

**MINUTES OF DUCKLINGTON
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON THURSDAY 21 MAY 2015
IN THE VILLAGE HALL, DUCKLINGTON AT 7.00 PM**

1. Present: **Parish Councillors:**
David Duthie (Acting Chairman)
Peter Almgill
Peter Godwin
Catherine Maddison

In attendance: Richard Brown (Clerk)
James Mills – County Councillor

3 members of the public

2. Apologies: Edmund Strainge (Chairman)
Adrian Armitage – Parish Councillor
Richard Border – Parish Councillor
Sarah Stanley– Parish Councillor

Ben Woodruff – District Councillor

Speakers:

Jane Bowley – Lower Windrush Valley Project Officer
Martin Layer – Smiths of Bletchington
Joanne George – Chair of Ducklington pre School
PCSO's Fiona Holt and Heather Jones – Thames Valley Police
James Mills – County Councillor

3. Welcome

David Duthie, Acting Chairman of the Parish Council, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

David explained that neither the Chairman nor Vice Chairman were able to be present due, respectively, to a hospital appointment and a work commitment and that in addition a Casual Vacancy in Parish Council membership had occurred through the recent resignation of Glen Rees.

4. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting on 19 June 2014

The Minutes were published in the village newsletter of Aug/Sept 2014 and with no objections at this meeting were signed by the Acting Chairman as a correct record.

5. Speakers

The Acting Chairman introduced the following speakers who talked on issues of local interest that particularly affect the residents of Ducklington. Questions were invited on the content of the talks that lasted approximately 15-20 minutes and on any other related matters. Areas covered included progress made during the year, issues encountered and future developments. A Question and Answer session followed each presentation where all matters raised received a full explanation.

- Jane Bowley – Lower Windrush Valley Project (LWVP)

Jane commented on the following:

Habitat creation- green hay spreading at Standlake Common Nature Reserve resulted in one cowslip being found this year, hopefully there will be more next year. It can take several years for the seed to germinate in the new fields.

Rare birds –ring necked ducks at Standlake for several weeks around Easter. One is rare, four is exceptional and resulted in a small influx of birders from around the country.

Great white egret - Graham Lenton was very delighted to find one on a brief stop at Rushy Common, these are unusual at the moment as once were the little egrets.

LWVP strategy document - is nearly completed in the design phase and should be available to all shortly. Core themes being to continue business as usual, but with a stronger focus on fund raising to continue the work that is highly regarded and also to be prepared to contribute to some landscape scale projects that are starting to develop with other partner agencies such as the Wildlife Trust. Also a stronger focus on education and research.

Jane said that she is downsizing her work two days a week, however, in the meanwhile will be recruiting a full time project manager once the County Council have completed the amalgamation of their HR and finance departments with Hampshire CC in a couple of months' time. This process will hopefully be completed by the end of the year.

Therefore the next projects are to:

- Complete and publish new strategy plan
- Recruit new LWVP Manager
- More practical conservation projects
- More work with schools
- More public events
- More information about walks, especially for circular walks

Jane then answered questions as to when the walks would be ready and said that in that this would be up to the new Manager, but hopefully by the end of this year.

5. Speakers (continued)

- Martin Layer of Smiths of Bletchington Ltd – Gill Mill

Martin gave a slide presentation with an update on Gill Mill Quarry.

After 14 years, extraction of the Tar Farm Reserve Area has been completed and the field conveyor removed, the land reinstated, seeded and planted with trees. This area had included the early creation of the Rushy Common Nature Reserve and more recently Tar Lakes, both of which were proving to be very popular for both birders and local walkers alike.

Smiths will continue to look after Rushy Common as a nature reserve for the next 20 years, but the management of Tar lakes will be transferring to the various landowners and The Harcourt Estate next year. The remaining four lakes in this area are private with no public access - owned by the Harcourt Estate.

Management works have continued in Rushy Common throughout the year and more recently Smiths have used a digger to carry out clearance and improvement of the pond and ditch within the reserve supervised by Freshwater Habitats Trust. The reserve is maturing well and the wildlife value of the site remains high for a wide range of birds, insects and plants.

Work on the new extension to Gill Mill is in hand and this involves the creation of the new *Northern Cross Valley Way* between Ducklington and Cogges Lane in Cogges Witney and also the *Down Valley Way* running inside of Cogges Lane down to the existing Bridleway 18. Hedge laying and new planting have been carried out on the southern section of this route last winter and both of these new routes will be opened to the public as permissive bridleways before the end of the year. With existing rights of way and the Windrush Path, this will provide a full circular route through the area. Smiths are also working with the County Council and Parish Council to extend and upgrade the existing footpath out of the village to a bridleway and will also be providing additional parking spaces within the village with an extension to the Parish Council's car park by the school.

With a secured long term future at Gill Mill, Smiths have invested in a new processing plant that will produce high quality aggregates from construction and demolition wastes and are currently building a new washing plant for the sand and gravel. The current plant has performed very well for the last 24 years, but was beginning to show its age and needed to be replaced. The site still employs around 40 people, many of whom are local and Martin said that Smiths look forward to working closely with the village and the Parish Council over the coming years.

Martin offered to answer any questions, but none arose on this very useful report.

5. Speakers (continued)

- Joanne George – Ducklington Pre School

Joanne and her team gave a very useful insight to the work of the pre school in the village saying that it is constituted as a Not For Profit charity. It seeks to provide an education for children aged from two and a half up to five years old, and is held on five mornings a week in the village hall.

The main aims of the school is to help the 26 or so children develop in the year 7 areas of the arts, understanding the world, maths, literacy, physical development, communication and social personal development to hopefully prepare them for infant school where usually the pre school children do onto Ducklington school.

In the village, the pre school provides a service accessible to residents to walk to, it help parents meet together and raise money for the community at functions like the Flower Show and Big Lunch.

The children's work is documented to show the progress that they make and is shared with parents and grandparents.

Joanne offered to answer any questions, but it appeared that all queries had been answered through a very full and interesting talk.

- Thames Valley Police

The two PCSO's apologised for arriving late, but explained that this was due to local traffic accidents that obviously required their response immediately.

However, they felt that the best use of everyone's time would be to take questions straight from the floor as there was nothing specifically to report at present and that replies to questions would hopefully go some way to answering local issues.

David Duthie asked if there was any news and advice of the spate of local break-ins. The reply was that nothing had come to light at present and their best advice was to lock all doors and windows as not leave desirable items on display.

However, it was explained that this was not just a problem in Ducklington, but occurred all over the district, but the favorite items appeared to the vans with tools, radios and batteries- perhaps stolen to order!. Consequently Police advice here was to empty vans after use, but they appreciated that this may take much time every day and some may feel it not to be practical.

Another question from the floor concerned the problem of certain vans hanging around near the school, but the Police replied that they were not aware of recent complaints, but the matter was always taken seriously when raised.

The Police reiterated that if vehicles were parked carelessly around the school, the best advice they could give was to take photos and registration numbers and forward them to the Police Station in Witney. This would give them something positive to discuss with the motorists concerned – some of whom are likely to be parents/ grand parents.

There were no further questions raised.

5. Speakers (continued)

- James Mills – County Councillor

James started by explaining that he was very new to the role, but had always lived in the area and was busy dealing with local planning queries concerning the District Council's recent 2021 document. On commenting about the County Council's budget for this year, he made the point that revenue expenditure was obviously restricted in the current economic climate and that some 75% of total costs are already accounted for in activities which are ring fenced, which leaves little room for financial maneuver. However, County Councils were all looking at opportunities to save costs by various methods which include the possible benefit of amalgamating activities across the regions.

In response to questions, James said that one of his main aims was to promote capital expenditure in his West Oxfordshire area, as it produced much revenue for the County in terms of tourism and filming rights and he felt that it was now the turn of area to receive funding of projects. In addition, James said that he would assist Ben as District Councillor in such aims and, as an example, would assist the Parish Council in pursuing the possible expansion of its sports field site.

Jill of the Pre school asked a question re their obtaining a grant to update their facilities in the knowledge that 5/6 years ago villages obtained such educational cash, but that it had now disappeared. James agreed to meet the Pre School at a later date where he will advise them as to where he has been successful in obtaining monies previously.

Jane of the Lower Windrush Valley Project, asked that she may be allowed to show James around the works already completed in the project and be made aware of the future aims. This was agreed, especially as James remarked that he is to join the County Council's Leisure and Health Group.

6. Parish Council Report – David Duthie – Acting Chairman of the Council

David reported on the activities of the Council during the year, reading from notes prepared by the Chairman Edmund Strainge. Firstly he introduced the members of the Council at the meeting, indicating those who could not attend, and the Clerk. David explained that the Casual Vacancy for a Councillor arose due to the recent resignation of Glyn Rees. Glyn had been a Councillor for some nine years and the Council wished to thank him publically for his work and support over that time.

David continued by explaining that Craig Warner, the final member of the team and the Council's Volunteer Co- Ordinator, now also carries out the monthly playground checks following his success in passing the necessary RoSPA qualification. However, Craig's main role continues to be that of ditch clearance, where he and the Parish Council have been grateful for the additional help of local volunteers from time to time.

David then commented on another successful year of continuing Parish Council expenditure on facilities, examples of which were:

- The Tennis Court - where the surface was renewed and new lines applied for both tennis and netball, together with the repair of the floodlights. This has greatly enhanced this local facility which has always proved to be popular. However, it was also disappointing to have to report that the gate to the court had been vandalised twice!

6 Parish Council Report – David Duthie continued

- Council have agreed to arrangements with the Pre School, in tandem with the Sports Club, to move the two Pre School containers at the school to the sports field site. This will permit the school buildings to expand and at the same time allow the Pre School to continue to have storage facilities, together with additional storage areas for the Sports Club and the Council. The Council will use their area for storing the ditch clearing equipment that Craig uses.
- The pavilion at the sports field has had replacement windows and a door fitted. The Sports Club have had a defibrillator fitted to the pavilion wall and the Council have provided a defibrillator in the village that is fixed to the forecourt wall of the Strickland Arms Pub. However, the Pub has been recently sold and the Council are currently seeking a new site and welcome suggestions.
- The Council has worked with Smiths of Bletchingdon to provide a new bridle path between the village and Cogges/ Stanton Harcourt Road that should be open before the end of the year. New gates have been fitted at each end to stop cars using it as a short cut or race track.

The Council is currently considering two projects for the future:

- Sarah Stanley and Peter Almgill are leading the plans for redevelopment of the children's play areas.
- Glebe land
The Council are hoping to improve the sports field pitches that are currently in a poor condition. The Institute of Groundsmen having inspected and reported on its condition and have given guidance on what is needed to make improvements, which includes the need to balance the standard required with the amount of use and the funds available. David Duthie is leading this work, where already the lighting has been repaired in the sports field car park and the approach to the field.

Finally, David concluded by thanking fellow Councillors for their help and support during the year and to the Clerk for his efficiency in keeping the Parish Council compliant with the many rules and regulations and the financial records in good order.

Questions from the audience were as follows:

1. Queries on the future use of the Pub.
The meeting was informed that the pub had been sold to private owners who are believed to be intending to use it for a private dwelling.
2. Query regarding hedges behind the Witney Road
The meeting was informed that hedges had been improperly taken out around the electricity sub station and also running along behind Chalcroft Close etc
The Chairman was personally dealing with this matter hoping for reinstatement of those removed.

7. Parish Council Financial Report

Richard Brown, Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, started by discussing the financial results of the Parish Council for the year ended 31 March 2014 and then distributed a number of financial packs of printed information. These showed by narration and graphs that income of £30,706 was mainly made up of the precept at £26,500 and recharges of circa £2,300. Expenditure of £23,082 gave a surplus for the year of £7,624, versus a deficit last year of £5,253. Expenditure, it was further explained, fell into the broad categories of ordinary (administrative) expenses of around £9,800, on open spaces of around £5,500 and on Sports of circa £7,000 all of which was in a similar pattern to previous years when other one-off items are excluded.

No questions were raised by those attending and the Richard indicated that the Accounts would now be audited by both Internal and Externally appointed Auditors.

8. Closing Comments

David Duthie thanked everyone for coming and hoped that the Annual meeting had been of interest. He especially thanked all those who had contributed to the evening and hoped that everyone would now say on to enjoy refreshments and further conversation.

The meeting closed at 8.25PM.

Signeddated.....