

FREELAND PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 26TH APRIL 2019 AT 7.30PM IN FREELAND HALL, FREELAND, OXFORDSHIRE

PRESENT:

Chairman:	Peter Newell
Vice-Chairman:	Robert Crocker
District Councillor:	Alaa Al-Yousuf, Merilyn Davies (until 9.30pm)
County Councillor:	Liam Walker (until 9.30pm)
	Parish Councillors: Mary Ann Canning, Bill Phillips, Tim Webster, Peter Foster, Matthew Ruddle, Veronique McCoy
Neighbourhood Police:	Not present
Clerk/RFO:	Not present
Minute-taker:	Polly McClean

Plus 100 electors of the Parish.

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming everyone.

1. APOLOGIES:

PCSO Phil Workman – work commitments.

Lisa Smith, Parish Clerk - injury.

The Chairman explained that the minutes of the meeting would be taken by Polly McClean in the absence of Lisa Smith, who had suffered an injury and could not be present.

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ON 20TH APRIL 2018

The Chairman advised that the minutes had been signed off and that copies were on display at the back of the hall for electors to read during the refreshment break.

3. ANNUAL REPORT BY PETER NEWELL, CHAIRMAN OF FREELAND PARISH COUNCIL ON PAROCHIAL MATTERS.

The Chairman began his report with an introduction of the members of the Parish Council. He thanked Jane Linnell, who had stepped down as a member of the Parish Council in July 2018, for all her hard work and welcomed Véronique McCoy as the new member. He also explained that they were now 3 years into the 4-year cycle and that anyone wishing to join the Parish Council could put their name forward for election next year when Parish Council elections were due and urged people to consider doing so.

On Planning, the Chairman explained that the S106 funding to which the village was eligible as part of the approval of Mears New Homes (the 41-house development on the A4095) had still not been received but, in the meantime, £16,000 had been spent on a tractor and mower for the playing field. He also noted that, in connection with the (now disused) Methodist Church, a Community Benefit Society (CBS) had been set up and

this had been granted planning permission for change of use of the Church to a shop/café/hub. Roger Faulkner would speak about this later

Garden Village

The Chairman noted that this would be discussed later in the meeting as an individual Agenda item.

The Garden of Remembrance:

The Chairman gave an update on the progress of The Garden of Remembrance. This is now open for the scattering and burial of ashes. Lisa Smith has taken on responsibility as Registrar for organizing this. Mary Ann Canning had ideas for works of art, funding for which would be part of S106 funding, and these were available for people to look at during the break. The Chairman asked that people give feedback on which pieces might be most appropriate and also for suggestions for additional pieces.

Mobile phone coverage

The Chairman updated the meeting on mobile phone coverage and the mast that had been mentioned last year but that had never been erected. The Chairman explained that, due to a change in government regulations, negotiations over the land to be used had stalled but that the Parish Council would continue to monitor any changes to government funding in order to resolve the issue as soon as the opportunity arose. He directed enquiries to Peter Foster who was the Council lead on this matter.

Little Free Library:

The Chairman gave an update on The Little Free Library. A larger library was being made, funded by The Teddy Girls. In order for the larger structure to be located in the same position as the current one, planning permission would be required. It had therefore been agreed that the new structure could be located between the wall of Freeland Primary School and the line of trees on the pavement of Wroslyn Road. This would not require planning permission as it had previously been established that the trees are considered to be located on the school grounds and therefore the boundary of the school ends beyond the trees rather than at the wall.

Financial Matters:

The Chairman gave an overview of the funding for the Village Hall. The Precept (Village part of the Council Tax) was being reduced for the coming year (2019-20) by 2.7%. Overall for the 6 years 2014 - 2020 the change is a reduction of 8.3%
On the matter of funding for the village Hall construction and the outstanding loans, he explained that in 2010-13 we obtained £350,000 in grants and donations for building the Hall:

(£150,000 in 2 grants from WODC, £100,000 in 2 grants from Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd (WREN), £50,000 from Sport England, £7,500 from OCC ,
Plus £9,100 from Freeland Open Gardens plus private anonymous donations.)

The remainder (£350,000) of the £700,000 cost of the project came from two loans from the Public Works Loan Board. Half of the Precept goes to paying off those loans. He noted that the money we owe on the PWLB loans is steadily decreasing:

- The £300,000 we borrowed in 2011 for the Hall (over 25 years) has now dropped to £271,832

The £50,000 we borrowed for the CRF (changing rooms and Newell Room) in 2013 (over 10 years) has now dropped to £23,771.

New VAS signs:

The Chairman described the new Vehicle Activated flashing signs (VAS signs) and explained that these had been placed in the two areas that the Speedwatch Team had recommended, based on the information they had gathered regarding areas where speeding tended to happen.

Speeding:

The Chairman explained that the Speedwatch Team had had a setback due to a change in their ability to use the Bushnell gun and submitting the findings to the police. He noted that this would be covered in more detail by Roger Faulkner in the allocated agenda item.

Donations:

The Chairman thanked The Freeland Teddy Girls for donating £663.90 towards the Little Free Library and £433 for other Village projects, and the Gardening Club for donating £150 for a Hornbeam tree on the playing field to mark the 20th anniversary of the Club.

The Chairman concluded his report by passing on a number of thanks to various people/groups – these were as follows:

Nigel Green for keeping the lawns and hedges around the Village Hall, the Garden of Remembrance site and the Green so well mown and clipped; Jason Footitt for his help in mowing the Green; Graham Lay for refurbishing the seats around the Village; Members of the Gardening Club run by Jill and Ray Evans for the wonderful display of daffodils throughout the Village and for funding the Hornbeam tree in the Playing Field (planted by Robert Crocker); John and Margaret Hewitt for keeping the Pump on the Green well stocked with lovely flowers; Mary Ann Canning, Tim Webster and Robert Crocker for organizing the planting of trees and shrubs in the Garden of Remembrance; Bill Phillips for constantly picking up litter and making the Village look so much neater; Matthew Ruddle for organizing the Big Lunch and the Little Free Library; The Internal Auditor, Brian Wildblood for his help in auditing the accounts and Kenny Wylie for editing the very helpful Village Grapevine

He also thanked everyone for all of the small additional things they do around the village.

4. ANNUAL REPORT BY THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR – LIAM WALKER

Liam Walker explained that he would be covering three topics:

The A40:

Liam explained they were progressing with the new scheme and that £180m was to be invested. He mentioned that investment was being made in a new bus lane and that there was an emphasis on getting people onto public transport to help reduce congestion. He also confirmed that the plans for the park and ride at the end of Cuckoo Lane were being amended to include access from Cuckoo Lane, as had been suggested by a number of his constituents.

Public Transport:

Liam expressed disappointment at the decision to stop the Number 11 bus service but said that a solution couldn't presently be found. He was hopeful that a bus service could be brought back in the future. He noted that with the amount of housing development happening, more money would be available.

Liam urged people to use public transport, cycle or walk whenever possible to give the best argument for a bus service to be brought back. He confirmed that he would update the Parish Council on any progress.

The Cotswold Line:

Liam explained that the platforms had been extended, but the trains hadn't yet been changed, resulting in issues with alignment between the trains and the platform but that this was being corrected with a view to it being resolved by mid-May.

Potholes:

Liam gave an overview of the cost of resurfacing and patching. He urged people to upload information regarding potholes onto the website fixmystreet.com. He explained that this was the site the county council use for reporting potholes and that logging the information there directly would result in the pothole being dealt with more quickly.

Questions:

Liam took a question regarding a change in priority on Cuckoo Lane, directing the traffic around Freeland Village rather than through it. Liam said that he would look into this.

Liam took a question regarding the development by the train station and whether a new car parking facility would be included. Liam said this was being considered.

Liam took a question about road resurfacing prioritization. It was asked why a road in Yarnton had been resurfaced ahead of Cuckoo Lane when it was a slower road in a better state of repair. Liam explained that the criteria for prioritizing road repair included the volume of traffic measured. He said that structural patching on Cuckoo Lane was hopefully going to happen next year and that he would keep working on getting this done.

5. ANNUAL REPORT BY THE DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

ALAA AL-YOUSUF

Alaa first thanked the Parish Council for all their hard work within the parish and for what they had achieved and for the high turnout of residents who had chosen to attend the Annual Parish Meeting.

He talked about his role supporting and working alongside the Parish Council, listing the meetings he had attended over the last year and explained that there were two standing items he was focused on: The Methodist Church and anything that might come up from the Council that would impact the Parish. He discussed his dedication to working on improving pensions, protecting the planet and climate change.

Alaa mentioned that he was pushing for the introduction of new and improvement of current cycle lanes. He had also spent time looking into the elimination of single-use plastics, with an emphasis on raising awareness of sewage pollution and the maintaining of local streams and rivers. He asked that anyone who was interested in knowing more talk to him during the break or after the meeting.

MERILYN DAVIES

Merilyn explained that she had been finding her feet over the course of the year, working out how to best help people and that she was going to be firmer next year. She noted that West Oxfordshire District Council needed to help the County Council more, stepping up a bit and being less inclined to pass the buck.

Merilyn confirmed that she had set up A Hub in A Pub. The sessions would include things like Yoga and computer courses, and she requested feedback on the types of sessions people might be interested in. The sessions would take place at The Three Horseshoes in Long Hanborough.

Merilyn discussed her idea for a WhatsApp group which would enable people to let others know when they were doing something that might be of help to others. She gave the example of someone letting people know they were driving to Witney, giving others the option to car share, or perhaps have something picked up that they couldn't otherwise get.

Merilyn noted that she was no longer a Labour Councillor, but an Independent Councillor, so she can now work across parties.

6. REPORT FROM PCSO PHIL WORKMAN, THAMES VALLEY POLICE

Unfortunately, PCSO Phil Workman could not be present at the meeting. However, he had sent a brief report regarding crime rates in the local area over the past year which the Chairman read out to residents:

Recorded crime figures in Freeland indicated that crime and crime related incidents had stayed roughly the same during the last 12 months (48 reported incidents). The main

offences were Theft and Criminal Damage. No drug offences were recorded in the Parish, but the team had received lots of intelligence regarding several persons who are using drugs, as well as locations of where it is happening, therefore they were working to crack down on this.

The Woodstock Neighbourhood Police Team was now covered under the umbrella of West Oxfordshire Neighbourhood Police. This meant that there were a number of police officers responsible for the community policing side based at Witney Police Station as well as one officer stationed at Chipping Norton. There were still two Police Community Support Officers at Woodstock, Chris Jones and Helen Keen. Helen replaces Phil Workman who was retiring at the end of May.

Thames Valley Police were making more use of the Thames Valley Alert system which was a great way that the police can communicate with the public as well as receive messages back. We can send out messages that are relevant only to Freeland and of interest to different community groups such as Shop watch, Countrywatch, Pubwatch, Business watch etc. – there are many more categories that are on the system which allows us to send out Crime Alerts, Witness Appeals, Crime Prevention Advice and good news stories when they happen! Residents were encouraged to sign up for this and they can do so at www.thamesvalleyalert.co.uk or speak to one of the officers.

Woodstock Police Station was still being used by the Neighbourhood Team, however it was still the intention to move the team into another building in the town, but there was no timescale for this.

The Police still relied heavily on the community to keep them informed of any current or emerging crime trends. If there were any concerns, whether it be security advice, suspicious persons or vehicles, concerns for a vulnerable child or adult or any other information residents would like to pass to the Police, then they wanted to know. They can be contacted on 101, or via the online reporting form on the Thames Valley Police website.

The current Local Policing Priorities were Domestic Abuse, Child Sexual Exploitation, Dwelling Burglaries and the Exploitation of Persons for the supply of drugs. The first two were mainly 'hidden crimes' which mean that they don't come to the public attention as much as the more traditional crimes and this is where the police were concentrating their efforts in reducing the risk to vulnerable children and adults.

It was noted by a member of the audience that speaking to someone by dialing 101 could be difficult and that the online form was better. It was also noted by the Chairman that Freeland was a safe neighbourhood, but that it wasn't exempt from crime and that it was difficult for the police to handle many of the cases due to the lack of evidence. Therefore, it was suggested that any evidence of a crime should be reported as quickly as possible.

7. OXFORDSHIRE COTSWOLDS GARDEN VILLAGE

ANDREA CLENTON, WODC (Garden Village Programme Manager)

Andrea Clenton gave an overview of the national and regional planning policy, what is required and the national context as well as five aspirations for planning in regional context. She explained that planners were expected to bear in mind how the future might look and how any plans might fit with that. She also compared society of the past with current society and that of the future. Andrea asked people to write down one word describing what they thought the very best a community could be in the year 2031. She then collected the answers during the break. Andrea gave an overview of the words people had come up with during the same activity at a meeting in Eynsham.

Andrea took a question regarding when the locals had been given an opportunity to vote for the Garden Village. Andrea explained that it was in the local plan, following consultation.

Andrea gave the details of a dedicated site gardenvillage.org, onto which all information would be uploaded. She confirmed that they were in the process of putting options together and that this would be available for input in July.

There would also be a Community Design Workshop and Public Exhibition event taking place between 15-18th May to which the Parish Council had been invited.

NIGEL PEARCE, EPIC (Eynsham Planning Improvement Campaign)

Nigel started by explaining his background and how he came to live in Eynsham, also describing where he lived. He explained that residents in Eynsham had put together plans for 750 new homes, having come to the conclusion that affordable new housing was essential, but that WODC ignored the proposal, subsequently proposing The Oxfordshire Cotswold Garden Village. He explained that EPIC's initial aim was to persuade WODC to think again and replace this with the original Eynsham plan but now that the Garden Village had been accepted as part of the local plan they were trying to get the best possible outcome for the residents affected. Their concerns included the impact on infrastructure and character and the cohesion of the village. He emphasized the importance of a carbon neutral expansion with the correct infrastructure and the need to challenge assumptions which might risk backsliding.

Nigel talked about EPIC, giving an overview of how it works. He explained that it is unpaid, raises its own funds, is unaffiliated with any political party, has no official offices, has a core handful of people running it, with people coming and going and others staying long-term, but being more involved and less involved as otherwise it could be too intense. The strategy being to keep momentum going. He mentioned that EPIC has a social media presence, does marketing and has staged marches and picnics, including a 5 minute hold up of the A40. He noted that there was a great deal of support from the wider Eynsham community and that coordinating with neighbouring parishes was key as shared expertise was invaluable.

Nigel ended by talking about how to set up a group like EPIC. The importance of identifying a small number of people within the community who could keep an eye on what is happening and give updates; identifying people with expert knowledge and pooling that knowledge; sharing the burden with other communities; sharing resources and communications and supporting one another and each other's events.

BREAK FOR REFRESHMENTS: 9.30pm

MEETING RECONVENED: 9.45pm

8. WILDLIFE CORRIDORS - ROBERT CROCKER

Robert Crocker explained that he had been vehemently opposed to The Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village but, as it was now going ahead, he wanted to make it as good as it can be. He explained the ways in which he had worked hard to create linked habitats, joining the best areas together to create better, connected wildlife habitats. He explained that City Farm was the richest ecological site in the County. He also suggested that, as low wet areas don't lend themselves to be built on, these could form a barrier to any future developments. Robert mentioned that he had been attending meetings with Grosvenor and felt that they might be better promoters when compared with their counterparts.

Robert ended by stating that wildlife corridors were vital to species survival and that he hoped that this development could do something not done before in maintaining these and focusing on the impact on wildlife. Within this, he emphasized the importance of allowing hedgerows to grow rather than aggressively cutting them back as the blossom-bearing points of the hedge were being stripped out at great cost to wildlife.

9. THE VILLAGE HUB - ROGER FAULKNER

Roger Faulkner gave an overview of the background of the village hub. He listed the members involved and explained that, although the Methodist Church was deemed to be an ideal location for the Hub, it needed to be put on the market in order for its value to be established before things could move forward. Once the property was on the market, a share offer would be put to the local residents and local businesses would also be approached with a view to raising the funds required. He confirmed that the necessary change of use had already been agreed, but that the Methodist Church had more recently put an application through for change of use to a private dwelling.

Roger ended by asking people to please participate in any fundraising activities.

10. CHRISTMAS DAY LUNCH 2018 - JULIE STUART-THOMPSON

Freeland resident Julie Stuart-Thompson gave a short update on the Christmas Day Lunch she had organised for local residents. She noted that people came from Freeland, Long Hanborough, North Leigh and Combe and that many of the people who attended would have been on their own on Christmas Day or would probably not have cooked a full Christmas dinner.

Julie thanked Kenny and Dorothy for all their help. She also thanked Kathy and Steve Liddell for cooking.

Julie gave an overview of the help that she had received, including people peeling vegetables, cooking, baking, decorating the hall and giving up time on Christmas Day itself to serve the lunch. She confirmed that planning had already started for the next Christmas Day Lunch and asked for volunteers. She needs two cooks who can cook two turkeys and drop them off for 1pm, people who can help with the preparation and cooking of the meal, people to help serve the meal on Christmas Day and a team of people who can help clear away and tidy the hall at the end of the meal. Alternatively, people can donate money if they would like to. Julie can be contacted via the Freeland Book Club or by the contact details below: Email: julie.st@btinternet.com Tel: 01993 880378.

The Chairman thanked Julie for her presentation and commended her on a very worthwhile and successful project.

11. SPEEDWATCH - ROGER FAULKNER

Roger Faulkner gave an overview of how the Speedwatch Team had worked. It consisted of five people, trained by Thames Valley Police to use a specific speed gun. They took the details of any car driving at over 35mph and sent this, along with whether the driver was male or female, over to Thames Valley Police for logging. However, Thames Valley Police no longer approved the use of the Bushnell gun.

Roger said that there were a number of options available. They could cease completely, invest in an instrument that the police would accept or simply continue as they were, but without submitting the information to the police. The decision had been made to go on with the same gun. However, an advert placed in the Grapevine for volunteers to join Speedwatch had been unsuccessful, with not one response.

Roger ended by requesting help from anyone who might be interested.

12. FREELAND HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - ROB CROCKER

Robert Crocker, Chairman of the Village Hall Management Committee gave a brief report on the hall's progress over the past year. There were nearly 1,000 individual bookings last year, so things were progressing well. There was currently £35,000 in-hand but, having had a maintenance holiday for the first 5 years, it was now necessary to spend more on maintenance. However, it was still covering its costs. Part of the loan agreement was that the hall would be self-sufficient, which it is, but Robert emphasized the importance of ensuring that standards don't drop as this would result in fewer bookings.

Robert explained that, with the large range of activities taking place at the hall, including sport and social, trying to satisfy everyone could be a balancing act. There were eight weddings last year and a decision had been made to try not to have many more than that due to the disruption they can cause. Robert thanked all of the committee who work very hard but he singled out Dot Sharpe who was doing a wonderful job.

Robert took a question regarding whether people who booked the hall had the option to park on the playing field. He confirmed that the path that has been put in is there to enable guests attending events to park at the basketball pitch and walk down to the hall, but that there are caveats to this and it also depended on the event itself.

13. NET POSITION REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2019

Residents were supplied with copies of the Net Position report for the year ended 31st March 2019. This was accepted by the meeting.

14. REPORTS FROM VARIOUS SOCIETIES IN FREELAND

Reports from the Allotment Association, Bell Ringers, Primary School, Gardening Club, Pre-School, Football Club, St Mary's Baby & Toddlers Group, Cricket Club, WI, Parochial Church Council, Brownies, Wine Group, Little Free Library, Photo Group, Eynsham Consolidated Charity and the Craft Club were all displayed for residents' information. They would also be placed on the village website (under the Parish Council heading) for residents to read at their leisure.

15. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

One resident asked about potholes. It was confirmed that this had been answered by Liam Walker during his agenda item.

Another resident asked about mobile phone signal. It was confirmed that this had been answered by Peter Newell during his annual report.

Another resident asked what was being done to address the speed of traffic along Pigeon House Lane. The Chairman explained that Highways had been contacted about reducing it to a 20mph zone, but that they had not been interested in moving this forward. Alaa Al-Yousuf noted that the process required by Highways was complicated and required various studies, statistics and accident and near accident reports, for which the Parish Council would be financially liable, as well as being liable for any remedial work. It was agreed that it will require a strong will from the community through the Parish Council. Robert Crocker mentioned that the 20mph rubbish bin stickers were an idea he had seen in another area and he had noticed that they were now using green stickers that just had 20mph in a circle, which could possibly be more effective. He would look into this.

A comment was made about the parking on the corner by the Church and a suggestion was made to increase the size of the No Parking signs.

There being no further business the Chairman thanked everyone for their time, interest and input and the meeting closed at 10.15pm.