

**MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**  
**HELD MONDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2023**  
**IN SWALCLIFFE VILLAGE HALL AT 7.30PM**

Present: Cllr Gandy (Chair of PC), Cllr Borkmann, Cllr Collett, Cllr Hodgkinson, Cllr Smith, Cllr Taylor and Cllr Warrington, Christine Coles – Parish Clerk, Cllr George Reynolds and 44 villagers

**Welcome/Apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and in particular Cllr George Reynolds and Pete Stocker (the postman).

**Parish Report and Accounts**

The purpose of the meeting is to report on the previous year and coming year. New initiatives will be introduced for 2023/24 and more will follow at the next meeting in May.

Cllr Gandy introduced the Councillors. He thanked Neil Urquhart, the previous Chair, who had moved the Parish Council on significantly. He thanked Cllr Taylor who was the Vice-Chair. The new Vice Chair is Cllr Collett who has very kindly Chaired more meetings than Cllr Gandy. He welcomed two new Councillors, Cllr Warrington and Cllr Borkmann.

*2022 Report*

After the disruption of the covid years, 2022 was a period in which the Parish Council could start the process of getting back to normal. Principle achievements included the internal refurbishment of the village hall, hosting the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations, reviewing and establishing a new set of Councillor responsibilities and starting the reinvigoration of the Speedwatch programme.

One learning point included the siting of the Jubilee Tree and bench. There was a lack of co-ordination and Cllr Gandy recognised that correct procedures were not followed.

*2022 Accounts*

The Parish Council broke even as far as the budget was concerned. A lot of money was spent on the village hall refurbishment. Many areas of spend have increased such as insurance and grass cutting. There will be a surplus at the end of the year to reinvest.

*Forward Looking*

Tonight more will be said on the Development Plan. The last time the village was surveyed was in 2015 and the play park was formed shortly after. Improving communication within the village will be discussed. The Parish Council are reviewing their Governance procedures, in particular the Village Hall's charitable status and including other aspects such as Gift Aid and VAT recovery. Cllr Borkmann will be leading on the Environmental Plan and looking at the future wellbeing of the village. Work on the village hall will continue with significant works needed on the outside infrastructure of the hall.

**Major Programmes**

**Update on Speedwatch**

Cllr Hodgkinson gave an update. Speedwatch has been in place for quite a while but rules and regulations have changed. The Vehicle Activated signs are now working. Two villagers currently look after them by charging and changing the batteries. Two Speedwatch signs have been put up at each entrance to the village which is a Thames Valley Police (TVP) TVP requirement.

10 volunteers are trained up and used an online programme. 3 sites have been approved by TVP. It is hoped a 4<sup>th</sup> one can be included. Cllr Hodgkinson demonstrated the equipment. Speeds of 35mph and over are recorded. The volunteers work in pairs and record model of car, registration number, colour, time, date and speed. The camera is shared between four local villages who use the equipment over a two week period. Anyone can carry out the training. A Whatsapp group will be set up. Cllr Borkmann spoke about motorbikes racing through the village as well as motor vehicles.

### Village Development Plan

Cllr Warrington introduced the Development Plan. He asked everyone to think about the village, what they like, dislike and what they want to add. This is all about how the village will evolve over the next five years. There is some merit in standing back and taking stock. The Village Development Plan will be guidance about the village needs. Residents and businesses will be considered as well as OCC, CDC and utility providers.

There are four dimensions to the plan.

1. Physical Environment.
2. Amenities including the church/hall and pub.
3. The Community – Positive interactions with each other.
4. Character – Personality of the village.

A survey of the village will be carried out in the summer to understand people's preferences. There will be a hard copy or it can be completed online. This will produce a draft plan and practical actions to take. The last survey achieved a play park, defibrillator and dog bins.

### Communications

Cllr Smith gave an update. Currently the Parish Council rely on other people to distribute messages. The PC will look at what is available and whether it suits needs. The current options are Facebook and the website. The Facebook page has grown. Della's email is for social events. David McLindon has offered to help. If anything is set up it will have to comply with GDPR and a budget secured.

Issues will be discussed with villagers and they will be consulted to ask their needs. There are four options.

1. Continue as we are.
2. Use the website.
3. Use a Whatsapp group.
4. Use a village PC email.
5. Use the notice-board.

The idea is to get thoughts and ideas and have a process to get information out easily.

### Thanks to Pete Stocker

Mr Stocker is the postman for Swalcliffe and due to retire in June 2023. He has served 43 years with Royal Mail and worked in Swalcliffe for 29 years.

Another villager gave a lovely speech thanking Pete for all his service to the village. He was presented with a present and money raised from a collection.

## **Reports and Updates**

### **Village Hall – Kate Foley**

The refurbishment has been a good improvement. There is new insulation, new toilets and sound absorbers. She thanked Colin Hill who helped with the finances. Money was raised from the Christmas market and Burns Night. Usage of the hall keeps the hall running. Several grant applications have been made. The next phase requires a lot of money. The hall requires new cladding, a roof and kitchen. It will be a slow approach. It is hoped a working party can decorate the disabled toilet over one weekend. The current village hall committee consists of 3 people. More help is needed as there is still lots to do.

### **Play Park Committee – Mick Foley**

This year the usage of the Play Park recovered back to pre-pandemic levels and quite often the Park was buzzing with young children and parents. We recorded as many as 13 people on one occasion. Users continue to comment on its unique rustic and natural feel.

The administration of The Park ran well again during the year, and we had a very practical and helpful relationship with our main stakeholders, the Parish Council and Swalcliffe Park School. During the year we said goodbye to Neil Urquhart the PC Chair and welcomed Steve Gandy in his place. Neil was very supportive in the critical stages of setting up the Park and Steve is keen to help clarify and simplify our relationship with the PC. The current committee agreed to stay in post for another year.

We welcomed Jenny Woolston a parent user of the Park and Mark Thompson to the committee. Mark agreed to act as treasurer and took a lead in setting up a new online bank account with NatWest. Virginia Merritt resigned from the committee during the year.

We continue to have a few instances of dogs being seen in the park despite our notices but no reported accidents or vandalism this year.

**Financials** – We have total funds of about £7,000 in two accounts – The Village Fund and the PC allocation. These will be consolidated in the new Bank account in 2023. About £2,700 of this is money earmarked for development projects. The balance is available for maintenance which we anticipate will cost between £500 - £700 annually over the next two or three years. Main expenditure items included: the annual safety audit and additional supplies of bark.

**Maintenance and Safety** - We passed the annual safety audit carried out by Playdale with no significant maintenance requirements. The weekly safety monitoring and bin emptying system works well with a monthly rota with each member of the committee taking part and a form completed each week. We had a successful Working Party session in the Spring with a good turnout of volunteers. Unfortunately, the planned second working Party session in November had to be cancelled because of very heavy rain which meant that we weren't able to clear the leaves this year.

**Plans for future developments** – We continued to consider investing in one new piece of play equipment – a rustic climbing frame - aimed to appeal to slightly older children. We have received an initial quote and are exploring a slightly simpler version as well as sources of funding.

### **Parochial Church Council – Cllr Warrington**

It has been a good active year for the church. Their core role is to provide a home for worship, celebration and commemoration. There have been baptisms, weddings and funerals. There was a celebration for the late Queens Platinum Jubilee celebrations in June 2022.

The role of the church is to provide a sense of venue. The Christmas market and was held in the church and the Harvest Supper was the first event in the new hall.

Cllr Warrington spoke about the church building and the fabric and heritage. The Heritage Improvement Project was completed. Drainage work has taken place and this has cured the damp problem. The heating system is very old and works but it costs £150.00 per day to heat the church up. The restoration of the Medieval Wall Paintings was completed last July. Moving forward the next project is to illuminate paintings with summary boards.

The cleaning and restoration of family monuments was mentioned. It's a big job, there is a lot of history behind it and its a competition. The church wall was bowing and has been fixed. The back of the churchyard has been cleared. The PCC are very appreciative of the people in the village who provide lots of different skills to keep the church up and running.

There will be a special service in the Church on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> May for the Kings Coronation. Bells will be rung. A summer party will take place on 15<sup>th</sup> July and thanks was given to Mike and Barbara Taylor for use of their ground.

On a slightly sadder note Cllr Warrington announced that Reverend Neil Bowler will be leaving the area. He joined in July 2021 and is taking up a similar role in Bridlington, Yorkshire. His last service will take place on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

#### Swalcliffe Society – Colin Hill

I would like to explain a little of the background of the Swalcliffe Society and its involvement with Swalcliffe barn, and to let people know how they can get involved with the barn and other aspects of local history.

The Swalcliffe Society has existed for over forty years and has its roots in a Parish History Project, run in 1977/8 by Banbury Museum and Rewley House jointly. This was attended by a number of village residents who collected and studied information about the village and its residents, including photographs, reminiscences, documents, wills and deeds etc. The information collected became the village archive and the Swalcliffe Society was created soon after to continue their studies and look after the archive.

When Swalcliffe Barn was restored in 1990 and leased to Oxfordshire County Council Museums Service for use as a museum the Swalcliffe Society members formed a volunteer team to act as stewards enabling the museum to be opened to the public. In grateful recognition the Museums Service granted space in the barn for an exhibition of local history to be provided by the Swalcliffe Society using much information gathered by the Parish History project and from the Archive.

Since opening as a museum in 1992 the Swalcliffe Society has continued to provide a level of local administration of the barn enabling public openings of the barn and its museum to continue, whilst enabling the barn and its precincts to be used as a local resource for village activities. Our support is essential to these activities and the Museums Service could not operate the barn as it does without it.

Our team of volunteer barn stewards comprised nearly 70 people at its peak, requiring each pair of volunteers to do only one barn duty each year. But lives change and villagers move away so our numbers have diminished in recent years.

For the first time in our history we have been unable this year to fully populate the year's barn rota and it has been necessary to ask our members to volunteer for more than one duty to fill the rota. It is still not fully populated and we are now running a recruitment campaign in the village and wider community to increase our numbers.

Administration of the barn and its team of volunteers represents a significant workload at several levels. Workload has increased recently due to conditions imposed upon ourselves and the Museums Service by the insurers of the barn itself (as an Ancient Monument with the same protection status as Stonehenge) and of the museum contents, all of which, and the visitors and the volunteers themselves, require important levels of care, protection and insurance. This became increasingly important during the Covid pandemic as the Museum authorities became increasingly risk-aware and they required us to implement a process of administration beginning in 2020 in which each volunteer was asked to complete a volunteer application form and provide two references. In addition the insurers imposed an age limit of 80 on our volunteers and the application form required provision of some personal information such as National Insurance Number. A number of our volunteers objected to this process and withdrew which reduced our numbers somewhat, but as a result of feedback and negotiation we have been able to simplify the application process, removing the need to provide National Insurance Number, and the appointment of new insurers has enabled the 80 age limit to be removed. We hope we may be able to encourage some who resigned to rejoin our team together with new members from the village and wider local community. We also want to offer another form of Society membership for those who want to be involved in its historical work but do not wish to volunteer as a barn steward. New members of both sorts will be warmly welcomed.

Over the years the activities of the Swalcliffe Society became focused more and more on running the barn, and the Archive became forgotten to some degree and was not easily accessible to the village. Its contents became disorganized and dispersed and some were lost, so the Society has begun reconstructing and reorganising the archive so that its contents can be understood and enjoyed again by the Society and community. This work takes two forms, firstly in the gradual digitization of its contents and secondly by writing new pieces to present the fascinating stories that emerge as the archive is explored. These are published from time to time in the village magazine *The Link* and in the Banbury Historical Society's journal *Cake and Cock Horse* and are all available on request as digital documents. Eventually we hope to be able to present more of this fascinating information in publicly accessible digital forms for which we will need help and support to bring us fully into the modern digital age.

The Swalcliffe Society has always been interested and involved in Archaeology. The Parish History project undertook a number of Archaeological projects in the 1970s including field walking on the Iron Age and Roman settlement at The Lea, and has since followed closely the digs performed by a local digging group. We are now processing twenty years' worth of their archaeological finds from The Lea and are proposing to begin new work in the form of a Historic Landscape Study Project to which we invite participation. Previously unknown settlement patterns are already being identified using remote sensing techniques and this will help us to understand more fully the history and social context of one of the most important archaeological sites in Oxfordshire.

Finally the Society would like to record and give grateful thanks for the considerable contribution to the Society's work performed by Jeff Demmar throughout its history. Jeff continues as chairman of the Society even though Chris and Jeff have now sold and departed from their home at Swalcliffe Lea House and handed over all operational duties of the Society to Colin Hill.

Jeff and Chris are now living temporarily in Dartmouth but are planning to relocate as soon as possible to a new home much closer to Swalcliffe. We send them our best wishes.

The Chair thanked Mr Hill. It is so important that everyone continues to support the Barn.

#### Kings Coronation Celebrations

There will be a Coronation concert on the TV at 8pm on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2023. Timings may have to be rescheduled. The Stags Head will be putting on a beer festival serving different beers.

A big screen will go up and marquees will be available. A hog roast has been booked to serve 100 people and the Parish Council will underwrite this cost with the help of volunteers. A flyer will be distributed and placed on the notice-board, at the pub, on the website and via the village email. The CDC grant will pay for printing costs and the hire of screens to show the evening concert. A resident asked if houses could be decorated. It's a good idea and up to each individual if they want to put up their own decorations. A litter pick will take place soon.

#### Christmas Market – Catherine Warrington

The Christmas market will take place on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2023 in the Church. It is a huge fund raiser and fun and social event. Last year £3700.00 was raised and split between the Village Hall, Play area and church. Fresh blood is needed as a few people have decided to stand down. If anyone is interested they should contact Catherine. The Chair added that this event cannot fold.

#### Open Forum

Mr Borkmann asked about the placement of the Platinum Jubilee Bench. Cllr Collett replied that they hope to place it around the tree outside Swalcliffe Barn but work is progressing slowly as permission has not been given yet. OCC Highways have agreed the bench can be placed on the green outside the play area. The Parish Council will still progress the preferred site and it can be relocated.

Mr Ralph spoke of the disconnect between Tadmarton and Swalcliffe. There is a safe pathway between the two villages which is a much safer and physical connection.

#### Closing Remarks

The Chair thanked everyone for coming and for their contributions to the meeting. All the presenters had done a good job. It was clear from the meeting that more help, fund raising and engagement are needed. He thanked his fellow Councillors, the pub and different village committees.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9.30pm