

SWALCLIFFE PARISH COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
HELD ON 26<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2016 AT 7.30PM  
IN SWALCLIFFE VILLAGE HALL

**Present**

Cllr J Bell (Chairperson), Cllr B Benson, Cllr L Melvin, Cllr V Taylor, Christine Coles - Parish Clerk, Cllr George Reynolds, Reverend Ronald Hawkes, Julie Carpenter, Michael Foley, Peter Beddowes, Rob Piner of Swalcliffe Park School and sixteen parishioners.

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

Cllr Bell welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming.

**2. Update from Parish Council**

Cllr Bell advised that she would be giving an update on the work of the Parish Council and plans for next year. Just recently the Parish Council lost their Chairperson, Jane Morgan. Cllr Bell thanked Jane for all her work and said that the loss to this village was Sibford's gain. This means there is now a vacancy on the Parish Council.

From the Community Plan, various groups have been formed, such as a book, bridge, walking and film club. Thanks was given to everyone for their work on the plan. Peter Beddowes would be giving more of an update later.

The Parish Council have been working with the Woodland Play Area group and have agreed to support the project. The garage area has improved. It was an eyesore and the lease was not a happy arrangement. The Parish Council have been liaising with the Parochial Church Council. Cllr Bell was pleased to see Reverend Ronald Hawkes and Virginia Merritt at this meeting. The Parish Council are liaising with the Village Hall Committee about improvements to the hall. They have helped the committee to purchase new crockery and a projector by paying the VAT. The Parish Council continue to liaise with the Police, Highways and report potholes. Four dog bins have been installed and they are very successful. It is hoped that a defibrillator might be installed soon. Cllr Bell encouraged people to come forward with ideas for the new year and thanked everyone for coming.

**3. Update from Cllr George Reynolds**

Cllr Reynolds noted that Cherwell District Council ticks over but struggles due to the lack of a government grant. They are working with South Northants Council to save money. He spoke about planning and there being two sides to every argument. It has been a quiet year for Oxfordshire County Council. Cllr Reynolds represents 22 villages and works for them. OCC has no money and very little reserves. The bus service has been reduced from 7 journeys to 4. The service is being paid for Warwickshire County Council. The idea of 'Oxfordshire Together' was launched last year. The parish will pay extra through their precept. There has been a lot of enthusiasm but also a lot of frustration in trying to speak to people within OCC. Parishes are being asked to take over services such as the mowing of verges, clearing of signs and looking after rural paths. He spoke briefly about Devolution. He is cynical about the idea. The idea of a unitary authority will go out to public consultation later in the year. Cllr Reynolds is a supporter of the local smaller unitary. Highways issues are a problem and he encouraged the village to report problems on 'Fix My Street'. Potholes not being filled properly are the bane of his life.

From the floor, Mr Beddowes asked about high speed fibre broadband. Cllr Reynolds felt that Swalcliffe was on the list for 2017 as there is no new cabinet yet. The Chairman of Sibford PC has a lot of information. Mr Foley asked when a decision will be made about the buses. The date is 20th July but a tender has been accepted by Warwickshire County Council. OCC and Dial A Ride are providing more services for the elderly and disabled people.

#### 4. **Update from Parochial Church Council (Reverend Ronald Hawkes)**

Reverend Ronald Hawkes asked everyone to think of Gay Harris who is currently unwell in hospital.

The main project this year was the installation of a toilet and kitchen in the church, which went ahead thanks to all those who supported our fund raising events, private donations and grants. The project came in at just under £40,000, thanks to the expert management by Stuart Ralph.

This year the PCC have had to repair leaks in the roof of the South Aisle, a burst central heating pipe and arrange the spraying by Rentokil of the South Aisle and Chancel roofs for beetle and woodworm infestation.

The wall at the end of the churchyard is yet to be repaired. The PCC are now looking at the possibility of a pathway through the Betty Panks' Garden rather than an official Disabled Access. It is impossible to get the levels required for building regulations for a Disabled Access.

The PCC will be preparing a grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund over the next year with considerable help from Cathy Stoertz, for which they are extremely grateful. Work required includes modernizing the heating system to facilitate more community use of the church, preservation of the historical wall paintings, repair and cleaning of the stain glass windows and repair and pointing of the outside North wall. This is a considerable undertaking but progress is slowly being made.

Running costs per annum are in the region of £13,000 and so the PCC will be looking towards more help from Gift Aided Donations from an increase in the number of Friends of Swalcliffe Church as they cannot rely on fund raising alone.

There are two vacancies on the PCC and they would welcome new members to bring renewed energy and ideas. Please get in touch with either Gay or Virginia if anyone is interested.

Finally, the PCC would like to thank all those volunteers who help with the upkeep of the church and churchyard; to all the flower arrangers, to Maurice and Gillian for mowing, to Gerry for keeping the front and pathways mown and in good shape. To Rob West and Matt Watkins for winding the clock and to Ray who has kindly allowed the PCC to use his water supply for flower arranging over many years.

Thanks also to Alan Mayor, and George (a pupil) from Swalcliffe Park School for their sterling work clearing round the graves on the East side of the churchyard enabling a wonderful display of snowdrops and primroses this Spring.

#### **Dates for the diaries:**

1<sup>st</sup> May: 11.30 Rogation Walk to Jesters Hill with picnic

14<sup>th</sup> May: 10.30-12 Swalcliffe Café and Cathy History Tour

19<sup>th</sup> June: 6pm RC Mass

25<sup>th</sup> June: Alfresco Dinner "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at Sparrow Hall by kind invitation of Peter and Virginia Beddowes

26<sup>th</sup> June: Pet Service and BBQ tea

10<sup>th</sup> July: 6pm Bamsford Singers Choral Evesong (with Dr Roy Massey organist ex Hereford Cathedral)

2<sup>nd</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> July: Scarecrow Festival (with Tadmarton)

23<sup>rd</sup> July: Baptism and wedding

2<sup>nd</sup> October: Harvest

22<sup>nd</sup> October: Harvest Supper in the Village Hall

23<sup>rd</sup> December: Carols round the tree and in the church

Mrs Brookes asked if the church is open now and the answer was yes. Cllr Melvin asked what the charge was to hire the church. Reverend Hawkes had written to the Diocese but the matter has not progressed much further. To use the church with the heating would cost about £80.00. Virginia Merritt advised that they will be creating some guidance on hiring soon.

**4. Update on Community Plan (Peter Beddowes)**

Mr Beddowes sees the plan as a set of priorities and preferences. The village have no control over bigger issues or those matters relating to finance. The main focus was on what people wanted. A draft report has been on the website for a number of weeks and has had 50 hits. There has been no feedback. The document is not contentious. It is very interesting and paints a good picture of the village. By the end of May, it will become the final version. The main thing has been the setting up of 5 social groups. They are thriving and have 10-15 people in each group. They are self sustaining and the organisers have done a good job. There is also some new life in voluntary activities. A common clearance group was created and there have been six sessions. The website is severely underused and the group are providing content for the website. More information has been put on the website and Cathy will be providing a history of the village.

A Digital Connectivity group has been set up involving Colin Hill, David McLindon and Peter Beddowes. This is the biggest issue to face the village whether it be a computer or mobile phone connection. A workshop will be organised for people to go to. It is hoped that pressure can be put on the providers.

Other issues are the state of footpaths and speeding. Attempts have been made to set up groups to tackle these issues but nobody has shown an interest. OCC are responsible for growth through footpaths and the landowner is responsible for grass growing up. Some villages have footpath wardens and there are official footpath maps. Cllr Taylor noted that she and the Parish Clerk had attended a meeting with Thames Valley Police in March. The idea of the meeting was to discuss common issues. The top three priorities identified for this year by the police are Speeding, Parking and Anti-Social Behaviour. Three speedwatch sessions were held last year and the equipment is currently broken. The Parish Council are able to purchase their own equipment and share the cost with neighbouring villages. This is something that is being explored at the moment.

The Steering Group has now been disbanded, 15 months after being set up. It is for the Parish Council to decide now whether they need to do something to keep the momentum going.

**5. Update from Swalcliffe Park School (Robert Piner)**

The school have had a successful year with two Ofsted inspections, one for Education and the other for Care. The refurbishment is successful and Lodge Cottage is finished. During the summer, work should start on the educational building. The school are working with the village on the new play area.

Cllr Bell asked about the new lighting plans. A consultation went out to the village and the planning application was approved by CDC with conditions on 17<sup>th</sup> March. The school will be working with CDC whilst the work is being done. The lights will affect the neighbourhood but be less obtrusive.

Virginia Merritt asked what Lodge Cottage will be used for? Mr Piner replied that the cottage will be used for students or for staff staying over.

**7. Update from Village Hall Committee (Julie Carpenter)**

The Village Hall continues to sustain itself with the income received from the hiring out of the building for parties, classes etc. It remains a valuable asset to the village for larger gatherings however there is still a need to increase the usage in order to build up a fund that allows the committee to continue to make improvements.

The committee received a substantial rebate from NPower following an investigation into the very high

meter readings that were being recorded...the meter proved to be faulty and resulted in a rebate of £929...this additional and much welcomed windfall has gone towards the purchase of good quality white China, tea and coffee pots to replace the very old and unattractive crockery and equipment that had been in place for many years. The committee also received a donation from the proceeds of the Burns night supper in January together with a donation from June and Nicholas Carter which has been used to obtain a new projector.

The village hall is now used on a monthly basis as the venue for a Film Club and Art classes. Regular piano lessons also take place. New emergency lighting has been installed to comply with Health and Safety legislation instigated by the village hall committee and paid for by the Parish Council. Going forward the Committee would like to make the following improvements: upgrade kitchen and add an internal door from the Mrs Rudge room into kitchen area, replace seating for something more comfortable, install WiFi in order to attract additional use of the hall by promoting to local small businesses for training courses, sales meetings etc.

Successful village events that have taken place recently include Last Night Of The Proms, Harvest Supper and Burns night Supper. Forthcoming events include a Bollywood evening, Quiz Night and the Harvest supper.

The Village Hall is in need of redecoration and the committee would welcome any offers of help to complete painting. The committee would also be interested in hearing from anyone with ideas or contacts for help in any of the above areas.

There is a vacant position on the committee for anybody interested. The VHC are also interested in hearing from anyone with an interest in accounting who might be willing to do the village hall accounts.

8. **Update on Woodland Adventure Area (Mr M Foley)**

- Considerable progress has being made since last year's AGM
- In May last year a pre-planning submission was made to CDC. In essence CDC outlined their approval in principle
- The results from the Village questionnaire that Peter Beddowes has/will mentioned tonight give an over SEVENTY per cent approval of the project
- A Swalcliffe Management Committee has being formed. This consists of Peter Beddowes/David McLindon/ Charlotte Watkins/Anna McLindon/Mick Foley, Mark Williams from SPS. SPC are in the process of allocating a Councillor to represent the Parish Council.
- The Management Committee hope to be in a position to present to SPC either at the May 17<sup>th</sup> or June 21<sup>st</sup> Council meeting. They will present outline proposals /projected costings funding and timings.
- The project is being planned in three parts a) Pre commissioning that involves all Legal Approvals/ Costings agreements and project plans. The second stage will be to raise Funds/ Commission Fencing/ and Clear the site. The third stage will be to prepare the entrance area/ layout pathways and woodland equipment and nature trails.
- It is hoped that the Management Committee/SPC will be in a position to present a formal Planning Application to CDC by Mid-July
- No work can be undertaking or fund raising until there is a formal Planning approval given by CDC

- On timing it is hoped that by the end of August/ early September the Management Committee will be in a position to commission the second stage of the project.
- The proposed area of the playground has now being agreed with SPS and has also being taped off.
- SPS have prepared a draft Lease Agreement which will allow the playground area to be rented for twenty five years
- SPC will in law be the Tenant but supported by the Management Committee.
- The committee have an outline brief that covers the Ecology issues and they have identified all the trees that are in the taped off area of the woodland.
- The committee are in the process of agreeing the Fencing Style which will be an open cross design. They will make sure that local Badgers and foxes will have an opening at the base so they will not be impeded in their night time walkies.
- The design of the woodland play area is working progress at the moment. The committee have had a meeting with 4 Corners Design Company who worked on the Woodland/Orchard walk for Sibford School and more recently Frank Wise School in Banbury.
- On Friday the committee have a company making a presentation on the style and equipment that could be considered suitable for the project.
- The Swalcliffe Village Fund committee have given their approval to release over £3000 of their Funds to support the first and second stage on the project. Nearer the time the committee will ask the villagers to offer their help with the project including clearing and making good.
- The committee have had two meetings with the Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association who have given the Management Committee considerable help and guidance and have agreed to guide the project through to outside Fund raising for the second and third stage of development.
- Epwell Parish Council have also offered their help following their experience in building the play area in their village.
- Re Fund raising. The committee hope to approach National Lottery, Play England, Local Building Society/ Local Branches of two Banks, Government funding through Oxfordshire Playing Fields and private donations.
- It is proposed to have a web matting walkway/path that will be laid in front of the School wall so that villagers walking between Park Lane/Brick Row from the centre of the village will not have to risk being mowed down by speeding motorists.

From the floor Virginia Merritt asked when the area would be finished? Mr Foley replied that there will be staging periods but he hopes within the next year.

## 9. **Open Forum**

A question was asked about training for the defibrillator. One session was recently held in Tadmarton and another will be arranged once the unit is installed.

Michelle Boycott asked if the PCC dates would be made available. It was confirmed they will be put in the Link and on the website.

Mr Foley asked for an update on the garage area. Cllr Melvin replied that in the past all garage owners have had an unfair lease. A new five year lease is being drawn up with proper terms and break clauses. There will be a separate service charge to be used for the upkeep of the drive area. One person has asked to buy the freehold. This is currently under consideration. The offer will be made to the village to keep the process fair. Cllr Melvin suggested that anybody could knock on her door to talk about the garages if they wanted to. Mr Beddowes asked if there is a shortage of garages? One more garage will be available this year. It is not necessarily a shortage of garages but what people are prepared to pay for one. Mrs Taylor felt that the open door policy being offered by Cllr Melvin was not ideal as Councillors are volunteers and have to protect themselves. Any points to be raised should be discussed at meetings by the Council as a corporate body.

Another villager said that Vodafone may install a phone signal in a pub. An offer was made to her as part of her phone service at home. She agreed to pass the details to Colin Hill.

Cllr Bell thanked everyone for coming,

Meeting closed 8.50pm.