PCSO MC Tutty, Thames Valley Police
PCSO Tracy Waller, Thames Valley Police
Steve Townsend, Ducklington Sports Club
Dave Duthie, Ducklington Sports Club
5 members of the public

2. Apologies:

Richard Border – Parish Councillor
PC Sam Moore – Thames Valley Police

3. Welcome

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

4. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting on 20 April 2010

The Minutes were signed by the Chairman.

5. Thames Valley Police

PCSO MC Tutty provided an update from Thames Valley Police. 78 crimes in Ducklington were reported to the police over the past year; 20 were non-recordable (being domestic matters, issues where first warning letters were issued or accusations of harassment), leaving 58 recordable crimes for the parish in the year. These are analysed as: 1 assault, 17 theft, 1 drug possession (cannabis), 19 criminal damage, 1 burglary from a dwelling and 11 burglaries from a non-dwelling (such as a shed – there have been several of these at the allotments) and 8 criminal damage (most of these related to the graffiti in December). 10 of the 58 crimes have been detected. 58 recordable crimes in the year was a big increase over the prior year (when 45 were recorded), but most of the

increase is due to the graffiti. Two youths have been dealt with over the graffiti incidences.

Q: Martin Layer from Gill Mill asked whether the crimes reported at Gill Mill are recorded in the statistics given. He said that there has been an increase in the number of incidents at Gill Mill over the past year, including the theft of 1km of copper cable which cost £20,000 to replace and the theft of 18,000 litres of diesel.

A: PCSOTutty said that she was not sure whether crimes at Gill Mill are included in the figures for Ducklington but that she could find out.

A: Edmund Strange pointed out that Gill Mill is technically within the parish of South Leigh although it is closer to Ducklington – the river forms the boundary between the two parishes. Any crimes at Gill Mill may therefore be included in the figures for South Leigh rather than Ducklington.

Q: From Parish Councillor Peter Godwin. What is going to be done about the parking in the hammerhead turns of Tristram Road, Starnham Road and Sealham Road. This has been reported by the Parish Council to Thames Valley Police before and action has been promised, but nothing appears to have been done.

A: PCSO Tutty agreed to raise this with PC Sam Moore.

6. RAF Brize Norton

Wing Commander Mike Gardner gave a presentation about Programme Future Brize – the ongoing project to expand capacity at the base in advance of the activities moving over from RAF Lyneham when that base is closed. Whilst the programme is ongoing, with all the building work and changes that it requires, the base has to maintain its existing operations. In addition to this two whole new aircraft types are also being introduced.

Wing Commander Gardner told the meeting that 9 C130K (Hercules) and 24 C130J are moving to Brize Norton from Lyneham over the next month or so. The 7 C17 currently based at Brize Norton will remain but the numbers of VC10s (currently 13) and Tristars (currently 9) will rapidly reduce. The new aircraft which will take the place of the Tristar and VC10 are the KC-30. The A400M will replace the Hercules – there are currently none of these based at Brize Norton, but they have already flown in on occasion. By 2014 there should be no C130K, 24 C130J, 7 C17, no VC10, no Tristar, 8 KC-30 and 1 A400M. The number of C130J should start decreasing significantly from 2018. In the longer term there will be 7 C17, 14 KC-30 and 22 A400M based at RAF Brize Norton.

A significant number of new buildings (both operational and residential) have already been constructed at the base to accommodate the increase in activity and more building work continues. A lot of new single living accommodation has already been built/is being built on site and a large number of additional married quarters will need to be built, both on the base and within Carterton – 600 existing units will be demolished and replaced with 800 new units. All new residential accommodation will have been built by 2016, but this does mean that there is a gap between the families from RAF Lyneham moving over and the new family housing being complete. In the interim the RAF will access private rental accommodation around the area, particularly in Faringdon, Shrivenham and Fairford. The area being looked at is wider than the RAF would normally look in order to ensure that renting private units does not distort the local rental market.

Q: *From District Councillor Steve Hayward. There has been at least one incident in the last few months which has brought the runway to a standstill and there are questions in the press asking whether it is therefore a good idea to base so many aircraft at RAF Brize Norton after all?*

A: *It is still a good idea. If the runway has to close there are plans in place to divert planes elsewhere. The new planes couldn't land at Lyneham anyway as the runways there are not suitable. There are sound arguments for focusing activities on RAF Brize Norton. All troops being deployed overseas will in future leave from Brize Norton. There will be financial benefits to this and broader benefits gained from the fact that all the technical expertise will be focused on one base. 15% of the Airforce will be based at RAF Brize Norton – it will be the largest RAF base.*

Q: *From District Councillor Steve Hayward. From a County Council Highways perspective, the expansion of Brize Norton will lead to an increase in the amount of traffic travelling to and from the base. As Carterton is accessed by B roads the County Council has asked for the Ministry of Defence to contribute to road improvements, but nothing is forthcoming.*

A: *The Ministry of Defence has limited resources and has to focus these on its troops and the activities it is directly responsible for although it does look at the impact on the roads and other issues such as schools. The RAF asks for some indulgence over the transition period – transferring activities from Lyneham and introducing new aircraft are major tasks. There is a tremendous sense of responsibility about taking into account the wider issues caused by the transfer. Once things have settled down people will see benefits to the local community – including increased business for shops and bars.*

Q: *From County Councillor Don Seale. Do you intend to operate a 24 hour flying day?*

A: *The base will be capable of operating 24 hours a day, but this doesn't mean it will.*

A: *Glyn Rees (Parish Councillor). RAF Lyneham operates on the same basis as RAF Brize Norton does currently – there won't be an increase in night flying.*

Wing Commander Gardner closed by informing the meeting that one change which people will experience is that the modern aircraft are significantly quieter than the existing ones.

7. Oxfordshire Highways – Ian Clarke, Area Steward

The system of Area Stewards was created to improve the interface between local councils and Highways. Time has been spent establishing the interface; explaining what Highways does and what its limitations are. Mr Clarke has three staff working with him responsible for the area. There is one central email/telephone/ mailing address for Oxfordshire Highways – all enquiries are put through one central point so that they can be logged and given an individual reference number. This makes it easier for issues to be followed up as all action taken on them is recorded against the reference number. All roads receive a statutory highway inspection every 12 months; major routes are inspected more frequently. In between this Highways relies upon local people to let them know about issues with the roads.

Mr Clarke then spoke about the two specific issues which the Parish Council had asked him to report on:

Management of Station Lane Junction in Witney

Ian Clarke informed the meeting that he has spoken to Andrew Goddard, one of his colleagues within a different section of Oxfordshire Highways about this junction. The County Council is now looking at a full-size roundabout (not traffic-light controlled) as a

solution for the congestion at this junction. This would possibly be built at the same time as the Cogges Link Road, as carrying out two major road infrastructure projects at the same time would achieve financial economies of scale. The County Council is currently preparing plans and reports which will go to the Council Cabinet for approval, and the project could start in 2012. Mr Clarke stated that he assumes that there will be consultation on this proposal as the plans progress.

Proposal for new river crossing for the A415 at Newbridge

The County Council reviewed all of its proposed capital projects given the current financial constraints and many were indefinitely deferred after the review. This is the case for the proposed new river crossing. The County Council is continuing to monitor the safety of the existing bridge and if it deteriorates traffic using it would have to be restricted further.

Q: Are there any plans to deal with the problems of congestion on the slip road coming off the A40 into Witney from the direction of Minster Lovell?

A: Mr Clarke was not aware of any proposals to deal with this.

Q: Are the plans for the new roundabout on the A40 at Downs Road progressing or have they been shelved because of the financial constraints?

A: Steve Hayward (District and County Councillor) replied to this question. This roundabout is not subject to the financial constraints as it is going to be developer funded. The current plan is to construct a roundabout on the A40, rather than an elevated two way roundabout as previously proposed, which would have been more expensive. It is hoped that this project will start soon.

Q: Will the roads around the new roundabout be improved?

A: (Steve Hayward) The end of Downs Road near the new roundabout will be improved, but there are no plans to change the other roads in the vicinity. The County Council wants to ensure that more traffic is not encouraged to go through Curbridge.

Q: When there was snow before Christmas there was no treatment of the roads in Ducklington. The Parish Council wants to arrange for someone local to clear the main road through Ducklington with a snow plough if this happens again. What problems might there be with this proposal?

A: (Ian Clarke) Some parishes are doing this type of self-help. Highways is creating a database of landowners/farmers who are willing to help. One of the issues which arises is the question of insurance. If Highways asks the person to carry out the work they will be covered by the County Council insurance. Highways wants to co-ordinate the activity, so that any other work which could be done to support it (for example spreading salt on the roads once the snow plough has passed through) can be arranged. Highways therefore wants to hold the contact details of the local people willing to carry out the work. One of the other questions which has arisen is whether it is acceptable to use red diesel – this is OK. If Highways commissions the work the County Council will pay £30 per hour.

Q: Would it be a problem if the individual who is willing to help only wants to help in Ducklington?

A: No –provided Highways knows the limitations to the individual's offer of help.

Q: How would the Parish Council arrange for the work to be done?

A: The request would have to be made to Highways who would then contact the individual prepared to help.

Mr Clarke closed by saying that he would be happy to arrange a walk through the village with Parish Councillors to discuss local highways issues.

8. Presentation by Smiths of Bletchington Ltd – Gill Mill

Martin Layer, Planning and Estates Manager, gave a presentation about activities at Gill Mill. Gill Mill has been operating for 21 years. The quarry produces sand and gravel and 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 area of land which currently has planning consent for minerals extraction covers 170 hectares. Once the minerals have been dug the land is restored to various uses – mostly nature conservation, with some public access, lakes and agriculture. A new nature reserve called Rushy Common and adjoining lakes called Tar Lakes which are accessed off Cogges Road are due to be officially opened at the end of May. Rushy Common has been short listed for a Biodiversity Achievement Award sponsored by Natural England. There is disabled access to some of this site and a bird hide has been built which is large enough to accommodate a whole primary school class.

Mr Layer went on to explain that the reserves on the land which Smiths currently has planning consent for are declining, and at a faster rate than had previously been anticipated as not a lot of sand and gravel is being dug elsewhere in Oxfordshire at the moment. Smiths is therefore looking at obtaining permission for an extension to the current site, with the land proposed running from the existing area, past the back of Ducklington up to the A40. The whole area has been drilled with boreholes so that the amount of sand and gravel within it can be assessed. The depth of sand and gravel across the area is between 4m and 6m – 9 million tonnes of sand and gravel, which is a good amount.

The proposed plans divide the area into three potential working areas - east, west and central. There is an exclusion zone around Ducklington Mead SSSI (the fritillary field). Smiths is in the process of obtaining technical and local feedback on the proposed areas. The current proposal is to concentrate on the east block up to the A40, excluding more of the areas that had previously been considered for digging which will therefore create a bigger exclusion zone around the Mead.

The proposed afteruse for the new areas will include a large area of mixed habitats for nature conservation. There is also a big drive nationally for improved public access to these type of restored areas and increased pressure for them to be used for future recreation, leisure and tourism purposes. Once restored the new areas could provide increased recreation amenities for Witney as it expands.

Mr Layer explained that no decisions have been made yet – discussions are continuing with stakeholders and there will be more public consultation. A brochure will be delivered to every household within the parish in May/June and there will be a public exhibition at the sports pavilion in Ducklington on 16 June.

Q: Parish Councillor Peter Almgill asked what wet woodland is (one of the proposed habitats that the land could be restored to)?

A: Woodland for trees which like to have their roots in water, such as alder and willow carr. The attraction of this type of habitat is that the dug area only has to be restored to the level of the water table rather than to the original land level.

Q: Is the gate to Gill Mill closed at the weekends?

A: The weekend operating hours are restricted to 7am to 1pm on Saturday and outside of these hours the gate should be shut.

Q: A lot of motorbikes were seen riding around the site on Sunday – maybe the gates were left open?

A: Unfortunately there are a lot of public footpaths through the area and it is easy for people to get in even if the gates are shut. CCTV has been installed following the thefts and other incidents over the past year. Smiths has tried to improve security, but the cost of 24 hour security for such a large site would be prohibitive.

9. Ducklington Sports Club

Dave Duthie spoke about activities at the Sports Club. The Club has hundreds of members, but like most voluntary organisations only a few people are prepared to do the work which needs doing. Mr Duthie explained that he is the Treasurer, the Welfare Officer and also oversees the cricket team.

Two sports are played by the Club – football and cricket. There are youth football teams for children from the ages of under 7 up to under 16 (the under 16s due to be reintroduced next season). There are four adult men's football teams and also a veterans team which plays under floodlights mid-week (not at Ducklington).

There are two cricket teams playing in the Oxfordshire Cricket Association leagues. The cricket teams are short on senior team members and so some of the younger boys from the youth teams play on the senior sides. There are also youth cricket teams from under 11s up to under 17s. Children younger than this play kwik cricket.

10. Ducklington Parish Council

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

Councillors: The Parish Council started off the year one Councillor down until Catherine Maddison was co-opted back onto the Council in July. The Council has ended the year one Councillor down – Brian Hicks recently resigned from the Council. Mr Strainge paid tribute to Mr Hicks and to his work and commitment to the Parish Council over 38 years. Mr Hicks was a Councillor in the mid 1970s when the Ducklington bypass was built. This cut through the allotments off Witney Road. Mr Hicks was involved in planning, developing and running the replacement allotments from the beginning. He is a keen gardener and has one of the best kept allotments. The bypass also cut through the middle of a 16 acre church glebe field. The four acres left next to the village were bought by the Parish Council for a village playing field. Mr Hicks has been a leading light with the purchase, planning, development and running of the field for over 30 years and without his local knowledge and council experience Ducklington would not have such a great village asset now. Mr Strainge said that 38 years of time given as a Councillor is a tremendous achievement and he expressed the Parish Council's thanks for Mr Hicks' help, advice and friendship over the years – he will be greatly missed at Parish Council meetings.

Problems in the Village: There have been break-ins at the allotments several times over the year and a lot of graffiti was sprayed on fences and walls shortly before Christmas. The Parish Council has twice fitted anti-bird spikes to the top bars of the swings, but on both occasions they have been vandalised very soon after they were fitted. In future people will have to clean the seats before they use them.

Positive achievements: The Parish Council put pressure on the County Council to do something to improve the safety of pedestrians walking past the Old Rectory. They have installed what is called a “virtual footpath” and this seems to have helped.

The Parish Council has carried out a lot of work to improve the open space at the end of Bartholomew Close – some of the bushes have been removed and rubbish which had been dumped there has been taken away. The ground in this area will now be levelled and seeded. A gate has been fitted to the entrance and new benches donated by Wesley-Barrell as well as a litter bin have been installed. The hedge on one side has been lowered on Police advice and one third of the hazels have been coppiced – the rest will be done over the next two years. The school is using this open space for outdoor learning.

The Probation Service was asked to come in and paint the play equipment and the outside of the pavilion. The lights up to the pavilion are still not working – the Parish Council is trying to get this sorted out.

Pond: Smiths have agreed to dig the sludge out of the pond at no expense to the parish. The Parish Council is intending to install filter beds so that the water which runs off the road doesn't pollute the pond. A borehole has been dug to monitor the underlying water level and a water level gauge has been put in the pond.

Highways: We are still waiting for yellow lines to be put on Standlake Road by Fritillary Mews to stop people parking on the bends.

Two new bus shelters have been installed at the edge of the parish by the A415. The Parish Council was approached by the shelter company who wanted to install them at no expense to the village in order to gain the advertising revenue from them. The Parish Council negotiated to receive £4,000 on their installation and a further £4,000 in ten years' time.

New blue “unsuitable for HGVs” signs have been put on the entrances to the village at Witney Road and Aston Road and we are still waiting for a new sign to go on the roundabout to try and stop HGVs going through the village.

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

Q: Will Brian Hicks be replaced?

A: Yes – there is a procedure which has to be followed. The District Council is informed and there is a period during which residents can request an election. If this is not requested the Parish Council can co-opt – this will be advertised in the July newsletter.

Q: Steve Townsend, Chairman of Ducklington Sports Club, expressed his thanks on behalf of village residents to Edmund Strainge for being the Chairman of the Parish Council over many years.

11. Parish Council Accounts

Helen Sandhu, Clerk to the Parish Council, spoke about the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011, the most recent accounts which are as yet to be audited.

The Parish Council receives the majority of its income from the precept which is collected with residents' Council Tax. The other notable receipt in the year was the £4,000 received from the bus shelter company as a fee for being given the permission to install

the shelters next to the A415. This has been placed in a reserve for the future refurbishment of the playgrounds.

The main expenditure over the year was £7,875 for sports and recreation. This includes the maintenance of the field, the rent of the field extension, some of the running expenses of the pavilion, its external painting and repairs following a break-in at the pavilion. Income of £3,294 received from the Sports Club and from the insurance company for the break-in is offset against this, reducing the net expenditure to £4,581.

The next main area of expenditure covered costs relating to the management of the open spaces. The Parish Council owns and/or manages several areas of open space – at Chalcroft, Bartholomew Close, the cemetery, Peel/Lovell Close, the village green and pond. Various works have been undertaken over the year – grass cutting, hedge cutting, ditch clearance, repainting of benches and the bus shelter, tree inspections and improvement works at Bartholomew Close. The cost of the work at Bartholomew Close has been funded from the money received from the developer when the estate was built.

Expenditure at the playgrounds over the year related to the costs of materials for the repainting work carried out by the Probation Service and works to the safer surfaces – these have been glued and the remaining gaps will now be filled.

Mrs Sandhu told the meeting that at the end of March 2011 the Parish Council had total reserves of £37,368, which is broken down into four specific individual reserves.

Mrs Sandhu then spoke briefly about the budget for 2011/12. The Parish Council reluctantly decided to increase the precept by £3,500, which amounts to £5.57 per Band D property for the year. The Parish Council has continued to experience inflationary rises in its costs, and wanted to ensure that it had the funds to maintain the full range of the services it provides to residents.

12. Parish Council website

Parish Councillor Peter Almgill gave a presentation about the website, highlighting the changes which have been made since the website first went online after the last annual parish meeting. Data from the borehole by the pond has been put on the website. This shows the changes over time of both the underlying ground water and the surface water levels at the pond. Rainfall and temperature data is also being received from a local resident – this is recorded on the website and shows the correlation between significant rainfall and changes in the water level at the pond – there is approximately a two week delay between the rainfall and the pond level changing.

Images taken by a camera installed on the church tower are shown on the website. This is not CCTV as the images are not recorded. The camera has recently been knocked slightly out of position by jackdaws nesting on the tower.

An Ordnance Survey map has enabled a page to be created called “Parish Explorer” – this shows Parish Council sites, footpaths and bus stops, etc.

People can subscribe to receive emails when the site is updated and can also click on the site to share it with external sites.

The website can be used to request an allotment, submit news items and contact the Clerk. Parish Council documents, including meeting minutes can be downloaded and there are useful links to other websites and services. There is also a Ducklington diary providing information about local events.

13. Oxfordshire County Council

Ducklington's County Councillor Don Seale spoke about matters relating to Oxfordshire County Council. He used the previous year's meeting minutes in order to provide updates on how the matters discussed last year have progressed. He repeated the point he made in the previous year that he enjoys coming to the Parish Council meetings as they are always very business-like and friendly.

Quarrying: The County Council has resolved that future minerals extraction will focus on digging existing quarries further rather than establishing new ones. Land near Bampton and Clanfield had been identified as potential new quarry sites but a local action group managed to persuade the County Council that the sites were not suitable. They raised various arguments including the proximity of RAF Brize Norton and the unsuitability of local roads. The strongest argument presented against these potential sites was from English Heritage which has stated that the area has historic significance and should be preserved if at all possible. This argument will be difficult to overcome in the future if new minerals extraction sites are needed.

Finances: The situation is much the same as stated at the previous year's annual parish meeting. The majority of the savings which the County Council has managed to achieve have been efficiency savings, where the same service is provided but more cheaply. One area where it has recently been identified that savings can be made is not very popular and links to the introduction of self-directed budgets for qualifying vulnerable (mostly older) people. These people will now receive direct payments from the County Council and will be able to buy the services they want, rather than being provided with services which the County Council thinks they need. The home visiting service run by the County Council direct where staff go into people's homes to provide them with the support they need costs more per hour than the service offered by private providers. People are therefore choosing to use private providers rather than the County Council. The Council has therefore decided that it does not need to run this service itself and will make the staff it employs within it redundant. The service can be better provided by other providers. This will save the County Council £3.5million a year.

This time last year the General Election had not yet taken place and the Labour Government at that time intended to provide free social care to all elderly and vulnerable people in need of it, although there appeared to be no idea where the money for this would come from. The new coalition Government has scrapped these plans. A study is currently being carried out to work out how people can access the services/money they need for self-support without paying for it in full themselves. Mr Seale said that he thinks that any new scheme proposed will be much less ambitious than that suggested by the former Labour Government.

Two unpopular areas for savings have been considered over the past year, one of which is cutting back the library services provided direct by the County Council. The Council had been proposing to shut 20 libraries, but the proposals have been modified now that it has been accepted that it is not possible for volunteers to run libraries on their own. Money has been set aside with the inference that there will be some funds and staff support to keep libraries running if local communities want them to remain open. There will still be 23 libraries fully funded and fully managed by the County Council.

The County Council had hoped not to introduce significant financial cuts to children's services. However, the County Council needs to save £119million over the next 4 years - £54.6million in 2011/12, £37.2million in 2012/13 and lower levels of savings in the two

years thereafter. To put this in context the annual budget of the County Council is about £1billion, so the percentage which needs to be saved is not earth shattering.

The County has kept Council Tax at the prior year levels – the Council received a lump sum from the Government to make up any deemed increases that were thought to be necessary. Unlike some county councils, Oxfordshire has not made the criteria which older people need to meet to receive help any harder than it was before.

14. West Oxfordshire District Council

Steve Hayward, Ducklington's District Councillor spoke about matters relating to West Oxfordshire District Council. Mr Hayward told the meeting that he has been a District Councillor for 12/13 years and was the County Councillor for the area before that – he is still a County Councillor for Witney.

Council tax: There has been no increase in the District Council's share of the council tax this year. Mr Hayward said that he would like to see council tax decrease. He believes that the District Council should divest some of the services it currently provides direct. He pointed out that the waste collection now costs less since it was divested than it did when it was being run by the Council direct 11 years ago. He informed the meeting that he is aware that there have been some problems with the new waste collection contractor and system, with some collections being done later in the day than they should be – efforts are being made to sort this out. Mr Hayward said that the District Council may also divest the commercial waste collection and street cleaning services, carrying out fewer services itself and contracting out more.

Housing: The District Council has completed 169 social housing units in the year; significantly higher than the target of 115. This is very good, particularly in the current economic climate.

Parking: There have been rumours that the District Council is intending to get rid of free parking, but these are totally untrue.

Downs Road junction: The plans for the new roundabout on the A40 were discussed earlier in the meeting.

Expansion of Witney: the Local Development Framework focuses the next stage of Witney's expansion on North Curbridge – this will not affect Ducklington directly.

Station Lane junction: Mr Hayward said that he had been unaware that the County Council is considering installing a roundabout at this junction.

15. 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.

Signeddated.....