

CHARNEY BASSETT PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 10 MARCH 2004

PRESENT:

Mr G Beer (Chairman)
Mrs P McGuire
Mr J Stiles
Mr S Taylor

Mr P G Davies (Clerk)

Fourteen members of the public were present. Apologies had been received from County Councillor Andrew Crawford, District Councillor Elsa Boyce and Councillor Jim Harper.

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising.
2. Dog Incident on 11 February 2004
3. Clerk's Financial Report.
4. Planning Matters
5. Charney Field.
6. Charney Mill.
7. Village College
8. Clerk's Correspondence.
9. Residents' Questions.
10. Any Other Business.
11. Next meeting

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING.

The minutes of the January meeting were approved and signed by the Chairman.

Mr David Douglas has been re-appointed Council representative as Trustee to the Longworth Charities.

The Clerk had been unable to arrange to cut the hedge at the New Road/Buckland Road junction but would speak to John Daghish about doing the job "in-house".

2. DOG INCIDENT ON 11 FEBRUARY 2004

The Chairman introduced this special item on the agenda by explaining that events on the 11th February 2004 when an Airedale dog from Gunton Barn had escaped and attacked livestock had generated such a level of concern in the village that it should be discussed in public. While the incident was very regrettable and distressing to those involved, it could have been much worse if a child, rather than chickens and a guinea pig, had been attacked. One of the Council's roles is to receive complaints from villagers on any matters which cause them concern and to take any action it could to deal with these concerns; it would be failing in its duty if it did nothing. While the Council had no remit to invoke the law concerning dangerous dogs (that was for the District Council) it had invited the owners of the dogs to explain what steps they had taken to minimise the risk of a recurrence. Although the evidence collected immediately after the incident revealed a history of problems with the dogs, the debate should focus on the future and consider the steps the owners proposed to take. The Chairman reminded members of the public that whereas the Council's remit is limited, individuals were perfectly at liberty to pursue a course of legal action if they so wished.

The dog owners were not present at the meeting but had responded to the Council's invitation to explain their plans in a long letter, too long to reproduce in these minutes. In summary, the letter also adopted a forward looking approach, declining to discuss past incidents and subjective opinions in the dossier. The owners expressed genuine concern that their dogs can frighten people and they recognised the chasm between their

apparent and actual behaviour, admitting that they are very boisterous in play. They also admitted that if the dogs had bitten in anger rather than given playful nips, the consequences would be much greater.

The letter concentrated the owners comments on the four points below, the first of which formed the focus of the debate as it contained information on the owners' proposals to confine the dogs. The other three concentrated on the owners viewpoints and explanations of the dogs' behaviour towards people.

- events on the 11th of February
- barking and boundary chasing
- the postman (they were unaware that a postman had been bitten), and
- dog walkers and dog walking.

The owners propose to build a 14m² concrete-based pen surrounded by a six foot chain link fence. Until this is built, the dogs will remain in the house when the owners are not at home. The pen will have a padlocked gate so that the dogs cannot be released without the owners' knowledge. However, when the owners or other people who are familiar with the dogs are at home, the dogs will continue to have access to all areas of the garden. The fence through which the dog involved in the 11th February incident escaped has been repaired.

Mr Taylor expanded on the contents of the letter in recounting a conversation he had with the owners two days before the meeting. He said that the owners were both mortified and embarrassed at the mayhem the dog had caused and were determined to minimise the risk of a recurrence. From his personal perspective as the next door neighbour he commented that life in the vicinity had improved somewhat since the dogs had been confined to the house where their frequent barking was less noticeable, although they could be heard whimpering occasionally during the day. Other neighbours also reported they had discussed the dogs with the owners.

There were 14 members of the public present, a number of whom took part in the discussion. Some residents were extremely worried by the dogs' dangerous behaviour and more than one indicated the offending dogs should be removed from the village in order to eliminate the risk of a more serious incident in the future. They would continue to have an adverse effect on activities in the vicinity, such as deliveries and leaving babies in gardens. There was a suggestion that the behaviour of the dogs while being walked warranted them being muzzled but the Chairman pointed out that the Council could not insist on this. Concern was expressed that it appeared the village had to wait for another incident to occur before positive action against the dogs could be taken.

The Council considered its response to the owners' letter and incident outside the public session of the meeting. There was clearly a consensus among the people at the meeting that the dogs were perceived as continuing to represent a threat, despite the precautions proposed. It was, however, noted that the pen would go a long way towards the Council's concerns, in that it would reduce the risk of escape while the owners were out. However, when the dogs were not in the pen and were free to run around the garden, the only thing to prevent their escape would be the fence through which the dog escaped on 11th February. Accepting that the escape was not due to wilful neglect on the part of the owners but due to the errors and omissions of an external party (Thames Water), the Council would wish to know whether there was any form of back-up to avoid complete reliance on the fence, in case another event beyond the control of the owners should cause a breach again.

The Clerk was asked to draft a letter to the dog owners for councillors approval before sending which would:

- thank them for an explanation of the proposed actions to minimise the risk of another escape,
- accept that the proposed pen would go a long way to meeting the Council's concerns,
- question the security of the garden when the dogs were not in the pen, and
- question whether the owners had considered muzzling the dogs when out walking.

The Council noted that it would need to ensure that the precautions described in the owners' letter had been carried out before it could fully accept that the risk had been minimised. It was therefore agreed to keep the

situation under review. The Clerk was also asked to keep the Vale Dog Warden informed of developments and to receive her reports of any visits she makes to The Green.

3. CLERK'S FINANCIAL REPORT

The Clerk presented his Financial Report which was adopted. The question of payment for the fence around the children's play area was discussed under Agenda item 5.

Grants of £30 were approved for Abingdon Citizens Advice Bureau and Oxon Association for the Blind. In the latter case, the payment would be deferred until the next financial year. The Clerk had submitted a claim for expenses over and above the budgeted figure of £50 to include cement and turf for Green improvements and the printing of two issues of Charney Chatter for which he had paid. The claim, for £104, was approved.

4. PLANNING MATTERS

There has been no progress since the last meeting on the proposal by Mr McBain to build on his site, which awaits the approval of the Secretary of State. The Clerk has informed the planners that the Council wishes to see some planning gains but it is premature to discuss these before a detailed planning application is made.

There have been no further developments on the rejected applications for Gunton Barn and Mill Cottage.

There were no objections to an application for internal work in the Solar wing of Charney Manor to support the ceiling of the Dining Room. **The Clerk** was instructed to tick the "Fully Support" box on the response form.

5. CHARNEY FIELD

The fencing around the children's play area has been installed. However, there was a last minute change of layout by CHAFT which appreciably extended the perimeter, resulting in a cost escalation from the £800 (plus VAT) committed by the Council to £1614 (inc VAT). As the Council can reclaim VAT, the extra sum involved which CHAFT must pay to the Council is £574. As a result of criticisms by Mrs Gildersleeves and others of the standard of workmanship, illustrated on a series of photographs, CHAFT had withheld payment of the labour part of the extra cost and had paid the Council only £354.

Despite these criticisms, there was a consensus that the fence was fit for purpose and the faults were minor. The Clerk had contacted the contractor who had agreed to return to the site to rectify them. The Chairman therefore stated, and CHAFT agreed, that there was no reason to withhold the £220 labour costs and a cheque to that amount should be sent to the Clerk forthwith. If CHAFT had any concerns about risks to children from any part of the fence as erected, they should arrange a working party to eliminate them.

The risk assessment and inspection of the children's play area has been booked with RoSPA for July.

6. CHARNEY MILL

Mr Taylor had yet to carry out a more detailed survey of the mill to follow his interim report. When this has been done, the question of remedial work would be raised again with Atkins.

Nineteen villagers attended a talk on "The Archaeology of Charney Mill and its Millstream" by Bruce Hedge of the Vale of White Horse Industrial Archaeological Group on 8 March 2004 and learnt a great deal about the mill and other archaeological sites in the parish. The Chairman thanked The Clerk for organising the trip.

7. VILLAGE COLLEGE

Jackie Cross and Peter Davies attended the CLET meeting on 21 January 2004 to discuss future involvement of CLET in the running of the College. CLET has subsequently written to the College offering to change the

funding arrangements to an annual grant of £750. The College intends to accept this offer which will enable it to plan ahead and improve the quality of teaching aids available.

Yoga and French Conversation courses continue and flower arranging re-commences on 11th March. A one-day course on "Willow in the Garden" has been arranged for 24th March 2004.

8. CLERK'S CORRESPONDENCE

The Clerk read out a letter from Mr Metcalf concerning the state of Bridle Path which is riddled with potholes. The residents are concerned that with greater use of Bridle Path to access Charney Field, action should be taken to repair it to allow easier passage of pushchairs and disabled buggies. Although it owns Bridle Path, the Council declined to offer funding for this work as responsibility for its maintenance lies either with the residents of the last three houses (for vehicular access) or with OCC as the Highways Authority (as a bridle path). **The Clerk** reported that he had sought funding from sources other than OCC, which had no funds available, and proposes to submit an application to the Trust for Oxfordshire Environment. Mr Metcalf agreed to obtain a quotation for the type of repair the residents had in mind. There was some discussion on notices to prevent vehicles parking on Bridle Path but, in the absence of a consensus, it was agreed not to take any action but to invite residents to monitor the situation.

It was agreed not to enter the Best Kept Village Competition this year.

The Clerk reminded councillors that they were invited by the Vale of White Horse Industrial Archaeology Group to a social evening at the Mill on 19th June 2004.

The Clerk had received a copy of a letter to the Vale Council from Mr Paske, who is once again trying to have Chapel Lane officially registered in his address to avoid confusion, especially on the part of utilities looking for his property. If Mr Paske succeeds in his attempt, the matter will revert to the Council for approval.

The Vale Council had written to The Clerk to explain that it had failed in its attempt to mount an exhibition of Millennium celebrations due to lack of responses to its invitation to parishes to give accounts of their events. Charney Bassett was one of only 12 parishes to respond.

Having considered the Parish Remuneration Panels report, the Council resolved to pay councillors travelling and subsistence allowances based on the recommendations of the Panel.

9. RESIDENTS' QUESTIONS

Mrs Rumble raised the question of two overhanging bay shrubs in Orchard Close which were obstructing the pavement. Mrs Dahele, from the floor, explained that the owners had every intention of cutting them back but had been prevented from doing so by roosting starlings. When the starlings have gone, they will be trimmed.

Mrs Rumble also reported that the pothole in the Orchard Close pavement, which The Clerk had reported to OCC on 3 February, was still there. Mrs Adamson reported a "dip" which had appeared in New Road and **The Clerk** added a pothole outside Primrose Villa to the list which he would submit to OCC for action.

The Clerk was asked to look into the removal of a tree which is growing from Bridle Path bank into the stream and to chase Albert Rayner to remove the stump of the lilac tree behind the bus shelter.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business

11. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 12 May 2004 at 7.30 p.m. in the Village Hall.

The Chairman closed the public session of the meeting at 9.15 p.m. with thanks to all those who attended.

Signed.....

Chairman

Date.....