

SHERSTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING held on Thursday 28 May 2009 in Sherston Village Hall at 7.30pm

PRESENT

Parish council chairman Mr John Matthews took the chair. Thirty-eight other residents were present including ten parish councillors, Wiltshire councillor Mr John Thomson and acting parish clerk Ms Lynda Fleming.

Mr Matthews outlined the format of the meeting.

Copies of the minutes of the 2008 APM, the draft accounts and the meeting agenda were issued and an attendance register was circulated.

1 Convening notice

Approved

2 Apologies

Mr Graham Morris, Mrs Sue Morris, Ms Fiona David, Mrs Caroline Moore and Mr Philip Moore

3 Minutes of the annual parish meeting of 29 May 2008

Agreed unanimously

4 Matters brought forward from the meeting of 29 May 2008

None

5 Report by the parish council chairman

Mr Matthews said the year had produced more positive than negative events in Sherston. The negatives had included: enforcement problems with footpaths and unauthorised development; parking and traffic; the lack of plastic and cardboard recycling facilities; and the non-arrival of the new notice board for the wall of the old school building.

However, he added, there was to be a recycling presentation to the parish council.

And, during Mr Matthews's report, the new notice board was delivered.

On the positive side was the introduction of Cliffhanger which, said Mr Matthews, had proved enormously successful in keeping residents informed and was making a small profit from its advertising. He paid tribute to the hard work of the Cliffhanger team of: Beryl Clampton, Lynda Fleming, Frank Hatt, Cilla Liddington, Richard Maslen, John Mackison, Caroline and Phil Moore, Martin Rea and Paul Ormiston. He also thanked the printers CPC, of Pinkney Park, for producing 850 copies of the latest 20-page edition in less than a day. Mr Matthews added parishioners must ensure the production of Cliffhanger did not become a burden for the volunteer team.

The footpath group, formed to talk constructively to council officers, farmers and landowners, was another success.

The parish council had leased Grove Wood as a community wood and Irene Johnston had been appointed parish tree warden.

A new classroom had been opened in the school and the parish council had attempted to improve communications with parishioners in Willesley particularly thanks to Willesley resident Mike Barnes. Mr Barnes later said the people of Willesley no longer felt excluded.

Once the old school had been converted for community use, visiting officers from the new Wiltshire Council would be able to provide information on their services.

Last year's Boules Day had been a great success and Mr Matthews reminded the meeting of this and other forthcoming summer events.

He thanked the parish councillors for their work - especially vice-chairman Martin Rea and treasurer Geoff Martin - and the parish clerk Sarah Wood.

6 Financial report

Presenting the draft accounts, Mr Martin outlined the auditing process which, he said, should be completed in July.

He said the comparatively large sum in the bank was largely attributable to the grant received from the former North Wiltshire District Council for the old school conversion. As this could not be passed to the project until it was up and running, it was still technically repayable to the new Wiltshire Council.

Mr Martin added that, once the long-running negotiations over the playground were settled, a further £5,000 would be disbursed.

There were no questions from the floor and Mr Matthews said parishioners could ask questions about the accounts at any time through the parish clerk Mrs Wood.

7 The Old School Project

As the parish council was still awaiting a formal response to its offer for the premises, Mr Matthews said there was a limit to the amount of financial detail which could be reported.

But, he added, the project was in a strong financial position.

He reminded the meeting that, the previous year, councillor Mr Thomson had suggested raising money by selling the allotments for housing. To avoid the loss of the allotments, two local trusts had made generous offers totalling £340,000. There was also an opportunity to borrow up to £500,000 from the Public Works Loan Board.

Mr Matthews said that, as the old school is a listed building, the Heritage Lottery Board was likely to look favourably on the project.

However, there could be no long-term plans until the building had been bought.

Mr Matthews said the economic downturn had meant the parish council had reduced its offer for the site from £450,000 to £323,000.

In addition, £75,000 would be paid for control of the field behind the village hall which is mainly owned by Wiltshire Council and, to a lesser degree, by the Diocese of Bristol. Wiltshire Council will provide a long lease with conditions while the diocese wants to sell its strip.

While there was an agreement to the old school scheme in principle, there was still none in writing. Mr Matthews said there had been frustrations with the diocesan agent and thanked the diocese itself for its patience.

He added that working out how to pass the field to the village when one part would be freehold and the other leasehold was causing a hold-up.

But Mr Thomson said the county council would buy the land from the diocese and put it into the package it was offering the village.

Mr Matthews commended Paul and Gail Mather of Sherston Post Office on their successful business and expressed hope they would be able to continue to resist closure by being able soon to take up a tenancy in the bigger premises of the old school.

Turning to the governance of the Old School Project, Mr Matthews said the charitable trusts had to be sure their money was donated to an organisation acceptable to the Charity Commission. To that end Burges Salmon, who are the Bristol solicitors employed by the parish council, and the trustees had proposed a community interest company. Burges Salmon had made the proposal to the Charity Commission on 27 April and Mr Matthews had contacted them that morning to be told they would give an answer within 15 working days.

As soon as the proposal was accepted, said Mr Matthews, pressure could be put on the diocesan agent.

Mr Matthews said the community interest company would be separate from the parish council and comprise different individuals, although the parish council would have to have some involvement in case the PWLB money was called in. The company would be independently run and anyone in the village could get involved.

Mr Matthews thanked Richard Hulme who had put a great deal of time and effort into the project despite heavy work and domestic commitments.

In response to a question from Maggie McKenna, Mr Matthews stressed only the field would be on a long lease; the school would be bought freehold.

8 Other parish business

8.1 Westonbirt road traffic. John Hall asked whether the council could do anything to slow traffic on the blind corner between the B4040 and the children's nursery.

Saying there were speed guns for use by anybody in the community, Mr Thomson offered to ask Sgt Martin Alvis to investigate whether it was appropriate to take such enforcement action. If that did not work, Mr Thomson could ask the highways department for signs but he cautioned against spoiling the village landscape with signs. He added drivers were sometimes perceived to be speeding when they were not.

8.2 Willesley speed limit. Willesley's link to the parish council, Mr Barnes, said the introduction of a 50mph limit on the A433 had resulted in a sign de-restricting speed at the entrance to Willesley. This had focused attention on speeding drivers at a point where it is difficult even for two cars to pass.

Mr Barnes said he had been told by the county council that a 30mph sign would cost the 20 or so households up to £5,000.

He asked Sherston Parish Council unanimously to agree that a 30mph restriction was necessary and to pay for it.

Mr Thomson said evidence of a problem had first to be provided. To achieve this, the parish council should request a 'golden river' which is two cables across the road to register speeds and the mix of vehicles. If appropriate, the parish council could then request a 30mph limit. Because of problems with traffic and accidents on the B4040, there was extra funding for the north of Wiltshire. Once the B4040 had been dealt with, it might be possible to consider, for example, a one-way system for Willesley.

8.3 Willesley weight restriction. Mr Barnes asked whether a weight limit could also be imposed but one which did not affect Willesley businesses which relied on lorries such as the equine clinic.

Mr Thomson said a weight restriction would only apply to vehicles using the road as a through route. It would not affect businesses or deliveries. He added that the cost should be met from general taxation.

In response to a question from Tony Wood about speeding in Sherston, Mr Thomson replied that drivers were so restricted they 'went crazy' on country roads. The solution was not more signs but greater local powers and national speed limits of 30mph in villages and of 50mph on country roads. Wiltshire Council was hoping for government guidance along these lines.

8.4 Sign at Sopworth Lane. Bob Broadway said the 30mph sign at Sopworth was too close to the crossroads. Mr Matthews said it could be looked at in any future rationalisation of signs.

8.5 Parking. Cilla Liddington said bad parking at the junction of Silver Street and Cliff Road was restricting the access of large vehicles and thereby endangering elderly householders who might need the emergency services. Drivers who had parking space should be encouraged to use it to the full, said Phil Cutcher.

Malcolm Hillier asked why the parish council was allowing High Street householders to

reserve parking spaces with traffic cones outside their premises. He said he wanted to see more action from the council.

High Street resident Bob Broadway outlined the problems caused by visitors' cars, including hikers and those of people from The Tartars and Manor Close driving to work in the High Street. Mr Matthews asked whether the parish council could provide more parking off the High Street. But Trevor Moody said a parking survey showed drivers were not interested in parking anywhere else.

Saying the problems occurred during the day, Mrs Liddington said nonetheless hikers should not be discouraged as they brought business to the village and that the doctors' surgery was used by outsiders.

Mr Thomson said there were some 30 spaces at the school not used at weekends or holidays and being supported by council tax payers. Mrs Ness Whiffen undertook to raise the possibility of their use with her fellow school governors.

8.6 Recycling. Richard McNicol said the community bins for plastic and cardboard scheduled for near the hall heating unit had not materialised and nor had a recycling presentation which Mr Thomson had undertaken to arrange. Mr Thomson replied that restrictions on addresses imposed by the forthcoming elections had prevented the presentation but that he would pursue the matter.

8.7 Luckington Lane development. In answer to a question from Mrs Liddington about the unauthorised developments at Luckington Lane, Mr Matthews said the matter was still in the hands of the county council's enforcement officers. But Mr Thomson reported that papers were being drawn up for legal enforcement over the wall at the entrance to the site and over some of the structures by the caravan. The Environment Agency was dragging its feet over tackling the bridge which the parish council feared might impede the flow of the river and cause flooding.

Thanking Ms Fleming for taking the minutes and urging parishioners to email the parish clerk or phone any councillor with their queries, Mr Matthews closed the meeting at 8.40pm.

Lynda Fleming
Acting clerk to Sherston Parish Council