

**MINUTES OF ASTON, COTE, SHIFFORD & CHIMNEY
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY 17TH JUNE 2014
IN THE VILLAGE HALL, ASTON AT 8.00 PM**

- 1. Present:** Parish Councillors:
Richard Haines (Chairman)
Jane Everex
Ben Lings
John Ordish
Paul Sparrowhawk
Phil West
- Helen Sandhu (Parish Clerk)
Hilary Fenton - District Councillor
Steve Good – District Councillor
Charles Mathew – County Councillor
Robert Courts, Thames Valley & Chiltern Air Ambulance
Jane Bowley, Lower Windrush Valley Project
Carolyn Simmonds, Chair of Aston & Cote Community Trust
Irene Beadle, leader of 1st Aston Brownies
Roy Williams, former Chairman and member of the Parish Council
4 members of the public

- 2. Apologies:** Parish Councillor Jane West
Thames Valley Police neighbourhood team

3. Welcome

Richard Haines, Chairman of the Parish Council, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the members of the Parish Council who had been elected (unopposed) in May 2014. Six of the councillors were on the Council before, with Phil West joining the Council as a new member.

Mr Haines expressed the Council's thanks to Mr Roy Williams, who had served on the Council for 12 years, latterly as Chairman, who left the Council in May 2014. Mr Williams was presented with gifts as an expression of the Council and community's appreciation for his service.

4. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting on 14th May 2013

Were accepted as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

5. Thames Valley Police

The neighbourhood team had given their apologies for the meeting.

Parish Councillor John Ordish read the written report provided by PCSO Helen Keen:

Between 14 June 2013 and 14 June 2014 there were 4 recorded crimes for the Aston area.

One was for criminal damage to a telegraph pole (undetected), one was for assault on a police constable following a domestic incident (the offender was arrested and charged), and the final two crimes (actual bodily harm and criminal damage) related to a single incident.

There was insufficient evidence to bring charges in relation to the actual bodily harm, but an adult restorative disposal order was issued for the criminal damage.

There have been changes on the neighbourhood team over the past year. PC Richard Conner has retired and been replaced by PC Martyn McHale. Sgt Liz Bell is on maternity leave and has been replaced by Sgt Philippa Payne.

The Eynsham Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG) meets very 5/6 weeks and has worked hard to target the three priorities raised by the community; criminal damage/anti-social behaviour, speeding, and parking. The NAG is made up of members of the community, the police and partner agencies. If residents would like to find out more about the group or get involved, they should contact the Eynsham Police Office.

The neighbourhood team makes regular visits to the primary school, visits Aston once a month for a "have your say" session and are also regular visitors to the Wednesday Club.

Updates on policing matters can be found on the team twitter page (@TVP_Eynsham), via the community alerts messaging system (register on <https://www.thamesvalleyalert.co.uk/>), and on the WODC Safer West Oxon Facebook page.

A new project called VERA (Vulnerable Elderly Residents' Addresses) has been launched in West Oxfordshire. This helps police keep a log of where the most vulnerable people live, so they can make sure they are given the help they need. The neighbourhood team is now calling on residents to let them know if anyone vulnerable lives in their street.

6. Thames Valley & Chiltern Air Ambulance – Mr Robert Courts

Mr Courts told the meeting that Thames Valley & Chiltern Air Ambulance (TVACAA) knows that it is critical that they come out to speak at meetings such as this one, because one of the service's biggest challenges is making people aware that the air ambulance is not part of the NHS and is not government funded. The air ambulance relies on donations in order to operate.

36% of call-outs are for road traffic accidents and 24% are for medical emergencies (such as heart attacks and strokes). In rural areas in particular there are also a lot of call-outs for agricultural and equine injuries. One of the advantages of the air ambulance is that patients can be evacuated quickly and smoothly, saving a slow and bumpy transfer across fields in a land ambulance.

The Thames Valley & Chiltern Air Ambulance is based at RAF Benson and can arrive anywhere in its operational area within 15 minutes. The TVACAA is one of the most advanced in the country, and carries a doctor on board and emergency blood supplies, unlike many other air ambulances.

TVACAA relies on the generosity of the public to keep the helicopter flying – it costs £3.7 million per annum, and only 13-18 months' funding is kept in reserve, which means that ongoing fundraising is critical. 55% of the funds raised is from the weekly lottery. Other funds are raised at events, and some from bequests in people's wills. Further funds are raised through the TVACAA recycling bins which can be found at some local recycling centres. Mr Courts encouraged people to only use these bins when recycling clothing, and to be wary of using the bags which are put through the letterbox – these sometimes purport to be raising money for the air ambulance, but often this is a scam and the clothes are taken by private organisations for commercial gain.

Mr Courts said that civil aviation guidance currently restricts the air ambulance to flying in daylight hours, but that TVACAA is currently looking into extending the times when the helicopter can operate by using night goggles. TVACAA is also looking into how the transfer of patients between the helipad at the John Radcliffe Hospital and the Accident & Emergency

Department can be improved, as there is often a delay whilst the helicopter waits for the arrival of a land ambulance to carry out the transfer.

Mr Courts showed the meeting several photographs of the air ambulance attending incidents, which illustrated very well the ability of the ambulance to land in a wide variety of locations.

Q: Is the children's air ambulance part of TVACAA?

A: No – that is operated by a separate charity. The children's air ambulance is not part of HEMS (the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service); it carries out hospital transfers only, and does not attend emergencies.

Q: Is the on-board medical team employed by TVACAA or by the NHS?

A: The paramedics are employed by the NHS, the on-board doctor is an NHS doctor but is funded by TVACAA.

Q: Does the NHS pay TVACAA for attending at emergencies?

A: No. If a land ambulance attends an incident, the NHS pays for this, but if the air ambulance attends, the cost is met by TVACAA. The air ambulance is also on occasion used to carry out hospital transfers which would alternatively be done by a land ambulance. TVACAA won't discriminate on the basis of funding - the sole focus is on need; if the air ambulance can help meet a medical need, then it will be deployed.

Mr Courts was thanked for his interesting presentation, and a small collection was taken for TVACAA.

7. Lower Windrush Valley Project (LWVP) – Jane Bowley, Project Officer

Ms Bowley told the meeting that our parish sits on the edge of the area covered by the Lower Windrush Valley Project. The project area runs from the A40 at the edge of Witney along the A415 (encompassing the former gravel workings) to Standlake and Newbridge and ends at the river Thames. The Project was set up to manage the after use of the closed gravel pits in a planned and coherent way. A lot of the pits are privately owned, and used for activities such as fishing. The Project has developed the land on which there is public access, creating Rushy Common Nature Reserve and Tar Lakes. The nature reserve is ideal for picnics and dog-walking, and is also well used by schools, who enjoy the large bird hide, pond dipping and nature trails. There is a second nature reserve at Standlake Common on which there are two bird hides. Visitors have to purchase a key to access this reserve for a one-off payment of £10 for life.

Ms Bowley says that she works with the landowners and gravel companies to improve the wildlife habitats in the Project area. There is a meadow adjacent to Standlake Common which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of its rare wildflowers. Seeds have been collected from this meadow and spread on other prepared areas in the Project area in the hope that the flowers will spread. Efforts are being made to build wildlife corridors between the different parts of the Project area. There is also partnership work with the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) on a water vole project, investigating the presence of mink in the area and trying to control their numbers.

Ms Bowley went on to talk about the footpaths across the LWVP area, and the Windrush Path in particular. This is currently in two separate sections – one running from Witney to Hardwick and then a second running from Standlake to the Rose Revived pub at Newbridge. There are plans to close the gap between the two sections to create one continuous path. Ms Bowley recommended that people obtain a booklet on the Standlake Mosaic Trail which runs along part of the Windrush Path.

There are ways for the public to get involved in the project – there is a Thursday volunteer group which carries out various jobs across the project area. Ms Bowley said that she is also carrying out a consultation so that people can have some say in the future of the project, particularly as funding will be reducing. Ms Bowley said that she would send documents through to the Parish Council for comment.

Ms Bowley ended by encouraging people to look at the Project website:
<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/lower-windrush-valley-project>
and blog:
<http://lwvp.blogspot.co.uk/>
for further information.

Q: How is the Project funded?

A: The County and District Councils provide some funding, with the rest of the core funding met from the S106 money historically obtained from the gravel extraction agreements. The S106 funding pot is being run down and will eventually be used up. The Councils are also reviewing their own budgets, which are under pressure. The change in the funding environment is one of the reasons for the current review of the strategy for the future management of the Project. It is hoped that sponsorship or other funding can eventually be obtained from businesses.

Charles Mathew informed the meeting that the County Council has made contact with the landowners of the gap in the Windrush Path, and it is hoped that the plans to continue the Path across the gap will be able to be moved forward soon.

8. Aston & Cote Community Trust – Carolyn Simmonds, Chair

Ms Simmonds told the meeting about the current status of the proposal to provide a social club and more sports facilities at the Village Hall. Research into the various options is being carried out, which will lead into a feasibility study. The research is currently looking into whether it would be better to extend the existing hall or to build a separate new pavilion. Everything would remain under the umbrella of the Community Trust which is required by the trust deed.

Charles Mathew told Ms Simmonds that the Community Trust could apply to him for some funding from his Community Chest budget.

9. 1st Aston Brownies – Irene Beadle, Leader

Ms Beadle told the meeting that she started helping with 1st Aston Brownies 18 months ago having seen a sign saying that more helpers were needed, but three weeks later she ended up running the pack as the existing leaders had been running it for 17 years and had been wanting to stand down for some time.

The pack has 22 Brownies, and a waiting list of girls wanting to join. The weekly activities range from the fun (a meal at Frankie & Benny's, kickboxing) to the more serious, such as a three week anti-bullying course that the pack did. 2014 is the year of the Big Brownie Birthday, with UK Brownies celebrating their centenary. The pack did a lot of fundraising in 2013 so that they could take part in a wide range of celebratory activities. On 26th April the Brownies went on a trip to London on the "Big Brownie Train" – 560 Oxfordshire Brownies travelled on a special train provided by Great Western to London to take part in a picnic at Kensington Gardens. In two weeks' time the pack will be going camping in Cornbury Park, joining 1000s of other Brownies.

The pack gets involved in activities in the wider community, and has taken charge of two church services in St James', with excellent feedback. The pack also asked everyone in

Aston who had been a Brownie in the past to participate in this year's Thinking Day; requesting former Brownies to put a candle/lamp in their window. The Brownies walked around the village and counted 32.

10. Aston, Cote, Shifford & Chimney Parish Council – Richard Haines, Chairman

Richard Haines introduced the newly elected members of the Parish Council, 6 of whom had served under the previous Council, and one of whom – Phil West – is a new member. The election was uncontested, with seven nominations received for the seven vacancies, and so there was no poll.

Richard Haines informed the meeting that the Parish Council now has a twitter account (@AstonOxonPC), and a new parish website has been created which is managed directly by the Parish Council. This has information and links to other organisations in the parish.

One of the most important issues over the past year has been the planning application for a new residential development on the land between Saxel Close and the Village Hall. The Parish Council objected to this proposal on the basis that it would be outside the built envelope of the village and because of concerns over flooding. The District Council resolved to defer a decision on the application at its meeting in April because of concerns over the ability of the sewerage system to cope with 38 new houses. The Planning Committee of the District Council met again on 16th June and resolved to grant outline planning permission with the conditions that the sewerage treatment must be dealt with on site, discharging clean water into the ditch system; i.e., the development will not be connected to the mains sewer system. A total anti-flood water retention system must be built and installed on site. 50% of the homes will be “affordable.” Additionally, the developers must install a zebra crossing across Cote Road at the school and will have to pay for any noise mitigation issues coming from the village hall.

There has been a variety of opinion within the parish on this development; on the positive side, it will bring access to affordable housing to some who might otherwise not be able to remain in the village, and will attract £47,700 of s106 funding towards leisure and play facilities in Aston. The Parish Council is not against a level of development within the village, but is against development in inappropriate locations and maintains its objection to this development.

The Parish Council has had some success in sorting out problems with the highway, particularly on the Cote Mile, on the footway between The Red Lion and the Old Bakery, and the road to Chimney.

Ongoing maintenance and infrastructure improvements have been carried out over the past year – the annual grass cutting contracts continue; the war memorial posts have been replaced (with thanks to Charles Mathew for arranging for the funding); the Jubilee bench has been replaced after it was destroyed by a vehicle; new brown signs have been put in place for the Pottery; and the noticeboard in Southland has been destapled and repainted thanks to Paul Sparrowhawk. The blockwork and kerbing around the War Memorial in the Square remain an issue, for which the Parish Council is continuing to seek a permanent solution. The Lengthsman resigned in June 2013, and with no replacement found, orders for essential maintenance work have been placed with a contractor on a job-by-job basis.

The Parish Council has continued to give donations to organisations within and beyond the parish who apply for funding and who can demonstrate the impact their work has on residents of the parish.

The Parish Council obtains its money primarily from the precept which local taxpayers pay as part of their overall Council Tax. In order to maintain the services provided by the Parish Council, the precept was increased by £368 to £18,868 for 2014/15 – an increase of 2% (71p per year for a Band D property). The County Council has continued to provide a grant (£2,097 for 2014./15) as a contribution towards the cost of cutting the verges and maintaining the war memorial area. The County Council has advised that this will be halved in 2015/16 and withdrawn completely the following year. A further increase in the precept will be required if the current level of service is to be maintained.

The Parish Council has arranged for the Red Lion to be included on the District Council's list of assets of community value. This means that if the owners, Enterprise Inns, decide to sell the pub as a non-going concern, our community will have a 6 month period in which to put together an offer to buy it before it is placed on the open market.

As residents may be aware, the County Council is rolling out "Better Broadband" across most of Oxfordshire through a contract with BT. The Parish Council understands that high speed cabling has been laid to one box at the top of Cote Road, with work to connect most households in Aston scheduled to start in September. Most of Cote, Shifford & Chimney are not covered by the contract with BT, however, and it is hoped that additional funding will be supplied by West Oxfordshire District Council to ensure that high speed broadband is rolled out to all but the most remote of households.

11. West Oxfordshire District Council - Councillor Steve Good

Mr Good said that he had recently moved into Aston and had been very touched by how welcoming the community had been. Mr Good said that he and Hilary Fenton are co-councillors for a Ward which covers our parish, Sutton, Stanton Harcourt, Northmoor and Standlake. As he has lived in several of these settlements over the years, he knows the area very well. Mr Good said that he sits on several different District Council committees and that both he and Hilary Fenton are members of the Lowlands Planning Committee, and so they are very aware of all planning application for the Cote Road development and the concerns of local residents. Mr Good explained that there have been a lot of changes in planning law over recent years, with the presumption now in favour of housing development. Mr Good read from the draft minutes of the Lowlands Planning Committee meeting on 16th June – outline planning permission for the Cote Road development has now been granted, with details about the proposed mechanism for the discharge of sewerage to come back to a future Lowlands Planning Committee meeting unless the proposal is for all foul waste to be dealt with on site.

Mr Good went on to explain why West Oxfordshire District Council cannot demonstrate that it has the required 5 year land supply. The new Local Plan had very nearly been completed when the RAF informed the District Council that they no longer needed as much housing as they had previously advised, which meant that the parameters for the Local Plan had to be changed entirely. Until the Local Plan is finalised, the policies contained in the previous Plan can no longer be relied upon, and this means that the District has reduced protection from speculative development applications.

The District Council members consider that high speed broadband is a vital part of the infrastructure for modern life, and Mr Good said that he is delighted that this service will soon be rolled out to much of the parish.

2014/15 is the fourth year in which the District Council has agreed a balanced budget, and the District Council's share of council tax has been held at the same level for the fourth consecutive year, with no serious cutbacks in frontline services, and the retention of free parking.

Mr Good ended by thanking people for voting him back into office for a second term.

Q: Aston is a Conservation Area. If the Cote Road development is built, will this automatically be included in the Conservation Area?

A: Richard Haines, Parish Council Chairman, answered by saying that he believes that the boundary of the Conservation Area is the village hall boundary of the field on which the development will be built. Provided this is the case, it will be included in the Conservation Area, but if the boundary is the Saxel Road side, then it wouldn't, and it would be difficult to get the Area extended to include the site.

12. Oxfordshire County Council – Councillor Charles Mathew

Mr Mathew told the meeting that he has been the parish's County Councillor for 8 years and has really enjoyed working with the parish.

Mr Mathew said that he has several current areas of concern. One relates to planning, and particularly the infrastructure required to support developments such as the one proposed for Cote Road. Linked to planning is a serious issue with Thames Water who are persistently ignoring major concerns about sewerage across the whole County Council area. Mr Mathew said that he wrote to all of his fellow County Councillors to ask them whether they share these concerns; 48 of them have serious problems with sewerage with at least 3 of the villages in each of their Wards. It is clear that the problem is serious and ongoing. Mr Mathew said that he has had meetings with Thames Water who say that they will take action, but nothing seems to get done. The West Oxfordshire District Councillors are encouraging residents to write direct to Thames Water with their own problems with sewerage and to request information about the network's capacity. David Cameron is aware of the problems.

Mr Mathew said that another key concern of his at the moment is the issue of gravel extraction and the County Council's new draft strategy on the extraction of minerals. Mr Mathew advised that he had attended a meeting on 16th June, and that at this meeting the County Councillors responsible for gravel extraction areas in the south of the County had succeeded in requesting that all reference to the need for gravel extraction to be carried out nearest to the site where the minerals are needed, for the need to reduce gravel miles, and for the importance of balancing digging between the south and the west of the County, be removed from the current draft of the strategy. Areas around Bampton and Clanfield have also now been included as potential sites for future gravel extraction. Mr Mathew told the meeting that since 1946, 92% of the gravel dug across the whole of Oxfordshire has been extracted from West Oxfordshire, with the impact felt particularly keenly in the Lower Windrush Valley. The problem for our area is that there are 8 County councillors for West Oxfordshire, and 10 representing South Oxfordshire. The South Oxfordshire councillors ensure that they attend the meetings at which the minerals strategy is discussed, with attendance by the West Oxfordshire councillors not being as good. This means that the discussions are not always very well balanced. Mr Mathew did reassure the meeting that the concerns he has with the current version of the draft strategy may still be resolved, and that the leader of the County Council is very well aware of the situation. The issue does, however, represent a threat to our area.

In terms of highways issues, for which the County Council is responsible, Mr Mathew said that he tries his best to get highways issues resolved, sometimes without success due to budget and other constraints. However, he has been directly responsible for some of the repairs in the parish, particularly the resurfaced footway near the Red Lion, for which he provided the funding from a budget he controls.

Mr Mathew told the meeting that CPRE (the Campaign to Protect Rural England) is holding a meeting on the new Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) on 18th June. The CPRE is going to explain why it considers that the target for housing growth across the County is unnecessarily high and is based on unsound evidence. The Chief Executives of West Oxfordshire and Cotswold District Councils have been quoted as saying that 40% of new homes become second homes, and therefore 40% of the housing target is not necessary. Mr Mathew said that he is not against the building of new homes, but does not agree with the number of new homes included in the SHMA. Oxfordshire County Council does not have the money it would need to provide the infrastructure, schools, buses, etc., required by the volume of new homes suggested. The Government grant is not sufficient to cover the County's funding needs, and the pressure upon funds is being compounded as schools convert to academies – when a school converts, the land is passed to the new academy, but any debts in relation to that land are retained by the County Council.

Q: What council is responsible for road signs? A lot are barely visible because they are either twisted round or covered by vegetation.

A: These are the responsibility of Oxfordshire Highways, part of the County Council. The County Council doesn't have sufficient funds to remedy all these problems across the county, and looks to communities to provide self-help. All County Councillors have control over a budget of £12,500 each for highways maintenance this year, and if there are specific problems, people can email me (Charles Mathew) and I will see if I can help.

13. Other matters raised by members of the public

Someone said that she has a problem exiting her drive as the road is obscured by ivy growing on a neighbour's property. Steve Good said that he will see if he can help with this.

14. Close of Meeting

Richard Haines thanked everyone for coming and for participating in the meeting which closed at 9.30pm.

Signed

dated.....