**Swerford Parish Council**

**Parish Council Committee Meeting**

**Thursday 5 November 2020 at 19:30 hrs**

**Virtual Meeting using ZOOM**

**Present:** Mr J Chaplin, (Chairman), Mrs J Abbott (Councillor and Deputy Chair), Mr J Drinkwater (Councillor), Mr W Haddon (Parish Clerk), Mr G Strachan (Councillor and RFO). Mr L Tustian (Councillor). (JC, JA, JD, Clerk, GS, LT respectively hereafter.) Mr Chaplin was a little delayed and we lost contact with Mr Tustian (see further below). Forum was maintained.

**Residents:** Mr Ian Heath, Mrs Elizabeth Walkinshaw. (IH, EW respectively.)

**Draft Minutes**

1. **Declarations of Interest.** When discussed (see below), JC noted a potential conflict of interest as a neighbour of IH and therefore with an interest in the situation related to the Swere floods outside Griffin House. Otherwise none noted.
2. **Apologies for absence.** Jennifer Allsop apologised by email as she was still in / just leaving London and could not make the meeting.
3. **Code of Conduct.** Noted.
4. **Approval of minutes** of meeting of 20th July 2020. Approval proposed by J.A, seconded by J.D. Approved.

JC joined the meeting. The first few points were reviewed again.

1. **Matters arising.**
   1. Matters to do with the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (Part 2) (AGAR) were confirmed as having been completed.

(It was felt at the meeting that we had lost the connection to LT. Having chatted to him afterwards he confirmed that this was for a few minutes only.)

1. **Financial Governance**:
   1. An up-to-date statement of Receipts and Payments, actual versus forecast, together with Summary of Balances held was quickly reviewed having been previously circulated. There is £7,687 in the Current Account and £6,664 in the Deposit Account.
   2. The situation re the Internal Auditor, very unfortunately struck down with COVID, was briefly covered. It has been difficult to make contact with Arrow: therefore, there has been no internal audit and there will be no Notice of Conclusion of the Annual Audit. It was considered that as sufficient financial reporting is done to meetings and that the volume of transactions is minimal, in the current pandemic this is not unacceptable. It was agreed that there is no practical manner in which to appoint a replacement at such short notice.
      1. The Internal Audit Effectiveness Review was (regrettably) negative: a new Auditor needs to be identified for 2020-21. (**Action:** JC/GS.)
      2. Members of the public are invited to contact the RFO, Gavin Strachan, in the event any discussion or investigation with regard to the books is sought.
   3. A Review of Bank signatories was made and the current arrangements deemed satisfactory (JC, JA and JD were confirmed as signatories.)
   4. The budgetary forecast for 2020-21, together with the Annual Precept, will be done by 10th December. It was agreed that there was no requirement to increase the Precept, with little change in the budget. (**Action:** JC/GS.)

The Village Hall budget is also due by year end.

1. **Planning Applications**:
   1. There is nothing new to report re: Cold Harbour Farm.
   2. The Parish Council confirmed its approval to the Lyndhurst proposal. (Planning Application 20/02156/HHD).
2. **General Governance**:
   1. The following were very briefly discussed, having been circulated prior to the meeting:
      1. Standing Orders;
      2. Financial Regulations;
      3. Financial Risk Assessment;
      4. Financial Timetable;
      5. Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities (Publications Scheme).

Proposed by JD, seconded by JA, they were duly approved.

Items of note to be addressed in due course - delayed due to COVID:

* Chairman’s Report to the 2020 Annual Parish Assembly (not held);
* Formal election of Chair which was due at the 2020 Annual Parish Council Meeting (not held): in the meantime, current office holders remain in place until either the next Annual Meeting or as the Council may determine.

1. **Playground.**
   1. A long discussion occurred. There remains strong feeling. While government is allowing these to remain open, the main issue is compliance with complex regulations. While JA remains most concerned, and against continuation, the general consensus was that this was a good thing provided that ongoing close review is maintained. It was agreed therefore that the playground will remain open with JC and JA considering how best this is done going forward. (Obviously local COVID conditions will have a very strong bearing on any change needed.) (**Action**: JA/JC.)
2. **Village Hall** 
   1. An update was given by JC. Nothing much has changed. The results of the final crack monitoring are awaited and the way forward under discussion. Post receipt of a grant from government of £10,000, there is no short-term concern as to funding of the basic costs of some £1,500 pa required to keep the hall in good condition.
   2. JC confirmed that insurance was renewed on 13SEP20 for a further year.
3. **Village Website**
   1. Congratulations were given to JC and all those involved for the excellence of the new Website.
4. **WODC Planning**
   1. JC gave some further information on what has been uncovered within WODC. The amalgamation of ‘back-office’ functions across various Councils has effectively meant that WODC Planning is now greatly diminished in staffing in any meaningful hands-on manner. Responsibilities have in effect been assumed by PUBLICA who now cover a large area including the Forest of Dean, Cheltenham, the Cotswold District of Gloucestershire and West Oxford. There was little positive to say about the new arrangements.
5. **Any Other Business**
   1. Ian Heath gave a detailed summary as to his investigations into how he sought (with neighbours) to solve the drainage problems on, and around, the bridge next to Griffin House, which as we all know, can flood very badly. Several parties are involved including the Environment Agency’s Flood Prevention Office, the Highways Department, and neighbouring landowners (one of whom, JC declared his interest).

IH outlined issues to do with drainage, maintenance, river flows above and below the corner, and the complications involved. At the moment discussions are ongoing, a Plan has been agreed with Flood Prevention and matters have been reported to the necessary authorities: he awaits a response from the Highways Department to see what responsibility will be taken to resolve the matter.

In the meantime, he is canvassing the support of both Hook Norton and Swerford Parish Councils in the event that he needs to take this further with local government.

It is a dangerous bend and particularly so when flooded.

It was agreed that he will continue to liaise with neighbours, (he has been in close contact with Elizabeth Walkinshaw), to see whose responsibility is what, and what can be done. If Highways do not respond in any positive manner, the Council will consider this further with a view to proffering support as is possible. He was asked to keep the Council advised as appropriate.

It was acknowledged that this is complicated in terms of responsibilities but that all had an interest in some equitable settlement.

* 1. Unfortunately, Jennifer Allsop was delayed and unable to make the meeting.
  2. The damaged mile post by the A361 will again be addressed by John Chaplin who will be assisted by Mr David Andrews.. (**Action:** JD.)
  3. It was agreed to drop pursuit of any tie-up to whatever is being planned by WODC relating to expanded bus services to include Swerford (thought highly unlikely to get anywhere).
  4. JC and JD have had enough! The village sit-on mower must now be replaced as it has been costing too much and is far too unreliable. Authority was given for them to purchase a new mower for less than £2,500 (excluding VAT). (**Action:** JC/JD.)
  5. Philippa Radford has kindly agreed to organise the cutting back of the oak tree affecting the War Memorial at Church End: she will use her gardener (assisted by JC and Mr Roy Haigh). Profuse thanks were unanimous.
  6. The parking situation at **Chapel End** will be reviewed.(Understand agreed after the Secretary of the meeting was cut off by Zoom.)

The following general matters will be taken forward at the first practical opportunity:

* 1. **Playing Fields:** a working party to clean the area (Jane Abbott and John Chaplin liaising).
  2. **Swerford Charity** updates (when appropriate). Swerford PC Standing Orders note that according to Charity Law, having nominated a Trustee, an obligation exists to receive an annual report of activity together with Accounts.
  3. **CPR training** originally targeted for JUL20.
  4. Location of a new **Chapel End tree.**
  5. How best to install and thereafter maintain ‘dog friendly’ access to all **stiles.** Progress on writing to all involved landowners was to be taken forward by the Clerk after meeting with Colin Ford to gather names and addresses. A letter would then be sent by the Chairman.
  6. Re-institution of a village **‘Welcome Pack’** - volunteers needed!
  7. **Road Warning signs** on Chapel Hill.

The Meeting closed at 9:03. The next Meeting is scheduled for Thursday 11th February 2021 at 7:30 pm.

W Haddon 10NOV20