



Acting Clerk to The Parish Council: Louisa Freeman

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GREAT SHEFFORD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes – 8 January 2024 at 7.30 p.m.

In the Great Shefford Village Hall, Station Road, RG17 7DR

Cllrs Present:

Cllr. Eunice Tweedie

Cllr. Piers Storey

Cllr. Louisa Freeman

Cllr Tony Coard

Cllr. Jessica Copcutt – (SW Rep)

Parish Clerk: Louisa Freeman

Members of the public: Many

Ward Member: Clive Hooker

The Clerk announced that the meeting will be recorded, and the recording will be deleted once the minutes are approved in the next meeting.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies - apologies were received from Miranda Armstrong who was unwell on the night of the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declaration of Interests were raised.

3. MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

Members **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY** to confirm and adopt the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held 6 November 2023 and these were signed.

4. OPEN FORUM

It was noted that many members of the public were in attendance due to the Flood Warnings which had been put in place in the area recently. For that reason, the Chair, Cllr Freeman suggested that the meeting moved immediately to Item 9 on the agenda which covered Emergency Management Team update and Flood Alerts.

David Blundell introduced himself to the meeting as the co-ordinator of the Great Shefford Emergency Management Team. David explained that a WhatsApp system has been implemented in order to cascade information both downwards and upwards in the most efficient way. To date, the Whatsapp system has been working effectively.

Linda Bowden (village Flood Warden) also introduced herself to the meeting and gave an update on issues which the village has been facing including major sewage problems for a number of residents due to the rising ground water levels. Linda advised that today, 8 January, she has collected a Portaloo. WBC have not indicated whether this cost would be recoverable. It is widely acknowledged

that water levels in the village are rising, including water on the A338 (with a risk of freezing overnight), even though it appears that WBC are claiming that the water levels are receding. Despite requesting Thames Water to site to provide a solution to the sewage issue, it has been reported by residents that they have received messages from TW to advise that the situation is sorted when it is not. Linda has written to WBC to ask why Great Shefford appears to be forgotten.

Additionally, Linda is still waiting for a reply re green waste collection and what we do with the material that has been cleared from the waterways. She also raised the issue of some fly tipping which had been left in Spring Meadows and when that would be removed by WBC.

Cllr Storey advised that he had been in contact with Steve Ackrill who had advised that pumps which have been sourced via a contractor should be being installed this week. Linda requested that any such correspondence should be channelled through her so that she could manage the situation. Linda also advised that in the past, a monitoring rota had been put in place around the pump station on account of diesel being stolen back in 2014.

Clive Hooker extended his thanks to Linda for all her efforts as Flood Warden at a time of great stress and strain for everybody. He reported that he has been on the phone for most of the day with Karen Nelson, Project Manager at Thames Water who has advised that tankers are currently at capacity in the area, with 27 a day removing sewage from East Garston alone. Clive also reported that some 90 tankers are full with nowhere left to discharge their contents. The Environment Agency are making efforts to pump water from higher up the Wantage Road in order to reduce the volume coming downstream, but it was noted that this does nothing to help rising groundwater levels.

With regard to the provision of Portaloos, Clive advised that originally he had heard that these would be provided by TW, but that the commitment across the area is simply too big. John Winstanley at WBC has indicated that, in cases where TW are not able to provide Portaloos, then WBC will 'consider' sourcing these. Clive repeated that he is in constant dialogue over this, and has expedited emails which Linda has been sending, but recognised that 1 x portaloos will do little to alleviate the issue.

Cllr Coard expressed concern that it was important to keep clear lines of communication to residents, as it would seem that the village is receiving different information from many different sources. The principle that individual residents are - and must - remain responsible for their own property was widely discussed.

The issue of sandbags was discussed and the fact that sandbags are not routinely available from either the Parish Council or WBC, and indeed, some residents present have already ordered sand to be delivered to their properties. At present the Council are storing some empty sandbags which were bequeathed some time ago by Steve Ackrill, and the Parish Council agreed to purchase sand for the sandbags, the quantity of sand and the terms under which sandbags would be distributed to be agreed at a meeting of EMT members present at the end of the PC meeting. It was recognised that there are some more vulnerable residents, and therefore the EMT Team Leader will make a call on who should receive sand bags, based on individual need and the situation. Should a resident disagree with the Team Leaders decision, David Blundell would be the 'referee.'

Linda Bowden also wished to reiterate that WBC will not collect any used sandbags, not least as the used sandbags may well have become contaminated with foul water (WBC will issue further information about where residents may be able to deposit used sandbags).

It was also noted that the Flood Alleviation Scheme is now waiting for the Environment Agency to withdraw an objection to works.

5. **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The following planning applications had been received since the last meeting, and passed to Cllr Copcutt (councillor i/c Planning). Cllr Copcutt advised that there had been no objections raised by the Parish Council.

2023 23/02204/FUL - East Shefford House, Great Shefford, Hungerford, RG17 7EF
New photovoltaic panels with associated hedge screening.

- 23/02025/HOUSE Rivermead, Newbury Road, Great Shefford, Hungerford Replacement windows, insertion of new entrance door, blocking up of existing entrance door and new double doors to master bedroom with juliet balcony

Cllr Hooker led a discussion on the status of the Local Plan. He reminded the meeting that Bryan Lyttle had attended a PC meeting in September where Mr Lyttle had presented his views and concerns if the Local Plan were ever to be withdrawn (currently the Local Plan runs to 2038). Cllr Hooker reminded the meeting that Mr Little did point out that there were 2 sides of the planning coin to consider: one to preserve the village status quo, and the other to accept new housing which would bring with it additional CIL funds.

WBC had previously published a proposal to withdraw the Local Plan ahead of it going to Public Examination and subsequent adoption. The objective was 'to create a new plan which meets the aspirations of the new administration to put the environment front and centre, while prioritising new homes and employment spaces within existing town and village boundaries.' Cllr Hooker advised that these plans to withdraw the Local Plan for West Berkshire have now been blocked after an intervention by the Government.

The Minister of State for Housing, Planning and Building Safety, Lee Rowley MP, has written to West Berkshire Council to instruct the Council to progress with the Examination of the Local Plan, which was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination in March 2023. The letter warns that further action will be taken unless the Council agrees to halt its current path. The letter cited powers the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities can exert under Section 27 of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act.

There is, of course, concern that a new Local Plan might see an imposition of excessive new housing in the Downlands ward (where previously only 15 new houses had been identified, all in Great Shefford). Updates can be seen by accessing the WBC website.

6. FINANCE

Cllr Freeman circulated to councillors a budget vs expenditure analysis which had been provided by Cllr Armstrong.

Action: Cllrs to contact Cllr Armstrong for any further detail.

In the meantime Cllr Freeman reported that online bank account access has now been granted to herself and to Cllr Tweedie. Cllr Freeman also notified the meeting that Barclays have now appointed Stuart Hughes as our dedicated account manager which should help as a point of contact in the future should any other issues arise.

Action: Clerk to contact Barclays to pursue issue of PINsentry to Cllr Tweedie.

The chair requested a short meeting post the meeting separately with the RFO to discuss outstanding invoices. Members **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY** to confirm the payments as necessary.

7. VILLAGE COMMUNICATIONS

Since the last meeting, the new website has had a soft launch, it is fully active and linked to search engines. Cllr Storey reported that feedback has been positive so far, and engagement has been good. In particular, Cllr Storey would like to focus on a 'one page' news feature for the website which would be updated regularly. Cllr Storey also advised of his intention to build out a (small) wider team of administrators for the website.

The Chair wished to place on record once again, the Council's thanks to Cllr Storey for the many hours spent on developing the new website which it is hoped will become the Parish Council's official communication channel.

Discussions were held on the merits (or otherwise) of multiple news channels (newsletter, Facebook, website) and Cllr Coard queries whether the new website has been promoted throughout the village widely enough so that residents understand it is where they can go to find PC information. Cllr Storey acknowledged that there will always be room for our newsletter and those residents who like to engage with the longer form of the written word, but that the website will hopefully also appeal to those residents who may prefer shorter forms of communication. It was noted that the village Facebook group is not owned or administered by the Parish Council.

The Clerk advised that, following the Core Skills councillor course offered by BALC (Berkshire Association of Local Councils), that the PC must seek to provide a council specific email address which would ordinarily be a .org account. The Clerk will investigate further and report back.

8. VILLAGE ISSUES

The Clerk circulated to councillors the tender from Scofells to provide grounds maintenance for next year. Scofells have suggested that they attend site more often, in order to alleviate issues which were encountered last summer in the playground.

Action: Clerk to provide a further contract for maintenance for comparison purposes.

Cllr Coard reported that the barrier along the footpath in front of the pub has been smashed once again. Cllr Coard also noticed that the property next to the pub have installed new wooden gates and have cut the barrier in order to access this entrance. **Action:** Clerk to write to the residents to enquire whether planning permission was granted for this access.

Speed awareness update - Linda Bowden reported that there has been little activity over the winter months, due to restrictions in daylight hours. Cllr Coard requested that momentum should not be lost on this project, as the issue of traffic and speeding is an ongoing one in the village. If the village is to make any progress in reducing the speed limit from 30mph, we will absolutely need data to back up our requests. The Clerk suggested that she would write to the school once more to see if there is any appetite for a project to make mannequins which could be placed on the roadside. The Council agreed unanimously that funds would be made available for this sort of project.

Action: Cllr Tweedie to progress.

The Clerk advised that she had been in further discussions with the cricket club and WBC to progress the conversation around cricket club nets, and whether these are deemed infrastructure. CIL funds can be used to support infrastructure projects. David Fawcus questioned the use of funds for the Cricket club which is frequented by residents outside the village. The clerk advised that the club supports residents in the village (including one female player U16 who has been given the chance to play league cricket) as well as numerous other local players. She also assured David that no monies have been promised to the club, just an investigation of whether CIL Funds could be directed to them.

Post Christmas Review - The Council wished to place on record their sincere thanks to all who were involved in the securing of this year's village Christmas tree, from the providers of the tree itself, to the loan and storage of the base, the decorating and decorations, procurement of solar lights and the removal of the tree. Discussions were held around the merits of the location this year on account of the fact that there is no electricity supply. Carol Turner suggested that planning for Christmas should

be taking place well in advance of November and she countenanced discussion of the same in September 2024.

9. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT TEAM AND FLOOD UPDATE

See item 4 above.

11. COUNCILLORS

Mindful of the time of the meeting, Cllr Copcutt suggested that perhaps where there was much to discuss on an agenda, that the Council might consider meeting every month instead of every 2 months. The Clerk suggested that calling an Extraordinary meeting where need arose might alleviate any congestion of issues.

There being no other councillor business, the Councillor vacancy was offered to the floor. Carol Turner had introduced herself to a previous meeting and formally expressed her wish to join the Parish Council.

The Councillors voted to unanimously accept Carol onto Great Shefford Parish Council. The clerk thanked Carol for accepting the position.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING.

The next meeting will be on Monday 4 March 2024 in the Great Shefford Village Hall.