

FREELAND PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF FREELAND PARISH COUNCIL, HELD ON THE 16TH MARCH 2020, IN THE NEWELL ROOM, FREELAND, IN THE COUNTY OF OXFORDSHIRE AT 7.30PM.

PRESENT:	Chairman:	Peter Newell
	Vice-Chairman:	Robert Crocker
	Councillors:	Mary Ann Canning, Tim Webster, Peter Foster, Matthew Ruddle, Vero McCoy
	District Councillors:	Alaa Al-Yousuf (till 8.45pm) Merilyn Davies (till 8.45pm)
	County Councillor:	Liam Walker (from 8.20pm till 8.45pm)
	Clerk:	Lisa Smith

At the time of this meeting taking place, the UK and rest of the world were currently experiencing a Coronavirus (Covid -19) pandemic, and legislation and rules around social distancing were being updated almost daily. The current Government advice was to still allow public meetings to take place, but it was felt likely that this advice would change in the coming days. As it happened, three days after this meeting it was announced schools would be closing and social distancing had to happen, with local authority elections and all public meetings having to be cancelled.

1. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION

Simon Brown, Chair of Freeland Cricket Club was present for this session. He wished to talk about the mower used for the cricket pitch that was in need of repair/replacement. The Cricket Club were currently using a cylinder mower that was purchased over 12 years ago. It was likely to have been manufactured in the late 1960s or early 1970s. The throttle cable broke on it last year, so the Club had been fortunate enough to have been able to borrow a mower from Marcham Cricket Club, which they had had serviced. A quote had been obtained to repair the Club's own mower, and the price quoted was around £800, with the main cost being the replacement of the cylinder. Prices had been investigated for a second-hand mower which would cost around £1,200, with a brand new mower costing in the region of £2,500 - £3,000.

The Club were therefore investigating ways they could raise the funds needed to either repair the old mower or purchase a replacement.

Grants were being investigated via the Oxfordshire Cricket Board, and the Club's own funds currently stood at £2,100 at the end of last year. However, £500 was due to be paid for the delivery of some new pitch covers that were worth around £8,000 that the Club managed to get for free, but transferring them would cost around £500, plus another £500 was needed for the maintenance of the cricket square (seeding, loaming, drainage holes etc). Taking into account these expenses the Club's funds were down to just £1,000. Various fundraising activities had already been planned although with the Coronavirus outbreak it was now unclear if any matches could actually be played.

Simon wished to ask the Parish Council if there was anything they could do to assist with the fundraising. He advised there was no rush as no decision would be made until next April.

Liam had already agreed to fund £538 of coaching equipment for the children's and ladies' team, so Simon could not ask him for further funds.

The Council agreed to consider this request and thanked Simon for attending the meeting.

Simon then left the meeting at 7.40pm.

2. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – Bill Phillips - precautionary self-isolating after trip abroad.

3. CODE OF CONDUCT:

3.1 TO RECEIVE ANY AMENDMENTS TO THE REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no amendments to the Register of Members' Interests.

3.2 TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FROM COUNCILLORS FOR MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE MEETING

Mary Ann Canning (personal) as a member of Freeland Charitable Foundation.

Robert Crocker (personal) as a member of Freeland Charitable Foundation (FCF) and as having a local business.

Tim Webster (personal) as having a local business.

Matthew Ruddle (personal) as caretaker of the Little Free Library and as a member of 1st Hanborough/Freeland Scouts Committee.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

4.1 To approve and sign as a correct record the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held on Monday 17th February 2020

The Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held on 17th February were approved and signed as a true record of those proceedings.

5. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to report.

6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

6.1 Mobile coverage in Freeland – to receive an update on progress to improve mobile signal

Peter F gave a brief report. The new site in Freeland that was currently being explored had apparently been dismissed as it was felt it was not viable option, although the reasons for this were not clear. So, the site at Whitehouse Farm was now being explored again.

Peter would keep the Council updated on any further developments.

6.2 Freeland Methodist Church: To receive an update on future of Methodist Church

The Clerk had written to Rev. Rose Westwood last month to seek reassurance that the Methodist Church building was being properly maintained whilst it was closed to ensure it was not going to be left to fall into disrepair. A response had been received to advise that, in keeping with the regulations put into place by the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (the legal custodians of the building), the local managing trustees were checking the building on a regular basis and had arranged for some background heating to be put in place to ensure that the building was properly aired and maintained. She also advised that the area surrounding the church was also tended to from time to time. Councillors noted that at the gable end of the building there was a rather worrying bow in the roof. The wall plate on the Pigeon House Lane side of the building had also worn, and it was believed that damp may be coming through in the kitchen. In view of this, it was agreed to notify WODC Planning Department so they could send someone to take a look at the Grade II listed building. Merilyn agreed to contact Phil Shaw at WODC Planning Dept.

Action: Merilyn to contact Phil Shaw as above.

6.3 Little Free Library – to update on progress in transforming phone box into a new library

Matthew gave a brief report. A successful opening had been held last week for the new phone box that had been successfully transformed into a new Little Free Library. The opening was well attended and the new library was already being well used.

Matthew now had a group of volunteers who were willing to assist in helping to run the new little Free Library by the Village Hall.

A new plastic storage box had been placed behind the bus shelter by the village hall where people could drop books off. Councillors passed on their thanks to Matthew for setting this up and his work in getting the new library up and running.

6.4 Parish Council elections – to consider if any action required before the upcoming elections

Notification had been received from WODC that due to the Coronavirus pandemic, all local elections had been cancelled for this year. No further information had been received, so the advice from WODC was that it was likely two assumption could be made; (i) the term of office of councillors for towns and parishes will be extended from 11 May 2020 to 10 May 2021; and (ii) the term of office of councillors elected in May 2021 will be three years rather than four, to bring future elections back into the correct existing cycle. Following Matthew's announcement last month that he would not be standing for election in the May elections, he had agreed to stay on for a few extra months until things calmed down with regards to the Coronavirus pandemic. Councillors passed on their thanks to him.

6.5 To consider any actions arising from the Coronavirus epidemic, especially in relation to the Annual Parish Meeting

Following on from the above, Council were also asked to consider whether they wish to postpone the Annual Parish Meeting, due to be held in April, because of the risks associated with the Coronavirus pandemic. With a normal attendance rate of around 100 residents, the majority of whom were aged 60 or over and therefore fell into the category of the most at risk group, Council unanimously agreed that it was not sensible to allow that many people of that age group to be in very close proximity to one another.

It was noted that the APM was a mandatory requirement that had to be held between 1st March and 1st June inclusive, but it could be argued that the Coronavirus would fall under a "Force Majeure" event. It was also felt that it was likely the Government would be issuing further sanctions on public meetings imminently. Council therefore **resolved** to postpone the Annual Parish Meeting until such time that it was safe to hold it again. Council also **resolved** to cancel the Big Lunch event planned for June, and to postpone all future Parish Council meetings until such time that it was safe to hold them. The Clerk would cancel the Village Hall and Newell Room bookings.

It was also noted that as things were changing daily at such a fast pace with regards to the Coronavirus pandemic, that further ordinary Parish Council meetings may not take place for a few months. Cheques still needed to be paid (as did the Clerk), and the Council still needed to perform its basic functions. So, in light of this, Council unanimously **resolved** to empower the Clerk (or in her absence any 2 Councillors) to do anything expedient and necessary to ensure the continuous business of the council, and to deal with mandatory undertakings in order to prevent the authority from incurring liability during the period that the delegation is applicable (this authority also includes getting cheques signed by 2 Councillors to the value of £1,500 as and when needed and setting up Committees as and when needed).

Planning applications – after a brief discussion, Council **resolved** that all further planning applications would be circulated via email to the full Council (rather than just the Planning Team) for comments and feedback/decisions to be made.

Vulnerable residents – Marilyn updated the Council about an initiative they had set up in Hanborough to help vulnerable residents during the Coronavirus pandemic. There was a Covid 19 Mutual Aid Facebook page which had lots of useful information for setting up teams of volunteers and Street Champions, and a dedicated phone line had been set up for residents to ring to request help. After some discussions, Council agreed that the Clerk and Vero would work together to set up a Facebook page and come up with a system for a dedicated phone line and leaflets which could be sent out to the whole village. Alaa also advised that Volunteer Link-Up and Age UK were also able to assist and had lots of useful information on their websites. The Clerk would make sure residents were advised about this in her Grapevine notes.

Action: Clerk and Vero to set up a phone line support service, allocate Street Champions and design and arrange a leaflet drop around village.

7. PLANNING - Applications received & WODC Decisions plus:

7.1 Applications Received:

20/00586/HHD

69 WROSLYN ROAD, FREELAND.

Erection of single storey front extension and detached garage with home office above for Mr Simon Horner (revised plans from withdrawn application number 19/03528/HHD).

20/00634/HHD

THE HAVEN, 61 WROSLYN ROAD, FREELAND.

Alterations and erection of two-storey side and rear extension for Mr Stephen Ebbs.

20/00679/HHD

5 HURST LANE, FREELAND.

Convert store to bedroom/study with en-suite for Mr & Mrs Tom & Vero McCoy.

One further application had been received since the meeting papers were sent around:

20/00510/FUL

FREELAND PLAYING FIELD, WROSLYN ROAD, FREELAND.

Erection of replacement storage building for Mrs Mary Ann Canning.

After viewing the above four planning applications, Council agreed that they had no comments or objections that they wished to make about any of the proposed changes to the properties.

7.2 Applications Approved:

19/03094/HHD

GLEBE FARM, THE GREEN, FREELAND.

First floor extension for Mr R Crocker.

7.3 Applications Refused: None.

7.4 Applications Withdrawn: None.

7.5 Applications Awaiting Decision:

19/03419/HHD

176 WROSLYN ROAD, FREELAND.

Erection of single storey side extension for Mr James Eaton.

19/03370/FUL

FREELAND HOUSE, WROSLYN ROAD, FREELAND.

Construction of three timber cabins for use as staff accommodation for Mr Mahesh Patel.

7.6 Planting trees in the village – to note any response from Pye Homes/Blenheim to extend the woodland behind Wroslyn Road or plant trees elsewhere in village

The Clerk had written to Dominic Hare, CEO at Blenheim last month regarding the possibility of extending the woodland behind Wroslyn Road and/or planting more trees in the village. A reply had been received to advise that they would take a look, but that Pye and Blenheim did have quite a lot of tree planting commitments (on a serious scale) over the next two years so it may not happen in the near future. This was duly noted.

7.7 Cherry tree in BML causing potential issue by resident's house in relation to imminent building work – to note any response from WODC/OCC

An email had been received from WODC which confirmed that the cherry tree was not affected by a Tree Protection Order, and it was likely it belonged to OCC Highways as it was on a grass verge between the road and footpath. No response had been received from OCC.

8. REPORT OF COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCIL BUSINESS

Alaa gave an update on the community bus. It had been decided that from Thursday the Community Bus service would be suspended in light of the Coronavirus. A number of drivers had expressed concerns for keeping themselves as well as passengers safe.

A Community Transport meeting was taking place tomorrow afternoon which the Chairman was due to attend to discuss the Comet Bus service, whose 6-month free trial period was due to end on 1st May. It was hoped to try and look at way the Comet Bus service could be continued, possibly by linking it to Stanton Harcourt or other local villages. Alaa was hoping OCC would support the service and offer some financial assistance, and if they did then it was likely he would be asking the Parish Council for a monetary contribution as well. He would update the Council following the meeting. The Clerk also wished to pass on her thanks to Alaa for writing the article that would appear in the next Grapevine regarding the Council Tax increase and how it was calculated. This was helpful to try and explain the increase to residents.

Liam's update included details of a £32m capital programme that had been launched for road resurfacing and footpath improvements. Cuckoo Lane had been included in the programme and had been scheduled for resurfacing work in April, and the outstanding line painting would also be carried out at the same time.

Liam's Councillor Priority Fund had just come to an end for this financial year with various community projects having been supported (Football Club/Christmas Lunch/Village Hub group/Pre-school/Cricket Club/ Community Bus).

A meeting had been held with Stagecoach re the A40 and the 233 bus service. An extra £2b from the Government had been provided towards Community Transport, and Oxford would be getting £0.5m of

this money. A pitch had been put to Stagecoach for the 233 to run a Sunday service to increase its usage, which hopefully in turn would lead to a better bus service going forward for local residents. There had been over 23 referral cases for the Coronavirus in Oxfordshire and the Government were looking at changing the rules for local councils and authorities to ensure these organisations could continue to function in the midst of the pandemic.

A question was put to Liam about how feasible it would be to close off Pigeon House Lane and have it as an access road for residents only. Pigeon House Lane had had an HGV completely stuck in the lane last month, a 45-foot trailer and articulated tractor unit, fully laden. The lorry made it all the way down to the bend at Whitehouse Farm and then had to be recovered, blocking the lane for several hours.

The driver was asked (he had been following his SAT nav) why he did not heed the two signs which clearly state "Unsuitable for HGV's". He had read them but was undeterred "*as most country roads are unsuitable for HGV's*". When asked what would have prevented him using the lane as a short cut, he replied "*No through road, access only or width restriction of 2 metres.*"

A suggestion had been made to block off the lane to through traffic. It was felt high speed delivery vans and 4 x 4's now made it too dangerous to walk, as the steep banks left nowhere to escape to.

Liam advised a consultation would be required and signage and bollards were likely to be needed. Liam agreed to add it to his list to see if it could go out to consultation.

Alaa, Merilyn and Liam were all thanked for attending the meeting and all left at 8.45pm.

9. FINANCIAL MATTERS

9.1 Presentation of the monthly financial report

The monthly financial report was presented to the Council showing details of the bank balance at 28th February 2020 and the receipts and payments received or paid out in the last month. The bank statement was checked as agreeing with the figures on the finance sheet and was signed by Matthew.

9.2 To approve renewal of OALC & OPFA annual subscriptions

After a brief discussion, Council **resolved** to approve the renewal of the annual subscriptions to OALC and OPFA.

9.3 Approval of invoices for payment

The Council approved invoices for payment as listed on the invoices for payment sheet distributed with the meeting papers.

Council therefore **resolved** to approve all of the following invoices for payment:

The following invoices are requested to be approved for payment:				
Cheque Number	To whom paid	Details	Amount (£)	
102611	Freeland Village Hall Bookings	Hall hire 16.03.20	12.50	
102612	Lisa Smith	Clerk's salary March 2020	902.57	
102613	OPFA	Annual subscription	42.00	subject to approval
102614	Matthew Ruddle	Refund storage boxes for library x 2	40.00	
102615	OALC	Annual subscription	304.81	subject to approval
102616	Ubico Ltd	Litter bin & dog waste bin for GOR	816.55	
102617	Lisa Smith	Refund expenses - stamps/paper	20.72	
		Total:	2,139.15	
Plus:				
	NEST pension payment of £67.64 (employee & employer contributions). £38.65 has been deducted from Clerk's salary for March salary payment.			

9.4 Any other financial business – none.

10. PARISH COUNCIL STANDING ITEMS

10.1 Play areas/Playing Field – to receive any reports:

Peter Foster had the pink book and there were no problems to report. The book would be passed to Matthew.

10.1.1 Play area reports – to update on trampoline tile gluing

With the ongoing wet weather, the trampoline tile had still not been glued. Mary Ann had the trampoline tile glue and would get this done shortly once the weather improved.

Action: Mary Ann to glue tile. Robert to provide temporary fencing around trampoline if needed.

10.1.2 New storage building on field – to update on progress in obtaining quotes and to update on planning application submission

Mary Ann gave an update. Four quotes had been received and details of each of these had been circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting. The planning application had been submitted to WODC and details of this had been discussed under item 7 – Planning.

The specifications for the base needed clarifying, and Mary Ann and Tim would measure this up and get the final spec agreed. After careful consideration and further discussion, Council **resolved** to accept the quote from AC Jackson. The final price would need to be confirmed with them once they had visited the site and when the final specification for the base was agreed. It was also noted to check that an anti-condensation membrane would be included as this was required to ensure the inside of the shed did not get damp. Council passed on their thanks to Mary Ann and Tim for all the work they had done on getting to this stage.

Action: Mary Ann to contact AC Jacksons to agree quote and to finalise base specification with Tim.

10.1.3 Picnic bench on field – to receive an update from Picnic Bench Working Group re location for installation of a new picnic bench on the playing field and obtaining quotes for additional safety surfacing, plus to consider complaint from residents re picnic benches and to consider installation of benches instead

A complaint had been received this month from residents who lived near the bottom end of the field, who were unhappy about not being consulted about the proposed new picnic benches. They also were unhappy about the amount of noise they often had to put up with from children playing near their property on the climbing frame (and sometimes on the roof of the teenage shelter) and especially noise associated with the zip wire. They felt the proposal for the two new picnic tables would add to the current noise nuisance and attract a mess from food brought to the site and could potentially be used for noisy parties. An apology had been offered on behalf of the Council for not consulting them and an explanation was given that the PC thought that siting picnic tables near the play equipment was not something that would have attracted any significant noise or disturbance to them. They were advised that the tables were meant for the use of parents with their young children playing on the nearby equipment. They did, however, feel that benches at the proposed site would be acceptable as these would be less likely to attract food mess and noise.

Councillors noted these concerns, but after some discussion did not feel that the two new picnic benches would significantly add to the noise or encourage any food mess. They did agree to monitor the situation once the benches were installed and noted that there was already a litter bin near the zip wire for any waste to be cleared away. They also wanted to provide what was originally asked for by the parents which was picnic benches (with a table) rather than just a bench.

Mary Ann confirmed that since the last meeting she had found a company (Sawscapes) that could provide wooden picnic benches that had curved seats that worked out cheaper than the plastic ones discussed last month. After a brief discussion, Council **resolved** to accept the quotation from Sawscapes for the safety surfacing extension and to ask them to provide the timber picnic tables as well, with the total cost quoted being £4,375 exc VAT. Council passed on their thanks to Mary Ann for all her work on this.

Action: Mary Ann to arrange work with Sawscapes, Clerk to write to residents re outcome.

10.1.4 Tractor – to update on getting a winter service carried out

Robert had not had chance to contact the company regarding the quote but would do so this month.

Action: Robert to liaise with supplier to see if price for winter service can be reduced.

10.1.5 Replacement of Hornbeam trees on the playing field – to update on replacement of the dead Hornbeam trees on the playing field

Robert had ordered the replacement trees and was in receipt of them, he just needed to plant them which he would do as soon as he could.

Action: Robert to replace Hornbeam trees on field.

10.1.6 Playing field mowing: To confirm whether PC wish to continue using Ubico to mow the field

Notification had been received from Ubico advising that the Retail Price Index had increased and was forecasted to be at 2.5% for the 2020/21 season, resulting in Ubico having to increase their annual costs of the work they carry out across all of their services by 2.5%. This included the mowing carried out on the playing field. After a brief discussion, Council **resolved** to approve the 2.5% increase. The Clerk would advise Ubico accordingly.

Action: Clerk to write to Ubico to confirm price increase as above.

10.2 Village Highway Matters – to receive any reports

10.2.1 Highways reports: Overhanging shrubs on Hurst Lane

The Clerk had been notified that the shrubs had all been cut back so no further action was necessary.

10.2.2 Parking near the Church – to discuss any response from Witney Town Charity re suggestion of leasing their field as a temporary car park and planting trees on their land

The Clerk wrote to Sarah Fenton at Savills last month regarding the above and received a reply which advised that the email had been forwarded on to their development partner and she would discuss with her client. She also noted the comments about tree coverage and hoped to get back to the Parish Council as soon as possible. This was duly noted.

10.2.3 Comet Bus – to consider providing some co-funding with OCC for a Freeland to Witney Comet Bus service

As already noted in item 8, the Chairman and Alaa were due to attend a meeting on 17th March with OCC to discuss a possible Comet Bus service providing a Freeland to Witney service. OCC were apparently willing to roll over some funding for a Freeland to Witney service provided there was co-funding from the parish council and/or users. (or if the service were to serve Freeland and other villages, such as Stanton Harcourt and Standlake).

Alaa was hoping to argue that it would be administratively easier to run the service for free. Peter or Alaa would update the Council after the meeting.

10.2.4 Pigeon House Lane – to note issue with HGV getting stuck in lane last month and to consider if any action needs to be taken to stop HGVs driving down this lane (change of signage, blocking lane etc)

This had already been covered at item 8 – Liam was going to add this to his list for investigation/consultation.

10.2.5 Village benches by bus stops – to consider resident's suggestion to move a bench by a disused bus stop so that it is adjacent to the Little Free Library

A suggestion had been made by a resident to move one of the benches that is located by a disused bus stop to outside of 138 Wroslyn Road (next to the Little Free Library). Matthew has had to remove the bench that was there due to it deteriorating, and a resident had suggested moving one of the other benches to replace the deteriorated one. Whilst this was a good idea in theory, there was the problem of having to install a concrete base for the bench, which presented all sorts of Highways related issues when this was investigated for a large little free library. Councillors therefore agreed not to move any benches but noted there was a bench just opposite Matthew's house that could be used to sit and read.

10.3 Footpath & Bridleway matters/Footpath Book – to receive any reports plus:

The rota was due to restart in March. Robert had the book so the Clerk would email him the rota to be placed inside the book.

Action: Robert to place rota in footpath book and start checking the allocated footpath.

10.4 Garden of Remembrance – to receive any reports

No reports had been received.

10.4.1 To receive an update on the outstanding archway work

The Sawmill was currently closed but Mary Ann had spoken with Lee Hyatt (from the Sawmill) re the outstanding archway work. Lee had advised he would be able to complete the outstanding work so Council **resolved** to approve Lee Hyatt completing the archway work.

Action: Mary Ann to arrange archway work with Lee Hyatt.

10.4.2 To update on the progress to review the GOR rules and consider some slight alterations to wording with regards to plot sizes/locations

Following on from last month, it had become apparent that it may be necessary to amend the wording of the GOR rules in relation to sizes of stone tablets and options to choose plots. The GOR Working Group would arrange a virtual meeting and review the rules and report back to the Council. It was suggested using Word 'track changes' as an easy way to do this.

Action: GOR Working Group to arrange virtual meeting re reviewing rules, Clerk to attend.

10.5 Freeland Hall Management Committee – to receive any reports

There was nothing much to report. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, there had been a mass of cancellations for the village hall which was to be expected but the finances were such that they could manage. The maintenance of the Hall was all up to date.

10.5.1 To update on installation bike racks by the Village Hall

This had not been done but would be done as soon as possible.

Action: Robert to install bike racks by the Village Hall.

11. CORRESPONDENCE – To discuss and agree any actions arising from:

(a) OALC – February update – details had been emailed around.

(b) WODC – Town & Parish Councils Meeting – to be held on Thursday 26th March at 7.00pm, WODC offices Woodgreen, Witney – this had now been cancelled.

(c) Oxford City Council Sustainable City Team – invite to Parish Council's Climate Emergency Workshop to be held on Sat 28th March, 9.45am – 1.00pm at Long Room, Oxford Town Hall. This was likely to be cancelled although hadn't been as yet.

Plus, additional items received since agenda sent out:

(d) Cancellation of May elections – the elections had been postponed till May 2021 - details had been emailed around. See item 6.4.

(e) OCC Rights of Way drop in – to be held on 29th April, 1.00pm – 4.30pm in Bicester Tesco's Community Room – details had been emailed around, although it was likely this would be cancelled in due course due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

(f) Freeland Cricket Club – request from Club for assistance with new mower – this had been discussed at item 1 and would be considered in due course.

12. CIRCULATION

March circulation – out at meeting.

No February circulation.

13. TO RECEIVE A MONTHLY UPDATE REGARDING FREELAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

There was nothing further to report. The school were investigating plans to set up a school library.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS – FOR PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION ONLY

Defibrillators – It was noted that the pads had expired in the defibrillator by the school. Council agreed to order new pads for each defibrillator.

Action: Clerk to order new pads as above.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

No further meetings would be held until the Coronavirus pandemic had subsided and it was deemed safe to hold meetings again. The minutes of the meeting would be circulated via email for approval.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 10.03pm.