

Little Milton Parish Council
Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 10th May 2017
in the Pine Lodge Little Milton

Present: Cllr. Barry Coward (*Chairman*)
Cllr. Alison Shelton
Cllr. Kate Daunt

Mr R Fergusson (Clerk)

Councillor Stephen Harrod (District/County)

Seven members of the public

01/05/17 Introduction by Chairman

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish meeting.

02/05/17 Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 11th May 2016 were taken as read and the meeting approved the minutes as a true record of the meeting

03/05/17 Report by Chairman of Parish Council

The Chairman reported that a dominant feature of parish council business had been absorbing the impact of the massive savings which the County Council needed to make in order to stay within budget. This has had a major impact on the highways maintenance budget and the effects of the lack of investment can be seen as we walk or drive around. Under the so-called Oxfordshire Together initiative whereby town or parish councils can take on certain services from the County Council. He stated that the only service that Little Milton Parish Council had taken on was the grass verge cutting contract. Some funding followed this commitment and, overall, it was working well.

The Chairman stated that budget cutting had had a traumatic impact on bus services. In common with most other villages, Little Milton no longer had a bus service. The cost of subsidising a bus service was astronomical. The Parish Council looked at a number of options in conjunction with surrounding villages but none were viable. However the Oxford Comet service was available for individuals and groups to book.

The Chairman reported that good progress had been made on the foul water issues within the village. The problem manhole cover outside the school had, at last, been properly sealed, and there were no problems over last winter. Thames Water had completed a major project to re-line the main sewer running across the fields from Great Haseley. Although there was a snag with this work which resulted in sewage flooding onto BBOWT land this has now been rectified.

The Chairman also was pleased to report that the project to install three defibrillators in the village was almost complete. He stated that two have been in place for some months at the village hall and the school. The third was going to be installed in the centre of the village at Morgan Associates. He thanked the hard work on the project that had been done by Teresa Quested and Kate Daunt.

The Chairman reported on the progress on the project to replace the children's play area, which is coming towards the end of its useful life. A small working group led by Elizabeth Swabey-Collison had done an enormous amount of work on our behalf researching, talking to companies, consulting and designing a scheme. The stage we are at is that the Council have submitted grant applications to both SODC and WREN and await the outcome of that process.

The Chairman moved on to the initiatives that had taken place on housing. He stated that in May last year the Council received the first indication that a major housing development was being considered on Chalgrove Airfield. This almost coincided with the draft of SODC's Local Plan, which looks ahead to 2033. The version which came out in June 2016 showed Chalgrove Airfield as their preferred option for a so-called strategic development site. The latest version of the Local Plan, published for consultation 6 weeks ago, now shows new strategic developments at Chalgrove, Culham and

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Berinsfield and potential developers for the Harrington site and Grenoble Road were still lobbying hard. In response to all that was happening on the housing front, in the summer he reported that the Parish Council decided to go ahead with drafting a Neighbourhood Development Plan. The Parish Council has been closely involved with the Chalgrove project in particular, attending workshops, conferences and meetings. The Chairman stated that the policy the Council had adopted throughout had been 'We don't like what you are proposing but we want the best possible outcome for our village. Therefore we will participate fully in all events which might help us further that aim.' The Chairman stated that the major emphasis had been on traffic and this is an on-going battle to try and make sure that the increased traffic did not swamp our village.

The Chairman stated that the Council continued to maintain the recreation ground, play area and MUGA and thanked the small team of volunteers who help with keeping the recreation ground in good shape. The Council continues to support the village newsletter and he expressed his thanks to Raymond for his sterling work as editor. He also thanked all those who had helped the work of the council during the last 12 months, such as the recreation ground committee, the volunteers who do the litter blitzes, stream clearers and many others.

The Chairman stated that against the background of everything else that is going on, and in particular a shift towards parish councils doing more, the Council decided, after a rise of 5.8% in 2016-17, to leave the precept unchanged for the current year.2017-18.

The Chairman outlined his thoughts for the next two years. He reported that after many years of service, Raymond had advised the Parish Council that he wished to stand down as Parish Clerk by the time of the next parish council elections in 2019. It seemed likely that most if not all of the current councillors will also stand down by or in May 2019, so we will need a brand new Parish Council. Indeed 2 councillors may need to stand down this year, which would then lead to us seeking to co-opt new councillors if there is no request for an election. The Chairman went on to highlight the challenges that all the bodies within the village have in attracting new volunteers. He believed that the current situation is very fragile as it currently depends upon a small number of people doing a lot. He stated that we need to take some positive steps to secure our ability to continue to govern our own affairs and that he was in the process of consulting the chairs of various village organisations on this whole topic of retaining governance of our own affairs.

Finally the Chairman commented upon the recent consultation evenings on the Neighbourhood Development Plan. He reported that the 6 proposed aims were overwhelming supported, with that support running at a minimum of 98% and the suggested 26 policies, most of which had 100% support. He felt that there was strong support for the direction in which our plan is heading and what we wanted it to cover, which was very reassuring.

04/05/17 Financial report

The Clerk outlined the factors that govern the Parish Council finances and emphasised that the Parish Council always had to determine whether it had the legal power to spend any money. The Clerk also outlined the budgetary control that the Council uses to manage the finances of the Parish.

The total income in 2016-17 was £33,354 which is £11,285 more than it was in 2015-16. The main reason for the increase is monies received from Grants in respect of the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), £8003, Defibrillators of £2298 and verge cutting from OCC of £529. There was also an increase in the Precept of £750. The advertising revenue was less than 2015/16 due to the reduced number of colour pages but still at a very healthy level at £5,773.

The total expenditure in 2016/17 was £29,742. The major items of expenditure were Neighbourhood Development Plan £5,162, Defibrillators £4,595, the cost of the newsletter £4,194,, the maintenance of the recreation ground and play area £3,498 of which ground maintenance was £1,755, bark £538 and play equipment repairs and replacement £810, repayment of loans £3,524, Council administration £2,858- and MUGA £1,486. The main items included under Other Expenditure were replacement of the Millennium benches £775, Verge cutting £900, subscriptions and donations £391, insurance £246 and annual maintenance of church clock £162. This year we also provided £300 in respect of the elections to the Parish Council to be held in May 2019.

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The outstanding balance on the Parish Council loans is £10,617 and will be finally repaid in September 2021.

The total closing reserves at 31st March 2017 were £20,821 of which the general reserves were £15,757 and £5,064 of earmarked reserves for the defibrillators, NDP and the playground. The Council consider that the general reserves are adequate to meet known future events and sufficient reserves to cover normal ongoing expenditure.

04/05/17 District Councillor Report

Councillor Stephen Harrod gave a report of the activities within the District Council.

Planning and development issues

We have continued actively to support our Parish Councils and residents with questions and issues concerning development, ranging from questions about fences and hedges up to issues around new major developments. We encouraged the District Council to fight two Planning Appeal rulings with Judicial Reviews in the High Court at the start of this Council year, but unfortunately the Court found in favour of the developers, ending our Five Year Land Supply.

Didcot Garden Town is a major part of our plan for development in the District, offering a significant number of jobs and homes. Following the consultation, all comments from the website, events and conversations with community groups are being used to help prepare a draft masterplan for the Garden Town. This masterplan will be published soon.

Our plans to 'refresh' Berinsfield are progressing at a good pace and will bring significant benefits to this community and the wider district.

The draft of our Local Plan to 2033 is out for consultation. A number of controversial proposals are attracting significant interaction from residents.

Unitary Authority Bids

Our proposals for a Unitary Authority were stopped by the changes within the Government following the Brexit decision last year. Following the County Council's publication of its revised proposals earlier this year, we and the Vale council decided to join them in preparing a combined bid which would deliver based on the strengths of all three councils, which is now with the Department for Communities and Local Government. Our local MP, John Howell has now also provided his support for this initiative. It is likely that the General Election will hold up the process though.

05/05/17 County Councillor Report

Councillor Stephen Harrod gave a brief report on behalf of his role as County Councillor.

Stephen reported that at the recent County Election no overall majority has been achieved. The Conservative Group, with 31 of 63 seats would be seeking an alliance with independent members to achieve a voting majority.

Stephen commented that following a year of negotiation, proposals, counter proposals and deadlock, the County eventually persuaded South and Vale Districts to join in the proposal for a single unitary council for Oxfordshire. This has now been submitted to the DCLG for consideration by the Secretary of State and has very recently received the support of local MP, John Howell.

Stephen reported that extra funding had been secured in addition to the 2017/18 Budget of £1,957,000 as a result of better than expected business rate collections, council tax collection fund surpluses and a higher than expected grant. The County is proposing to hold £926,000 of this until the 2018/19 financial year, and to spend the rest of the money (£1.03m) in this financial year.

06/05/17 Report from Village Hall Management Committee

The report on the Village hall was given by Teresa Quedstedt Chair of the Village Hall Management Committee.

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Teresa reported that it had been another busy year at The Pine Lodge with the committee working hard as always to keep the hall running smoothly and in top condition. Teresa stated that Dave Ponting had resigned from the committee as he had moved out of the area and he has been much missed. She thanked Chris Coward for taking over much of the administration tasks. She also thanked Anne Hawkins who is standing down at the AGM after many years of support. Teresa had a special thank you to Stuart McGill who has moved to France. Teresa stated that Stuart had been involved with the Pine Lodge from the planning stages and worked tirelessly to bring the project to a great conclusion. Teresa was pleased to report that three new members, Marian Buckingham, Maggie Wheeler and Kay Ward had joined the committee and their help was much appreciated.

Teresa outlined the various activities that take place during the year including quiz nights, the annual firework evening, craft evenings, and Christmas Fayre that help fund the cost of running and maintaining the hall. Teresa expressed her thanks to the quizmasters who give up their time to organise interesting evenings for us all David Hawkins, Tim Sharp, Mike Pennick and Roger Longshaw. She reported that the Film Club had to be discontinued as it was uneconomic but was pleased to report the introduction of a board game evening. Teresa highlighted the concerts given by Clive Carol and Elliott Morris who provided good entertainment. As part of our remit the Pine Lodge supported other charities by waiving the charges or hiring the hall at a reduced rate and this year had helped Bloodwise Cancer Charity, a fundraiser for the new playground, the Macmillan Coffee Morning and Friends of Oscar which supports children with brain and spinal tumours.

Teresa gave a brief report on the various maintenance items that had been addressed during the year including PAT testing, roof repairs, replacement of the water meter and work on the hearing loop. The level of work is significantly less than the previous year and this was reflected in the finances.

Teresa stated that there had been a comprehensive review of the hiring agreement and the changes were now reflected in the agreement. She reported that the hirers included Yoga, WI, Rugby-tots children's dance groups and new regular hirers this year have included Pilates twice a week.

Teresa expressed her thanks to Linda and Jim Lovegrove who take the bookings, let hirers in and out, carry out minor repairs and decorating and keep the hall beautifully clean and tidy. Secondly she thanked an amazing, dedicated committee who give up so much of their time to keeping everything running well, a special mention for Dee who keeps our books and finances in perfect order, for Chris for all the time spent on administration and Kath who does such a good job on publicising all our events. Teresa also thanked the partners who provide loyal support.

Finally expressed a plea that it was necessary to recruit new people to the committee to maintain what was done and to provide fresh ideas and energy. The present group cannot go on forever, and more volunteers were urgently needed to help.

07/05/17 Report from Little Milton Shop

Mr Simon Oddie, Chairman of the Village Shop, gave the following report on behalf of the Shop Management Committee.

The shop and post office status can be summarised currently as "work in progress".

In August the post office section closed at very short notice when the then postmistress left, closing the post office, which was run as a self-employed business. Post Office Limited provided part-time support to us from September while we embarked on applying for Little Milton Village Shop Limited to take

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on the post office function, which was by no means certain. We (myself and then committee member Richard Yelland) attended for interview by Post Office Limited in Bristol on 3rd November and a contract was signed between Post Office Limited and Little Milton Village Shop Limited on 29th November. Following training for Alison Shelton (in Guildford) in early December, the post office re-opened full time on 8th December.

We applied, in March, to the Post Office – Network Transformation Community Branch Fund for funding to modernise the Village Shop and Post Office and have, I am pleased to report been awarded just over £18,000 to cover most of our costs. We expect to schedule the refurbishment work over the summer period.

On the finance side, this has been a difficult year in view of the disruption to the business and we expect to report a loss to the end of March of the order of £15,000, covered by reserves, compared to a profit of £900 the previous year.

Thanks must go to our shop manager Alison Shelton who has coped excellently in a difficult year, to our part time assistant Annie Coates who has provided solid support, and to all the volunteers without whom we could not function. Also thanks go to the Shop Committee - Sarah Wakeling, Liz House, Mike Erwood and Alison Shelton who have all worked tirelessly in support of the business. We continue to seek more volunteers to support the shop and committee.

I anticipate that we shall complete the turnaround of Little Village Shop Limited over the next 18 months.

There was one question from the floor seeking clarification on how the loss was funded. Simon stated that it came out of reserves.

08/05/17 Report by Chair of Little Milton School Governors

Samina Lyden Chair of Governors gave a report on behalf of Little Milton School.

Samina reported that Little Milton School has enjoyed another fruitful year, following their Ofsted and Siam's (Church) inspections in Spring last year. She reported that the school continued to be popular because of the nurturing family feel and small class sizes. There are seventy pupils on roll of which about 60% of the children come from outside the village. Samina reported that a new school motto was agreed after suggestions from the pupils, "Small School, Big Heart, Great Start" that reflected the vision and values of the school.

Samina reported that the results achieved by the children were good despite a challenging year with a new curriculum being assessed for the first time. The children acquitted themselves very well and the Year 6 leavers were all sent on to new schools with great confidence.

Samina went on to say that Sport has featured largely in their priorities during the last year, with specialists coming to teach each class weekly in addition to our regular PE sessions. The school have hosted two hockey tournaments with 4 other schools and are due to take part in the annual sporting events with other local schools, including track and field competitions, gymnastics.

Samina reported on the popular after school clubs as well as a new French Club and a very popular dance and art club. The school is keen to promote the arts at Little Milton and all the children have been involved with singing festivals and plays. She reported that one of our finest productions to date was the Year 5/6 children's performance of The Tempest held at Thame Players' Theatre last summer – worthy of several ovations!

She thanked the energy and commitment of the Friends who had organised a string of successful events throughout the year which have raised money to subsidise visits, pay for whole class music lessons (all of our Year 4, 5 and 6 children play the violin) and to improve our technology within the school.

Samina stated that the buildings project was looking positive and the school had just been given a grant to build a satellite classroom, to sit between the two existing ones, and to refurbish the school in

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essential ways, including re-roofing and installing a new boiler. This work is planned to be completed during the summer holidays subject to planning permission that is being sought currently.

Finally Samina expressed her very grateful for the support from parents who are fully supportive and who work hard on helping keep costs down and we now have some beautifully painted sheds and play equipment as well as a Chelsea worthy border, all due to parent power!

The school is looking forward to the end of year activities, including lots of trips and visits for the children, and hope to see many faces from the community at their Ascension Day service and Maypole event later in the term.

09/05/17 Report from Orchard Pre-School

Linda Nann, Chair of the Orchard Pre-School, gave a report on behalf the Committee.

Linda explained that she had just taken on the Chair of the Orchard and was not in a position to give a comprehensive report on the activities over the past year. She stated that she was very much finding her way. However she did state that the number of children attending the Orchard was good. She expressed her thanks to all the staff over the past year as well as to the committee who support the Orchard Pre-School.

10/05/17 Report on St James' Church

The Reverend Simon Cronk gave a report on behalf of St James's Church.

Simon reported that the church in Little Milton was in good heart. It was welcoming and was through its members a church with good community engagement. Simon reported upon the activities that had been organised including an Alpha Course and Spring Harvest. The latter had been fully reported in the May 2017 Newsletter. Simon appreciated the support that the community gave to the church and village fete as well as attracting those from outside the village.

Simon then highlighted the concerns that he had about the church in Little Milton. He stated that it relied heavily on a few volunteers and like other organisations in the village this was not sustainable in the long term. The congregation numbers were small but festival services gave him encouragement. Simon commented upon the recent Quinquennial report that highlighted a repair cost of around £250K. This highlighted the need to widen the use of the building to attract funding and that could possibly be the school.

He concluded that despite the resource challenges and the burden of maintaining an 'ancient' building the church would remain strong at the heart of the community.

11/05/17 Parish Forum

There were no matters raised.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Signed by

Chairman.....Date.....