

MINUTES OF THE SHIPTON UNDER WYCHWOOD
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

(Held at the New Beaconsfield Hall, Station Road, Shipton under Wychwood on Tuesday 23RD April 2013 at 7.30 pm)

Present: Cllrs: Neil Jagger (in the Chair), Mike Watson, Jill Mavin, Robin McConnachie, Brian Rigby, Brian Young, CCllr Rodney Rose. **Parish Clerk:** Annie Champness.

Members of the village: Mr M Cochrane, Mr G Gillett, Mrs C Halliday, Mr J Harris, Mr and Mrs J Hartley, Mr and Mrs H Harvey, Mr R Hollingdale, Mr L Hugill, Mr J Huntingford, Mr and Mrs L Knightson, Ms J Murphy, Mr S Pettit, Mr J Pratt, Mr G Prior-Wandesforde, Mrs A Rigby, Mrs J Shackle, Mr and Mrs J Shannon, Mr. S Walker, Mrs R Waterman, Mr T Wigley, Mr and Mrs J Willson.

1. Apologies for Absence were received from: DCllr Hibbert-Biles, CSPO K Tyrer, Mr N Meredith, Mr J and Mrs P Walmsley (Mr Walmsley had submitted a report on the Lady Reade Educational Charity which was available for attendees), The Revd K Stacey, Mr Alan Vickers

2. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 24 April 2012 were signed as a correct record.

3. Chairman's Report – Cllr. Neil Jagger welcomed the meeting and picked out highlights from the *Annual Report to Residents*, which had been distributed to attendees and made available beforehand. He said the Parish Council had risen to the challenge over the past 12 months in the uncertain financial climate with the work it had achieved within income of approximately £28,000. **The Shipton Volunteers** led by Gordon Gillett has 60 members - and it is thanks to the work they do that it has been possible to maintain a reasonable annual precept. **New Christmas Tree Lights** gave a festive feeling to the village centre over the festive period. A tremendous turnout to *Carols round the Tree* raised over £500, which was donated to the Oxfordshire Air Ambulance (which had been called upon at least 3 times in past year). **Village Jubilee Celebrations** had been badly hit by the poor weather. Nonetheless 180 people braved the conditions and as a result a financial surplus has enabled the erection of a memorial to the jubilee in the form of a bench on the green. Also a commemorative stone seat was put together for the playground by volunteers. **The Area Steward's Fund** provides money from the County Council and enables us to access money through Rodney Rose. This has allowed us to bid for a few small funds for projects which would not otherwise be funded by the CC: additional salt and grit bins, bollards at the upper end of Church Street and repairs to the village wall outside the old Cost Cutters site (the quality of repair there is being worked on). A successful application to **The CC Big Society Fund** meant we could buy equipment for our volunteers in the form of a petrol driven all-in-one grass strimmer, bush cutter, and hedge trimmer and ancillary equipment. **Maintenance of Green Spaces** is a major expenditure item on the annual budget. We are responsible for the village green, recreation field, closed churchyard and cemeteries (where we carry out low level maintenance) and the village verges. We seek to find a compromise between those who want a neat trim and those who favour a wild space. The current grass-cutting contract is with Green Scythe. As to hedges - the main one is round the recreation field. By reducing its height we have lowered the money we have to spend on keeping it in check. The costs formerly ran to several thousand pounds per annum; now they are around £50 with the help of the Volunteers and a local farmer with tractor and flail. Trees - a comprehensive survey was carried out at our cost by WODC and as a result we decided to enter a contract with a local firm who do an annual survey, look at the condition of our trees and then, under the guidance of a Councillor, take remedial action. We are now proactive rather than reactive and hope that the tree stock of around 200 will remain in good condition

and not fall down. Many of the verges around the village belong to OCC who do not take kindly to vegetation being cut down without permission. If there is a complaint about overgrown areas, the parish council take the matter up with OCC and get Volunteers to tidy low-level vegetation if needed. **Communications** - this is a most difficult thing to deal with and the parish council try to communicate in a variety of ways: -The Annual Parish Meeting; Monthly Parish Council Meetings; anyone can write to the Parish Clerk who will pass information round and put a matter on the agenda if it needs discussion. The Parish Council have also published a newsletter 3 times per year containing important messages. The website was revamped a year or so ago. Twitter and Facebook are now being used by OCC and we may need to employ these social media in the future. Feedback is greatly appreciated on all these initiatives. **Infrastructure** - Cotswold Broadband gave a presentation before Christmas; the Parish Council is neutral in the matter but can feed back local demand to companies that come along. **Severe Weather**: we pester highways to ensure gritters etc. come through when required, and this year the main roads were kept passable. Side roads are our and our neighbours' problem and we need to encourage self-help in our community - the parish council does its best to provide facilities so residents can dig their way out. The Council considered but did not think it should employ a privately bought snowplough - unlike Ascott who have a local farmer who helps, we would need to permanently employ someone. Heavy rain threatened the Old Prebendal - the sand bunker was full, supplies monitored and requested, and was well used by those who needed it. That is as much as can be done for now. We will be looking to get more salt grit bins before next winter. **Planning applications** - these take a lot of time. The Council has a duty to both applicants and neighbours. The Parish Council refer to policy documents issued by WODC and use the appropriate planning policies and references in making comments in response. The Council does wonder whether those comments are given due weight and it can be frustrating since the result is not always what we would like. As the entry tier of local government, the Parish Council keeps alert to national concerns and policy making that may impact the community. Feedback from residents about wider proposals may be needed. The Council has some scepticism about the much-mooted 'Village Plan' but will take advice about whether we should do one; if we do, we would need to hold a referendum. The Council is concerned to protect the village and we need to keep a close eye on what is sustainable development. Being part of a conservation area is a key part of the planning process; by contrast Milton is not in the conservation area and so is freer than we can be. **Allotments** - a big vote of thanks is owed for the work there: the Allotments Field is no longer an empty field, but a community asset and a social centre for the village. A community orchard is being developed there. Looking forward, the Roles and Powers of a local authority is changing and General Powers of Competence can be exercised by the Council if we have a qualified clerk (in CiLCA), and appropriately elected Councillors (at least two thirds of the members of the council must hold office as a result of being declared elected. This means they should have stood for election, whether at an ordinary or by election, even if unopposed, rather than co-opted or appointed). (A document will be produced about this to go on website in due course.) **Village owned land** has now been registered and is thus protected. **Finance** - the low base from which we work is Band D - £35 pa. Milton are paying nearer £70. Our spending power is much lower compared with other villages round Oxfordshire. A rise of over 2% requires a referendum - Cllr Jagger asked the meeting to let the Parish Council know if they think more spending is needed - there is still time to apply.

4. CCllr R Rose spoke and explained he is Deputy leader of the County Council, appointed last year. He also retains the transport portfolio and serves on the Thames regional Flood and Coastal Committee, as well as being Deputy Chairman of the East West Rail Joint Delivery Board It's a 7 days per week job.

He and the new leader have brought a new emphasis - no library will close now or in the future. But each library has to do its bit in paying back the National deficit. 10% of the county's

libraries are in this area and Ian Hudspeth's division. In relation to the loss of Dean Pitt - big discussions are underway between WODC and Chipping Norton regarding a replacement at Greystones. £70million will be spent over the next 4 years on highways - much needed after awful recent winters. An extra £3.5million extra has been put into the coming year's plan. Locally work will be seen on a sealing 'chip and tar' coat on Station Road, High Street and the hill towards Burford, preceded by defect repairs where marked. He is also trying to persuade the team that the start of Milton Road needs the same treatment now but is needing to work with the criteria of the Asset Management Plan that dictates where repairs are done, which CCLr Rose had put in place himself. Contractors are experimenting with new jet machines to lower costs to do more and cover ground quickly. The Area Steward Fund and Big Society Fund were put in place to try and enhance things communities thought were important but the County Council had stopped doing and Shipton under Wychwood has done well out of these funds. The work on the wall opposite the Shaven Crown is a shocking job but should be done again from 1 May with proper mortar and joints. £1000 of his budget went into that project and he won't allow it to be paid for again. £800 went into volunteer equipment and £1000 into the Day Centre and £1200 for IT use for children using iPads in the school. The 1.99% rise in Council Tax instead of 0.5% rise against D Cameron's requirement is because of needs - the County Council was not prepared to make further cuts in bus subsidies or funding to libraries for example. On a Countywide level, after the demise of the Cogges Link Road, phased improvement to roads around Witney has been agreed. The Ducklington Lane/ Station Lane junction will be done up first, including the slip off the A40, followed by a Downs Road/A40 roundabout. Following this, and subject to developers gaining land needed, a Shores Green improvement will happen, followed by improvements around Bridge Street with a 4 way junction.

5. Mr Meredith's report on road conditions on the High Street was read out commenting especially on size and speed of vehicles using the road, the County Council's refusal to act to divert heavy vehicles from this environmentally sensitive area, and the vibration to dwellings caused by these vehicles. He has been working to try and get the road surface improved and large vehicles encouraged to use other routes. He writes *'In 2010 OCC published a coloured brochure titled "Oxfordshire Lorry Routes" in which Burford and Chipping Norton were both described as "Environmentally sensitive areas to be avoided if at all possible." Sadly there is not a single physical road sign on any of the approach roads to Burford or Chipping Norton alerting HGV drivers to the sensitivity of this route.'* Others commented on these points too.

6. Gordon Gillett's Report on the work of the Volunteers was read out. 5 new volunteers have joined. Grateful thanks are owed to Cochrane's of Oxford who have been since November 2012 the Shipton Volunteer sponsor providing the necessary funding for the coveted burgundy sweatshirts. There are 55 names on the SVs data base and 39 volunteers have contributed their time and effort in the past year. The highest turnout was last month when 18 Volunteers participated in the annual litter blitz. A total, in excess, of 440 work hours over the 12 months has resulted in:- 4 sessions of clearing, pruning, weeding, mulching and tidying at the Playground behind the NBH; 5 separate involvements, in June 2012, in helping the Village celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. 5 mornings' work in conjunction with other volunteers in the Wychwood Wild Garden; help provided to the organisers in the setting up, manning stalls and clearing up after the Church Fete; additionally, the pavements through the village have been weeded and swept, fallen leaves removed from pavements and paths, the village green grass edges better demarcated, the church yard tidied, fruit trees composted at the allotments, hedges trimmed and undergrowth cleared, and stream beds dredged and cleaned.

The meeting expressed the village's gratitude and thanks for the work done with a round of applause.

7. Written reports had been requested and received from the Shipton United Charities (and were available for attendees to read. Other reports from the police and DCllr Biles were not available.

8. The meeting was then opened to the floor.

Questions were asked about the demarcation of responsibility for snow clearing. The meeting was told that the CC had responsibility for the roads shown on a published map representing 43% of the highways. It had been possible to do a bit more in recent years, and to do more than other communities, but it was necessary because of budget cuts to rely on getting communities to help themselves. A further question mentioned a substantial operating surplus and whether some of this could be used for hiring a snow plough. The meeting heard that Ascott under Wychwood has a cheap operation with a local farmer and have a salt dispenser and the kit to clear pavements but that it might be too expensive for the PC in Shipton to manage within existing budgets. It was necessary to check insurance and manpower and storage (and it had not been possible to identify either of the 2 latter when distributing salt supplies within the village). The short term solution is additional grit bins - we can pay extra to get those filled if not enough is coming from OCC. Options would continue to be investigated. Negotiating with Ascott for hire of their equipment, was not thought to be a viable long term idea - it is their private arrangement and we did pay for a limited amount as they had cleared the road to the A361. Longer term contract costs could not be controlled.

CCllr Rose was asked about speeding through Shipton and Milton which is hazardous to pedestrians as well as to road users - what about restrictive signs in strategic points and speed traps? It was explained that the only signs allowed are flashing ones and that in response to complaints we have requested speed guns in areas where we thought there was a problem. In each case the number of vehicles travelling in excess of 35 mph was less than 2%. Short of catching offenders, it is a problem. The CC had refused to put a 20mph limit near the school some years ago when this was requested. OCC does not have the funds to do this at the moment. Reporting perpetrators might help.

Potholes were also a big cause of concern. Many sites were mentioned - the road between Shipton and Leafield which is in a terrible state - especially on the corners which is very dangerous since people pull into the centre of the road. A Swinbrook Road repair 3 months ago is already breaking up with water in it. It was asked what control there is on the quality of the work done. There is a 2 year guarantee on all work done - so it is put right at contractors' expense. We all need to report potholes (and can do so if necessary through the parish clerk or through [FixMyStreet](#) (which takes information straight into the OCC system for people with smart phones). One on the other side of Judd's garage had been reported to the Council, in 2 days 4 men came out with one digging. It failed in one week, and was repaired again. It is still terrible. There is no faith in work being done. The corner near the post office is shocking too and for one villager it has been his worst experience in 60 years of driving in 4 continents - no better than a 3rd world country. The strength of feeling was noted and the Parish Council ensures this is reflected in comments regularly made to OCC it was also recommended that individuals should write and let their feelings be known.

In relation to Planning, advice was requested as to whether owners of the photovoltaic farm are compliant with the tree planting aspects of their permission? The quick answer with such matters is to get directly onto the WODC planning officer, alternatively to refer to the Parish Clerk. The Council will raise the matter.

Communication from the PC. Could emails be used more than paper? It was explained that people had been asked whether they wanted to go on a mailing list and few had signed up. One option might be to update the village website - things can be done by the RSS feed on the

website: the news alert link (which is anonymous therefore bypassing problems with the email list) - subscribers only get new items. Councillors asked for feedback - it is difficult to represent the community, as many are silent on their wishes and were not represented at the Parish Meeting. For instance is the precept too low compared with other villages if more services are required (for instance for pavement clearing in extreme weather)?

Bridleways, for example Dog kennel Lane are the responsibility of the CC. Drainage there is a problem so would it be possible to get some rubble and if so a volunteer will spread it. CCllr Rose agreed to look into that via the CC person who has that responsibility.

Car parking by the School was a concern, with children running around cars, there was a problem waiting to happen. The PC is writing to the school but may not get much of a result. The PCSO comes from time to time and is a visible presence round the school - much of her time taken up with this issue.

The Reserves seem to be building, what are the plans? Cllr Watson responded that some time ago reserves were minimal. Under Mr Cochrane's chairmanship the policy began to build reserves to twice the precept as a form of prudent financial management. The figure is slightly above that at the moment because we are holding onto a £12K obligation to discharge over the playground over coming years. We would be surprised if they go up any more. We expect to hold reserves at twice precept level to deal with emergencies and as further costs explicitly or implicitly are transferred down the line, which we will have to pick up on at Parish Council level. The need for a new burial ground in the future is an example of why reserves would have to go up massively. The alternative would be to load the living versus the dead as it were by borrowing heavily at the time of need. We are embarking on management of assets and future planning - and if necessary can explain the level of reserves without need of apology.

What about the Village plan idea? - The functionality of Milton and Shipton are linked. What does the Growth through Conservation strapline mean? Maybe Milton, Shipton and Ascott could better work together? Cohesiveness? There could be benefit from working with other parish councils. The speaker is part of the architecture of the system (and is an adviser to the planning inspectorate and would be willing to help). We need to be more strategic, less reactive. We need a set of objectives, plus tools in the plan. The conversation would continue outside the meeting and the speaker was thanked for his offer.

A new Councillor needed since Cllr Chapman had resigned owing to family commitments. The vacancy had been advertised for the statutory period of time and an election is not required. So we now need to co-opt a Councillor - the meeting was asked to let Parish Councillors know of anyone who might fit the bill.

The Meeting closed at 21.06.