

**DRAFT MINUTES OF ASTON, COTE, SHIFFORD & CHIMNEY
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 24TH MAY 2017
IN THE VILLAGE HALL, ASTON AT 7.30 PM**

- 1. Present:** Parish Councillors:
Richard Haines (Chairman)
Jane Everex
John Ordish
Paul Sparrowhawk
Jane West
Phil West
- Helen Sandhu (Parish Clerk)
Hilary Fenton, District Councillor
Charles Mathew, County Councillor
PCSO Sandra Syphas, Thames Valley Police
Pat Chirgwin, Manager, Volunteer Link-Up
Carolyn Simmonds, Chairperson of Aston & Cote Community Trust
20 members of the public

- 2. Apologies:** Ben Lings, Parish Councillor
Steve Good, District Councillor

3. Welcome

Richard Haines, Chairman of the Parish Council, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the members of the Parish Council and the Clerk.

4. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting on 25 May 2016

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

5. Thames Valley Police

PCSO Sandra Syphas presented the Thames Valley Police report for the year ended 1 April 2017 which had been prepared by PC McHale. There were ten recorded crimes for the Aston area in the year; an increase of six on the previous year. 30% have been detected. Three of the crimes were theft related (minor thefts), two were bicycle thefts (not detected), one was a Public Order Offence, one was a criminal damage offence (under investigation) and three were non-dwelling burglaries in Cote (outbuildings). The presence of good CCTV cameras at one of the properties in Cote meant that the Police were able to identify three offenders responsible for the burglaries, and these offences are being pursued.

The Police team is aware of ongoing concerns about parking in Aston, particularly outside the school, with some people parking across driveways as they drop children off at the school. Parking on pavements is becoming a problem again, particularly at the Aston Potteries end of the village.

There are some changes to the team – PC McHale is moving on and will be replaced by PC Ken Cook on 1 June 2017. PC Cook will be based in Kidlington but the PCSOs will still operate out of the Eynsham office.

PCSO Syphas informed the meeting of a recent anti-social behaviour incident in which some ball bearing pellets fired by a couple of young adults had gone astray. The people responsible for the incident were very regretful and have written letters of apology.

There were no questions. Richard Haines thanked PCSO Syphas for attending and she left the meeting.

6. Volunteer Link-Up – Pat Chirgin, Manager

Ms Chirgwin told the meeting about the work of Volunteer Link-Up (VLU). VLU is a volunteer centre whose mission statement is to “link people who have time to spare with people and organisations who need their help.” There are three main strands to the work – supporting local charities who are looking for volunteers and advice, good neighbour schemes and community transport. To support charities looking for volunteers, VLU organises volunteer fairs, provides a volunteer brokering service and also offers good practice advice to charities. Good neighbour schemes provide an important service in these times when people don't always know their neighbours; people who are older, disabled or infirm can become very isolated. Good neighbour schemes provide volunteers who can visit people in their homes, and provide help getting to medical appointments, etc. This enables people to live independently for longer. The largest area of work is in the field of community transport; volunteers provide an essential service, using their own cars to take people shopping and to medical appointments. Many rural areas have lost their buses following the County Council withdrawal of the bus subsidies, and in any case people who are ill or infirm are not always able to use public transport. Volunteers are able to provide a door-to-door service, getting their client to the right place at the right time (particularly useful for appointments at hospitals) and settling them back at home again, which the clients find very reassuring. There is a large demand for the volunteer community transport service, with over 800 requests per year being received and over 550 clients regularly using the service. The service helps people get out and about and have human contact, particularly welcome to those recovering from an illness. When you are lonely this type of volunteer help can make a world of difference.

VLU has a small team of volunteers who are able to support people with practical tasks including minor DIY, changing light bulbs, replacing smoke alarm batteries, mowing lawns, trimming hedges, etc. Each request is bespoke and VLU works to find the right volunteer to meet the need.

VLU is also contracted through Age UK Oxfordshire to provide support to 70 Good Neighbour schemes across the county, running the Community Information Network to support them. VLU is ideally placed to support these types of schemes and other charities due to the length of time it has been running which means that it is likely to have knowledge of most situations the schemes and charities can face. VLU has a raft of policies and procedures to help new groups to establish themselves and can provide advice over the telephone.

Ms Chirgwin explained that VLU was founded in 1983 and has only had three managers in its history, which demonstrates the passion and commitment that the small staff team feel for VLU. Ms Chirgwin said that she has been post for 12 years; the previous manager did 17 years.

VLU is facing some issues as it looks to the future – the contract with Age UK Oxfordshire for running the Community Information Network expires in a year. Oxfordshire County Council has recently voted to stop all of its “daytime support” contracts, which includes the withdrawal of funding from day centres and VLU – from August 2017 the OCC funding ends. Ms Chirgwin explains that VLU has always taken a cautious approach to its finances and so has reserves in place to cover 18-24 months' running costs. VLU has been successful in its

application for funding from an Oxfordshire County Council transition fund which will enable VLU to seek out alternative sources of funding, and the trustees are working hard on this at the moment.

Ms Chirgwin said that it is essential that VLU is successful in finding alternative funding; VLU provides an essential social service which will only grow in importance as the population ages. VLU remains optimistic that replacement funding will be found and Ms Chirgwin said that if anyone knows of any potential funding sources or has fundraising skills, would they please get in touch. If people can't help with this but they do have some spare time Ms Chirgwin encouraged people to come forward as volunteers.

Q: What level of funding does VLU need a year?

A: £30,000 per annum.

Richard Haines thanked Ms Chirgwin for her presentation and wished her and VLU well for the future. Mr Haines said that the Parish Council has been able to provide some grant funding each year for many years and will hopefully be able to continue to support VLU in the future.

7. Aston & Cote Community Trust – Carolyn Simmonds, Chairperson

Carolyn Simmonds highlighted the improvements that have been made to the village hall in recent years – new windows and doors, a new patio leading from the small committee room with new bi-fold doors. These have improved the look and usage of the hall. The next planned improvement is a £50,000 project to relocate the younger children's play area to a position adjacent to the car park at the side of the hall, with all new equipment. The new play area will be fully fenced. The repositioning will make it easier for parents to access the play area as it will no longer be in the middle of the field and will include inclusive equipment that can be used by disabled as well as able-bodied children – a wheelchair accessible roundabout and sensory equipment. The Community Trust will need a lot of grant funding for the project and will need to find several grant sources as the District Council can only provide a certain percentage of the total funding required. The next step is to get a group together to prepare grant applications.

Future projects after the play area is completed will include the removal of the storage shed which will be replaced with a wooden summer house that will look nicer and be more usable.

Ms Simmonds said that it is important that people know that the Community Trust is run by volunteers. This means that sometimes projects take longer to complete than residents may expect. Any offers of help are always appreciated. The AGM is on Wednesday 21st June and anyone who wants to get involved is welcome to come along.

The funds raised from this year's Aston & Cote fete will be going towards this project, and the Community Trust has been running other events specifically to raise money for the project (including the fiddle night). To be successful in grant applications the Community Trust has to demonstrate that it can raise its own funds and provide evidence that there is community support.

Q: What is the full expected cost of the playground project, and what level of grant funding are you seeking?

A: The total project (without providing replacement car parking for the parking area that will be used for the playground) will be around £50,000. It is hoped that West Oxfordshire District Council will provide 25% and other grant sources will need to be found for the remaining 75%.

Q: *What is the timeframe for the project?*

A: *This is difficult to set as it is dependent on volunteer resource. The Community Trust would like to start the project as soon as possible, hopefully before Christmas 2017.*

Q: *Can the project be done in stages?*

A: *It will be better and cheaper to do it at one time.*

Q: *Bampton has recently done some play area improvements; maybe they will be able to provide some advice?*

A: *We haven't been able to find the right person to speak to in Bampton.*

Q: *What happened with Sport Aston?*

A: *It has been quite difficult to get this established. The same people have been trying to establish Sport Aston who are already involved as volunteers in other community activities, including the Community Trust – there are too few people coming forward to help and those people who are helping only have so much free time. With Sport Aston the intention is to look afresh at the project in September; it may be that the Sport Aston committee doesn't continue and that the activity comes back within the umbrella of the main Community Trust committee. The Community Trust remains keen to promote sport in the village; children's football has been successfully established, we are still trying to get the short mat bowls running.*

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

There has been quite a lot happening in the parish over the last year; these are the main topics.

Housing developments

Many residents have commented on the fact that outline planning permission has been granted to two large housing developments in Aston but nothing seems to be happening. Outline approval gives the green light for the site to be developed. The developer must then submit detailed plans covering appearance, landscaping, layout and scale to District Council Planning in order to gain full approval for the development. This must also include a 'Construction Traffic Management Plan'. Residents will again have the opportunity to comment on these proposals when the application is made.

In 2014 the land between Saxel Close and the Village Hall was granted outline planning for 38 homes to West Waddy. However last year the new developers Matthew Homes Ltd who have taken over this development made an application to have a condition changed. Rather than allowing treated sewage water to be pumped into the field ditch system, they requested that sewage from the site be attached to the Thames Water waste water network which serves Aston. This application has been approved.

Although this is ultimately what the Parish Council wants, the Parish Council and several residents strongly opposed the suggestion that this could be done without significant upgrading work by Thames Water. Mr Haines said that in his role as Parish Council Chairman he had addressed the WODC Planning Committee meeting where this application was considered. Because Thames Water had stated that they had no objection to the site being connected to the public waste water system, from a technical perspective the planning officers had no option but to recommend approval. This was irrespective of the fact that Thames Water had referred previously on the original and other applications in the village to the 'inability of the existing waste water infrastructure to meet those needs' or the fact that the system fails regularly. However, the Planning Officer was able to recommend attaching a

condition to the effect that the new properties could not be occupied until such time as a timetable for improvements to the sewerage network had been agreed with Thames Water. Unfortunately, the applicant has subsequently been able to get this condition discharged by presenting evidence indicating that the sewerage from the development will flow into the waste water system at connections points not via the problematic sewerage points relating to the Bull Street pumping station. The way is now clear for the Developer to gain legal agreement and subsequently submit detailed plans for full approval.

The Gladman application for outline planning to build 41 homes on the land north of Cote Road was approved in July 2015. This was subject to legal agreement which was completed in April 2016. In September 2016 Gladman submitted a second application for 30 homes to be built on the land north of Foxwood with access via the approved 41 home development site. This Application has been refused by the WODC planning officer under delegated powers. These boil down to three reasons:

- Harmful urbanising impact on the sensitive rural edge and approach to the settlement.
- Absence of an agreed mitigation package and appropriate amount and nature of affordable housing;
- Inadequate demonstration that the drainage strategy is able to mitigate the likelihood of flooding.

It had been expected that this application would have had to be decided by the WODC Lowlands Planning Committee. The fact that the decision was made by the planning officer with delegated powers indicated the strength of the case against Gladman. It also clearly demonstrates the value of not only the Parish Council but also the forty plus members of our community who sent objections to the WODC planning authority.

There have been many other planning applications across the Parish in the last year. These have been as diverse as an application for new four home developments to insertion of a dormer window in an existing property. A few of the refused developments have also gone to appeal with the Planning Inspectorate.

Buses

The No. 19 bus service has been retained albeit with a reduced service level. A great deal of work and discussion with Stagecoach was put in by all the parishes on the bus route. It is important to remember that this is a commercially operated route with no subsidy so it is very much a case of use it or potentially lose it.

Roads

Potholes continue to proliferate and are filled regularly by Oxfordshire County Council Highways. Anyone can report a pothole via the FixMyStreet website; it doesn't have to be reported directly by the Parish Council.

Many white central road and Give Way lines throughout Aston and the Parish need to be repainted, as do the yellow "No Parking" zig zag markings outside Aston and Cote Primary School. OCC Highways has confirmed that these locations have been added to the maintenance list for consideration when they receive the lining funding for summer 2017.

Parish Council Precept

This is the term for the taxation levied by the Parish Council which is collected with the council tax payments.

Once the Matthew Homes development is built and occupied the Parish Council will receive £48k for improving leisure facilities in the parish. In response to a questionnaire in 2015 the parish residents expressed a desire for a multi-use-sports-court to be provided. The total cost

of this is estimated at £80k. The difference is currently being built up as a specified reserve through the parish precept over a three year period, this now being the final year.

The Parish Council is not allowed to build up unspecified reserves, so for next year's budget there are two options:

1. To identify other specific large projects which will benefit our community for which a reserve can be built and so to keep the precept as it is.
2. To reduce the precept by the amount used to build up the reserve for the multi-use sports court. This could reduce the Council Tax bill by about £1 per month (for a band D property).

The Parish Council will be seeking the views of residents on this topic in advance of the January 2018 deadline for setting next year's budget.

Volunteers

Mr Haines said that in advance of the meeting he had started to draw up a list of the groups and other activities in our parish for which residents volunteer their free time – this soon exceeded 20. It is the large number of volunteers who help our community to thrive. Mr Haines expressed the parish's thanks to all the volunteers

Q: The speed of traffic through the parish is a concern.

A: Over the past year the Parish Council has tried several approaches to this issue. In November Richard Haines met with Thames Valley Police's Inspector Fishwick on Cote Road to discuss speeding. From the Police's point of view one of the problems is that only a low number of drivers are caught speeding in the parish – the last time the Police came out with a detector device only three tickets were issued (at the Bampton Road entrance to Aston). The Parish Council view is that the detection and control of speeding is a police matter – they are the only organisation which can issue penalties. The local Police has a wide area to deal with and other areas they cover have a bigger issue with speeding and when the Police attend with detection devices a much higher number of tickets are issued. Inspector Fishwick did say that they would send out an officer to the parish with a detection gun on occasion. The detection van can't be used in Aston as there is no suitable site.

Inspector Fishwick had also asked again about whether the parish residents were keen to establish a Community Speedwatch group. This has been discussed in the parish for the past couple of years but needs to be organised and run by members of the community and to date no-one has come forward to establish a group. There would be a cost to running a group (public liability insurance in particular) and the Parish Council has made it clear that it would be willing to fund the essential running costs of a group.

Q: Why can't we have traffic calming measures now?

A: The County Council has said that there is no need as there is no history of accidents and the County Council would not therefore provide any funding.

Q: Can't the parish fund something themselves?

A: Yes; this will be one of the possible projects looked at when the Parish consults on future precept levels.

Q: Could the other funding coming from the housing developments be used?

A: Apart from the £10k from the Gladman development referred to above, the funds which will come to the parish are restricted to leisure and recreation improvements.

Q: Parking on the bend outside the pub contains to be an issue. At the APM last year there was a question about whether it would be possible to have double yellow lines put on the road here but it was said that the parking restriction wouldn't be enforced. However, the white lines don't seem to be in the middle of the road here and if they were repositioned it might make the road safer. Could this be done?

A: Possibly. Double yellow lines aren't very effective in rural areas as they aren't well enforced. What we need is the community to pull together and to talk to each other – if people are concerned about other people's parking they could raise that concern direct.

Q: Is the second Gladman application which was refused going to appeal? There have been new documents uploaded on the WODC website which suggest as much.

A: The Parish Council is informed of appeals and hasn't been contacted about this site. If an appeal is lodged the Parish Council and anyone who responded to the District Council about the original planning application will be informed by WODC.

Q: Is It worth keeping a log of all the sewerage issues so that there is a body of evidence when planning applications are received?

A: The Parish Council always raises concern about the capacity of the sewerage system when responding to every planning application for new housing, even for a single house. It is clear from information provided by Thames Water in response to the original Gladman application that they are aware that there are capacity issues. If people would like to compile a log of incidents, maybe this is something that a member of the community could volunteer to be responsible for?

Q: Couldn't we use the "What's on in Aston & Cote" Facebook group to register incidents?

A: Possibly, but it would be down to a member of the community to take it on board and be responsible for it. It could be possible to put something in a future of edition of Voices asking for suggestions about how sewerage incidents could be recorded.

9. West Oxfordshire District Council – Councillor Hilary Fenton

Picking up the last point, Hilary Fenton expressed the view that it would be a good idea to assemble a log of issues with the sewerage system. Every village that she acts a District Councillor for has problems with Thames Water services and she is aware that there are serious problems in Bampton, and the sewerage pipes from Aston feed into Bampton.

Mrs Fenton then turned to the issue of planning. It is very difficult at the moment for the District Council to turn down applications for new housing as there is no current Local Plan. This should be resolved within the next few months as the draft Local Plan is currently being examined by the Inspector.

Mrs Fenton said that she hopes that residents are happy with how the new payable garden waste collection service is working. The District Council introduced a £30 per annum per bin charge in April. The rest of the waste collection contract changes in October – residents will then have two wheelie bins – one for recycling (not glass which must continue to be put in a black box) and one for residual waste.

As a member of the Lowlands Planning Committee Mrs Fenton said that it is very important that residents object to planning applications if they aren't in agreement with what is proposed (and indeed express support if they agree with them). Objections do have a significant impact on the considerations of the Planning Committee. Residents can also apply to speak at Planning Committee meetings. Mrs Fenton said that she thinks it is important that the Committee sees and hears from residents and that residents are able to see the planning process in action.

Mrs Fenton ended by saying that her contact details are always included in Voices and that anyone who needs help can contact her direct.

Q: Where does the money from the green waste bin charge go to? It was free before?

A: Like all Councils, WODC needs to raise additional funding as the level of funding it receives from Government continues to be reduced.

Q: Why is it difficult to turn down planning applications?

A: If an application is going to be refused it must be on the basis of planning law; local feeling and local realities don't override this need. If the District Council refuses an application for unsound reasons then it is likely that the application will be allowed on appeal and the District Council could be required to pay the applicant's costs and could also be fined

Q: Sometimes the documentation submitted by developers in support of an application isn't accurate and/or sometimes is based on surveys, including traffic surveys, which are carried out at unrepresentative days/times. Can the developer be forced to correct the documentation so it is accurate?

A: The planners and Planning Committee are aware of these issues and will push back hard, but aggressive developers also fight their position very hard.

Q: What is the success rate of a planning appeal?

A: This isn't something that I know but I could try and find out.

Q: Why does the District Council get fined if an appeal is allowed?

A: This depends on the findings of the Inspector – if the District Council decision process is found to have been significantly at fault, then the Inspector can levy a fine.

Q: When the new waste contract starts will the existing bins be collected?

A: Yes, but not automatically, residents may need to ask for their old bins to be collected.

10. Oxfordshire County Council – Councillor Charles Mathew

Mr Mathew started by thanking the local area for all the support for him expressed over the last few years.

Picking up on the concerns about sewerage expressed earlier in the meeting, Mr Mathew confirmed that every one of the villages he covers also has ongoing issues with Thames Water. Both the County and District Council have held meetings with representatives of Thames Water to challenge them over quality of service issues and will continue to do so – the ongoing issues are completely unacceptable. It shouldn't be necessary for sewage pumping stations to be manually pumped out by tanker, which is an ongoing reality for several SPS across the area.

Mr Mathew went on to talk about how Stanton Harcourt and Sutton have tackled concerns about speeding in their villages. The villages combined to buy their own speed gun (at a cost of £100) and a group of volunteers have been out to use it a couple of times a week for the past few months. This has had a very good result. Some drivers have been caught multiple times. The volunteers have sadly been subject to some threats. There have been some challenges from the authorities – it took some time for the Police to accept this local action, and the local Neighbourhood Action Group were inclined not to believe the results as such a large number of vehicles were identified as driving at excess speed. Mr Mathew said that the alternatives had their own issues – no-one will enforce a 20mph speed limit; chicanes can have some effect, but in Bampton residents find that drivers try and race through the chicanes.

Mr Mathew said he has attended three of the sessions of the WODC Local Plan hearing. Mr Mathew expressed the view that there are still problems with the draft plan.

Mr Mathew picked up the issue raised by a resident earlier in the meeting of the evidence presented by developers in support of a planning application not always being fair/accurate. He agreed it would be better for the planning system to be changed so that District and County councils arrange for the evidence to be prepared (funded by a developer) in order to ensure that the evidence is without bias.

The County Council is about to spend £35 million on the installation of a bus lane and the construction of a Park & Ride car park for 500 cars on the A40 at Eynsham. Given that between 15 and 20 thousand cars commute up the A40 and back on each working day, there must be questions as to how effective the proposed Park & Ride will be and whether it represents value for money. The County Council subsequently proposes to spend £56 million to extend the dualling of the A40 from the current single carriageway point to the new Park and Ride. Mr Mathew said that he thought a whole new transport system could be developed from Carterton to Oxford for £250 million and expressed the view that a much more radical approach to the traffic problems is required than what the County Council is currently proposing.

Mr Mathew identified three further changes that could be put in place to relieve some of the pressures on the A40 – building a link at Dukes Cut from the A40 to the A44 at the Pear Tree roundabout, reopening the closed road at the Cassington junction which only requires a £0.5 million investment on a new bridge, and installing a smart card system on the Swinford toll bridge.

Mr Mathew said that the County Council should be lobbying the Government for the funding to put radical new traffic solutions in place.

The problem of above-weight lorries breaching the weight restriction on Newbridge continues. The enforcement cameras haven't worked for 4 years, and despite the County Council having promised that they would be replaced in 12 weeks some 14 weeks ago, there is still no sign of the new cameras.

Mr Mathew ended by saying that whilst he doesn't think that the new draft Minerals and Waste Core Strategy is sound (particularly in relation to the proposals for gravel extraction continued therein), it is likely to be passed to the ultimate regret of everyone in the local area.

Q: Will Dix Pit Household Waste Recycling Centre be closed?

A: The landfill site was closed last year, but the recycling centre will not be closed.

11. Open Questions

Q: There is a lot of construction traffic coming through Aston going to the housing construction sites in Bampton and the block perimeter of The Square has become badly damaged on the shop side – is this going to be repaired?

A: In fairness this was damaged before the current housing construction started. Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for maintaining The Square and has previously advised that when repairs are required they will be done in tarmac; they will not replace the blocks. The Parish Council has already expressed concern to the County Council about the potential damage to roads in the parish caused by the routing of the construction traffic through Aston, and this includes the road from the A415 where the heave has increased, possibly being exacerbated by the increase in HGVs. To date the Parish Council has not received a satisfactory response and will continue raising this issue.

When the traffic plan is being developed for the construction of the two housing sites on Cote Road, the Parish Council will be pushing for the routing to go through Cote and not through Aston past the school. Whilst this will not please everyone, it will be the safer and less disruptive route.

Q: Have we got a local street cleaner/Lengthsman?

A: No, and we haven't had one for several years. The Parish Council issues contracts for specific work, including recently issuing a contract to Oxford City Council for weed spraying. The street cleaning vehicle operated by West Oxfordshire District Council is supposed to visit Aston every six weeks. Some volunteers also carry out litterpicking in the parish – people will have seen the recent article about one specific volunteer in Voices.

12. Close of Meeting

Richard Haines thanked the speakers for their presentations and the members of the public who came for attending and participating in the meeting. Mr Haines encouraged residents to consider attending the monthly Parish Council meetings.

Signed

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