

FREELAND PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Parish Meeting

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 19th APRIL 2010 AT 7.30PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL, FREELAND, OXFORDSHIRE.

PRESENT:

Chairman: Bill Pinkerton
Vice-Chairman: Peter Newell
District Councillor: Colin Dingwall
County Councillor: Louise Chapman
Neighbourhood Police: PCSO Phil Workman
Parish Councillors: Joyce Williams, Bill Phillips, Martin Shann.
Officer: Clerk
Plus 48 Electors of the Parish

1. **APOLOGIES:** Janet Dalton, Linda Day.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were no declarations of interest to be made for any items to be discussed at the meeting.

3. **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ON 20TH APRIL 2009**

This item was taken after the break so that electors could have the opportunity to read the copies of the minutes on display. The minutes had been displayed on the village notice boards for two months following the meeting and circulated to the parish councillors. The minutes of the meeting on 20th April 2009 were proposed by Dr Alaa Al-Yousuf and seconded by Gerry Marais and signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. **ANNUAL REPORT BY THE DISTRICT COUNCILLORS (TO INCLUDE AN UPDATE ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING)**

Colin Dingwall gave a brief report to update residents on progress made during the past year by WODC. The new retail development at Marriott's Walk in Witney had opened in October last year with a 10 storey car park. The car park was very environmentally friendly, as it operated on solar lighting so did not cost anything to run. Marriott's Close was one of only 2 major developments in the country over the past 2 years in the difficult financial climate and it was thanks to David Ross, the CEO of Carphone Warehouse for investing in the project when a major bank pulled out that it was able to be completed.

The WODC Council Tax had had to increase this year by 3.9%, which amounted to only £3.06 per year and despite this increase WODC were still the second lowest charging shire Council in the country. WODC had just completed the tendering process for new waste contracts, - recycling had to be increased to reduce the amount of rubbish going to landfill. If everyone recycled just 5% of their rubbish instead of it going to landfill it would save WODC £500 per year. A new incentive would be starting next year to encourage householders to recycle more. Colin

attended Parish Council meetings regularly and also sat on various committees, including the finance committee and as a Director on Cottsway Committee.

In response to questions Colin commented that the roads by the new Marriott's Close development in Witney were narrow to slow the traffic down, as if the roads were wider they traffic would go faster. A pedestrian crossing was also going to be installed in the near future. He hoped that once the economy the remaining units would be let. The broken pavement opposite Merlins in Witney was being attended to and the car park in Woodford Way would remain in the short term but was likely to be used for housing in the longer term. A possible park and ride scheme may be coming to Witney and there were two potential sites, but 7000 houses needed to be built in order for funds to be obtained from the Government. Colin also assured residents that although when the recycling boxes were being emptied, all of the waste was being tipped into one bin, it was being sorted out at the depot.

Affordable Housing – A resident asked for an update on affordable housing. Colin advised that WODC were trying to get land for affordable housing but the most difficult part was getting landowners to sell their land as they don't get a great deal of money for it. There was a site that was possibly going forward, and although there had been some objections so far he was hopeful the concerns could be addressed. He asked that if there were any other landowners present with land to sell to speak to him directly.

Public Participation at Planning Meetings - Toby Morris gave a very brief report about development control. He advised that as from 1st June WODC were trialling public participation at planning meetings. This meant that if anyone had any particularly interest or objections about a particular planning matter, then they would be allowed to speak to the planning committee who ultimately make the decision on planning applications rather than just writing to WODC. This he felt was good for residents to have an input.

5. ANNUAL REPORT BY THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR

Louise Chapman was the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. She gave a brief report on progress made over the past year by OCC. Louise stated that OCC had had a very difficult year and had had to make some very tough decisions when setting their budget for the coming year. The budget figure had now been set with an increase of 2.75%, and it had been difficult in finding a balance of looking after the young and the older people both of whom were very vulnerable. They had tried to look to the future and had managed not to make cuts from front line services. OCC did not wish to have a Baby P case in Oxfordshire and had to protect front line vulnerable people.

However OCC did have to review how they commissioned services as a County Council and have worked with the PCT and the Police. It was likely there would be far more integrated services in the future.

Following the recent snowy weather there were now big potholes across the county. OCC were able to find another £1.2 million to put towards repairing the potholes, and these were being done on a priority basis with those that could cause a major accident being done first. Unfortunately roads could not be resurfaced as there were no funds available, so the potholes just had to be filled in. A pothole telephone

number had been set up to report potholes that any resident could use and these would be prioritised in order of severity.

The Chill Out Fund had been able to support the Village Hall Rebuilding Project and the sports clubs.

In response to questions Louise advised that about 5 years ago OCC had brought back office services together to have shared services. Lots of functions had been brought together to enable more efficient working and they were now seeing the benefits of this. OCC were working in partnership with the PCT with pooled budgets for front line services. Louise also advised that the Chill Out Fund was a fund that had a maximum limit of £200K per year and offered her assistance with any applications for the Chill Out Fund.

6. ANNUAL REPORT BY BILL PINKERTON, CHAIRMAN OF FREELAND PARISH COUNCIL ON PAROCHIAL MATTERS (TO INCLUDE PROPOSAL OF WHETHER THE VILLAGE WISHES TO EMPLOY AN “ODD JOB PERSON” (LINESMAN) TO KEEP THE VILLAGE TIDY)

This past year had been one of the busiest years for the Parish Council. The Council had met with Rodney Rose, the Cabinet Member for Transport who had helped in getting the potholes in the village and various other Highway matters sorted out, including the drainage by the turning for the A40 which had now improved. A new dog waste bin had been installed on the A4095 opposite the junction for Wroslyn Road. He thanked Bill Phillips who did a superb job in keeping the village free of litter and creating a very nice environment. He also thanked the Gardening Club for the lovely display of bulbs which makes the village look really attractive.

There had been one accident in the play park this year where a young child was hit in the face by the gate. The gate did comply with the rate at which it closed and the Councillors have now added this onto the rota to be checked at each visit. The junior slide had been repaired and a new bridge had been fitted to the toddler Multiplay equipment. Some of the wet pour surface in the play park had been repaired. The hedging on the Pigeon House Lane side of the playing field had been trimmed back thanks to the volunteers from the Wychwood Project, and the Council had paid to have a few trees trimmed back and pollarded.

Unfortunately one of the village notice boards was vandalised in January and a new one had to be purchased to replace the one on the corner of Parklands.

The new Cemetery was still going ahead, and a final design was nearly complete, with planning permission being granted for the new gates and storage building.

Under the revised Freedom of Information Act the Parish Council had published various policies and procedures in order to comply with the Act – these were now available on the website or via the Clerk. Over the past year the Parish Council had also been investigating the ownership status of the Broadmarsh Lane amenity areas (previously known as Bumpy Lane), and he asked if anyone had any historical information about this land to let him know.

There was currently a vacancy on the Parish Council following the departure of Matthew Hardy which had been advertised and applications were invited from the residents. The Village Hall project would be discussed more fully by Peter Newell, but the Parish Council had been successful in obtaining the £350,000 loan from the PWLB and he acknowledged that residents had probably seen an increase in their Council Tax bill to cover this loan.

The Parish Councillors had all worked very hard over the year – footpaths had been walked and problems reported, and weekly inspections of the play equipment had been carried out, in addition to two RoSPA inspections. Over 20 planning applications had been received and commented on, a couple had been objected to and some of the Councillors had attended various meetings and training courses. The Chairman thanked all of the Parish Councillors for all their work during the past year. He also particularly thanked Peter Newell who worked extremely hard for the village with the website and the village hall, and the Parish Clerk who also worked exceptionally hard as Clerk and had recently taken over the position of Treasurer for the Village Hall Committee.

Special mention was made to John and Diana Peverel-Cooper, an ex Councillor and the previous Clerk who were possibly moving to Shrewsbury. He thanked them both for everything they had done for the village over the past years and the residents gave them both a round of applause.

Linesman proposal – The Chairman recognised there were a large amount of weeds in the gutters around the village for which WODC had no funds to clear. He had noticed in Stanton Harcourt that they had a couple of linesmen employed who were paid £6.50 an hour and had very specific roles they carried out. This was something for consideration and discussion.

In response to questions the Chairman advised that the cycle path from Woodstock to Witney was the responsibility of OCC Highways department and that if it was overgrown with weeds then they would need to address this. However weed sprays were no longer permitted to be used as they posed a danger to animals. Concern was raised by a resident regarding grass cutting equipment and a chain harrow that was left on the field near the play equipment. The Chairman advised that the Parish Council do require the Cricket Club to put the equipment away when not in use but unfortunately this was not always done. Jon Langford who was present agreed to speak to Les Hole about this. After discussion the general feeling was that the weed problem was not particularly bad and that it would be better to sort out the health and safety matters such as the chain harrow rather than spending money on a linesman to clear weeds. A new roadside sign was requested on The Green as the posts were rusty – this could be supplied it just needed to be reported.

Joyce Williams asked to be made aware of any new residents in the village as she would visit them to deliver a few contact details to welcome them to the village. The old shop site in Parklands still had no new shop and the planning permission had now expired. Colin Dingwall advised that this was currently being investigated legally as the developer had claimed that as the old building had been demolished then this constituted starting the development, even though work on the new building had not commenced.

7. REPORT FROM PCSO PHIL WORKMAN, THAMES VALLEY POLICE

Police Community Support Officer Phil Workman gave a report on behalf of the Neighbourhood Specialist Officer Gordon Richardson. Over the past 12 months Freeland had had 20 reported crimes recorded. These included 7 criminal damage of which 1 was damage to a vehicle, 5 thefts of which 1 was from a vehicle, 2 burglary dwellings, 2 assaults, 2 domestic incidents and 2 harassments.

There were 12 crimes reported in 2009 and there had been 8 so far this year.

Between 1st January and 7th January 2010, 5 criminal damages occurred in and around the Broadmarsh Lane, Wroslyn Road and Hurst Lane area. This was both

unusual and out of character for the village. It was believed that those involved may have visited the Yeoman pub that evening, and although there had been mention of a group of youths from Eynsham that may have been around at the time, due to lack evidence, witnesses and any possible names, there had been no further progress on this case.

Speeding had been highlighted as an ongoing problem in Wroslyn Road, especially during peak times, and Phil advised that they would be carrying out speed enforcement checks on a regular basis in the hope that they can reduce speeding vehicles, although in the past a number of offending drivers had been local residents rather than those just passing through.

Phil also reminded residents that with the warmer weather approaching, not to leave windows or doors open when they go out, and that if an alarm is fitted, to ensure that it is set when the house is vacated, even if it is for a short period of time. He also reminded everyone not to leave valuable items on display in the house or in a car, including coats, phones, sat-navs and bags. He also advised to ensure that car keys are put away somewhere safe, and not left on display in hallways or where they can be reached from a closed door.

He also stated that the elderly are particularly vulnerable at this time of year as they are often targeted for garden and house work, being charged extortionate amounts to have relatively small jobs done. He suggested that anyone who has elderly residents to make them aware of this problem and to ensure they have a chain fitted, Bill Butcher, the local Crime Prevention Officer Bill Butcher may be able to assist with this and could be contacted on 01993 861638.

PCSO Tina Townshend had unfortunately been ill recently but was due to be back on duty the following day. Regular police surgeries were held in the village and advertised locally, although they were not always well attended. He finished his speech by saying that him and his team could not work without the help of local people and encouraged residents to contact them, no matter how small the issue appeared to be. The incident number 08458 505 505 was on the website and he assured everyone that despite the figures above, the crime rate in Freeland remained very low.

In response to questions, Phil said that he and his team do go into Primary Schools to speak to 5-10 year olds to build up a good rapport with them and to talk about crime prevention. He also advised that the lack of street lights had not contributed to the low crime figures.

BREAK FOR REFRESHMENTS 8.45pm

MEETING RECONVENED 9.05pm

8. UPDATE ON THE REBUILDING PROJECT FOR FREELAND VILLAGE HALL

Peter Newell gave a report on the rebuilding project for the village hall and introduced the members of the Village Hall Working Group. Since the last Annual Parish Meeting, the Village Hall Working Group and its sub groups had been working hard and things had progressed well.

WODC Grant – The application to WODC for a grant of £100,000 had been successful. This had to be spent within a year and was dependant on obtaining the rest of the money needed to complete the project. Peter thanked Colin Dingwall for his time and effort getting support to secure the funds and also Robert Crocker who persisted with the application when it almost seemed impossible to submit by the

deadline. Robert had been appointed as the official Fund Raising Officer for the project.

£350,000 PWLB Loan – The application to the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) for a £350,000 loan had also been successful. This was a multi-stage 6 week process with the Clerk working hard to jump through the hoops of Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) and the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in Whitehall. The loan of £350,000 was obtained at a very favourable fixed rate of 4.58% per annum over the 25 year period of the loan. It would be financed through twice yearly repayments of £11,827 via the Council Precept which worked out on average as approx 80p per week per household through the Council Tax.

The total of the grant and the loan add up to £450,000 and with the £5,000 Chill Out Fund grant and a £6,000 donation from the Open Gardens the project could now proceed with the first element, this being the main hall in its basic form costing £409,000 plus about half (£50,000 of the £100,000) needed for the landscaping. The landscaping element included relocating the play park and digging out the tarmac of the car park and replacing with half tarmac and half gravel to ensure the area drained properly.

Complications – 2010 Building Regulations – one of the complications faced by the project is that the Quantity Surveyors costings were based on the Building Regulations in force at the time (2006 Regs). However, the new 2010 Building Regulations which come into force in October are much more stringent in their requirements for energy efficiency and sustainability. The Sustainability Sub Group had been investigating the options available, and this group was under the direction of Colin Smith and Martin Shann, with the expert help of Martin Merritt and Neil Edwards, both residents in the village. Martin Merritt was in the process of producing a detailed report on various options such as a ground source heat pump and solar thermal water heating. These improvements were highly desirable and saved money in the long term, but cost a great deal of money up front, so special grants from the Low Carbon Building Programme (LCBP) and the Community Sustainability Energy Programme (CSEP) were being applied for.

To make the hall better the fund raising sub group led by Robert Crocker were also applying for a £49,000 grant from WREN (Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd), who is a possible source of funds due to the Hall's proximity to the Dix's recycling pit at Stanton Harcourt. WREN did not give grants towards buildings but did cover things like fitting out the kitchen, so the grant application has been submitted to cover the kitchen fitting, which if successful would mean that wedding caterers could use the hall as they require expensive modern commercial grade dishwashing equipment.

Community Recreation Facility (CRF) – The fund raising for what was originally called the sports element costing approx £200,000 was progressing much slower than the main social element. Grants for sports were proving much more elusive than originally hoped. Ideally it was preferable to complete as much of the sports element at the same time as the Hall as it was much cheaper to put in the footings and services (particularly the under floor pipes for a ground source heat pump) when done simultaneously with the Hall. As a consequence the Fund Raising Sub Group have broadened the scope of the building to a multi-purpose "Community Recreation Facility" that would provide for a wide range of recreational activities for clubs and societies for people of all ages, not just sports people. Fortunately the original

design of the sports element included a meeting room besides the sports changing rooms, and because of this the Fund Raising Group have been able to apply for a £39,000 grant from the VEOLIA Environmental Trust which supports schemes designed to improve social amenities. This is a multi stage application process which was in the very early stages.

The Fund Raising group also plan to apply to the Big Lottery Fund which again was not for buildings but to support social amenities.

So, although progress had gone well this past year, there was much to do to gain the funding required for the CRF.

The next stage was to go out to tender for the project and for this the architect was preparing detailed specifications to enable firms to bid on an even playing field. This would take about 6-8 weeks and the tendering process itself would take several weeks so a likely start date was probably September at the earliest.

In response to questions Peter advised that when the project was put out to tender it would be for the whole build, not just the main hall. It was likely there would be a Village Hall Management Committee to oversee the running of the new hall, just as there was currently. The sports clubs would be consulted with regarding the non-availability of the changing rooms whilst the new hall is built which would take approx 40 weeks and a possible option was to have a portacabin. The oak tree at the front of the hall would have to be removed and the oak tree at the rear of the hall would need to be trimmed to ensure the lower branches would not be damaged when the building work commenced. After seeking professional advice, this would be done later in the year.

Peter handed over to Robert Crocker, the Fund Raising Officer who wished to say a few words. Robert encouraged the residents to get involved with the project and to assist with the fund raising for the CRF. He asked that if anyone had any ideas on fund raising to let him know, and that it was down to everyone to get on board. He advised that if they used the recent Bells Appeal fund raising efforts as an example which over the past year had been very successful, he felt sure they could raise the money required. He also asked the residents to write in letters of support to him or Peter Newell as these carried a lot of weight with the grant applications.

Louise Chapman advised that a separate application could be made to the Chill Out fund for the CRF which she was willing to assist with and she would also investigate other possible grants that may be available.

9. PRESENTATION BY DR PETER LEIGH, REGARDING WHETHER THE VILLAGE WISHES TO HAVE A GRIT BIN INSTALLED AND A TEAM OF VOLUNTEER GRIT DISTRIBUTORS FOR SNOWY WEATHER

Dr Peter Leigh, a resident in the village gave a brief presentation in which he suggested the Parish Council install a grit bin in the village at a cost of £150.00 + VAT which could be stocked with grit. A team of 50+ volunteer grit distributors could then apply the grit throughout the village which he felt would then mean Freeland would be relatively ice free and therefore mobility in the snowy weather would be increased. OCC had been unable to grit the roads as they were low on stock and had to prioritise roads to be treated, which did not include Freeland. Dr Leigh thought it was time for self help and advised that he had purchased a 25kg bag of salt from a local merchant for only £6.00. Louise Chapman said that whilst self help was a fantastic idea, some villages with grit bins did not get filled due to a shortage

of grit this year. OCC were trying to build up their supplies and were taking extensive legal advice as to the implications of residents applying grit to pavements and roads as there had been some case law that had not looked favourably on this scenario. An advice leaflet was being produced that was nearly ready so that they could advise Parish Councils and villages as to the best action that could be taken. One resident commented that if grit was applied throughout the village, once the snow had gone there would be a lot of grit left on the pavements that would need clearing. However, if anyone had any strong views about a grit bin then were advised to use the forum area of the website to offer their comments.

10. REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CEMETERY COMMITTEE

Peter Newell gave a brief presentation to update residents regarding the new gates and storage building for the Cemetery. With a great deal of help from Derek Thomlinson, planning permission had been granted for the wooden cemetery gates and the stone storage building, using the design that had been displayed and supported at the last APM.

Since then there had been much discussion about the best design for the foundations of the storage building, and the Committee had settled on a concrete raft design to avoid the potential problem of the tree roots in the site causing difficulties. Derek had involved Tony Reedman, a Structural Engineer in the village in the design and drawing of this structure which was not straightforward, but involved carefully designed steel reinforcing bars.

Once the full drawings are prepared, Peter explained that the designs would be put out to tender to obtain quotations for the project. The Parish Council currently had £30,000 in reserves to cover this work, and it was possible the new gates may be built first before the storage building.

With regard to space in the current Churchyard, Peter had been informed that there were 16 unallocated spaces left in the Churchyard. The most recent rate of new burials had been 3 to 4 per year, so there was approximately 4 years of space left in the Churchyard. Residents were given an opportunity to ask any questions, however none were raised.

11. AUDITED ANNUAL RETURN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2009, WITH UNAUDITED RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS STATEMENT FOR YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2010

Copies of the Audited Annual Return for the year to 31st March 2009 had been placed on the notice boards and on the village website and residents were supplied with a statement of Receipts and Payments for the year ended 31st March 2010. These were both accepted by the meeting.

12. REPORT BY THE VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE'S REPRESENTATIVE

Joyce Williams presented the accounts for the Village Hall for the year ending 31st December 2009, stating that it was likely to be the last report she gave in the current village hall. She thanked Lisa Smith for stepping in to take on the role of the Treasurer following the departure of Iris Randall. The rental income was particularly low, although some payments had been held over from the previous year. The cost of electricity had increased, and the cash in the meters had only covered half the cost of the electricity. No donations were received in 2009 apart from £5,000 from OCC Chill Out Fund towards the new hall which unfortunately had to be initially returned but then was returned to the Village Hall in 2010. This had been transferred

to the Parish Council as they were leading the Rebuilding Project. The annual payment of £750 from Greene King had been received which covered Oxfordshire Yeoman Users being able to use the car park. No interest had been received into the Current Accounts, and the Bradford & Bingley account which had been set up for fundraising towards a new village hall had been closed, with the closing balance being paid directly to the Parish Council as the current signatories for this account were no longer available. The National Savings & Investment account had also been closed and the money transferred into the main Village Hall Committee account. The payments had covered various cleaning and maintenance, plus a new extractor fan for the kitchen, some new china and clearance of the toilets. The meeting accepted the report and accounts.

13. REPORTS FROM VARIOUS SOCIETIES IN FREELAND

Reports from the Christian Fellowship, Gardening Club, Tuesday Club, Preschool, Baby & Toddler Group, and Football Club were all available for residents' information.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no further business the Chairman thanked everyone for their time, interest and input and the meeting closed at 10.10pm.