**Swerford Parish Assembly**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 April 2019**

**Swerford Village Hall 7.30 PM**

**Present:** Jane Abbott,Cllr Andrew Beaney (West Oxfordshire District Council), Charles Campion, Kate Campion, John Chaplin, Maggie Chaplin, Cllr Nigel Colston (West Oxfordshire District Council), Gordon Craig, Nick Davies, Charlotte Douglass, Jonathan Drinkwater, Tim Field, Colin Ford, Maurice George, William Haddon, Graham Hayman, Sarah Hayman, Cllr Hilary Hibbert-Biles (Oxfordshire County Council), Annette Huyton, Roger Huyton, David Nelligan, Suzanne Stogdon, Gavin Strachan, Leonard Tustian, Rona Wyld.

A warm welcome was extended to all. John Chaplin acted as Chairman of the meeting without objection. The meeting followed the Agenda other than that Cllr Hibbert Biles proceeded early as she was feeling unwell.

1. **The election of a Chairman for the meeting.**

As above.

1. **Apologies**

The following apologies were received: Rev Wendy Cunnigham, Philippa Drinkwater, Gay Ford, Rosalind Haddon, PCSO Phil Workman.

1. **Minutes of the last Assembly: 4th of May 2018**

These were noted. Maurice George proposed acceptance, seconded by Colin Ford. The minutes were duly approved and signed by the Chairman.

1. **Matters arising from the minutes**

No matters arising.

1. **Country Council Report (Cllr Hilary Biles)**

Cllr Biles made a presentation that was extensive and detailed highlighting various areas particularly to do with education, mental health, special needs, social care, the state of our roads and other matters. A very interesting summary mentioning also the changes in budget over the years and the Council’s need to balance change within related constraints. The Parish Council was thanked for its efforts. Cllr Biles again offered to help with funding any village needs. Questions and answers followed.

1. **Parish Council Chairman's Report**

Various matters were covered including the following:

* the Parish Council had objected to two planning applications over the year. One had been reconsidered by the applicant, amended plans submitted and these were duly approved without further objection. The other was approved by the District Council after a strong objection by the Parish Council (including the facts that it considered the application incomplete and the resulting access dangerous). No further reference to the Council was made and the application was approved, albeit after further investigation at District level. That no further representation or counter argument is allowed by the Parish Council to any ‘defence’ by the applicant, particularly where there may have been no changes to the original application, is seen as a particular point of weakness and a method seen to lack adequate transparency, whatever legal and technical arguments might exist. Some change where controversial applications are objected to at Parish level is urged;
* the reasons of an increased Precept were briefly covered;
* the village had many successful events over the year. Particular successes included the Armistice Centenary celebrations; the Art Exhibition in St Mary’s (with special thanks to Charlotte Douglas and the Rev Wendy Cunningham) and Remembrance Day itself (with special thanks to Tina Poke);
* CPR training was repeated (with thanks to Colin Ford).

Thanks were also extended: to the Ford and Radford families for their continued assistance with the mowing of communal village areas; our Churchwardens Jenny Tustian and Charles Campion; Jonathan Warr and Kate Campion for their management of the village Charity; and all of those who have worked hard on the village hall, village events, the playing fields, the church grounds and so on.

Despite the generosity of many, a call for further assistance was made. There are ‘odd jobs’ for which the Parish Council could do with some help (for example walking the Parish pathways and reporting any problems). These tasks need not be onerous, performed on an entirely informal basis, and undertaken without major responsibility (for example in this instance without the need to resolve problems which would still be left to the Council).

1. **Parish Council Financial Report**

Gavin Strachan outlined a positive position. The main costs to the Parish Council over the year had been mowing (some £500), the Village Hall Roof (contribution £1,000), the mid-term Parish Council election (£700) and upkeep of the Playing Fields (£600). An increased annual budget increases the Precept from £23 to £42 per head (still considerably lower than the District average of £83).

Bank balances are considered satisfactory with a current account of about £6,000 and a deposit account of a similar amount**.**

Charlotte Douglas asked about the Precept and this was discussed in some detail

1. **Police Report**

Neither PCSO Phil Workman (who apologised for his absence and retires this year) nor his colleague PCSO Chris Jones (otherwise engaged) could attend.

They submitted a Report highlights of which were read out by William Haddon. This is available from him if anyone would like a copy. Highlights include:

* 16 reported incidents for the year;
* Chris Jones and Helen Keen are our Woodstock Neighbourhood Police Team. There are a number of police officers in Witney and one in Chipping Norton;
* we are urged to sign up to Thames Valley Alert: ([www.thamesvalleyalert.co.uk](http://www.thamesvalleyalert.co.uk) )
* contact non-emergency number 101 or the Thames Valley website for any matters of concern;
* Police priorities are domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation, household burglaries and the exploitation of persons for the supply of drugs;
* they are always keen to receive feedback.

1. **Parish Councillor’s Updates**

There were no updates other than those mentioned elsewhere in these minutes.

1. **Swerford Charity Report**

A brief history was outlined by John Chaplin and thanks given to the two Parish Council appointed (and long serving) Trustees, Jonathan Warr and Kate Campion. An annual income of some £2,000 exists, available to persons, or organisations, in need, in the Parish.

1. **Village Hall Report**

A full report was given by Charlotte Douglass who after many years of invaluable service now retires as Chair to be replaced by Gavin Strachan. Carla McKay has resigned from the Committee for health reasons. Alexandra Stanton assumes the role of secretary. There is room for further members and anyone with energy and enthusiasm is welcome.

It has been active year and regular hall bookings continue. The events are well known (and much appreciated) in the village and the hall is well supported.

Budgetary wise, the hall works on a modest surplus and after the major cost in refurbishment of the roof there is £4,350 in the bank.

Two matters were raised:

* Maggie Chaplin asked about hall cleaning. It was agreed that this could do with more attention, particularly vis a vis external hirings;
* Jane Abbott asked about the cracks. This was discussed in some detail. Basically it is to do with the reconstruction of parts of the Hall some 30 years ago: separate foundations exist to that of its neighbour (School House) and there appears to have been some slight movement over this time exacerbated by the very dry summer of 2018. While it is not felt that the cracks are of very major concern, the matter has been raised with insurers and is under further discussion.

Much effort is made in the community to serve and it was again remarked upon by the District and County Council Officers that they were continually impressed with efforts to do with the village hall, the Parish Council and the village in general.

1. **Playing Field Committee Report**

The support given by the Ford family, and particularly Jane Ford, in meeting the costs of maintaining the playing field was again noted. With their departure the mowing of the playing field will be an additional (considerable) cost to the village.

Jane Abbott noted that ROSPA had given an acceptable safety report but some renovations were needed and carried out (two benches, a picnic table and new swing seats).

The village was asked for ideas as to usage. The response was limited but within this the most popular was to do with a possible boules area. It is felt that the level of support does not really justify the cost. Ideas remain welcome and it is thought that there is more opportunity for external funding for more athletic activities although nothing is that clear.

1. **Church Report**

A report was given by Charles Campion. The Rev Janet Foull will be installed as the new Rector on the 22nd May in Hook Norton. All are welcome to celebrate. Thanks were given for the amazing carol service and the work in the churchyard (special thanks again to Mel Poke). St Mary’s is the only church thought to be open all hours of every day.

As to the church repairs:

* All investigative works have been completed. £15,000 has been spent on architects and studies and preliminary work. The Diocesan Advisory Committee is reviewing the plans which are expected to be approved very shortly. The request that the lead roof be replaced has been rejected which is disappointing;
* The cost of roof repair, some stonework and internal decoration is expected to be in the region of £230-240,000. No lottery possibilities exist and this, less the £60,000 existing, will have to be raised in the village. A big launch is due imminently. Confidence exists that this target will be met.

1. **Village News and Website**

Maggie Chaplin outlined the following:

Website

Starting in 2008 West Oxfordshire District Council ran a scheme to encourage parish councils to have their own community website. For a small enrolment fee (£50) they offered web hosting, a site template and the services of a WODC employed advisor. Swerford opted in. It was a bargain. Soon afterwards WODC discontinued the service but the web host (Chris Stanbury of Cravenplan Computers ) very kindly agreed to continue supporting any existing sites. He has continued to do that ever since at no charge. The Parish Council makes an annual donation to his favourite charity - Hope & Homes for Children.

Much has changed and what was ideal for a basic community website isn’t really suitable for modern needs. There are already legal obligations regarding what Parish Councils have to put on websites and more stringent rules are due to come into force in 2020. The current web template doesn’t lend itself to these requirements and it also means that our website can no longer be a community project independent of the Parish Council.

She suggested that the Parish Council take active measures to seek an alternative before the new regulations have to be implemented. This will, of course, inevitably result in a very considerable increase in cost to the PC. She offered to continue in her current role until this is resolved (unless any other volunteers exist).

Swerford Newsletter

There are many people who no longer live in Swerford but have fond memories or an association with the village who like to receive the newsletter and every month 140 copies of The Insight are sent out. (The content of which is, incidentally, independent of the Parish Council.) Feedback is mainly positive.

Subject matter is ideally diverse and she is very grateful to everyone who contributes, whether voluntarily or when pressed! Photos, snippets of information that are village related (even vaguely!) or tales of villagers’ exploits are always welcome. She usually allocates space at the beginning of the preceding month so anything time sensitive needs to be advised as early as possible, even though generally, copy is not required until about 10 days before publication. (Word count is strictly controlled to keep content varied.)

The email address to send contributions to is usually the header to page two.

Suzanne Stogdon thanked Maggie for her brilliant and enormous efforts. This was heartily endorsed.

1. **District Council Report (Nigel Colston)**

A very warm, useful, and positive, report was given, supported from time to time by Andrew Beaney (also of WODC), about some of the key issues of the day. In this case as to: the Local Plan (recently adopted and of note due to the housing requirements within); the formation of shared public services (considerable savings occurring); the ongoing issue of a unitary council (basically the disbandment of District Councils within an all encompassing County Council - thought unlikely in the foreseeable future); and the creation of a Cotswold National Park (likewise).

Concerns were raised as to:

* the cost to our own environment by being slightly outside any new National Park (Swerford is on the edge of possible new boundaries);
* the Backside planning permission given last year. Views were expressed by more than one present that this should never have been approved and that in due course further applications might be expected including a change of use for which some neighbours were very opposed and fearful that they would again be overridden;
* the process to be followed where conditions attached to approved planning applications are not adhered to. It was again confirmed by Andrew Beany and Nigel Colston that community members need to police this themselves and raise any issues with the Parish Council who should take this to the planning office Enforcement Officer as soon as possible.

1. **Open Forum and Any other Business**

There were no issues raised. The Meeting closed at about 9:30 pm and many of those present stayed on for a glass of wine and some crisps, both plain and cheese and onion.

**Minutes to be Presented at Parish Council Annual Meeting on 14MAY19**