**Swerford Parish Council**

**Parish Council Committee Meeting**

**Wednesday 15th February 2023 at 19:30 hrs**

**Swerford Village Hall**

**Minutes**

**Present:** Mr G Strachan (Chairman and RFO), Mr L Tustian, Mr N Davies, Mrs J Tinsley (Councillors), Mr W Haddon (Clerk), Mr C Ford (GS, LT, ND, JT, WH, CF respectively hereafter). Mr R Hall, Mr R Huyton.

1. **Declarations of Interest.** There were no declarations.
2. **Apologies for absence.** Received with apologiesfromJ Drinkwater.
3. **Code of Conduct.** Acknowledged.
4. **Approval of Minutes of the Meeting of 16th November 2022.** Proposed by JT, Seconded by ND. Approved.
5. **Matters arising.**
   1. Chapel End Pond. The matter continues to be under discussion.
   2. Blocked gullies in Chapel End. While LT proposed we consider repair at the Council’s expense, it was felt that it was not the Council’s role to make repairs at its own expense when it was OCC’s responsibility. Furthermore, our funds are limited and a bad precedent might be established. GS will take this up with OCC. (**Action**: GS.)
   3. Defibrillator. The Council had already agreed that funds exist and the purchase and installation of a second defibrillator is necessary. The issue remains as to where as it needs electricity and protection from the elements. The aim is to place it in Chapel End. Jonathan Drinkwater is said to have made contact with St Mary’s as to re-siting the village hall machine in their porch: the necessary paperwork and permissions are being pursued. CF continues to liaise with BT as to use of the phone box in Chapel End (not currently possible). (**Action**: J Drinkwater, CF.)
   4. Approval was given to instruct Ben Acreman to remove the Willow at the Chapel End pond: the cost is £1,385 + VAT (the VAT will be reclaimed in due course). He would like to wait until summer when the pond is drier. This was agreed although the sooner the better. The willow is a very large tree - removal is a major project. In the meantime CF noted that signs had been placed to warn people of the danger. (**Action**: CF.)

The poplars are safe. It was agreed to leave as is for the moment.

* 1. GS advised that the Village Hall cost of works reconciliation is not possible until final numbers are to hand.
  2. A copy of the notice extending the Village Hall’s insurance has been provided.
  3. The Precept for 2023/24 totals £7,360. This is a substantial increase and the reasons have previously been noted. This was formally ratified.

1. **Financial Governance**:
   1. An up-to-date statement of Receipts and Payments, actual versus forecast, together with a Summary of Balances held, had been circulated by email. No Loans or Investments exist. The current balances are: Current Account - £600.43 and Deposit Account - £6,675.17. A further £4,000 is due from the Village Hall.
   2. A list of cheques issued from 16NOV22 was circulated prior to the meeting:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Payee** | **for** | **\*S.137**  **expenditure?** | **cheque no** | **date of**  **cheque** | **financial year** | **£ gross amount** | **£ amount**  **excl VAT** |
| Netwise UK | Upgrade to Websiste | No | 100438 | 2 Dec 2022 | 22/23 | 238.80 | 199.00 |

* 1. Noted.
  2. A copy of this year’s Village Hall budget remains due. (**Action**: GS.)

1. **General Governance:**
   1. **Register of Title Deeds**: this was reviewed, details having been circulated on 18JAN23. The issues related to Mill Cottage (possibly to do with a wall - a matter it seems from 2008) and Lands Farm (a possible Tenancy Agreement made in 1939) remain unclear. It was agreed that until the records are required, the related documents should simply remain lodged with Hancocks as there would seem little point in further examination at this time.
   2. **Register of Assets**: this was reviewed and approved, details having been circulated on 30JAN23. Values will be further reviewed when insurance is renewed in September.
   3. The position with **HSBC** is to be taken forward. JD, ND and JT are to be appointed signatories. JD will finalise the paperwork with HSBC. Online banking will also be looked into. (**Action**: JD in conjunction with GS.)
   4. **Retention of Records**. It was agreed that NALC’s Legal Note (LTN) 40 (of NOV16) be formally adopted with regard to the retention and destruction of records.
2. **Planning Applications:**

The following Application was noted as having been reviewed since the last PC meeting: 22/02965/HHD, Tweentowns. The position re Application 22/03348/HHD, Orchard Cottage, was noted for the record.

1. **Playground.**
   1. ND confirmed that the monthly visual checks were done.
   2. JT raised the point that the equipment looks tired. This was discussed and it was agreed that the Council now needs to consider further how best to get this upgraded. To this end ND (with help from anyone) will see what is what in his travels around some of the playgrounds in one or two of the adjoining villages. Once the direction of travel is agreed in some further detail (possible providers, costs, possible grants etc) a plan is required to include a budget, timetable, fundraising and so on. While ND will lead the charge, it was rather agreed that all might put their thinking caps on. (**Action**: ND.) WH receives commercial enquiries from time to time: as until now it has been the firm view that new facilities were not thought necessary, these have been set to one side. In future these will be forward for further consideration.
   3. The issue of mowing was not discussed. (An estimate of cost was a minimum of £1,500 pa: prior to looking for a contractor, an approach was to have been made to the Radfords to see if their gardener might be available for some extra work.) (**Action:** ND.)
   4. The monthly checks will keep an eye on the state of wear and tear.
2. **Village Hall**.
   1. A general update was given. There is hope that the insurers are being more positive.
3. **Swerford Charity**.
   1. CF advised that their tenancy income is some £2,375 pa and that most of this is taken up in costs, including disbursements (to parishioners) and other costs (such as insurance). He advised that the Trustees had agreed that the land should be sold and that the capital raised, which should generate much greater income than that received from the current tenancy agreement, be invested through advisers recommended by the Charities Commission. As a courtesy, he confirmed that they had had legal advice and that this was all perfectly in order.
4. **The New RFO/Clerk**
   1. The position was outlined by WH/GS who were authorised to proceed, any final choice of candidate being referred back to the Council. To this end:
      1. WH has made a tentative advance to VM Murphy in Chipping Norton to advise and assist with the administration required.
      2. They also offer Payroll Services. The cost is thought to be in the region of £30-£50 pm. This will handle salary, NI, PAYE, possible pension contribution etc. The details have yet to be clarified.
      3. There is no point in being ‘clever’ in our approach to remuneration. OALC advise a rate of some £15+ per hour as being a minimum call, whatever local government salary scales might advise. We will need to offer whatever is needed to find a suitable candidate (obviously within reasonable bounds.) The current thought is on a per annum basis, payable monthly.
      4. The Council should not underestimate the nature of the duties to be assumed. The successful candidate needs to be computer literate (including Word and Excel), competent in maintaining accurate accounts, and have relevant administrative experience in a similar role or able to demonstrate transferable skills.
      5. Some local RFO/Clerks were approached with no success. No interest has been expressed from the village.
   2. Once the Job Description is finalised (currently in initial draft form) we shall need to consider how best to advertise. This will include the OALC website. JT also offered some input and this is being followed up.
   3. The cost is likely to be some £3,250 pa in basic salary, added to which there will be additional costs (N I and possibly pension for example) including payroll services.

(**Action**: GS/WH keeping Councillors advised of major developments.)

1. **The Village Website**
   1. For the time being WH will continue to liaise with NetWise there being no takers to assume the role. The new Clerk will be asked to take this on. (It was reiterated that the role is one of liaison, there is little technical background required as this is provided by NetWise.)
2. **Any Other Business.**
   1. Noted. Matter on hold pending further developments.
   2. A ‘Street Party’ will be held by the Village Hall on the 6th May.
   3. Road Warning Signs. A lengthy discussion occurred with particular views expressed by Richard Hall and Roger Huyton on behalf of themselves, and some other members of the village, with regard to the possibility of 20 mph signs being introduced. The broad result:
      1. As to the problem with the Griffin corner, ND is basically getting nowhere in his attempt to pin down OCC. While he is in contact with Hook Norton PC it is unclear how this is progressed until OCC’s response is received.
      2. As to the 20 mph possibilities, there was either a feeling of no particular view, or the strong feeling that this was not wanted. The arguments made: that it serves no real purpose (over the last thirty years, thank-goodness, there have been no major accidents within the village that might warrant this); basically unenforceable; would no doubt be ignored by miscreants; that by and large 20 mph is sort of a maximum through most of the village anyway; and that based on what has happened elsewhere would be a major eyesore damaging the feel of the village. It was agreed that the Minutes should note the clear opposition in the event that this is ever proposed by OCC, and the Parish Council asked for input.
   4. ND will replace John Chaplin as a Responder in the case of any emergency. (**Action**: WH to complete return to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue.)
   5. The Parish Election scheduled for 4MAY23 was discussed in detail. WH reiterated the need for nominations to be properly completed and re-iterated the details of his email to Councillors of 9FEB23. Sarah Heath has been asked to include reference to the change in Voter ID Identification Requirements in the Newsletter and given some input to encourage parishioners to consider putting themselves forward.
   6. Noted.
   7. Stiles were again discussed. Contact with landowners is/has been made as best as possible. For hikers who come across broken stiles, there is the OCC website to report broken stiles. They will get on to owners.
   8. Renewal of our support for Community First Oxfordshire was approved.

The meeting closed at 2130 hrs. The next meeting is the Annual Parish Council at 1930 hrs in the Village Hall, on 10th May.

William Haddon, Clerk 18 February 2023