

Minutes of the Monthly Parish Council Meeting held on 8th April 2008
in the recreation ground pavilion at 7.30 p.m.

Present: Mr S Lilly (Vice Chair) Mr. M. Ricketts Mr D Marsh
Mr G Taylor Mr R Thomas Mr D Hayter
Mrs D Boughton-Waite Mrs M Turner (District Cllr) Mr R Waite (District Cllr)
Mr T Stock (Chief Executive, VWHDC)

Apologies: Mr J Fisher Mr C Lamont (County Cllr)

3 members of the public.

Mr Lilly took the Chair (in the absence of a Chairman) as Acting Chairman

1. Address from Mr Stock

Following further problems since the March meeting, Mr Stock attended this meeting in an advisory capacity.

Mr Ricketts raised a point of order so that he could present a petition from residents who were upset about the work done to trees in the cemetery. He had instigated the petition without prior reference to the Council. The petition was noted by the Council, but the majority of councillors were unhappy that they had no prior knowledge of it.

Mr Stock was invited to speak and commented on the role of a Parish Council, and of the Councillors within that council, stressing the need for councillors to comply with the Code of Conduct and not to bring their Council into disrepute. Recent incidents within HPC could lead to a loss of confidence in HPC from residents.

Mr Stock pointed out that VWHDC's arboricultural officer is happy that HPC has admitted to its mistake in the matter of the cemetery trees, that VWHDC is content that no further action will be taken, and that HPC will ask for guidance on such matters in the future. The petition should have been an Agenda item before it was instigated, ie as a Council action not an individual councillor's action. The Council formally resolved that this matter is closed satisfactorily. Mr Ricketts to take a copy of the relevant part of these Minutes to all residents who signed the petition. **ACTION: MR**

Council staff were invited to speak at this point. The grounds staff were very upset that in a recent email, Mr Ricketts implied that he had information that wood from the trees was sold in Didcot; the Clerk was upset that in the same email, Mr Ricketts had implied a misuse of petty cash. Mr Ricketts felt that his comments had been taken out of context, but he formally withdrew the remarks and unreservedly apologised to staff. The grounds staff left the meeting at 8.00pm. Annoyed at the comments directed at staff, Mr Taylor left the meeting at 8.05pm.

Councillors were concerned that no confidence could be placed in Mr Ricketts if he continued to act outside the Council or against majority decisions taken by the Council. Mr Ricketts expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the recent purchase of the chainsaw would lead to further expenditure by the Council. The Council was happy that the chainsaw had been purchased following advice obtained at the time, and that regulations had been followed. The Council formally resolved that this matter is satisfactorily closed.

Following further discussion, Mr Stock commented that the Council should address matters properly without descending to trivia. Any councillor who could not agree to abide by Council decisions may resign. Contact with the Clerk should be kept to a minimum between meetings, leaving the Clerk to attend to actions from each meeting and report at the following meeting. Any concerns should be addressed in the correct way. The Council formally resolved to minimize use of emails to the Clerk and

to other Councillors, and that items for attention should be placed on the agenda at the discretion of the Clerk in consultation with the Chair.

Mr Stock suggested adding an item to Standing Orders to the effect that any matter resolved by the Council cannot be discussed again for 6 months. The Council agreed; Mr Stock to send more information.

Mr Stock left the meeting at 8.35pm, after expressions of thanks from all for attending.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting – the Minutes of the March meeting (CPC 03/08 & PC/03/08) were signed as a true record.
3. Matters Arising – a) Affordable Housing – Ms Kennedy had been invited to the meeting, but had not replied. District Councillors reported that both ORCC and Sovereign Housing are still keen to move forward on this matter. Mr Waite to contact Ms Kennedy and Mr Roberts and invite them to the May meeting. **ACTION: RW**

4. Police/District Councillors

PCSO McCreath had reported to Mr Lilly some incidents of un-neighbourly behaviour in the Gaveston Road/ Westfield/Loder Road areas. A document had been delivered to some parts of the village highlighting concerns/duties of residents. PCSO McCreath wished to make it clear that all residents could contact him if they had concerns.

Mr Marsh reported that he had posted a recent Neighbourhood Watch notice on the website. The Council approved.

Mr Waite will supply extra copies of Vale Views in case some residents do not receive a copy. VWHDC's annual Audit is posted on its website. Problems highlighted in the audit will be addressed. Comments are welcome.

Workshops are being held to discuss the next phase of the "Your Vale, Your Future" strategy; Wednesday 30 April 7-9pm at Abingdon Guildhall, and Tuesday 13 May, 7-9pm at Wantage Civic Hall. Residents are encouraged to attend.

Recent concerns from residents include problems to do with the administration of Council Tax, the affect of Rural Rate Relief on local businesses, and The Environment Agency's response re: flooding.

Mr Treml raised concerns that the increase in the charge for a brown bin may put off people from taking up the scheme.

Mr Lilly asked whether it may be possible to waive charges at local tips for the council vehicle; Mr Waite to make enquiries of OCC. Mr Marsh commented that the Council must be prepared to pay such charges if necessary. **ACTION: RW**

Item 8b APM date was discussed at this point. Following further inquiries, the Freeman Hall is available on Thursday 29th. Clerk was instructed to book the hall for that date at 8.00pm. The date of the Annual meeting of the Council was formally altered from 13th to 20th May, because of the absence of the Acting Chairman on 13th. **ACTION: C**

5. Planning Matters

Formal Notice of Permission has been received in respect of;

HAR/20418	Installation of an automated teller machine at McColls, Curie Avenue, for Bank Machine Co Ltd. Consent was also granted for the erection of signage on north elevation of McColls shop, application number HAR/20418/-A.
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3 new Applications have been received as follows;

- HAR/1371/1 Erection of single storey extension & internal alterations to rear. Erection of single garage at front, at Five Corners, The Barrow, for Mr Beith..
- HAR/20108/1 Erection of single storey extension to form bathroom, bedroom, kitchen, utility room with separate garage at Holloway Cottage, The Holloway, for Mr & Mrs Davies.

The Council asked that neighbours' comments are borne in mind by Planners.

- HAR/20485 Erection of 1x3 bed & 1x4 bed dwellings at Land adjacent to Reading Road, for Oak Dell Properties Ltd.

Mr Lilly declared an interest in this application and left the room while the Council discussed it. The Council objected to this application on the grounds that it may set a precedent for similar building projects in the village, which could push the village envelope out further than its present boundaries. The Council also requested that should permission be granted, damage to existing vegetation is kept to a minimum, and that the existing screen of vegetation fronting the road is retained.

Mr Lilly returned once the discussion was over.

Advice has been received of intended Work to Trees:

Fell 1 pine tree at 1 Locktons Barns, Church Lane, for Mr Clarke.

The Council had no objection.

Mr Hayter had prepared a statement for release to the Didcot Herald (see PC/03/08) re: SODC's Greenspaces consultation.

6. Financial Matters – a) Receipts & payments cashbook for March 2008 - The cashbook had not been completed as BT has yet to send its quarterly statement. Mr Marsh to check with BT. **ACTION:DM**
- b) Request for funding –Home-Start Southern Oxfordshire – Mr Thomas proposed a donation of £35, seconded by Mr Hayter, carried unanimously.
- c) Parish Insurance – insurance quote is for £2449.05, which is around £49 dearer than last year. One change to the policy is that any repairs required to play equipment highlighted in a professional report should be carried out within 60 days (or as specified in the report), or the equipment removed. Clerk to obtain further quotes before sending payment. **ACTION:C**
- d) Van insurance – the new van has been delivered (see L&R/01/08); an extra charge of £103.39 has been applied by insurers.

7. Matters relating to Council Owned Lands

a) Recommendations from Lands & Recreation Committee

Mr Fisher had sent a letter outlining followed-up items since the last L&R meeting; he and Mr Hayter had conferred re: bollards for the rec – concrete bollards were no longer available, but Mr Hayter had asked for more information and prices. Clerk reported that RH Fencing had provided a verbal quote for around £1000, to include installation of a new gate at the rear of the pavilion, and to replace broken bollards and install new steel ones where necessary. Awaiting further information & written quote from RH Fencing; deferred to next L&R meeting. **ACTION:L&R**

i) Memorials notice – the Committee recommended that a Notice be placed in local press, in Harwell News and on cemetery gates, listing the affected graves, informing relatives of the regulations relating to memorials, and asking that anyone with an affected stone should contact the Council. Ratified.

ii) Fencing along cemetery footpath – the Committee recommended erecting a fence with suitable access for machinery along the public footpath in the cemetery, to minimise problems with dog fouling. Mr Ricketts suggested installing an extra dog bin; Council felt that 12 dog bins in the village was sufficient to deal with dog waste. Deferred to next L&R meeting. **ACTION:L&R**

iii) Weed spraying – Committee recommended that Mr Taylor confer with Mr Russell as to the necessity and frequency of weed spraying in the village. Ratified.

iv) Dog fouling – Committee recommended putting a notice in Harwell News reminding residents that this problem is still being monitored. Clerk to contact SDK as some bins seem to be left unemptied for longer than 1 week. Ratified.

v) Land purchase/ use of west field – Committee recommended that enquiries be made into purchasing extra land at the western edge of the rec, for future sports use; also that some football matches should be played on the west field before it is made over for use by football teams on a regular basis, so that drainage and surface wear could be assessed. Ratified.

vi) Van access – Committee had compared quotes and recommended that the lowest cost option be chosen. Mr Taylor had measured the area at approximately 30m x 4m;

Dynawest Grass protecta mesh and fixings - £210 for 2m x 20m roll

Grassmats.co.uk matting without fixings - £559 for a 2m x 18m roll

Polymax ORBIK rubber matting without fixings - £428 for a 1.5 m x 20m area made up of 1m x 1.5m squares.

Prices did not include delivery.

After discussion of the quotes, Mr Thomas proposed that the Council accept the Dynawest quote; total cost will be around £819. Seconded by Mr Marsh, ratified.

vii) Flamvault/ramp – Committee had compared quotes for these items and recommended that the verbal quote from Specialist Welding be accepted;

Technoform – large vault - £2253.60

Am-tek – small vault for fuel cans only - £549

Specialist Welding – purpose-built vault to Council's specifications – up to £1000

All vaults are vandal-proof.

West Garden Machinery – aluminium ramp - £232

Raalloy - £239, not including drilling van for hooks

Specialist Welding - £200 for hooked/ sit-on ramp

Specialist Welding had provided a further quote of £900 for supplying a flamvault and ramp.

Council discussed the quotes; Mr Thomas proposed that Specialist Welding's quote of £900 for the 2 items be accepted, seconded by Mr Hayter, ratified.

viii) Trees plan / lands plan – Committee recommended that a plan be drawn up showing all trees for which the Council is responsible, and a similar plan of all lands in Council ownership. Mr Marsh asked that the plans show clearly the Conservation Area. Ratified. **ACTION:C**

ix) Risk assessment – Mr Hayter to confer with Clerk.

ACTION:DH,C

b) Harwell News printing

OCC is closing its print unit in May. Mr Ricketts to obtain quotes from other local firms. **MR**

c) Tennis/Bowls Lease – nothing further has been heard from the Clubs. Clerk to ask solicitor what costs are likely to be in drawing up these documents. **ACTION:C**

d) Dilapidated stable – Mr Lilly to confer with Clerk re: notice for local press. Clerk to write to Mr Freeman to advise him of pending sale. **ACTION;SL,C**

e) New pavilion report – nothing further

f) Health & Safety queries – to be discussed further during risk assessment.

Mr Taylor returned to the meeting at 9.45pm, and apologised for his abrupt departure.

8. Environment – a) Footpaths – Re: Footpath 6 - Mr Ricketts is finding out the landowners concerned. Residents of Manor Green are still having problems re: Footpath 11; Clerk to pass concerns to OCC.

b) APM date – discussed at Item 4.

c) OPFA Roadshows – Mrs Boughton-Waite to attend a seminar on Play & Sports facilities on 14th May, cost £25.00 proposed by Mr Hayter, seconded by Mr Thomas, carried. **ACTION:DBW**

d) Best Kept Village competition – the Council is still waiting for its commemorative “winners” certificate from ORCC, and decided not to enter the competition this year.

e) OCC – speed limit change – further advice has been received of the intended speed limit change on the Harwell to Chilton road.

f) North Wessex Downs Forum – the Forum is on 6th June; no-one is able to attend.

g) OCC Leader’s letter – Cllr Mitchell has sent a letter discussing local issues such as post office closures and schools. Council asked whether future communications such as this could be sent via email.

9. Any Other Business

Age Concern petition – the petition is asking for support to allow bus pass holders to use their passes before 9.30am. Council sympathised but felt that the lack of bus services generally was of more concern.

Mr Lilly took a SEERA document to read on the Council’s behalf. **ACTION: SL**

Mr Lilly is no longer able to attend the Oxfordshire Partnerships briefing. No-one else can attend; Clerk to ask for notes from the meeting.

Mrs Boughton-Waite asked whether 6 bags of bark can be purchased for the Memorial Garden. Council had no objection (reserves of £289 are still held for this project). Mr Ricketts suggested placing an article in Harwell News thanking the Garden Club for their hard work in the garden.

Mr Treml reported there is still graffiti on the A34 bridge in Didcot Road.

The meeting closed at 10.10 pm.

Since the meeting, a letter has been received from Mr Stock; this letter was circulated to all councillors and forms an Appendix to these Minutes.



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TAS/ljh

Mrs S Taylor
Clerk to Harwell Parish Council

21 May, 2008

Dear Mrs Taylor

Support to Harwell Parish Council

Thank you for the invitation to meet the Council and to have the opportunity to offer some suggestions and advice.

I thought it might be helpful to put some of that advice in writing and also to make a few further suggestions that came to mind after I left the meeting.

Before doing so, I would wish to commend the Council for unanimously agreeing to put to bed the issues of the trees, chainsaw and petty cash and resolve that these matters are now closed and that the Council should now move on.

As I reported, this Council has acknowledged that the Parish Council made a mistake in respect of the trees, recognises that your Council will not repeat the mistake and believes that no further investigation or action is warranted. The District Council will continue to offer specialist advice on request from you as Clerk.

I was also heartened that Councillor Ricketts acknowledged that his comments about the trees, disposal of wood, chainsaw and petty cash had caused unwarranted distress. His withdrawal of the comments and unreserved apology should close these matters and I would not expect any of your members to need to resurrect them.

/Continued

I believe it was appropriate for Councillor Ricketts to agree to circulate a written response from you as Clerk to the signatories on the petition that he presented. I would be happy for you to use any part of this letter if that helps you. In any event, once distributed I believe the issues in the petition to have been concluded.

I believe it will help your Council now that it has resolved not to revisit concluded business for at least 6 months. This Council's Standing Order to this effect reads as follows:

“At a meeting of the Council, a motion or amendment to rescind any resolution of the Council which was passed within the preceding 6 months or which is to the same effect as one which has been rejected within that period, may be moved provided that such a motion:

- a) is recommended by a Committee or Sub-Committee, or*
- b) notice of such a motion has been given by at least one third of the Members of the Council.”*

I would suggest that you adopt some variation of these words. The Council will then be able to revisit issues only if a significant proportion of its membership agrees to do so.

The key part of my general advice was to stress that the role of those of us who accept public office is always to act in a manner that enhances the public perception of that office. This does not take away our individual rights but undoubtedly places a higher standard on the judgement made by members of the public of our actions, both individually and collectively. The reputation of your Parish Council is one to be cherished and I would urge Councillors to bear this uppermost in their minds.

The role of Councillors is essentially the strategic one of setting out a vision for the community and identifying those high level actions that it believes will deliver that vision. The Council should be clear about its priorities and aspirations and it is then the role of the Clerk to implement those decisions. I believe that although it is always helpful for officers to receive suggestions from members it is essential that the officers are given the freedom and space necessary to effect implementation.

I would suggest strongly that members of the Council make no contact between meetings with the Clerk other than in writing and then constrained to identifying new items of business for future consideration, or drawing her attention to new correspondence. This would enable the Clerk to concentrate on her responsibilities and leave it open to her to make contact with individual members if she believes that necessary or appropriate.

Two further thoughts came to mind after I had left your meeting.

Whilst a small group of well intentioned members will work most productively in a relatively informal environment, I believe that it might be helpful in the current circumstances and for the next few months for the meetings to become much more formal. This would place a greater emphasis on the Chairman of the meeting to invite speakers in turn, to ensure that both the substance and manner of comments is appropriate (the Chairman has an absolute right to intervene in another member's speech if this requirement is breached), and to move the agenda along at a reasonable rate. This comment is in no way critical of the meeting last night but is intended to offer a constructive way of allowing contributions to be made without becoming inflammatory. If a speaker sought to disregard the Chairman I would suggest that the Chairman uses his powers in respect of unruly behaviour by issuing a formal warning and/or move that that person be removed from the meeting. This latter motion would need to be put to the meeting immediately for a vote without discussion.

My second afterthought relates to your Council allowing "Any Other Business" onto its agenda. This is perfectly lawful and is intended only to convey information to colleagues and must not be used to seek decisions. It does offer the opportunity however to introduce potentially controversial information. I would suggest that you either remove this standing item at least for the time being, or constrain it for example as follows.

"Any other business agreed in advance by the Chairman (or in his absence the Vice-Chairman) having taken into account the advice of the Clerk."

I do hope these observations and suggestions are helpful. As I said at the meeting the community needs a strong Parish Council with enthusiastic members who wish to work together to improve the community. It would be a great shame and undoubtedly to the detriment of the parish if the current difficulties continue to escalate.

The District Council will continue to offer support in any way that it can as I am sure would the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils. I would be more than happy to return to your Council or be represented if you felt that would help at a future meeting.

Yours sincerely



TERRY STOCK
Chief Executive