

CHARNEY BASSETT PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL HELD AT 7.30 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 2008 IN THE VILLAGE HALL

Present: Mr G Rumble, Chairman
Mr J Harper, Vice-chairman
Mr M Cox

Mr P G Davies (Clerk)

08/44 Apologies

Apologies had been received from Mrs J Bath and Mr J Stiles. County Councillor Melinda Tilley, District Councillor Anthony Hayward and 9 members of the public were in attendance. There were no declarations of interest.

08/45 Minutes of the July 2008 Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the July 2008 meeting be approved and signed by the Chairman.

08/46 County Councillor's News

Councillor Tilley commented that things were quiet in OCC during this holiday period but she gave an insight into her new post of Cabinet Member for Place, a somewhat awkward title which gives her a wide portfolio and requires her to visit places in Oxfordshire to study their problems, particularly in the context of "mending broken Britain". She commented that this task required cross-party collaboration from local councillors which was not always forthcoming. She will hold this position for a year as there will be OCC elections in 2009 and she cannot be sure whether she will retain her OCC seat then and whether, if she does, she will remain Member for Place. Inviting questions, she was asked about the best way of presenting OCC with the evidence for a weight limit through the village and she agreed to contact The Clerk with advice on the best target.

Councillor Tilley complimented the Parish Council and village on its sense of community and commented that the village was "a beacon of self-help" in the county, quoting the work of the Charney Army as an example of this.

08/47 District Councillor's News

Councillor Hayward gave some details of the recently announced part-merger of South Oxon and Vale of White Horse District Councils under a single chief executive, David Buckle of SODC. This will, in theory, save around £700,000 annually, largely due to combining the waste management systems of the two councils. The number of senior staff will be reduced from 21 to 12 but this will require significant redundancy payments, reducing the claimed savings. The Conservative opposition on the Vale Council (which includes Councillor Tilley) has strongly opposed the idea and has expressed grave concerns that there will be major problems arising from this merger of two councils under different political controls (SODC is Conservative, the Vale is LibDem). It is believed that a similar merger of two councils in Sussex, which has been used as a model, has run into the difficulties foreseen by the opposition.

In other news items, the Vale has joined with OCC in opposing the Steventon reservoir and has welcomed the Environment Agency report which casts doubts on the future water usage figures used by Thames Water to justify it. The Hanson development at Longworth is also in doubt due to the insolubility of the traffic problems

it would create. The proposed eco-town in Oxfordshire is unlikely to proceed due to the opposition it has generated.

08/48 Clerk's Financial Report

The Clerk presented (a) his financial report CBPC/FIN/08/05 (appended to minutes) which had been distributed to councillors and (b) the Annual Return which had been audited by the external auditors with no matters arising. He drew attention to the fact that because of the transactions involved with tree planting on Charney Field, the Council's turnover continued to attract a higher fee band.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the financial report be adopted
- (b) the Annual Return be approved and accepted by the Council

08/49 Planning Matters

The application seeking changes to the roof of the parent annexe at Rectory Farm House had been approved.

08/50 Flooding

Following the production of the watercourse map reported at the last meeting, the meeting to walk the watercourse was convened for 31st July when around 20 people of the 30+ invited turned up, accompanied by Peter Dela, Vale Council land drainage engineer, who revealed the existence of a self-help team at the EA headed by Keith Lead.. Modifications to the map resulting from the walk resulted in a draft plan to clear the three watercourses which ran around and through the village. The River Ock was already being cleared by Colin McGuire and Diana Martin and Charney Wick Ditch was reasonably clear. The decision was taken to launch Project Chaffinch (**CH**allenge - **A**void **F**urther **F**looding **I**N **CH**arney) by clearing the millstream at the road bridge where riparian rights were not well-defined.

Contact was then made with Keith Lead who visited the village and confirmed that as an initial objective, the clearance of the three watercourses constituted a "broad plan". However, it was made clear by the EA that they could not provide resources to undertake clearance work and it was the responsibility of the riparian owners to do this, although they would be happy to offer advice, particularly on the best practices to preserve the ecology of the watercourse.. Since then, the EA has spoken to Trevor Brown and Diney Godfrey, the riparian owners upstream of the bridge and they are believed to have undertaken to clear their stretches. An approach will be made to the Lindseys to see if they have plans to deal with their stretch of the millstream. Downstream the owners are Steve Champion of Mill Cottage, Colin McGuire and Alan Cottrell, farmer. The last named has accepted his responsibilities and has asked that we report back to him on what needs to be done. The Charney Army has offered assistance where help is needed and where it is equipped to do the work. It is not expected that where machinery is needed to clear streams that the Army will be able to get involved.

In summary, Project Chaffinch has alerted riparian owners to their responsibilities and the Council, through the Charney Army, will help where it can. The situation has almost been reached where it would be beneficial to hold a public meeting to discuss the issues associated with flooding and to agree a longer term strategy, which would involve maintenance of the newly cleared watercourses and an assessment of the effectiveness of weirs and other controls on flood avoidance.

Following this update, the meeting was thrown open for public discussion as Mr and Mrs Brown and Mr and Mrs Roberts, flooding victims in July 2007, had attended to seek the Parish Council's views. The full discussion was too long to record in these minutes and only some of the important issues have been recorded.

Mr Brown challenged the acceptance by the Parish Council of the EA position that they no longer carry out maintenance on watercourses and depend on the riparian rights of landowners to keep watercourses clear. He

claimed that the EA are obliged by statute to manage flooding risks and he considered they were neglecting this statutory obligation by leaving clearances to landowners. He had written to the EA and awaited their response in which he would expect them to spell out their policies for flood management. The Clerk responded by pointing out that in order to mount a challenge of the EA position could require an approach to central government and the timescale of this would be so long that further flooding could occur in the meantime if no self-help activities were undertaken. There are now numerous self-help flood groups dotted around the county, showing that the EA position, although unhelpful, was generally accepted by village affected by the floods.

The question of EA funding was raised and The Clerk reported that although there appeared to be no EA, Vale or County Council funds available to Charney Bassett at present, if, in the long-term, studies of the village watercourses revealed that remedial action requiring capital investment was needed to protect the village, he was confident that funds would be found and the EA self-help group leader had confirmed this during a TV interview when he visited the village. At present, the very limited funds which have been spent on flood management in Oxfordshire have been focused on urban areas such as Oxford and Abingdon. Responding to a complaint that this seemed unfair to small villages, the Chairman commented that there was a scoring system used by Defra to determine the areas of greatest need and although the eleven properties flooded in Charney represented eleven personal tragedies, the reality was that there were 300 properties in Abingdon and over 600 in Oxford which had been flooded in July 2007.

The question of future maintenance of watercourses was raised and The Clerk commented that once the watercourses had been cleared, annual maintenance would be relatively easy and a suitable task for the Charney Army. The ongoing programme to clear watercourses was proving to be a major task because of the many years of neglect to maintain them.

The flood-affected parties considered it important that the support of the local MP, Ed Vaizey, should be sought and The Clerk assured them that Ed Vaizey was on the e-mail group associated with Project Chaffinch.

08/51 Clerk's Correspondence

The diversion routes devised by OCC Highways to be used in the event of a road traffic accident on the A420 between Kingston Bagpuize and Watchfield are now in place and have been signed by geometric symbols through the village. OCC have been asked what controls will be in place to prevent HGVs using the diversion. *[Note: The Clerk has been informed that signs on the A420 at Tubney and Swindon will be uncovered in the event of the A420 being blocked and these signs will redirect HGVs to other A roads, avoiding villages].*

The Clerk had circulated a paper raising the possibility of a weight limit for vehicles passing through Charney Bassett, using a number of pieces of evidence to justify this. It was agreed that the case was well made and the paper should be given a wider exposure. Councillor Tilley would advise The Clerk of the name of the person in OCC who should receive it and it would be copied to Ed Vaizey MP who would no doubt wish to support the case.

08/52 Information Exchange

The Clerk had contacted the VWHDC environmental wardens for more information on the organisation of a village clean-up and had received a reply offering to help organise it by lending suitable equipment and protective garments. It was agreed to hold such an event in the Spring of 2009, date to be arranged.

The Clerk reported on the recent activities of the Faringdon East Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG2) of which he and Dave Sibbert were members. Good progress was being made in getting this NAG up and running and there have been significant moves to address the principal concern of villages in the NAG2 area - speeding. The Faringdon Neighbourhood Team has been trained in the use of laser speed detectors which have been deployed to good effect in the area, notably The Hanneys.

However, it was interesting to note that during the last two visits of the Speedwatch Speed Indication Device (SID) little speeding was observed. In a session in Longworth Road on Thursday 17th July lasting from 08.10 to 09.40, 88 vehicles passed the two devices (almost exactly one a minute) and the average speed was 29.5 mph with one vehicle doing 42 mph. Only five of these vehicles would have triggered a Gatso speed camera had there been one. In a two-hour session between 11.50 and 13.50 on Tuesday 19th August, 103 vehicles were observed, only five of which exceeded 30 mph and none of them would have triggered a camera. These observations do not align with the perception of a speeding problem in the village and it may be that the speeding takes place outside these times, e.g. during the early morning and evening rush hours. Data will continue to be collected at future visits of SID. A comment from the floor observed that although the reference speed for measuring speeding was 30 mph, this was in many cases an inappropriate speed approaching village junctions where a much lower speed was needed for safety. This point was particularly applicable to the many tractors passing through the village which because of their width should be driven at much lower speeds than they are at present. As an aside it was noted that most of the tractor drivers seem to be using hand-held mobile phones when driving.

08/53 Date of Next Meeting

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

The Chairman closed the meeting at 9.27 p.m. with thanks to all those who attended.

Signed

Chairman