

SWALCLIFFE PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING **OF 5TH JANUARY 2016 AT 7.00PM** **IN SWALCLIFFE VILLAGE HALL**

Councillors Present

Jane Morgan (JM), Chairperson
Jenny Bell (JB)
Ben Benson (BB)
Lizzie Melvin (LM)
Mike Stanley (MS)
Victoria Taylor (VT)
Christine Coles, Parish Clerk (CC)

Cllr Jane Fitzpatrick from Tadmarton Parish Council, Cllr Sue Leech from Broughton Parish Council and one villager

1. Apologies

None

2. Co-option of new councillor

Ryan Smith was co-opted onto the Parish Council. The forms were signed and passed back to the Clerk.

3. Tim Shickle of Oxfordshire County Council

The meeting was attended by Tim Shickle (TS) to talk more about the Oxfordshire Partnership Scheme. He thanked everyone for the invitation. The Oxfordshire Partnership Scheme is part of a county wide project. The wider picture is that Central Government are devolving powers to County Councils. It was launched in September 2015 and covers a range of low risk minor services. Some areas are grant funded. The main one attracting attention is the grass cutting. It is split into two, urban and rural and grass has to be cut within the 30mph speed limit.

TS spoke about villages joining forces to buy in contracts. He was able to advise what OCC currently pay their contractor to cut the grass twice a year in the following adjoining villages:-

Broughton - £409.60

Swalcliffe - £396.74

Tadmarton - £942.46

He then passed over a series of maps for Tadmarton to show which areas have to be cut.

OCC used to cut the grass five times a year but this was reduced last year to two cuts. A lot of complaints were received last year after the cuts were reduced from five to two. OCC now have to find another £20M of savings. Only the areas that pose a danger to drivers will be cut in future. 120 parishes and towns have taken up the grass cutting offer. Some parishes have asked farmers to help and bigger estates are helping out. The funding should last for three years and after that the future is uncertain.

Cllr Fitzpatrick asked about the liability. TS advised that liability still sits with OCC as they have the statutory duty. OCC do have a list of contractors that have the correct public liability insurance. OCC have met with their insurers Zurich who are happy with the agreement. The policy is similar to the last one but has been rewritten.

Cllr Leech spoke about the Wykham Lane crossroads at Bodicote which is a very dangerous junction for drivers. OCC will continue to cut junctions. The benefits to parishes taking on grass cutting are that they know when the work will be done and there is more local ownership. Cllr Leech also asked about volunteers and would they be covered on the insurance? OCC are currently consulting their own insurance company about this.

Cllr Morgan asked about maps for other villages. Colour maps will be scanned and emailed to the Parish Clerk. If the village want to take on the grass cutting, an agency agreement will be issued. Agency agreements will be ready in February.

Other areas not grant funded are:

Vegetation cutback and footway sidings. OCC have not done this work for some time and the work will be stopping. The Chair asked about the cutting to Brailes. TS is currently finding out about land ownership.

Salt bin Management – In the Summer of 2016 OCC will be reviewing all grit bins on the network. A location of grit bins is on their website. OCC still have a duty of care and there is a strong set of criteria. Bins will stay in hilly areas. TS to find out if a free bag of salt will be offered to parishes by OCC each year.

Public Rights of Way Inspection - A pilot with the Ramblers Association was set up to cover 90% of the area. This is an opportunity for the network to be walked. OCC will still deal with defects and maintenance on public rights of way.

With regards to vegetation and drainage issues, the power is still staying with OCC and they will remain the enforcing body. The Parish Council can contact a landowner and will have the powers to send letters. OCC will then pursue the matter if no response is received.

The cleaning of road signs and roadside furniture is not being funded. OCC will still undertake some sign cleaning and replacements as some villages have elderly residents. Mrs Leech asked if parishes can borrow signs to put on the highway and warn drivers that work is being done. Cllr Benson suggested that Men at Work signs and four cones are given to each parish by OCC. Mr Shickle is currently waiting for confirmation whether personal protective clothing can be provided. He made a note of the other requests.

Mr Shickle spoke about classified roads which do not have tarmac on. If defects are found, OCC will give a certain amount of money to repair them. He referred to Stant Hill which was a gated road but has been forgotten over time and used by lots of people.

Cllr Bell asked how OCC will gain from devolved powers? Mr Shickle replied that this will enable parishes to take on more ownership. Services may be delivered in a much better way and be more cost effective. He spoke about highways being a small part of the budget that OCC are trying to reduce in comparison with Adult Social Care. OCC staff have been made redundant and some departments have stopped taking calls. Some departments such as HR and Finance have joined forces with Hampshire County Council to save money. A minimum service will be provided in the future. The OCC website will be updated with information on a regular basis.

The local Armed Forces did call OCC and offer their services so this is something to consider. The Parish Council could also approach Banbury Town Council who may offer a cheaper rate for some services.

The Chair thanked Mr Shickle and he left the meeting.

From the floor, Mr Foley asked about the flooding in Park Lane. The Chair advised that this would be an agenda item next week.

4. To discuss the budget for the new financial year 2016/17

Councillors briefly discussed projects for the next financial year including the upgrade of the village hall, play area and church. There was a short discussion about the garage area and whether money would have to be set aside for this. Cllr Melvin suggested that as it is more expensive than first thought, the Parish Council renew the existing lease for one year which will give more time for a five year lease to be drawn up. The current lease is enforceable and legally binding. The new lease will include a break clause. The Parish Council acknowledged the situation with the garage area will never be perfect.

Cllr's agreed to increase the current precept by 2.5%. To be formally agreed at the next meeting.

Meeting Closed 9.30pm