

SWALCLIFFE PARISH COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
HELD ON 8<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2019 AT 7.30PM  
IN SWALCLIFFE VILLAGE HALL

**Present**

Cllr N Urquhart (Chairperson), Cllr B Benson, Cllr K Hodkinson, Cllr L McCallum, Cllr R Smith, Cllr V Taylor, Cllr T Woolston, Christine Coles - Parish Clerk, Cllr George Reynolds and twelve parishioners.

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked everyone and Cllr Reynolds for attending.

**2. Update from Parish Council**

It has been a busy and unusual week: The opening of the play park, the Spring Fair which raised over £1,600 for village amenities and local Thrive charity, the first speedwatch session and the latest in the church concert series organised by Colin.

The Chair Introduced the Councillors. 6 were elected in May 2018 and Cllr Woolston subsequently co-opted. Now there is a full complement.

The purpose of the meeting is to receive a report from the Parish Council and other village groups, take questions from the floor and receive ideas of issues that the Parish Council should be considering over the next year. In particular, consider plans for the Village Hall.

These are the achievements over the last year:

**Governance.**

The Parish Council continues to publish agendas and meeting minutes on the website and post them on the village notice board. The September meeting established a set of responsibilities for Parish Councillors.

Planning and Budget – Cllr Urquhart  
Transport - Cllr Taylor  
Highways - Cllr Benson  
Environment - Cllr Hodkinson  
Defibrillator - Cllr Smith  
Communication Infrastructure - Cllr Woolston  
Social Media - Cllr McCallum

**Liaison Lead**

PCC – Cllr Urquhart  
Village Hall Committee - Cllr Taylor  
Swalcliffe Park School - Cllr Smith  
SWCPA - Cllr Woolston  
Village Fund - Cllr McCallum

**Garage Lease.** In January 2019 a 7 year lease was signed between the Parish Council as landlord and the 4 tenants of the 7 garages. Having carefully considered the issue, the Parish Council decided not to sell a plot of land to Jesters.

Grass Cutting Contract. The Parish Council has signed a contract with OCC to take responsibility for grass cutting within Parish boundaries. It will continue the contract with Andrew Bathe for a further year. His area of responsibility will be extended to include Park Lane and Green Lane. The Parish Council encourages residents to mow verges near their own properties.

Defibrillator. This is established in the phone box which has been clad to reduce its visual impact. It is checked monthly by Cllr Smith.

Speed Control. Cllr Taylor is leading on developing speed control measures including partnering with other councils for speed monitoring equipment. Thanks were given to Paul & Frazer for charging batteries on speed signs. Cllr Taylor gave a brief update on Speedwatch. Several other neighbouring villages (Broughton, Tadmerton and Hornton) have contributed towards the cost of Speedwatch equipment. The idea was first discussed eighteen months ago. A tablet is used to record the speed and the information on speeding vehicles is sent to the PCSO. There is a form to complete to record vehicle, make, colour, registration number and speed. Broughton had the equipment two weeks ago and recorded 183 people speeding over a 5 day period. The PCSO was surprised at how many were speeding and many were local. The Parish Council will work with the police van who visits Broughton and Tadmerton.

Village Map. The plan is to publish a village map showing postcodes and addresses but not names. Once finalised it will be available on the website and notice boards. It will be useful for delivery drivers. The idea of funding printing of copies by receiving advertising from local businesses will be considered. A suggestion was made to include the conservation area on the map.

Communications. Cllr McCallum gave an update. Facebook has been running for a while and is used to communicate information and events. He encouraged villagers to log on as members, look at pages and like posts on Facebook or Instagram. For people not on Facebook they can contact the Parish Council direct or through the website.

A separate report will be received from Swalcliffe Woodland Community Play Area.

#### Budget and Precept

The budget this year was complicated by the financial activity over the play park. A separate set of project accounts is being completed for this project and will be presented at the May meeting of the Parish Council.

Excepting the play park, income was in line with the budget taking account of the extra VAT reclaim. Expenditure has been greater due to legal costs related to the garage lease, the proposed land purchase, increased Clerk's hours dealing with these issues, and expenditure on the church garden, which has come out of the Betty Panks account. Grass cutting costs were greater than projected due to the change from Gerry Melvin to a commercial contract. The Parish Council also made a donation to the purchase of a stairlift for the church, the maintenance of the church clock, and has underwritten the play area project.

The budget for 2019/20 was considered at the January 2019 meeting. Estimated income is £9,542 and expenditure is £7,720. It was agreed to increase the village precept by £200 (3%) to £7,436 from April 2019. A budget for improvements to the Village Hall is yet to be discussed.

### Conclusion

The Chair concluded in last year's report that the Parish Council would consider 6 areas. The Parish Council have made progress in 3 areas.

- How to improve village communications – Facebook, Instagram, Village map.
- Speed control measures
- Parish facilities including the Village Hall

More thought is required on the other 3.

- How to welcome new residents
- The Parish Plan from 2015
- Development priorities for the next 5 years

And thank you to Christine Coles (the Parish Clerk) for guiding us for the last year.

### **3. Update on the Swalcliffe Community Woodland Play Area (Mr M Foley)**

The Woodland Play area is up and running and open. After four years the Woodland Play area is a tribute to the Committee that lived with the project through the thick and thin moments. It is a wonderful asset to the village both for now and future generations.

Special Thanks were given to the following people:

Principal Woodland Management Team: Peter Beddowes, Virginia Beddowes, David McLindon, Anna McLindon and the Principals of Swalcliffe Park School.

Swalcliffe Parish Council: The Chair Neil Urquhart and especially to Christine Coles for her contribution and unstinting support.

The support team, Tom Woolston, Sophie Thompson, Maggie Erwin, Mark Williams (Facilities Manager at Swalcliffe Park School) and to the many Swalcliffe villagers who helped with the work that was required during the past year at the Woodlands site.

Cllr George Reynolds for both his contribution from his Councillor's Fund and for introducing the Management team to Cherwell Council Community Fund who became the largest funding supporter. Peter Beddowes and Cathy Stoertz who four years ago, after the approval of the village plan, presented the idea of a Woodland play and experience area to be set-up within the School grounds to the Principal Management and Board of Governors at Swalcliffe Park School.

The Woodland opened on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> March. It was estimated that over eighty children accompanied by parents and grandparents attended the opening day. Special thanks to David and Anna and the support team who made the day so special for the children.

The official opening, to which the Sponsors and fund raisers were invited, took place on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> March. Under a massive downpour, Neil Urquhart Chair of SPC opened the Woodland Play area. Special thanks to Swalcliffe Park School who kindly hosted the event and provided plates of goodies that had been prepared by pupils of the School.

### Budget

The project has come within the budget. A final budget will be presented by the SPC at the May Council meeting.

### Pathway

The village has acquired another asset, the public pathway that now runs in front of the Woodland play area. The pathway connects the west side to the village but more importantly it provides a pedestrian walkway to Park Lane/Brick Row and beyond without having to run the gauntlet of traffic on the Main Road.

Now the Working Party Management and Swalcliffe Parish Council have formed a formal Management Committee that will manage the Woodland Play and Picnic Area on a week by week basis. This committee will have elected officers and be accountable to the Woodland leaseholders namely the SPC. A final version of the Terms of Reference will be presented for approval to SPC within the next few weeks.

The committee hope that the Woodland Play area will become a favourite place for many children. It is designed for children to play, explore learn and enjoy in a safe and secure setting. It is a magical tranquil place that the committee also hopes that everyone will enjoy...even the older members of the village.

The Chair thanked Mr Foley for being the main driving force in getting the grants from a variety of sources. This enabled the project to be completed in one a single stage in a short timescale.

#### 4. **Update from Swalcliffe Park School (Cllr R Smith)**

This has been another very busy year at the school, with progress on a number of fronts:

##### **Working with Students**

- All students who left at the end of last year moved into further education, training or employment.
- The School has the highest number of students the school has ever had (53).

##### **Working with families**

- The School has developed and implemented our Quality of Life Framework for families.
- The School has provided a range of training workshops for families based on their Quality of Life Surveys.

##### **Working with partners**

- The School received an 'Outstanding' judgement for our residential care provision.
- The School has provided training for a number of local schools.
- The School is currently supporting students from 21 Local Authorities.

##### **Working with resources**

- The School has developed the recreational facilities for students within its grounds.
- The School has facilitated the creation of a woodland play park in the village.
- The School is renovating the school owned house on Park Lane.
- The School has increased site security with an entrance barrier and cameras on the drive.

##### **Organisational strategy**

- The School is raising its profile by presenting its work at a range of national and international conferences.
- The School has recruited three new Governors from the local area.

From the floor Mrs Taylor asked what the maximum number of students would be. 55 is the maximum the school can take. Thanks were given to Rob Piner, the Principal, for writing the report.

**5. Update from Parochial Church Council (Virginia Merritt)**

- Apologies were received from Gay Harris, Churchwarden.
- Regular attendance at the church is often still in single figures, yet there is huge amount of support from the village for social events held in the church, at special services (the family nativity tableau last Christmas attracted 135 people) and hands on help in maintaining the fabric of the building and churchyard.
- The PCC had a 5 year inspection of the Church in 2018 and it highlighted the areas where further conservation and repair is needed. Encouraged by a Statement of Historical Significance carried out by Cathy Stoetz, the PCC have now identified the priority items that will form the focus for a major programme of restoration and conservation. For example, the medieval wall paintings are of particular significance, so they will be conserved by experts as a first priority. The PCC are currently getting estimates for the costs of all the works required and this will form the basis of a bid for a substantial Heritage Lottery Fund grant.
- When all the works are completed, the church will be firmly on the map for buildings of architectural significance in North Oxfordshire, and it is hoped will attract a much larger number of visitors into the village.
- With grateful thanks for additional financial support from the Parish Council, the PCC have been able to purchase a stair climber to provide disabled access, and also completed a redesign and replanting of the Betty Banks Garden which has enhanced the entrance to the church.
- These improvements have made the church more conducive for social events, particularly the Swalcliffe Concert series, which raise additional funds for the maintenance of the Church. The PCC is keen that the church is used for a wide variety of events that are of benefit to the whole community.
- 2018 was a good year for fundraising – the PCC raised a record figure of almost £20,000 from events and donations. This was used to fund routine maintenance and the purchase of the capital items such as the Stairclimber and a new oil tank.
- It was reported that Reverend Ronald Hawkes will be retiring from his role in the Benefice in January 2020. There will be an unavoidable interregnum until a successor is recruited. This could take up to a year or more to complete the process.

**6. Update from Village Hall Committee (Kate Foley)**

Income this year is £2,896.00 and the current bank balance is £6,807.00. Mrs Foley thanked Mrs Taylor for checking the accounts. Usage increased in 2017. Martial Arts now use the hall three times a week. There has been no significant expenditure. Electricity prices have increased. The hall is 100 years old. Work was carried out eleven years ago by volunteers. The heating system is old and requires attention. The VHC has approached the Parish Council, who own the hall, with

quotes to replace the heating system. The question was asked if a building of this age warrants that level of expenditure. A survey has now been carried and it requires significant repair and improvement to bring it up to date. It is an asset to the village but the VHC feels the long term future lies with the Parish Council. A discussion will be held at the end of the meeting on whether to keep the hall and improve it or knock it down to start again.

## **7. Open Forum**

Mrs Brookes spoke about grass cutting and noted that villagers were told by the Parish Council some time ago not to cut their own verges. The Chair responded that the Parish Council now encourages people to cut their own verges as long as it is safe to do so.

Mr Hill asked if the tablet used with the Speedwatch equipment can take photos. Cllr Taylor explained that it cannot whilst recording speeds of vehicles.

A short interval followed.

## **8. Discussion about village hall development**

This discussion would focus on whether the village want to keep the village hall and to get an understanding of what the space could be used for. A survey was carried out on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2019 and the report has been forwarded to the Parish Council.

The overview from the report included:

Lack of routine maintenance and repair. Areas that require attention are roof coverings, rainwater goods, outside walls to the rear and side extension, external joinery and decoration, and timber floor. Other key areas requiring attention are dampness, insulation, electricity running costs and energy efficiency improvements. The Chair asked the floor if there is a need to refurbish the existing hall and what would the priorities be for the Parish Council and Village Hall Committee to take forward.

The main points from the discussion included:

- To consider Air Source Heating. Although expensive to install, maintenance is getting easier.
- Farmers markets have been discussed in the church but would be well received in the village hall.
- The hall would be more welcoming with better kitchen facilities.
- A new build would not have to pay VAT, but the Parish Council can reclaim VAT.
- There are grants available at District, County and National level. This is the time to think BIG.
- The work could be phased over a number of years.
- The Church and Village Hall are two good public spaces and serve different purposes.
- If the hall is rebuilt the footprint would remain the same. The stage could be taken out. At the moment the maximum usage is 90 but without a stage it could increase to 120.
- The stage in the church cost £3K. It is moveable but designed to fit the shape of the Church.
- Keep the village hall as an asset. The problems seem to be with the extension at the back. This could be demolished and rebuilt. It could be bigger and solve the current damp issues.
- The building is sound and well structured. The cost to rebuild will be huge.
- If the village becomes more popular in the future, a village café could be considered.
- There are funds and grants available for renovations. A wish list should be agreed and the word 'community' included in any grant application.

- The village should be consulted. There may be a better response if people can visualise what it will look like.
- If the hall is developed there could be lots of opportunities being situated on a Main Road.
- As the fabric of the building is fine, it might be cheaper to replace the kitchen, toilet and heating.
- The new woodland area may attract families and children to the village.
- To consider a modular building similar to what the school have put in place.
- To knock the hall down, sell the land and use the money to build the village hall elsewhere.

Mr Hill asked if an indication was given of the lifetime of the existing building. No indication was given. The structure is sound and a lot of work was carried out previously.

The Village Hall Committee and Parish Council will meet together to see if usage can be benefitted by improvements. It is hoped that by the summer there will be a clear indication of which route to take.

Finally, the Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Meeting closed 9.40pm.