

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Steeple Aston Parish Council held on  
Tuesday 19th May 2015 at 7.30 in the Village Hall**

**Present:** Mr. Coley, Mr Preston, Mr. Lipson, Mrs. Wright, Mr Ferguson, Mrs Mulcahy-Hawes, Mrs McCready, Cllr Kerford Byrne, Cllr Fatemain, Mrs Whybrew, Mrs Bell, Mrs Gardner, Mr. Latchford, Mrs. Coley, Mrs. Ferguson, Mrs Brewer, Mr. Kewley, PC Caroline Brown, PCSO Chris Kidd, Deborah Hextall

**In attendance:** Cathy Fleet (Clerk)

1. **Apologies** No apologies were received

**Declarations of Interest :** There were no declarations of interest

2. **Minutes of the last meeting** held on 28th May 2014 were read and it was **RESOLVED** to accept these as a true record of the meeting and they were signed by the Chair.

3. **Matters arising** - there were no matters arising

4. **Chairman's Report**

This year we have had the year of the 4 "Ps":

- Planning
- Potholes
- Placement of tenants in Coneygar Fields
- Poor driving and People speeding past the school

**Planning** – there have been a number of planning applications in the village which have triggered public comments, and we have had a dispute with Cherwell District Council where they have acknowledged that one of their senior planning officers misled the Planning Committee on a point of planning law.

We now have the boundaries drawn up for a Local Neighbourhood Development Plan which is the largest of its kind in England involving eleven Cherwell villages and a developer. We are all aware of the need to build more houses (a) in order to lower prices and (b) to provide for those who want to own their own homes. But there is a limit to how much development can take place in a small village such as ours, so we are seeking to limit large numbers of houses being built by speculative developers in Steeple Aston and other surrounding parishes. The Neighbourhood Plan needs much more work before we are ready to give more details and will have to go to a referendum of all the affected parishes before it can be put into effect. Sarah McCready is here tonight to give you a brief outline on what it's all about.

**Potholes** – we have been plagued by an epidemic of different sized pot holes and some have been outlined in different coloured paints, red, green and white. These seem to indicate the urgency of the repair needed and the order in which they are repaired with a shovelful of tarmac. It takes 2 lorries and up to 4 men to repair each hole, so no wonder they are slow to react. At least one person has had a serious accident after catching their foot in one of the holes. Oxfordshire County Council Highways are difficult to contact, difficult to pin down for a timetable and are perpetually short of money to effect repairs. Expect more potholes over the next year.

**Placing people in social housing** – we had a running battle with Cherwell District Council when Central Government changed the rules for who qualified for inclusion on local Housing

Registers halfway through the building of Coneygar Fields. Under the old rules many people from Steeple Aston would have been included in the Housing register and thus for the allocation system. The new rules were rigorously applied by Cherwell District Council compared with some other councils, so that many villagers were excluded from the Register, which in turn meant they could not be allocated any housing **anywhere** in Cherwell, let alone in this village. It just happened to reduce those waiting for housing at a stroke. Cherwell promised to revisit the rules after everyone had been allocated. But a year later, the new proposals are, if anything even worse for villagers who cannot afford to buy a property in the village in which they live. Currently, we think possibly following our representations to the District Council, many Cherwell villages have suspended plans to offer social housing in their parishes as locals are now much less likely to be allocated new social housing in their own village.

**People speeding and poor driving past the school** – *“Complaints were heard at last month’s PC meeting about de-restriction signs, especially outside the School, where 60 infants cross the road several times each day.” “Oxfordshire County Council stated that the physical nature of the village itself restricts speed.”* That was in 1974 !

There has been a big push in the village recently to reinstate a School Crossing Patrol. Parents and parishioners have emailed Oxfordshire County Council urging them to bring back a "lollipop lady" before there is a really serious accident outside Dr Radcliffe's School. Although it is not something within the responsibility of the Parish Council, it is something which affects us all. There have already been around three minor accidents this academic year. As none were reported to the police, in the eyes of Oxfordshire County Council, they don't count. OCC have assessed the school, and in spite of counting 71 vehicles at drop off, said we did not meet the criteria for a Crossing Patrol as justified by the wonderful formula  $PV^2$  where “P” is the number of Pedestrians and “V” is the number of vehicles.

Children's safety should not be boiled down to a bureaucratic formula and we are urging them to reconsider , as we have two car parks, limited pavements and no visibility when crossing by the school bus. Apparently they are coming to assess us again one afternoon soon.....

We have asked if could fund our own lollipop person (a cost of around £2,500 a year) but was told this would not be possible as "the site did not meet the required minimum threshold". So the service cannot even be privatised !

**Those are the main themes which have run through the year. But that’s by no means all.**

Last May Margaret Mason who had been the Chairman for many years, and also two other Parish Councillors, did not stand for re-election. We managed to fill the vacancies, but then Marian Trinder also resigned because of her work commitments and in January we had the luxury of choosing from 3 candidates for the vacancy. Each was given an opportunity during a normal Parish Council Meeting to add to their résumés. Then, still in open session, a paper ballot of existing Councillors was carried out and Bridie Mulcahy-Hawes was co-opted as our newest Councillor. So compared with this time last year we have four new Councillors with a very different range of skills and experiences.

None of what we have achieved would have been possible without the huge amount of effort which Cathy Fleet has put into the last year. She has had to deal with a completely different style of Chairmanship, and co-options of new parish councillors. It looks as though she may

have even more to do this next year as the Neighbourhood Plan progresses towards a referendum. I would also like to thank all of our parish councillors, who have moulded into a formidable team in a very short time. Thanks also to the Website Committee who are always looking to improve what they do.

The Steeple Aston Church Allotment Association carries on growing and developing and the committee continues to improve to secure the future of the allotments for everyone. They have a waiting list of villagers keen to acquire a plot. There is now an apiary site, from which the allotmenters produced, bottled and sold 16lbs of Allotment Honey. A grant was obtained from the Woodland Trust and 115 saplings (all fruiting varieties of species found in the UK) have been planted up and will form a natural screen for the apiary. One of the long term aims was to have a communal allotment shed, to provide storage, a community allotment shop and a space for workshops and social events. Nicholsons' generous donation of one of their unwanted garden buildings was a real help. Preparation work is being carried out to the site so the building can be delivered. As the PC is the main leaseholder, I would like to thank all those committee members for their efforts.

There has been a review by the Local Government Boundaries Commission of all the Council Wards in Cherwell to try to balance the number of voters in each Ward. This was not without controversy as one Cherwell parish was missed off the list completely and we found ourselves bundled in with a ward encompassing Deddington and Hook Norton. We made a vigorous set of counter proposals based on the Commission's own criteria about equality of numbers (which were out of kilter in their original proposals) and community connections, particularly the Neighbourhood Plan, to be a part of the Heyfords Ward. We heard last week that they have been rejected and we remain part of the Hook Norton Ward.

We now have a new map and boundaries for the Parish Conservation Area and there is an exhibition in the hall for you to look at later on, if you haven't already seen it. Whilst we have no wish to preserve the parish in aspic forever, we are always mindful of our building heritage. If you live in the Conservation Area, we urge you to have a word with the Parish Council **before** you put in alteration plans as we should be able to help you to with a course of action which could save you time and money before sending your plans to Cherwell DC.

Finally, we are trying to be as careful with your money as we can, and although our grants have been cut by about £2000, we have restricted our spending increase for next year to only £128 in total, which represents about 30p per household extra, or 0.5%, for the whole year to the end of March 2016. Here's another quote from 1974 which shows that it isn't always as easy to save money as you might think. "Street lights were turned off saving £6 on the electricity bill. Turning them off cost £14, and turning them on again cost another £14."

We have also arranged, possibly for the first time, to have 2 speakers who will be presenting short talks about the Neighbourhood Watch and Neighbourhood Plan.

##### 5. Thames Valley Police - Neighbourhood Watch

Deborah Hextall gave a brief presentation on behalf of Neighbourhood Watch explaining that NW is the largest crime prevention initiative in the UK. A village co-ordinator is needed, and is a much less onerous task than in the past and is merely a point of contact with all residents encouraged to become members of NW. Members are provided with a kit which includes a UV pen for marking possession, smart water kits, nominated neighbour leaflets and message in a

bottle equipment (this enables the householder to provide all personal information to be stored in a bottle in the fridge available for emergency services if needed). Deborah encouraged all present to become members and provided contact details which are available from either Richard Preston or the Parish Clerk. The matter will be put on the next parish council agenda. Caroline Brown then introduced herself as the Neighbourhood Police Officer and said that crime in the Thames Valley area has fallen in the past year with robbery down by 17%, burglary down by 18%, vehicle theft down by 18% but domestic and sexual crime has increased, possibly due to better reporting and that in Steeple Aston in the past year there have been 3 thefts, 14 domestic incidents and 1 public order offence.

#### 6. Local neighbourhood Plan

Unfortunately Sarah McCready from Dorchester Living was unable to attend but had given her notes to John Coley who talked through them

### Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan

The application to formally designate the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan area (August 2014) is based on these key principles:

- To **maintain functional relationship** of the villages/parishes with the former RAF Upper Heyford
- To ensure future development **proposals meet the aspirations of Parish Councils** and other community groups in the locality.
- To ensure future development is **sensitive to its surroundings**.
- To ensure that the **quality and character of local communities** is maintained and where possible enhanced, whilst working jointly to respond appropriately to **opportunities for growth** as the District seeks to address its future housing requirements.
- To direct the majority of **new development to the Upper Heyford site to protect the rural communities from inappropriate development**.

*“Once designated, the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Planning Forum will collectively work together to ensure that future development in the newly created Neighbourhood area is appropriately directed to a preferred location to preserve the intrinsic quality and character of the rural communities within the Neighbourhood”.*

- Area Designation Submission Covering Letter (August 2014)

### Progress so far

- Application to designate Neighbourhood Area submitted in August 2014.
- Designation approved by Cherwell Executive Committee in April 2015.
- NP only attracts “limited weight” in the decision-making process at this stage.
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Need to progress quickly in order to offer protection to villages from speculative development

### Next Steps

- To prepare the Neighbourhood Plan and supporting evidence.

- The main areas that need to be developed will be:
  - Vision and Objectives
  - Policies
  - Develop and establish a **proportionate** evidence base
  - Sustainability Appraisal

There is no specific approach to the structure of a Neighbourhood Plan. The key message from National Policy and other guidance is to **keep it simple**.

Typically Neighbourhood Plans use the following structure:

- Introduction
- Description of the Neighbourhood Area
- Vision and Strategic Objectives
- Planning Policies
- Appendices

Strategic Objectives **must** correlate to the Vision, so could include:

1. **Creating sustainable communities:** provides for sustainable and appropriate development within the Plan area whilst protecting the rural natural and historic environment.
2. **Brownfield regeneration:** Consistent with the national and local policy agendas and protects the character and intrinsic qualities of the rural settlements in the Plan area.
3. **Support the delivery of a sustainable local economy:** supports the Vision in terms of facilitating future development as part of a positive planning framework.
4. **Protection of rural areas:** emphasises that the rural settlements are protected from inappropriate development, in terms of scale, location and impact on the built and natural environment.
5. **Delivery of new infrastructure / communities:** future development should be located where existing infrastructure can support that development. Where required, additional / improvements to infrastructure, both physical and social will be necessary to deliver appropriate development.

## Moving forward

- Establish NP Working Groups
  - Housing / Rural Allocations Group
  - Schooling
  - Community Facilities and Social Infrastructure
  - Transport Mitigation
  - Employment
  - Others?
- Working Groups to identify Issues / Objectives to inform Vision
- Evidence gathering
- Preparing draft version of Plan

- Prepare policies
  - Site allocations
- Plan wide consultation on draft Neighbourhood Plan

Following the presentation Cllr Mike Kerford Byrnes pointed out that the Neighbourhood Plan must not be confused with the Local Plan and answered a question from Mr. Latchford who challenged the use of the word 'Local' as asked for it to be re-defined and possibly renamed. . MK-B felt this was a good question and would pass Mr. Latchford's comments on. . Mk-B informed the meeting that CDC had recently been given an award for the top local authority for food hygiene and that the Institute of Housing had awarded CDC for the best strategic housing in the county.

The meeting closed at 21.09

The next Annual Parish Meeting will be on 16th May 2016