

Sydenham Parish Council

Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting 6th June 2013

Present: Paul Stancliffe
Roy Harrison
Janet Potts
Heather Mullins
Apologies: Alison Isherwood
Rachel Blake

The meeting was pleased to welcome Councillor David Wilmshurst, Councillor Dorothy Brown, Siobhan McKee, Mike May, Adele Stancliffe, Rosemary Carter and Peter Carter.

Report from the Chairman of the Parish Council - given by Mr Paul Stancliffe

The Parish Council met eleven times in the past year (as there is no meeting in August), and discussed ten planning applications. These included two wind turbines - one of these applications was withdrawn and the second refused. Other subjects discussed during the year have included dog fouling, speeding and the B4445 footpath. Since last year we have been trying to get Chinnor Parish Council to put weedkiller along the stretch from the Inn at Emmington to the garden centre to widen the available path. One small section was treated but the remainder still requires attention, and this is an ongoing matter.

The dropped kerbs at Emmington were achieved with the help of David Wilmshurst, to enable better access for mobility scooters and prams. The next stage is to get the available surface widened, but unfortunately this phase has not occurred. Once the weedkilling has been carried out then siding out can be done to establish how wide the tarmac is. As the vegetation has grown so much Chinnor will be asked to mow before they apply weedkiller. We have also been trying to achieve a safe cycling route from Lewknor to the Phoenix Trail together with a number of other interested parishes. It is hoped that a route can be established from Emmington via Henton to the Phoenix Trail.

The damaged road surface in Sewells Lane has also been discussed. Investigations show that the parish council of 1951 informed the County Council that the lane was a bridleway and so it has been recorded as such on the definitive map, which means that the council will not carry out repairs to the road surface.

During the past year the boundary changes have meant that our county councillor has changed from Caroline Newton to both David Wilmshurst and Nick Carter. Councillor Newton arranged a grant from the Big Society Fund which has provided new goals for the playing field.

The parish council has also been discussing broadband speeds and the village continues to try and achieve a faster connectivity.

The pumping station in Brookstones and the relief sewer system continue to be discussed during the year and Mike May is to report on this later in the meeting. The frequency of power cuts and the power supply to the village has also been a topic.

Regarding the finances, the precept has remained at £8,000. Of this, approximately one quarter is spent on village maintenance, and a further quarter on the Clerk/RFO salary. Other expenditure includes £800 on insurance, £600 to support the newsletter and a donation of £500 to the OSR.

Report from County Councillor David Wilmshurst

Having just gone through the election, Councillor Wilmshurst has been re-elected as Conservative Councillor for this area, which has been extended to include Kingston Blount, Aston Rowant and Tetsworth. The funding allocation remains the same although the division is larger. There will still be the Area Steward's fund which allows for items such as the weedkilling on the main road. The Highways department will fund items such as major resurfacing and potholes. The state of the kerbs along the main road to Thame was brought to Councillor Wilmshurst's attention as the green banks are so overgrown, together with the weeds at the side of the road, that they have totally obscured the kerbs.

Councillor Wilmshurst outlined the changes that have taken place since the election - although there is overall control for the council, there are a number of independent seats. The Committee structure has changed, although

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the Joint Health Committee between the District and County remains unchanged. The Scrutiny Committee has been replaced by an overall performance committee. The Audit and Government committee remains, although has been expanded to cover areas previously covered by other committees. These changes are a trial, to ensure that action is taken as a result of the meetings.

Councillor Wilmshurst will pick up concerns raised this evening over Broadband with his colleague Councillor Nick Carter, who is the cabinet member for Business and Customer Services and who has responsibilities for communications and ICT.

Report from District Councillor Dorothy Brown - attached.

In response to a question from the floor, the ratio of social housing on the cement works was confirmed as 30%. Councillor Wilmshurst pointed out that there are concerns about crossing Station Road in Chinnor to access the cement works, and said that there are plans for slowing the traffic in that area. During discussion about fly tipping, the Postcombe road was suggested as a possible site for a fixed camera. The empty house in Sydenham Grove and concern about the lack of repair to the driveway was highlighted to Councillor Brown. Tripping hazards on the public highway can be reported by the online link on the OCC and village websites, and details of one such accident were given to the Clerk to follow up.

Report from Sydenham Voice - given by Siobhan McKee

Sydenham Voice formed from a group of villagers following a parish council initiative, and meets every other month. The group canvassed the views of the village residents for ideas of things that they would like to see improved. SV has developed a 'Welcome Pack' for new residents, and has created the Sydenham Mail communication channel for circulating useful information by email, which has proved very successful.

The group have arranged for copies of the Chinnor Pump to be available in the telephone box, and have reinstated the Neighbourhood Watch group. In conjunction with the parish council the group are trying to improve broadband speed. The unmanaged copse area on the green was an issue that was raised with the Parish Council and this was dealt with rapidly. In response to ongoing dog fouling problems a number of different signs were left up for a short while for effect. Sydenham Fayre Committee have been asked for funds to replace some of the bulbs on the village verges, and to plant some new areas, and there will be a working party in the autumn to plant for the spring. Over the summer SV are putting together another survey to canvass views for other projects that people might like to see.

The Historical Society is putting together a digital photographic record, and also typing up the registers of births, marriages and deaths. The aim is to have an electronic record that can be viewed more easily. The display of records in the church on 1st June received very positive comments. A churchyard plan is also being compiled by the Historical Society.

Report from Munday's Charity - given by Paul Stancliffe

This charity runs the allotments, and during the past year received income of £375. As expenditure was £164 this leaves the accumulated funds at £1,836.64. There is now more latitude for how these funds can be spent, as the Charity Commission have now approved the amendment to the rules of expenditure. The income can be given to groups and amenities operating within the parish, and ideas of what the funds could be spent on would be welcomed.

Report regarding Brookstones pumping station - given by Mike May

Due to the unacceptable frequency of flooding problems in Brookstones, the parish council, residents and our local MP joined together to pressure Thames Water to resolve the issue. In practice at the moment some houses in Brookstones are unsaleable, and the problem also extends to Kingston Stert and Emmington. There is also the effect that the tankers have on the village as a whole.

The main solution suggested was the relief sewer scheme, which would cut across the Stert road, go under the Chinnor road and over to Henton. This would leave the Brookstones pumping station with only the waste from

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Sydenham and part of the Stert to deal with. The scheme would cost £2.5-3m. Thames Water have been brought to account and have reached the position of wanting to solve the problem, but it has needed perseverance. Monthly meetings have been held with residents and representatives from parish councils, and a long term solution has now been committed to.

At the end of last month the Thames Water Investment Committee approved the sewage relief scheme, with implementation to start in Spring 2014. This is marvellous news that they have allocated funding as it will solve all the issues, and it is a major commitment from Thames Water.

This does mean that we still have to manage this winter with the current conditions, however it is a major step forward and there is light at the end of the tunnel.

In the last two years there have been many steps taken to reduce the impact of flooding - a standby generator has been installed, the pumps have been replaced, the alarm and control systems have been changed to give earlier alerts, and Sydenham is on a top priority for tankers should the need arise. Where verges have been damaged by tankers over the winter, Thames Water have pledged to repair them, and it was decided that it would be better to do this after the Fayre to allow the grass to grow. Hopefully in the next few weeks Thames Water will also be putting in kerbs to protect the flood banks in Brookstones.

There have been concerns in terms of the environment and landowners in respect of the relief sewer scheme, but environmental surveys prove that there is no major impact on wildlife, and negotiations with landowners are progressing well. It would be too late for the scheme to start this year as the work must be finished before the winter weather, so the aim is to start as soon as possible in the spring.

In the short term, there will still be problems until the relief scheme is in place. At present there is an interval of 1-1.5 hours between the alarm going off and flooding. If flooding occurs before the tankers can get to the village the flood goes over the ground and then into the brook via the drains. The content of floodwater is approximately 90% groundwater, and only 1% is contaminated sewage. Because of the other problems experienced by residents during flooding (not being able to flush toilets or use washing machines), Thames Water reacted by putting in an overflow pipe, which they intend to use under certain circumstances to discharge the diluted sewage into the brook under licence from the Environment Agency. This prevents the floodwater going over the road, and into gardens and houses. In practice this pipe has bungs in it so it cannot work unless Thames Water actively send someone to remove them. It is not a system that will automatically discharge into the brook in times of high water, and is not an open discharge.

As far as the pumping station is concerned, failure is still possible, but the likelihood is much reduced and there are many safety features in place. Once the relief sewer is installed, the capacity of the Brookstones station will be far greater and this will increase the lead time between the alarm and any flooding.

A précis of this report will be included in the village newsletter.

The meeting thanked Mike May and David Read for all their work on this project.

Open Forum

The pothole next to the water cover in the road outside the Old Chapel has been reported to Thames Water as the county council will not carry out repairs concerned with manholes.

There being no further questions the meeting closed at 9.20 for refreshments.

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