

SWALCLIFFE PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

OF 21st JUNE 2016 AT 7.00PM

IN SWALCLIFFE VILLAGE HALL

Councillors Present

Jenny Bell (JB), Chairperson
Ben Benson (BB)
Lizzie Melvin (LM)
Mike Stanley (MS) – arrived late
Victoria Taylor (VT)

Peter Beddowes, David McLindon and Mick Foley from the Woodland Play Area Committee ,four villagers and Lord Grimston

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and made the following announcements: -

She welcomed the Parish Clerk back after her accident, Gerry Melvin is recovering from his operation, Gay Harris is also recovering after her illness, and Cllr Smith has had his second child, Jessica Rose.

On a sadder note, Sue Salter of Brick Row has passed away after a short illness. She gave the benefit of her wisdom at Parish Council meetings many times.

1. Apologies

Cllr Smith

2. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Melvin declared an interest in the grass mowing.

3. To discuss the proposals for the Woodland Play Area (circulated)

Mr Beddowes thanked the Parish Council for the opportunity to speak at this meeting and described the woodland play area as a valuable new amenity. He briefly summarised the detailed paper that had been pre-circulated and said the purpose of this session was primarily to focus on the obligations and implications for the PC – the lease; the need for the PC to contract with suppliers; funding; maintenance costs; public liability.

The new proposed pathway will link the village centre to Park Lane. The group cannot move to the next stage of the project without commitment from the Parish Council as this is a community project. It is a good opportunity to have a piece of land so central to the village. The play area will have lots of other benefits such as being close to walk to, having picnics, a meeting area for people and to enrich the community. The mandate from the village questionnaire was 74% in favour of the project. It was voted as the second most valuable amenity.

The total cost for Phase 1 and 2 and the pathway will cost £25K. The Parish Council will be able to claim back the VAT. The net cost is £21K and £4K is VAT. There is some money in the village fund and it is hoped the Parish Council can match fund. The group will be in a strong position to get external funding. The group are not asking the Parish Council to do the work but to be legally accountable. The Management Committee will maintain the area. The group are hoping to find parents with younger children and a member of the Parish Council to join the group.

Mr Beddowes did suggest to the Parish Council that they get legal advice on the lease.

The Chair asked about maintenance costs and who will be responsible for them? Mr Beddowes replied that they estimate the costs to be in the region of £500-£1000 per year. The village fund will fund this cost through their events. If they cannot fund the cost, it will have to pass back to the Parish Council. The Chair asked about accidents. These would be covered under the Public Liability cover of the general insurance policy.

There will be ongoing inspections, visual checks will be carried out fortnightly, and other monthly checks which will involve checking and making notes. A full inspection will be carried out annually.

The Parish Clerk asked who owned the path at the front. Mr Foley replied that it does not belong to the school. The previous Chair of the Parish Council had tried to register it but could not prove ownership to the Land Registry and were unable to. It is hoped that matting can be put down to enable the area to be mown, which is within the rules and regulations of OCC Highways. It will require planning permission as within the Conservation Area. The cost for installation is about £1.5K to £2K.

David McLindon showed the map which had been produced. Smaller trees will be cleared out and there will be places to sit down and talk. The piece of land is not flat. There is a bank at the back which drops down on the school side. There will be minimal impact of seeing any play equipment from the main road. A double gated area will be installed because of the closeness to the Main Road. Trees will be arched over the path and a woodchip path put in to keep as natural as possible. A fence will be put round first to safeguard the children at the school. Logs will be utilised and bug hotels created. Benches cost £200.00 and future plans are to have benches sponsored. Thinking ahead it is hoped that more items such as benches can be added.

Mrs Boycott asked if the area should be infilled to make it flat. The reply was that the area will stay as it is as children love to run up and down hills. It is hoped to keep the area as natural as possible.

Another villager asked what would happen if the weather was very wet. Trees will be inspected annually but if some areas do become muddy they will be out of bounds until the weather dries up.

Rubbish bins are being considered and dogs will not be allowed in the play area. Grass will be retained in areas as much as possible. This is the essence of a woodland area and children will learn much more. Otherwise, it would be in danger of becoming a playground. An information board will be put up. The school has offered to pay for the tree survey but the maintenance costs for any trees in the area will have to be paid for separately. The area will be open all the time. It is hoped that children will be supervised by parents although this cannot be controlled.

Mr Foley advised that this item has been on the Parish Council agenda for a number of years. They were looking for a community project and money has been set aside. The group are asking for agreement from the Parish Council in principle at this stage. The village fund has £6K, OPFA has £5K and there are two other sources who may give £2-3K. A pre planning application was made to CDC last year and they gave approval to proceed.

The project is being managed by four people who agreed to take this on. Mr Foley was the link whilst on the Parish Council. He is happy to take that on and it will involve less the time for the Parish Council. The group expects to do most of the work.

He asked the Parish Council to consider the presentation and at the next council meeting on 2nd August, be able to say yes or no to the project. If yes the group can proceed and prepare the documentation for CDC. Planning can take 6-8 weeks. Once the lease, planning and finances have been agreed, the group will be in a position to go to funders. It requires approval from CDC first and no money will be spent at this stage or commitment given to contractors. If successful, the work will begin in Spring 2017 and open in late Spring/early Summer 2017.

Mr Foley also noted there is a white paper going through Government now encouraging villagers to do these projects. OPFA are trying to find out more about it.

Mr Beddowes estimates the total cost of the path and play area and some equipment to be £25K (net cost £21K). They would like to the Parish Council to consider match funding the contribution the village fund, contributing £6K plus the costs to put the path in costing £1.5-2K. Total cost £8K. The Chair asked when the money would have to be paid. It would not be needed until Spring 2017 as there is hopefully £15K to come in from other sources. Mr Beddowes suggested that the Parish Council agree to fund up to a certain amount and then they are not liable to bridge the gap. Maintenance costs are open ended but if the area became unsafe, it could always be closed as a last resort

Cllr Taylor asked when the lease would need to be agreed. The Parish Council are to get advice on the lease. If there are any changes, this would go back to the school. The lease has to be signed before the planning application is submitted. It is planned to submit an application in the Autumn time.

Finally, the parents at the meeting gave their support for the whole project and spoke on behalf of those who could not make the meeting. The group was thanked for all their hard work which was very clear to see in the excellent presentation put forward tonight.

4. To approve the minutes of the previous council meeting and Annual Parish Meeting held on 26th April 2016 and the meeting on 17th May

The minutes from three meetings listed above were all approved and signed as a true record of the meetings.

5. Open Forum

Lord Grimston (RG) advised that he was approached by CITL (a joint venture between Telefonica/Vodafone) at the end of last year for a mast to go up. CITL looked at other sites but chose his site. RG agreed to take it forward but changed his mind a few weeks ago. The ground rules are changing. He was negotiating a commercial lease with break clauses but the government are now changing the emphasis. The immediate neighbours were not happy and Lord Grimston pulled out. He has no regrets about his decision. The mobile organisations do want to install a mast and other areas were looked at such as Sibford School and the sewage farm. He is not sure what area they will serve once up. Under new powers, the operators can upgrade masts. Some masts can be attractive, but others are unsightly. He said that everyone needs to think where a mast can go to maximise benefit and minimise the impact on the environment. They need to be sited as far away from houses as possible. It was noted there is now a Digital Connectivity Group in the village which could help with the process. Lord Grimston will make contact with them.

Gay Harris of the Parochial Church Council advised that she is meeting the DAC tomorrow to discuss disabled access and putting a pathway through the Betty Panks Garden.

6. Matters Arising

Swalcliffe Park School – Cllr Benson has liaised with them. The other work is part of their remit but the school are short of staff on the maintenance side. Cllr Benson was thanked for his work.

Councillor Vacancy – There is still a vacancy. Someone has shown an interest and may attend the next meeting.

7. To discuss the possible sale of garage/s

It was agreed at the last meeting that the Parish Council did not want to sell the freehold for two garages. They would consider selling one at the far end with the land to the left. Councillors discussed if they should ask the village about selling an asset. However assets such as land have been sold before without consultation. The Parish Council may prefer to keep and buy the garages as they become available. The money could go in a pot for special projects. Councillors did agree to get the freehold valued. In the past when land has been sold, a survey was done by an external agent and a value given. This leaves no exposure to criticism. There is rubbish by garages which requires tidying up. Potholes in the access area are getting bigger.

Action: Cllr Melvin to contact a couple of commercial agents with a view to getting a value. Cllr Melvin to make contact with Mr Stanton. The Parish Clerk to write to all garage owners about clearing any rubbish next to their garage.

8. To receive an update on the defibrillator and to sign the grant offer letter

The Parish Clerk was pleased to advise that SSE have offered a grant of £2499.00 to purchase a defibrillator for the village. The grant offer letter will be signed. She has applied to BT to adopt the phone box. BT are now in the process of consulting with Cherwell District Council. Cllrs discussed the possibility of swapping this box with an old red one if one can be purchased cheaply enough. The defibrillator will be placed in a locked cabinet and insured on the current insurance policy after purchase.

Action: The Parish Clerk to get advice from BT about swapping to a red box.

9. To receive an update on the culvert in Brick Row

The Parish Clerk has reported the incident to OCC Highways and the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency has advised the Clerk to go back to OCC Highways. The Parish Clerk has also contacted Duncan Jack. He thinks the ditch needs digging out but is happy to meet on site.

Action: The Parish Clerk to set up a meeting.

10. To receive an update on the Conservation Area Review

A date has been agreed with Jenny Ballinger of CDC to hold the Conservation Area Review. An exhibition will be held in the village hall on Tuesday 5th July from 4.00-6.30pm followed by a public meeting from 7.00-8.30pm. A note has been put in the Link. The details to go on Facebook and on the website.

11. Finance Report

The following payments were approved:

£17.00 to SLCC (membership)

£82.00 to Gerry Melvin (grass cutting)

£90.00 to Paul Crockett (grass cutting)

An additional payment of £90.00 to Paul Crockett was approved. This was received after the agenda had been issued.

To approve Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Return 2015/16

The Parish Clerk advised the internal audit has been carried out. She presented Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Return and they were signed.

12. Correspondence

The following correspondence had been received:

CDC/SNC, Devolution Message

Swalcliffe Park School, Future planning application

Shenington Parish Council, 20mph information

BT, Adopt a payphone

Sibford Ferris Parish Council, Withdrawal of Phone Mast application at Elm Farm

Oxfordshire Libraries, Mobile Library Service Closure in September

OALC, Invitation to AGM on 4th July

The following correspondence was highlighted:

Shenington Parish Council, 20mph information. Details had been circulated of the work that Shenington have been doing in trying to get a 20mph limit. It appears to be a costly exercise so this information will be kept on file.

13. Councillors' Reports

Cllr Benson reported that OCC have allocated £10K to spend on fixing Grange Lane. Other highway matters reported were the No Entry to HGV sign on Park Lane which is falling apart. Cllr Taylor to look into this. Cllr Benson suggested that a line diagram is put on showing drivers where to go.

Cllr Taylor spoke about the speed signs. The top one works better than the bottom one. She will speak to both parties about the signs. She spoke about the '20 is Plenty' sign. Two are needed, one for Park Lane and one for Bakers Lane. She will arrange for some to be made in A3 size.

Cllr Stanley attended the Cherwell Parish Liaison meeting on 8th June. The meeting was attended by 34 representatives, covering half of the parishes in the area. A presentation was given on lending money to villages to start up businesses such as pubs and shops and a planning update.

The Parish Council received a £200.00 grant from Cherwell District Council for the Queen's 90th birthday but no event happened. The money will have to be returned to CDC.

14. Date and time of next meeting

Tuesday 2nd August at 7pm

