**Minutes of the Swerford Parish Assembly**

**20 May 2022**

**Swerford Village Hall 7.30 PM**

1. **Present**

Cllr Andrew Beaney (West Oxfordshire District Council), John Chaplin, Maggie Chaplin, Jonathan Drinkwater, Roger Huyton, David Nelligan, Gordon Craig, Mel Poke, Tina Poke, Cllr Geoff Saule (Oxfordshire County Council), Gavin Strachan, Leonard Tustian, and three other members of the public.

A warm welcome was extended to all. John Chaplin acted as Chairman of the meeting without objection.

1. **Apologies for absence**

The following apologies were received: William Haddon the Clerk who was unwell, so Gavin Strachan undertook to record the minutes; Cllr Alex Wilson (West Oxfordshire District Council) who had to be at another meeting; Deborah and David Long; Sean and Trisha at The Old Police House.

1. **Minutes of the last Assembly**

As a result of the pandemic, the last Assembly was held in 2019. The 2020-21 Assembly was conducted electronically.

The minutes of these two assemblies were approved.

1. **Matters arising.**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the last Assembly except as recorded below.

1. **Chairman's Report.**

The Chairman outlined for what the Parish Council was and was not responsible. It was responsible for the public areas of land, the village hall, community affairs and mowing the public areas.

He thanked those who contributed to running these, and made particularly thanks to William Haddon, the Clerk.

1. **Financial Report.**

The RFO, Gavin Strachan, gave a brief report on the financial affairs of the Parish Council.

It had healthy reserves in both its current and savings accounts, totalling £11,447. A major reduction in running costs was the result of the purchase of a new motor mower.

The village had the lowest precept in WODC as a result of the many volunteers who undertook work on behalf of the community.

1. **Police Report.**

There was no Police Report.

1. **Parish Councillor’s updates.**

Nick Davies was to be adopted at the forthcoming Parish Council AGM.

In May 2023 the entire council is up for re-election.

The chairman announced that he was leaving the village in July 2022 and that he would need replacing.

1. **Charity Report.**

The Chairman of the Charity, Colin Ford, was not present to make a report, on the approximately £2,500 a year which is generated from the renting out of two fields in the parish for the “poor and needy of the village.”

1. **Village Hall Report.**

Gavin Strachan, the Village Hall chairman, reported on the much-needed improvements that had already been made to the hall and more that were planned.

The hall had benefitted from large grants made by WODC as the hall was unable to generate income over the period of the pandemic. The main upgrades were the removal of a very aged oil-fired boiler used for the central heating, the removal of the bottled gas for cooking, and the replacement of some windows which were failing with sympathetic oak double glazed windows.

The heating, cooking and hot water generation were now all electric.

The entire expenditure was forecast to total about £23,000.

Maggie Chaplin requested that the floor should be sanded and resealed.

Gordon Craig enquired if planning permission had been granted for the replacement windows, to which the answer was that as the hall itself was not listed this was not required.

1. **Playing Field Report.**

John Chaplin reported that ROSPA inspected the playing fields annually and that a monthly visual check was undertaken.

1. **Church Report.**

Charles Campion produced a lengthy written report which was read out in his absence by Jonathan Drinkwater.

Following the closure of the church during the pandemicm services were back to the usual pattern of twice-monthly and the additional special services.

The Bishop of Dorchester came in September 2021 to rededicate the church after its restoration. The approximate four years of restoration work was completed for a total cost of about £235,000.

Churchyard working parties continue as organised by Leigh Warr.

There is a misconception that the Church of England pays for the church. This is not the case. All running costs including insurance and repairs and a contribution of £7,000 to the diocese, towards the cost of the clergy, are paid by the village. In 2021 this totalled £11,395 versus revenue and donations of £10,055.

Charles Campion’s report included thanks to all those who helped on the working parties, flowers and cleaning, mowing, those who donate, and to Charlotte Douglass for her work on the restoration project and to Mel Poke for keeping the clock.

1. **District Council Report**

Andrew Beaney on behalf of Alex Wilson, who was at another meeting, gave his report on behalf of the District Council. He expressed pleasure in the number of people from Swerford who attended the Parish Assembly, distinctly different from other, larger parishes. Amongst several items Mr Beaney reported that COVID was still affecting bin collections and that fly-tipping had increased.

1. **County Council Report (Geoff Saul).**

Geoff Saull reported that he had been elected in May 2021 and was part of the Fair Deal Alliance of parties.

He outlined the various funds to which Swerford could apply and where allocations of various monies were being made on roads, childrens’ homes and youth workers. Eight percent of the budget was spent on roads and about 55% on social care. Centralised funding meant that some projects are ring-fenced and money could not be used elsewhere.

Planning officers were back to full strength, but some were still learning their roles, and enforcement officers were also back to full strength. John Chaplin made a firm point that enforcement officers should share information with the Parish Council – so as to increase the overall effectiveness of the planning process.

Jonathan Drinkwater asked about the thinking on electric car charging and who is responsible; and how are car owners going to charge cars when they lived on single track roads. The answer was that nothing had really been established and there was debate between the District and County about this.

Mel Poke said that the roads were in a bad state, to which Mr Saull reported that the income from central government meant that this was inadequately funded, and it was a third of what it was before.