

BISHOPSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Parish Assembly Meeting held at 7.00 p.m. on Monday 14th March 2010 at Hinton Parva Village Hall

Those Present: Simon Jenkins (Chair), Lesley Drewett (Clerk), Karolyn Tapper (Vice Chair), Ian Thomas, Stuart McGuigan, Rob Selbourne, Ian Thompson, Sarah Paye.

1 Approved Apologies

Cllr. Andrew Bennett, Julian Cooke, Doug Stevens.

Apologies

None.

2 Minutes of Last Meeting (Parish Assembly 2010)

The minutes were proposed by Councillor Stuart McGuigan and accepted unanimously as a true record of the previous meeting.

No members of the public were present.

3 Financial Statement

All Councillors had been sent a copy of the 2011 financial statement. The Clerk informed Councillors that the balance of the Current Account at 13 March 2011 stood at £8,587.33. The balance of the Business Reserve Account stood at £3,497.05. The balance of the Clerk's Pension fund stood at £1352.82.

4 Chairman's Report

The Chair's speech had been sent to Councillors via email. An amended version had been sent through and the Chair checked that all Councillors had received and read this. As there were no members of the public in attendance it was agreed not to read the speech aloud. A copy of the speech will be included in the newsletter.

Introduction

I would like to start by thanking all the members of the Parish Council for their work over the last 12 months; it is voluntary and we all live increasingly busy lives and I personally am grateful for your attendance and input to our discussions over the last 12 months. I would particularly like to thank our Clerk, Lesley Drewett, who has been in post since September 1999; her experience and knowledge is crucial to us. I very much hope that we will continue to work together for another year.

The Parish Council undertakes this work on behalf of all of you – the parishioners of Bishopstone, Hinton Parva and Russley Park – and we can only do this effectively if you tell us of your concerns and problems; there is more on the theme of communications later.

How did we do against the "action plan" for the past year?

Richard Alcock identified four points for the following year in his report in March 2010:

- 1. Stay focused on the danger of the Eastern Development Area (EDA). We were all pleased that the EDA disappeared, albeit temporarily, as a result of the recession and the change of government. However, it has not gone away for good and we will be looking closely at the emerging Swindon Core Strategy in coming months.*
- 2. Get the roads fixed properly. I suspect that is on the wish list every year.*
- 3. Complete the Vehicle Activated Signs programme. One VAS is in place and working; we would like your ideas about further traffic calming measures.*
- 4. Ensure we keep the True Heart. The struggle goes on.*

Finance

The precept for 2010/11 was £14,188; we have been able to reduce this to £13,480 for 2011/12 – a reduction of 5%; these are not large sums of money and we have little flexibility or spare cash. However after some delays caused by bureaucracy at SBC, one of the two proposed vehicle activated signs was successfully installed last autumn on the approach to Hinton Parva Village Hall. We have sufficient funds for some more traffic calming measures, as announced in the Parish Times in March – e.g., measures to prevent inappropriate vehicle access to narrow lanes – and we are keen to receive ideas from parishioners as to how they would like to see their money spent.

Planning Applications

Reviewing and commenting on applications for planning permission within the Parish are one of the more interesting aspects of our work; they have a direct effect on the appearance of our villages. However, the power to grant or refuse an application rests with SBC and we have not always agreed with their decisions. Our concerns grew to such a level towards the end of last year that we wrote a strong letter to SBC, which resulted in a senior official of the Planning Department attending our meeting in January 2011. We discussed a number of on-going issues and it was agreed that SBC's attitude to parish councils was on the passive side; we are exploring how to improve that in the future. However, it would help the Parish Council if all those intending to submit a planning application to SBC could discuss it with us first; the Parish Times will contain a reminder about this in the future.

The True Heart

You must have been on another planet in the last year not to be aware of this issue! In short, the initial application to convert the pub to two houses and build two more in the car park was refused by SBC. This has been taken to appeal and the hearing is scheduled for 22 March 2011; we hope that some of those parishioners who wrote to SBC with objections may be able to attend. If you wish to attend, please speak to Ian Thomas. Whilst that has been going on, a further application was submitted - to demolish part of the True Heart, retain the remainder as a pub and build two houses in the car park. We have major concerns about the viability of the pub as it is proposed, partly because of the large reduction in car parking spaces and consequent over-spill into an already over-burdened and damaged High Street, and the impact of two more new houses in the centre of a conservation area. We have therefore commissioned experts to draw up a report to review the viability of the new application. This is very much "work in progress". Ian Thomas particularly has put a great deal of time and effort into this matter on our behalf, in response to concerns in the village.

Swindon Core Strategy

As mentioned above, the EDA will not happen as originally proposed – 12,000 new homes in a very wet area between, roughly, the A 419 and the A 420. As we speak, SBC are about to launch their draft new Core Strategy, which will include proposals for about 7,500 new homes, with schools, shopping centres and some industrial sites, in a village concept in the north of this same area. Whilst it appears that this will not have as much impact on the Parish as the original EDA, we think that we should remain very concerned at the scale of this development and the apparent lack of funding for the infra-structure projects which will be needed. It is likely that a development of this scale would see a significant increase in traffic on all local roads and especially small country lanes. There will be more on this in coming months, and we hope that everybody who shares our concerns will get involved in the consultation process.

Vandalism in Bishopstone

There was a distressing outbreak of low level vandalism in Bishopstone in the summer and autumn of last year, including the destruction of two benches on the Island. The Police were involved but there were no convictions. Replacement benches will be delivered shortly, and we hope that those concerned have learnt their lesson.

Boundary Review

Central Government is reviewing electoral boundaries across the country. At SBC level, it is hoped to rationalise current electoral boundaries so that there will be, roughly, 9,000 electors in each ward of SBC, with three councillors in each ward. We are in Ridgeway ward, which has about 2,500 electors and one councillor at present. Our submission to the

consultation stated that it was important for the rural areas to stick together; amalgamation with Wanborough, Liddington, Chiseldon and/or Wroughton would be options which would achieve that, albeit creating a ward with fewer than 9,000 electors but possibly therefore not justifying three councillors. I suspect that we will have forgotten all about this by the time that anything emerges from this consultation.

Policing in the Parish

Whilst we are not aware of any complaints about police attendance to an emergency call, we have had discussions with Inspector Nick John and the Beat Manager, PC Rory Draper, about a routine police presence in our villages. There used to be an arrangement that they should attend at the same time as the mobile Library so as to be able to meet and discuss local matters with residents but that has not worked recently. We await further proposals.

Visit of Robert Buckland MP

We were very pleased to welcome our MP to a public meeting in Bishopstone Village Hall on a cold Friday in January. There was a reasonable attendance to hear him speak and take questions on a variety of subjects. He made quite clear that Ridgeway ward and the Parishes are an important part of South Swindon, and he promised that he would always work hard for the whole constituency.

The Big Society and the Localism Bill

I have left this until towards the end, as it is another item of “work in progress”. What the Prime Minister means by the “Big Society” is not really clear yet, and it has of course got confused with cuts to central and local government expenditure. If it means anything to us in the Parish, it must be that we should take more responsibility locally for things that matter to us; we may need to pay more attention to any vulnerable people in the Parish e.g. the sick and elderly, and to our surroundings.

The Localism Bill is going through Parliament at the moment; it includes

- *The community right to build.*
- *The community right to buy.*
- *Community Right to Challenge – the right to take over certain services from the Borough.*

We are not sure what this will mean at our level – it is another issue to keep under observation in the year ahead. Ideas on how to address any aspect of the Big Society will be welcomed.

Finally on this topic, we are fortunate to live in a beautiful bit of England, but I am constantly disgusted by the quantity of bottles, cans and far worse discarded in the hedge rows. Would there be support for occasional “clean-up” days?

Communications

We can only operate effectively as your Parish Council if you, the residents of the Parish, tell us of your concerns and problems. You can do that in a number of ways:

- *Speak or write to a member of the Parish Council*
- *Use the web site*
- *Attend our monthly meetings. This is the best way to communicate your concerns to the Parish Council as a whole; we have to follow government procedures, but we will make it as easy and non-confrontational as possible to have an open and frank discussion.*

Our Action Plan for 2011/2012

- *Keep expenditure under control; decide on further traffic calming measures*
- *Do our best to ensure the roads are properly maintained*
- *Work closely with SBC on all planning matters, including the True Heart*
- *Monitor the Swindon Core Strategy for its effect on the Parish*
- *Understand the Big Society and the Localism Bill*
- *Keep in touch with residents of the Parish*

The Parish Assembly then closed at 7:15 pm.