

FREELAND PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 4TH APRIL 2016 AT 8.00PM IN FREELAND HALL, FREELAND, OXFORDSHIRE

PRESENT:

Chairman:	Peter Newell
Vice-Chairman:	Robert Crocker
District Councillor:	Colin Dingwall
County Councillor:	Not present
Parish Councillors:	Mary Ann Canning, Bill Phillips, Tim Webster, Janet Dalton, Matthew Ruddle, Jane Linnell
Neighbourhood Police:	Not present
Clerk/RFO:	Lisa Smith

Plus 70 electors of the Parish.

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming everyone.

1. **APOLOGIES:** Toby Morris - away, PCSO Chris Jones – called out on urgent business.

2. **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ON 24TH APRIL 2015**
The Chairman advised that the minutes had been signed off and that copies were on display at the back of the hall for electors to read during the refreshment break.

3. **ANNUAL REPORT BY PETER NEWELL, CHAIRMAN OF FREELAND PARISH COUNCIL ON PAROCHIAL MATTERS.**

The Chairman began his report with a talk about the many positive events that had occurred over the past year:

Parish Council Elections

At least one Councillor was not standing for re-election so there would be vacancies on the Parish Council and therefore more members were required. The Chairman would talk about the elections in more detail later in the meeting.

New Bus Shelter

A new wooden bus shelter had been installed outside of the Village Hall, which had been paid for by using £5,148 of S106 funds (to be used for Transport Infrastructure) received from Oxfordshire County Council. The bus shelter also had a notice board inside it. The middle locked section was for parish council notices, and the two outer boards were for residents to place their own notices/adverts. A local carpenter in Cassington (Roy Pierce Joinery) had made the notice board and the base had been installed by Robert Crocker.

Play Park Extension

Some additional items of equipment were due to be installed immediately after the Easter Half Term to extend the current play park. A WREN application had been successfully submitted and the Parish Council were awarded a £47,000 grant towards the project. As part of the grant conditions, the Parish Council had to

show local fundraising, and the Freeland Teddy Girls had helped enormously in raising £2,167 for the play park.

Councillor Mary Ann Canning was the lead Councillor and would talk more about the Play Park Development Project later in the evening.

Garden of Remembrance

The design for the Garden of Remembrance was being finalized: it would have areas for burying or scattering ashes with seating and trees for remembering all departed loved ones. Councillor Mary Ann Canning was the lead on this project and would talk more about it later in the meeting.

Little Free Library

The Chairman thanked Matthew Ruddle who was the lead Councillor for a successful bid for a grant of £376 from WODC to erect and stock a small box outside number 138 Wroslyn Road. This acted as a library for children's and adults' books. It had been very successful and the Chairman congratulated Matthew on thinking of this and seeing it through to operation.

Memorial Trees

The 15 Memorial Trees had now had brass plaques fitted. Last year the Parish Council planted 15 trees to commemorate those killed in the two world wars and this year the project was completed (in time for Remembrance Day) by installing brass plaques with individual names of those fallen. The Chairman thanked Vice-Chairman Robert Crocker for his work in installing them and the people who had sponsored individual plaques.

Village Pond

The pond had been cleared and had many of its overgrowing bulrushes removed. The Chairman thanked Councillors Robert Crocker and Tim Webster for cutting the bulrushes back to give a clear open area of water again.

Mobile phone coverage

The mobile phone coverage was to be improved. The Clerk had repeatedly written to mobile phone operators with no joy to request a mast be erected in the village to improve mobile phone coverage. After writing to David Cameron's office, the Council had recently been informed that Vodafone (who control the masts in this area for all the operators) were going to improve the mobile signal for Freeland. However the mast by the engineering works on the Eynsham Road could not be upgraded, so another local (unspecified) mast would have to be upgraded and this could not happen for 18 months.

CRF (sports changing rooms)

The CRF was now 2.5 years old and had greatly helped to promote sport in the Village. One of the major grant sponsors (Sport England) required the Parish Council to give a detailed report every 6 months (for 5 years) of the usage of the facility this has been provided with the help of Matthew Hardy (for the football) and Simon Brown (for the Cricket). What was particularly noticeable, was that the number of youth teams playing and attending training sessions had increased and thanks were expressed to Matthew Hardy and Simon Brown and others who have

helped to organise these training sessions and provided the usage figures. Simon was due to speak about Cricket later in the evening.

Dog fouling

In relation to sports activities, the Parish Council were concerned about dog fouling of the playing field (particularly the football pitches) and if this continued the Council may have to get a bye-law to stop dogs running loose on the field. This was not something the Council wished to pursue but may become necessary if a few people did not cooperate.

Highway Matters

Speeding: The Parish Council had been concerned about vehicles speeding through the Village – particularly near the school. The Clerk had written to companies where their lorries or buses could be identified as travelling too fast and generally positive responses had been received.

The Council had made a request for two Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) to be installed and one had now been added to the top of the School flashing sign post to warn traffic heading North before the School. Unfortunately County Highways funding would not currently allow for a second VAS to be installed.

Drivers getting stuck in Pigeon House Lane

Two new “Unsuitable for HGVs” signs had been fitted in Pigeon House Lane to try and help prevent articulated lorries getting stuck, especially by the sharp bend at the bottom of the hill.

Minor pothole repairs

The state of the roads in Freeland was deplorable due to the lack of funds available by County Highways. The Parish Council had asked for some funds so that they could employ a local contractor to help with minor repairs and OCC had sent a cheque for £1,500. That amount would not go very far and it had been difficult to interest a tarmac company in doing the work because of the insurance and health and safety aspects of doing work on the highway. However a company called Churchill Surfacing Contractors in Kingham had agreed to repair the long rut-filled trench that goes through the Village past the school and this work should happen shortly.

Devolvement of responsibilities from OCC

Following on from the last two items and with the County Council so short of funds, the County Council had looked at ways of shedding itself of costly responsibilities. Some of these looked likely to be taken on by the Parish Council (probably with very little funding attached). It was not yet known what will be finally proposed but there had been discussions of work such as grass cutting and maintenance of verges, roadside signs and drainage channels. Further information on this matter was awaited.

Planning matters

Two large planning applications by Pye Homes and Commercial Estates Group (CEG) in Hanborough had been rejected by WODC planners. The Pyes application had gone to appeal and the matter was currently with the Inspector who had deferred discussion until 17th May.

A Corpus Christi planning proposal was awaiting a decision by WODC planners.

There would be further discussion about planning matters later in the evening.

The Daniel Homes application for 29 houses in Freeland and access off the A4095 was approved (subject to legal agreement) by WODC and the full application was now awaited.

The old shop site in Parklands which had permission for 10 flats plus a small shop was in the process of being sold, but the process was going extremely slowly.

The Chairman concluded his report by passing on a number of thanks to various people/groups – these were as follows:

The Internal Auditor, Brian Wildblood for his help in auditing the accounts. Brian replaced Peter Gill who had now retired after 7 years of service;

Nigel Green for keeping the lawns and hedges around the Village Hall, the Cemetery site and the Green so well mown and clipped;

Kenny Wylie for editing the very helpful Village Grapevine;

Bill Phillips for constantly picking up litter and making the Village look so much neater;

Members of the Gardening Club run by Jill and Ray Evans for the wonderful display of daffodils throughout the Village and for their help in weeding the front garden of the Hall - and as part of that group: John and Margaret Hewitt for keeping the Pump on the Green well stocked with lovely flowers;

To the District Councillors (Colin Dingwall and Toby Morris) for all their help during the year and the County Councillor (Louise Chapman) for her assistance with various matters.

He also passed on his thanks to all of the Parish Councillors for their individual efforts. In particular he thanked the Vice-Chairman, Robert Crocker for his constant help on many matters throughout the year, and Janet Dalton who had served at least 35 years on the Parish Council and who would not be seeking re-election this year.

He also thanked the Clerk, Lisa Smith for all her untiring efforts on the Council's behalf throughout the year.

4. ANNUAL REPORT BY THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR – LOUISE CHAPMAN

Unfortunately Louise Chapman was not present so no report could be given.

5. ANNUAL REPORT BY THE DISTRICT COUNCILLOR – COLIN DINGWALL

Colin Dingwall gave a brief report regarding progress made during the past year by West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC). He firstly commended the Parish Council in what they had achieved, especially when they are faced with many challenging issues.

Despite austerity measures, the District Council was in a very good position having cut 35% of its budget without cutting services. This had been achieved by introducing shared services with other District Councils (such as a shared CEO and Strategic Directors etc). Through a 20/20 vision programme they were embarking on further shared services with several more councils to save a further £2million.

A £1.6million project to provide high speed broadband to otherwise uncovered areas had gone ahead and a new fibre optic cable had been launched.

After 6 years of the Council tax being frozen, a small increase of 8% had to be applied for the coming year – this equated to 10 pence per week per household, and WODC were still the second lowest charging shire in the country.

The main issue for WODC currently was the West Oxford Local Plan which was now in its 3rd draft. Previous drafts of the Local Plan had not been successful, partly due to the SHMA figures being too out of date, so this was currently being revised with less housing figures than the SHMA figures called for. WODC had fought against high numbers of large developments, but there was an overspill from what Oxford City Council needed to provide and this was likely to be shared out among the other 4 district councils, including WODC.

There had been recent talk in the press about the devolution of services from County Councils to District and Parish Councils, and various options were being put forward, including the introduction of the role of a Mayor, or splitting the County into one or four district unitary councils. WODC's preferred option was to have four district unitaries, but nothing as yet had been agreed.

Overall the District was in a good position with low crime rates, good schools, excellent health and leisure facilities and free parking in many towns.

6. REPORT FROM PCSO PHIL WORKMAN, THAMES VALLEY POLICE

Unfortunately PCSO Jones (who was due to speak instead of PSCO Phil Workman) could not be present at the meeting. However, he had sent a brief report regarding crime rates in the local area over the past year which was available should anyone wish to read it.

7. PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS

The Chairman gave a brief talk about how to become a Parish Councillor, and then briefly talked through the nomination form. There were 8 seats on Freeland Parish Council, and at least one Councillor was not standing for re-election, so there would be vacancies this year. The Chairman was keen to see a full election and residents were encouraged to consider joining the Parish Council - nomination packs were available from either the Clerk or WODC offices in Witney. The deadline for return of the nomination forms was Thursday 7th April at 4.00pm and this deadline was absolute.

BREAK FOR REFRESHMENTS: 9.00pm

MEETING RECONVENED: 9.20pm

8. THE BIG LUNCH & THE QUEEN'S 90TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Matthew Ruddle gave a very brief talk on the plans to hold a community picnic on the weekend of 12th & 13th June at the same time of the Queen's 90th Birthday celebrations. The idea was that residents brought a dish of food to share. The event would be held in the Village Hall from 11.30 – 2.00pm, and Matthew would

need some help setting up and clearing away. Further details of the event would be in the next edition of the Grapevine. A query was raised about getting Freeland House involved, and Matthew advised this was certainly possible.

9. UPDATED PLANS FOR THE GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE

Mary-Ann Canning gave a brief presentation of the plans for the Garden of Remembrance by the allotments, which would provide an alternative place for the scattering of ashes to the churchyard. Two different designs (one formal, and one informal) for the layout of the garden had been placed on the village website and presented at a recent Parish Council meeting. The residents' preferred option seemed to be the informal design from the feedback received to date, and this design had meadow and orchard aspects incorporated into the design. Small crab apple or Amelanchier trees would provide a canopy for the Garden, so that there would be no shading over the allotments. The areas in the corners would be traditionally planted with plants such as lavender and thyme, and some options of arbour and arch designs were also shown. The paths would be kept mowed through the meadow area, and there were a number of options in terms of memorial stones that could be used. Once the final plan had been agreed, the work would be put out to tender and could hopefully start later in the year.

10. FREELAND CRICKET CLUB – UPDATE ON MEMBERSHIP AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF CLUB

Simon Brown, Chairman of Freeland Cricket Club gave a talk about the achievements of the Cricket Club that had been re-established in the village. Simon started by giving a brief background to the Club. At its peak Freeland ran a very successful Cricket Club, but approximately 4 years ago the adult team ceased.

The youth teams had progressed from having 12 children 7 years ago, to this year having 50 children. After a lot of hard work from Simon and Graham Walker, the adult team had been re-established and the youth teams had been extended. 21 games were due to be played this year including 6 adult matches and a women's team that had also been re-established. The team captain was the landlord of the village pub, who also very generously provided refreshments after the games, and thanks were expressed to Trevor for his ongoing support.

Since the sudden and very tragic death of Les Hole, the groundsman for the cricket pitch, it had been very difficult to find someone to maintain the pitch. Simon passed on his thanks to the Parish Council who had supported the Club this year by arranging to have the mower, scarifier and roller serviced and made usable so that himself and Graham could carry out the maintenance work on the pitch. The first game was in 4 weeks' time and he asked the residents if anyone had any spare time to help out with the work on the pitch to get in touch with him.

The Chairman then thanked Simon and Graham for all their hard work in re-establishing what appeared to be a very successful cricket team in Freeland and for their work in maintaining the pitch.

11. COULD EYNHAM AND FREELAND MERGE? NEW PLANNING DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

Robert Crocker gave a brief presentation about some new plans being put forward to develop land to the north of the A40 at Eynsham. An initial discussion between Eynsham Parish Council and Savills had been held, with the original draft plans

being for 1,200 properties and a Park and Ride area, but the number of houses had since been revised down to 750 properties, with a proportion of these being set aside as affordable housing. A map was shown to the residents with various areas highlighted to show which areas of land belonged to which landowners, and which areas were being proposed for development.

Robert had also been made aware of a further option being put forward by West Waddy for approximately 10-20,000 homes, with a primary school incorporated into the site, which would spread right up to the parish boundary with Freeland. Apparently some landowners in the area were supporting this option. However, West Waddy had not yet approached Eynsham PC and no plans for this development were currently in the public domain. This was still very much in the discussion and consultation phase.

Robert explained that due to the shortage of housing, parish communities were very vulnerable to speculative enquiries from developers who were keen to develop many pockets of land. However, much of the land being proposed was very rich and diverse countryside which had not been intensely farmed so had many species of plants and wildlife.

Robert responded to a couple of questions from the residents about timings for this development and communicating with other parishes.

12. AFFORDABLE, APPROPRIATE AND SUSTAINABLE HOUSING IN FREELAND

Amy Jackson spoke on behalf of a small group of residents that had come together to discuss some concerns around the lack of availability of adequate affordable 1-3 bedroom housing to buy within Freeland – especially for young people either already in the village or coming into the area; and an ageing population in Freeland, with few younger singles, couples or families, and the longer term detrimental impact on village services and facilities such as the pub.

The group was aware of strong feeling within the village against development, but also knew of many others who shared their concerns and didn't feel it was effective to keep opposing or rejecting all proposals being put forward for development.

The group was aware that there were people in the village who would like to see affordable housing stocks increased, and with an ageing population the diversity of the village cannot be maintained without some increase in housing in the village. She advised that whilst the group recognised that those living next to a potential development will have strong views about the immediate impact on them, this can make it awkward for others living further away about voicing support, even though their views may be entirely valid. The group therefore ultimately wanted the village community to take back control of planning and development in the village whilst ensuring Freeland remained economically viable.

The group was hoping to look at getting an up to date list of Housing Needs Survey figures and to possibly explore the opportunity of producing a Neighbourhood Plan which would direct development for the village into a pragmatic and realistic position.

She finished her talk by advising that the group hoped that these can be seen as positive and practical ambitions which have the potential to align with some of the Parish Council's aims and objectives. The group would be meeting regularly and hoped to expand its membership and Amy invited anyone who had similar views to get in touch.

13. PLAY PARK DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Mary Ann Canning gave a brief presentation of the plans to improve the Freeland Play Park. A final plan of an improved play park was drawn up after the last APM with the help of Russell Play, and was costed at £60,000 to build.

The children at the primary school had been consulted about what equipment they would like to have at the park, and the preferred options were a zip wire, climbing frame, basket swing, sunken trampoline and a Terrano climbing frame, and this equipment had now been ordered.

A grant application had been successfully submitted to WREN for £47,500. The Parish Council would make up the remaining £12,500. Letters of support had been received from the village, which were an important part of being successfully awarded the grant. The Freeland Teddy Girls had been fantastic and had raised £2,167 for the play park, and Mary Ann passed on her thanks to the group for all their efforts and ongoing support to the Parish Council.

The long term plan was to have a footpath that went right across the field and it was hoped to eventually add more equipment over time, including sand pits, a willow structure and an additional bench. Mary Ann pointed out that the area must be respected and dogs needed to be controlled to ensure it remained tidy and a safe place for the children to play. The installation of the new equipment was due to start on 11th April and would take approximately 3 weeks to complete, after which a family open day would be held in early May to officially open the new play park.

Robert advised that there was £2,800 donation from the Open Gardens last year that hadn't yet been spent that he hoped could be persuaded to be put towards the cost of the new footpath across the field.

The Chairman then thanked Mary Ann for her management of the play park project which would be a great asset to the village.

14. FREELAND VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – UPDATE

Robert Crocker, Chairman of the Village Hall Management Committee gave a brief report on the hall's progress over the past year.

The Hall was now 4.5 years old and some maintenance work was now required.

Robert passed on his thanks to the Freeland Hall Management Committee which was made up entirely of friendly and very hard working volunteers.

Crucial roles were the Treasurer and Bookings Secretary and he expressed his thanks to Dot Sharpe and Shelagh Kardos for their hard work and dependability. He also thanked all of the Committee members for doing their bit. The weekend cover had now been extended with some extra volunteers and he asked that if anyone wanted to be involved with the Hall there was always room for an extra pair

of hands. He also passed on his thanks to Wayne Creed for the maintenance work he had carried out and to Sam Walker who had recently joined as the Sports Clubs' representative.

Dot Sharpe gave a brief overview of the finances for the Hall. A summary of the Hall's annual accounts had been made available to residents at the meeting. £14k was being held in the account for ongoing maintenance, and £4.4K was held in the bookings account which was the refundable deposit monies. Usage of the Hall had increased each year and bookings were already being taken for 2017. The Newell Room was also now being used more often. Dot concluded by passing on her thanks to Brian Wildblood for his continuous support with auditing the accounts, especially at the year end.

The Chairman then offered his thanks to Robert and the rest of the Hall Management Committee for their hard work and to everyone who had supported the Hall.

15. AUDITED ANNUAL RETURN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2015, WITH DRAFT UNAUDITED RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS STATEMENT FOR YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2016

Residents were supplied with copies of the Audited Annual Return for the year to 31st March 2015 and a draft statement of Receipts and Payments for the year ended 31st March 2016. These were both accepted by the meeting.

16. REPORTS FROM VARIOUS SOCIETIES IN FREELAND

Reports from the Gardening Club, Freeland Pre-School, Freeland Football Club, Guides, the WI, Freeland Bellringers, the Craft Club and the Baby and Toddler Group were all displayed for residents' information.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no further business the Chairman thanked everyone for their time, interest and input and the meeting closed at 10.30pm.