

AMPNEY CRUCIS PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 9 MAY 2019 AT 7.00PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL, AMPNEY CRUCIS.

Present: 20 electors plus County and District Councillors
Presiding: Neil Holt
Clerk: Jayne Webster

1. Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on 14 May 2018

The minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.

2. Annual Report for Ampney Crucis Parish Council

The Chairman gave the following report:

It has been an interesting and busy year for the Parish Council.

At the May 2018 meeting I was re-elected as Chairman and Doug Crook was re-elected as Vice Chairman. Other members of the Council throughout the year were Rosanna Armitage, David Hardy, Tracy Oosthuizen, Andrew Raphael and Tony Williams.

Throughout the year, the Parish Council has been very ably represented at District level by David Fowles and by Shaun Parsons at County level. Both have been diligent in attending Parish Council meetings whenever possible, notwithstanding their responsibilities to other parishes.

I am sure all members of the Parish Council have welcomed and appreciated their proactive engagement and contributions to our meetings.

In particular, Cllr Fowles has been very supportive of the parish and the parish council on planning matters and in addressing our concerns over CDC's inconsistent application of their own planning processes. I would like to extend the Parish Council's thanks to Cllr Fowles for all of his help over the last four years and I wish him well following his recent failure to secure re-election.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to our new District Councillor, Cllr Lisa Spivey and I hope that she will continue to support and represent the views of residents and the Parish Council, even when they are counter to those of other CDC Members and Officers.

Four villagers or local residents who have continued to provide a regular service to the Council and the Village are: Janet Campbell, our Tree Warden; Paul Brice, who manages the village website; Frank Skinner, who coordinates and manages the Village Network; and Gordon Ford who has reliably cleared our village street and lanes after heavy snow.

I would like to thank them all and commend their commitment and timely engagement.

We have held seven meetings over the past year covering a wide variety of topics.

Planning

The Parish Council received 36 planning applications this year, including 13 tree work applications.

The new CDC Local Plan was finally agreed and received approval from central government. That has removed any uncertainty regarding which planning policies take precedence although we have already seen developers trying to breach the Plan, in some cases apparently with support from CDC Officers.

All planning applications can be viewed online at www.cotswold.gov.uk. Village residents who have any concerns about specific applications that are still at the consultation stage are invited to contact a member of the Parish Council or our Clerk.

Similarly, any villagers considering submitting planning applications are invited to contact the Parish Council to discuss their intentions.

Finance

The precept for the year ending 31 March 2019, was £18,239 and there was no Council Tax Support Grant.

Looking towards the new financial year, we have continued to make provision in the budget for future repairs and maintenance work on the Lych Gate, the Preaching Cross and the War Memorial.

In addition, we have allowed for part funding towards further reinstatement works along the Village Street.

We have also set aside funds towards the replacement of the village defibrillators.

The accounts for the year have been audited by our Internal Auditor, Mrs Judy Smith and externally by PKF Littejohn. The relevant pages of our annual audit and other Parish Council documents are accessible through the village website as well as being posted on various noticeboards around the village.

Burial Ground

Work on the extension to the Burial Ground is effectively complete and edges of the pathways have been marked out. In time, they will be delineated by stone setts laid flush in the ground to ease mowing and maintenance.

Routine mowing of the Burial Ground is done under our village grounds maintenance contract.

The annual Burial Ground clear up took place on 18th November 2018 with a record 20 adults and 4 children taking part. I would like to thank everyone who turned out for their hard work.

However, the expansion of the Burial Ground has meant that the amount of occasional maintenance needed to keep brambles, ivy etc under control has also increased and we hope villagers or relatives of those buried in the burial ground will continue to help in keeping the burial ground tidy and cared for.

During the winter, tree works were completed to make safe or remove branches damaged by earlier heavy snow.

Lych Gate (formerly the village mortuary)

The timber frame and exterior walls of the Lych Gate are in need of repair and more general refurbishment. We have sought advice as to the extent of essential works.

Old coatings applied to the timbers some years ago need to be removed, damaged timbers repaired or replaced and treated with a preservative, and where necessary, external render will also need to be repaired or replaced.

The Parish Council has invited expressions of interest from local builders and will be tendering the works in the coming year.

Preaching Cross

The Parish Council is responsible for the maintenance of the Preaching Cross and the land immediately around it. Works undertaken by volunteers in January last year have let more light into the area around the Cross and the public footpath to the church.

However, maintenance of the footpath itself is the responsibility of the landowners through whose land it passes. Whilst it is still passable, the condition of the footpath continues to deteriorate and work needs to be done to improve drainage and reinstate the surface of the path. The Parish Council has been working with the Parochial Church Council to help coordinate those works.

War Memorial

The War Memorial remains in good condition. Maintenance of the garden around the memorial continues to come under the grass cutting contract and is working well.

Highway matters

The Parish Council continues to work with County Highways regarding any highways related in the parish. In that regard, we very much appreciate the ongoing cooperation of the Local Highways Manager, Richard Gray in that regard.

Specific areas covered during the year include:

A417 – traffic calming measures:

The Parish Council has continued to maintain the grass verges along the northern edge of the A417, between Ampney Park and Mill Cottages. This, together with the village entry and exit signs installed on the A417 in 2016/17 have been intended to alert drivers to the fact that drivers are passing through an inhabited area, and to drive appropriately.

As an extension of that strategy, we installed two mobile vehicle activated “Slow Down” signs in May 2018, one on each of the eastbound and westbound carriageways of the A417. The signs were funded by the Police Crime & Commissioner’s Fund for Safe and Social Driving and their regular maintenance as well as collection of data is done by volunteers from the village.

The Parish Council will continue to collect and analyse the data gathered by the signs with a view to determining whether or not there is a demonstrable case for a speed limit reduction or other traffic calming measures along the A417.

Roadside verges:

The Parish Council continues to be concerned about the erosion of roadside verges around the village. We had secured matched funding under the County’s Community Offer Scheme for the reinstatement of the verges and installation of stone setts along the north side of the Village Street between School Lane and Allotment Lane. Those works were completed in the Easter 2018 school holidays.

Since then, we have secured further matched funding to reinstate the verges and install new setts around the northern edge of The Pound and its boundary with the Village Street. Those works were completed in March this year. County Highways have also installed bollards to discourage larger vehicles from mounting the verge there.

Potholes and general condition of village highways:

The number of new potholes, and the regular and rapid deterioration of previously repaired potholes on the village street and its surrounding lanes continues to be of significant concern to a lot of residents.

The Parish Council hopes that the recent change of contractor by County Highways will expedite improvements in the speed, quality and longevity of repairs. Time will tell.

In the meantime, I would encourage any villager identifying a pothole or other road damage to report it directly to County Highways via their online portal at www.gloucestershire.gov.uk.

The same process can be used to report blocked storm drains.

Footpaths

The Council has continued to maintain good relations with landowners and farmers over the past year. The majority of footpaths and stiles within the village are clearly marked and most are in good condition.

However, we do rely upon members of the public to alert us to any problems with the footpath network, including damaged or impassable stiles.

Village Spring Clean & Litter Pick

A very successful spring clean took place on Sunday 17th March 2019 and I would like to thank the 23 adults and four children who volunteered. We collected 20 bags of rubbish plus sundry larger items, including a vacuum cleaner!

Also, and for the first time in recent years, our volunteers included a couple from Ampney St Mary and our District Councillor, David Fowles, who picked the A417 from the Red Lion to the Ivy Church – a stretch not for the faint hearted!

I do feel that there has been an overall reduction in litter around the village and that has been due, at least in part, to the regular actions of villagers who have been picking and disposing of litter as and when they see it.

On behalf of the Parish Council I would like to thank all of those villagers for their continuing efforts.

General Village Maintenance & Facilities

Grounds maintenance:

Cottage Garden Services continued to cut the grass on open spaces and verges in and around the village and on the Burial Ground and War Memorial under a three-year contract awarded in 2017.

I would like to record that the Parish Council has very much appreciated their work, and also their timely actions to address specific problems, on a case by case basis.

Village defibrillators:

The Council continues to make provision in the annual budget towards replacement of the two defibrillators at the end of the current leasing contract with the South Western Ambulance Service.

As part of that contract, we receive at least one training session per year in the use of defibrillators and more generally in CPR techniques and I would like to thank the volunteers who gave up their time to attend the session last October.

The Playground:

Day to day management of the playground continues to be the joint responsibility of the Friends of Ampney Crucis School and the Playground Committee, although the Parish Council meets the cost of insurance.

The Council maintains a reserved fund of approximately £6,000 to provide for the reinstatement of the land currently occupied by the playground in the event that it ever has to be removed.

Other village matters:

Notwithstanding provision of five dog waste bins and other general waste bins across the village that may be used to deposit bagged dog waste, it is very disappointing to report yet again that some villagers or other dog walkers still do not pick, bag and bin their dog waste.

Allotment Lane seems to be particularly badly affected and given its proximity to the children's playground; I find it hard to understand why some dog owners are apparently so lacking in any sense of responsibility.

Such behaviour is not only deeply anti-social, but is also potentially very harmful to young children and other users of our lanes and footpaths, not least those who regularly mow or maintain our public footpaths, but also to livestock in fields through which those footpaths run.

It is also against the law, punishable by fines of up to £1,000. I would encourage you to please spread the word, encourage better behaviour among dog owners or walkers and report any observed bad behaviour to CDC, who have assured us that any reports will be treated in confidence.

Sadly, there has also been a return to the village of sheep worrying, resulting in the death of ewes and lambs on fields around the villages.

In some circumstances, farmers are legally entitled to shoot dogs caught worrying livestock.

We are fortunate to live in a village surrounded by open countryside, but that brings responsibilities, which include keeping our dogs under control, not only when near livestock, but also in woodland or other cover where there are game bird feeders or release pens.

I would encourage you to please spread the word – we have been assured that persons will be prosecuted if they are found to have allowed their dogs to worry livestock or to foul footpaths or highways.

Community Emergency Plan

The Emergency Plan is updated regularly and lodged with CDC; a copy is posted on the village website.

Communications

The Ampney Times continues to be delivered to all households in the three villages, Ampney Crucis, Ampney St Mary and Ampney St Peter. Its production and timely distribution is a true team effort and the whole production team deserve our ongoing thanks.

The newsletter continues to be funded from advertising revenue, but its running costs are underwritten by Ampney Crucis Parish Council.

Many residents have also opted to receive their copy electronically, distributed by Frank Skinner alongside the 'Village Network', which now links approximately 140 households through periodic and timely e-mail alerts of events or other information relevant to villagers.

A new noticeboard has also been installed alongside the Cricket Ground fence. The Parish Council paid for it to be made by Harold Stevens and installed by Harold and Terry Underwood – thanks go to both of them!

Finally, on behalf of the Parish Council I would like to thank our Clerk, Jayne Webster who has kept us on the straight and level over the last four years, as well as all those who have contributed in any way to the life of the village in the last year – without your help the village would not be such a pleasant place in which to live.

Also thank you to everyone who attended the Annual Parish Meeting.

3. Parish Council accounts for the year ending 31 March 2019

These were circulated and noted.

4. Reports from the Village Hall Charity, the Robert Pleydell Educational Charity and the Community Trust

Annual reports for the Village Hall and the Robert Pleydell Educational charities were given and noted.

Rosanna Armitage, on behalf of the Ampney Crucis Community Council, advised that it was now closed and the final funds had been distributed to the Friends of the School (who are planning on adding books to the library), the Church and the Playground Committee.

5. Reports from District and County Councillors

Councillor Fowles thanked the Chairman and outgoing members of the Parish Council for their hard work and commitment over the last 4 years. He also congratulated his successor Councillor Spivey. He advised that the Local Plan is now in place and although it took a long time, compared to other areas it went through smoothly and in a timely way. The Chesterton development will see approximately 120 houses built each year and the Section 106 payments are nearly in place. Whilst this is a rather complicated process, there will be approximately £10 million of agreed schemes for Cirencester including a new community centre, new school and road improvements.

Councillor Spivey thanked David Fowles for his report and advised that the new cabinet would start to implement the pledges detailed in their manifesto, ensuring good communication.

Councillor Parsons advised that unfortunately this year there would not be a booklet explaining how the Council Tax is distributed. He advised that there is still a large continuing pressure on adult services and in addition, £11 million had been earmarked for children services, since 2014 there had been a significant rise in the number of children in care. With regard to the highways, the new contract is in place and more authority will be given to local managers such as Richard Gray, who is responsible for the highways around Ampney Crucis. He urged residents to continue to report potholes around the county and advised that outstanding work was reducing.

One villager raised concerns over the condition of grass verges and Councillor Parsons agreed to pass on his comments. Another point raised was the suggestion of having a weight restriction on the bridge when entering the village. Again, Councillor Parsons agreed to raise the point.

6. Discussion regarding the necessity of a Neighbourhood Development Plan

The Chairman gave a short overview of how a village might use a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). He stressed that a NDP was only valid for the duration of the Local Plan, however, once one is in place a village would be in a better position to update it following expiry of the current Local Plan. The Chairman felt that the parish's main concerns about the Planning Department at CDC involved inconsistency of process and an apparent willingness to act counter to approved planning policies. He was therefore concerned that a NDP would not address these issues.

He went on to explain that the Parish Council has talked to Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) and attended a work shop at which NDPs were strongly promoted. The workshop had however, been very useful in that it had allowed the views and experiences of communities already involved in developing NDPs to be heard. One regular comment from those communities and others across the country is that the amount of work involved in development of a NDP should not be underestimated. Successful NDPs have involved extensive local consultation with residents as well as their local planning authority, requiring the committed input and engagement of a significant number of residents who have then gone on to draft the plan for review and agreement by a government appointed inspector.

The timescale required to develop an approved NDP is usually 3 years and whilst some grant funding is available for professional services, the village would also be required to contribute financially.

The Parish Council have twice asked for volunteers who would be willing to take the project forward and so far, only 3 villagers have expressed an interest.

A lengthy discussion followed involving the audience and it was agreed that the Parish Council would consider inviting Barbara Pond, from GRCC, plus James Brain and Joseph Walker, from the Forward Planning Department at CDC, to address a public meeting in order to outline the process of developing a NDP. Both David Fowles and Councillor Spivey advised that they would be willing to assist.

7. Questions from the floor

All questions were dealt with as they arose during the meeting.

One villager thanked Neil Holt, as the retiring Chairman of the Parish council, for all his hard work. In response Neil Holt thanked Rosanna Armitage and David Hardy, as outgoing members of the Parish Council, for their commitment.

Councillor Raphael read out a statement, on behalf of Councillor Crook, thanking all the outgoing members of the Parish Council for their contribution to the village over the past few years.

The Chairman closed the meeting by thanking those present for attending.

Meeting closed at 8.25pm.