

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting for Watlington Residents held at 8pm on Thursday 23rd April 2009 At the Memorial Club, High Street, Watlington

Present:

Councillors:

Angie Paterson - Chairman
Ian Hill
Barbara Crookes
Tony Williamson
David Shannon
Roger Beattie
David Tindale
Rhian Woods
Nick Greaves
Linda Nicholson
Di Tolan
Keith Lane

Officers:

County Councillor:

District Councillors:

Members of the Public:

Kristina Tynan, Sarah Pullen
Roger Belson
Rodney Mann, Angie Paterson
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1. WELCOME

Angie Paterson welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming.

She reported that last year residents raised communication as an issue which needed improvement and the council have been looking at this during the year and tried to make improvements to the regular monthly page in the Watlington Times, and the website. The Watlington Times page has also been made available as a monthly newsletter. This evening on the signing-in page we have asked for emails of residents who are interested in receiving updates from us. If you haven't already done so and would like email news please let us have your address before you leave this evening.

This Annual Parish Meeting is for the whole community. The Parish Council has therefore invited Local Organisations to speak for a few minutes on their recent news and provide them with a forum to speak to local residents. Angie Paterson also drew attention to the updated booklet of Local Organisations which gives information about organisations in Watlington. A copy was given to all attendees as they arrived. This is a draft version at present and will be made generally available when completed.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 24TH APRIL 2008 TO BE SIGNED AS A CORRECT RECORD.

It was noted that Nick Greaves was present at this meeting.

Resolved: That these minutes are a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

Angie Paterson said that we will get the minutes from this year's meeting onto the website as soon as is possible rather than wait a year to publish them.

3. REPORTS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Age Concern - Tom Holden (Chair Watlington and District Age Concern)

WADAC continues to provide services and activities for older people in the area, particularly by running a weekly Day Centre and the Drop In at 33 High Street, which is open Monday to Friday mornings. The Day Centre is held in the Parish Council's West Room on a Thursday and caters for 15/16 frailer men and women and includes a home cooked lunch. Transport is provided for those who need it.

The Drop In is open to all, providing the opportunity to sit and chat over a cup of tea or coffee, to visit a Chiropodist or Chiropractor, collecting hearing aid batteries and access National Age Concern advice material. The Drop In receives an average of 70 visits per week and is staffed by a rota of over 20 volunteers.

WADAC received grants from OCC who carry out routine checks. Good relations are maintained with Oxfordshire Age Concern who have been very helpful. The Directors of WADAC have set in motion plans to update the Drop In premises so that it will operate on the ground floor only and will be much more accessible to the disabled. WADAC has agreed in principle to enter into a 125 year lease for the whole of 33 High Street, including the planning permission obtained by OCC for a ground floor extension and creation of a flat above. The details of the lease have not yet been finalised. WADAC hopes to build the extension after work on the library has been completed. WADAC is grateful to the WPC for its decision two years ago for a grant of £2000 towards the cost of extension. It is hoped that a start can be made in 2010.

Business Association – Robin Holmes Smith.

The Business Association was set up to allow all businesses to communicate with each other. They have a healthy membership of High Street traders but need to have a major push to other businesses and trading areas to join. Hopefully you noticed the Christmas Fair, the flags are out for St. Georges Day. The Saturday Morris Men event was organised by Caroline Lye. Robin gave thanks to her. The biggest thing we are planning for is the Christmas Event, with better Christmas trees and lights and will be asking the WPC to assist with this to make the people of Watlington proud. They will be requesting ideas from members of the community.

With the Papershop being empty, the Business Association are talking actively with the owners so that they can help to find someone who wishes to lease this shop. There has been a lot of effort into keeping the High Street looking good.

British Legion – Derek Elliott

On behalf of the committee the British Legion want to thank WPC for tremendous help last year with the storage of poppies and equipment etc.

The people of Watlington are proud of RBL. We have won the county trophy 10 out of 12 years. We have a membership of 225, but sadly we don't have many active members. We

do not have any young people joining us. The Watlington branch is in severe danger of not being here in 5 years time. The average age of the Watlington branch is 74. There are four members over 80 and they cannot keep going on forever! The Legion is not just for old people, we help ex-service people from young children up to people of old William Stone's age. The Legion helps ferry people to surgeries/hospitals etc. You do not have to be an ex-service member to be in the Legion. Anyone over 17 can become a member. As they say you do not have to be a bird to be in the RSPB!

CAB – John

John is the advisor who visits Watlington every Thursday. He asked for his appreciation for the availability of the office in Old School Place to be recorded. Last year in Watlington CAB had 199 enquiries, 77 appointments, 96 drop ins and 26 follow ups. On top of that, case notes need to be written up in the afternoon. Follow ups take place with letters and telephone calls etc. Topics covered during the year have been benefit/debts/relationships/tax/consumer problems. From April 2009 CAB have increased the hours they are available in Watlington. This has been due to additional funding and more money is available nationwide to give more access to the bureau. Watlington CAB is now open on Thursdays from 9.30am – 1.30pm.

Environment Group – Robert Barber

We hold a programme of walks, talks and visits covering a wide range of environmental and natural history subjects, as well as offering occasional courses and training workshops. We carry out practical conservation work in the parish – in particular at Watlington Chalk Pits, a Local Nature Reserve, which we manage on behalf of Watlington Parish Council. We circulate a newsletter to members, and respond with help or advice to local residents with wildlife questions. Last year we had 75 members and activities included talks on hedgerows, swifts, orchids etc. There were visits to Oxford University and Warborough Nature Reserves. We had a Spring and Autumn walk and lots of practical work was carried out. This was primarily taking care of the chalk pits, ancient track way, Watlington Hill, the verges up Hill Road. Thanks to WPC who cover cost of liability insurance which allows activities to be done. Subscriptions are £5 per year.

Friends of Watlington Library – Philip Pinney

FOWL was formed 11 years ago. Oliver Knowles became the chairman and the campaign to prevent closure and develop the flat began. The flat was empty and the library had no money. Oliver stood down a year ago and sadly died three months later- his legacy of saving the Library and raising £46,000 are fitting testimonies of his tireless work for our community.

We now have over £51,000 in the kitty and our prime task is to get the building work started. The OCC newsheet received this week announced that '£700,000 for Watlington Library' – false dawn or will the OCC Capital Steering Group really give the go-ahead when it meets next month? I leave it to our County Councillor Roger Belson to brief us further when he delivers his report later. Philip Pinney thanked Roger Belson and OCC's Library Staff for their staunch battle to realise the development plan and to do so before 10th November which will be the 60th Anniversary of Charlotte Coxe's gifting of the High Street building used by Age Concern and Library as a Trust Property 'for the benefit of the people of Watlington'. Finally he thanked Bel and her staff for making the Library such a welcome and splendid facility in the heart of this town- by your next AGM, let us hope that she has a larger and fully refurbished Library with a flat above earning income for the people of Watlington.

St. Leonard's Church – Rev Christopher Evans.

There are so many everyday things that take place – St Leonard's, which is the Parish Church of Watlington has been at the service of community for 900 years and continues to be so. Over the last year there have been many events that have included our community. For example, the Pictorial guide to Church, Fetes and events which have had the involvement of the schools. The Church was proud that we were able to put on a semi-state funeral for William Stone which went out live on the BBC and Sky. There were increased congregations over Easter. There has also been an increase in the number of marriages.

I know you will expect me to speak about other things. I must lead the congregation to look to the future. It is a hard process. I personally find change quite difficult. When we stopped standing up for the National Anthem at cinemas I found it difficult! It is my responsibility to safeguard the future of St. Leonard's which means we have to think outside the box which can be uncomfortable. The Churchyard and Church Hall are all dealing with people's memories and any changes to this can be difficult for lots of people. We have to look to the future like any other organisation. I hope to soon be in a position to share with you in more detail how we can go forward, hopefully in partnership with other organisations. St Leonard's Church can be a tremendous help to the prosperity of Watlington and vice versa. Together in partnership we can go forward.

Twinning Association- Alan Craddock

At the moment the Twinning Association is regenerating itself as it has not been active over last few years. Next year, 2010 sees the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Twinning with Mansle. Mansle want us to celebrate May bank holiday next year in Mansle and a return visit to Watlington will be made in 2011. The committee are looking for people to keep the Twinning Association going. We are also trying to get organisations in Watlington involved with similar organisations in Mansle. Last month we had a successful taster evening with lots of support from the people who attended. We have another meeting tomorrow night. We have had support from clubs and societies. One other thing Mansle has communicated to us - they have 2 students who would like to work in Watlington in July/August so that they can improve their English. If anyone is interested please contact Alan Craddock.

Watlington Speaks - Caroline Lye

I have been asked to give brief update. I have led the steering group since March this year. The project was well advanced and I would like to thank the committee for all that was done prior to me joining. I give special thanks to Di Tolan for her help. Thanks also to Linda, Adrian and Julia for the Beer Mat and Love it/Hate it/Want it Consultation. We have recently had a good meeting with SODC who have advised us how to go forward. SODC will also do the printing. The Questionnaire should be ready for printing by the end of May for distribution during June.

Local Organisations Question and Answers

Q. Tim Horton told the meeting that the Church Hall still provides active, simple and cheap use to the community. He thought the new scheme is the most Mickey Mouse scheme that this community has seen in years.

A. Rev C Evans commented that Mr Horton had chosen, at a very early stage in the consultation to object to the ideas. He felt it inappropriate to dialogue with Mr Horton when he had already chosen to discuss this with the Diocese of Oxford, a higher body.

Q. Ian Bell Tony Williamson has a conflict of interest which as Parish Councillor shouldn't be allowed. Who has a god given right to make decisions for other people.

A. Rev C Evans On behalf of my colleagues – Tony Williamson, Angie Paterson and David Tindale have made it perfectly clear that they do not participate in any discussions regarding this matter. Reports on the Church Hall issue have been in the Watlington Times.

More Reports from Local Organisations

University of Third Age (U3A) – Jacky Wagstaff

I represent Ridgeway U3A which is a new group for retired and semi-retired people. We have a membership of nearly 60. We meet monthly on the third Tuesday of each month at 2.30pm when we have a speaker. There will be a get together at the Age Concern Drop In where interested new members can attend. Each month we have representation from different interests. We are no threat to other groups in Watlington. There is a wealth of talent in these golden oldies. The next Meeting is on 19th May and the Speaker will be Hugh Granger, who will talk on World War 2.

Friends of Watlington Hill- Terry Jackson

We are really short of volunteers at the moment. We meet one weekend in the month to carry out scrub bashing, cleaning the white mark and clearing paths. Please contact me if interested.

Helen Rints – Extended Services & Childrens Centre Manager

Helen Rints has expressed her apologies for not attending the meeting in person but has outlined a brief summary of the Extended Services activities of Watlington Primary School & Icknield Community College for the past year plus some information regarding the new Children's Centre. The full report was on the back of the agenda.

Further Questions and Answers to Local Organisations

Q. Linda Nicholson asked Alan Craddock the age of the students.

A. Alan Craddock replied that they are 20 years old. They are willing to work for their keep and are both female.

Angie Paterson noted the enormous breadth and range of organisations that had spoken and thanked them all for sharing information with everyone and for their contributions to the community.

4. PRESENTATION AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE ANNUAL PARISH REPORT

Resolved: That the Annual Report 2009 is accepted.

5. REPORT FROM WATLINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

A written report had been circulated and Angie Paterson said that she did not want to add much to the written Chairman's Report. Although in the report thanks have been expressed to members and staff of the Council she publicly expressed this thanks.

The bulk of the work on the council is done through our committees and thus the committee Chairmen would give their own reports.

Ian Hill – Strategy.

Strategy Committee is a new committee. The idea is to find a forum for more detailed discussion of whatever is relevant rather than squash a quick discussion into Full Council meeting. Every member of Full Council is a member of the Strategy Committee. We talk about a host of different things: decisions that are needed that require work/thought or everyday management. The other thing we spend time on is giving responses to consultations for a range of different bodies requesting comments. We had 9 Councillors at this week's meeting, spending 2 hours for instance on putting together a response for SODC Core Strategy Consultation. Key issues are described in the notes – traffic, 2 hour waiting in the car park, for example. The other traffic related item is that of parking considerations.

Another issue is the aim to communicate better with the community – we welcome your responses, positive and negative. Contact the Clerk with any comments you have. One key community issue is the Church Hall – I am not going to talk about this tonight. As Vice Chair, I can assure you that I stand in for all discussions on this item. Angie, Tony and Dave all leave the room for all discussions.

Dave Tindale – Planning.

Dave Tindale referred to his report in the documents circulated and added that the committee studies each application and sends a reply to SODC and where they can provide supporting comments. Members of the public are welcome to attend these meetings to discuss applications.

You can visit the SODC website to see applications dating back 50 years.

Finance – Tony Williamson.

The Finance Report is on page 6 and 7. Page 12 details the Provisional Year End Accounts for the year ending 31/3/09 (three weeks ago). Tony Williamson thanked the Clerk for producing these.

Operations – Roger Beattie

This committee is also a new one and meets during the day so that things can be looked at on site and that we can liaise with our caretaker. The committee works closely with the Strategy Committee which gives the Operations Committee directives and helps the Clerk to maintain the day to day working of the Council by obtaining estimates etc and has a main aim to keep Watlington clean and tidy and our properties in good condition.

6. REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCIL - Roger Belson

A written report was included in the documents. Roger Belson drew attention to the Library extension, which has been an ongoing saga for 20 years. Although he could not confirm at this stage he reported that the Capital Committee and Steering Group have set out a plan where we have sufficient money to extend the Library and refurbish the flat above. It is hoped that confirmation would be received in early May. Roger Belson reflected his sorrow that Oliver Knowles is not here to see it, having put in so much work over the years to try to make it happen. Finally Mr Belson reminded the meeting that there is an election on June 4th for the European Election and also the County Council election.

7. REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCIL – Rodney Mann and Angie Paterson

Rodney Mann gave the report on behalf of himself and Angie Paterson. The full District report is in the pack. There are 2 key subjects to talk about. The first is the one that affects

all of us - the change in the waste collection system. Wheelie bins are being distributed at the moment. This does not mean that everyone has to have them. There is a set of criteria about what is suitable and what is not. There are 3,000 out of 50,000 properties not suitable for wheelie bins. There will be people that we have to discuss the issue carefully with. We have a set of guidelines for officers to operate within.

The other aspect is the aspect of planning and the future of planning within South Oxon. This is in the consultation stage and will need lots of work and responses will be needed. The District Council recognise that these are important decisions and that some will have conflicting views so there will be interesting decisions to take.

Recreation Ground – New Play Equipment Scheme

Angie Paterson reported that at the time the area was fenced off and the diggers were in! The largest part of the grant came from the District Council for which the Parish is very grateful. This has been the biggest project of the Parish Council in the year. The 5th July is earmarked as the official opening day. This will be confirmed when we know that work is on track. Although many people have worked on this project Angie Paterson gave a special thank you to Rhian Woods who has been the Parish Council lead on it.

8. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. Bernard Moseley - commented on traffic problems in Watlington. He drew attention to many of the familiar traffic problems which he perceived to be getting worse and said something should be done. He particularly drew attention to parking on roads which he thought outdated and dangerous.

A. Ian Hill - regarding this issue of parking on roads – the County Council Engineer is sure that this does slow the traffic down. The County Council is planning a consultation to move parking from one side to the other in Shirburn Street and there are a number of reasons for this. One is to reduce congestion in the centre of town by ensuring people going out of town have a priority and so move the traffic build up away from the centre. Secondly the centre of Watlington has recently been identified as an area where air quality is an issue and by doing this it is trying to remove the bottle neck from the Town Hall. This should clear the centre of town and slow down traffic coming in. Traffic issues are regularly on the Parish Council agenda and the Parish Council do all they can on this issue.

Q. David Dibbens - asked why the Parish Council tax has increased this year given the economic climate. He also questioned the level of balances.

A. Tony Williamson - replied as Chairman of the Parish Council Finance Committee. He explained the way in which the Parish Council has consistently approached the level of council tax increase. The council has for many years based its decision on the October price index to avoid vast fluctuations year on year. This is the data available when the amount has to be set and hence the increase this year.

On the balances Canon Williamson reported that we take guidance from our external auditors. Balances should be approximately equal to the annual precept so as to be ready for exceptional expenditure. He also said that a lot of the balance is earmarked. For example some is grant money already received for the play equipment which is therefore to be spent on this project. The actual general reserves are about £80,000 which is in the region of what the auditor expects to see in the balances of the Parish Council.

A. Rodney Mann - for District Council commented on the District Council tax and costs. Mr Mann agreed that taxes need to be kept as low as possible and said that we had to be vigorous and bloody minded in our determination to keep costs down. He explained some specific things for the District Council. SODC is the first Council in the whole country to combine two District Councils' management teams to keep costs down. This will save approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ million pounds. It has joint contracts in place and continues to look at ways to save costs. However some costs are imposed. For example the Government has bought in a scheme for Concessionary Fares bus passes, this is given funding by the Government but there is a £400,000 difference between what it actually costs and the funding from Government and the District Council has to find the funding for this difference within our savings. We have no choice with certain directives from Central Government which leads to unnecessary costs.

Q. Tim Horton asked several questions:

1st Question to Angie Paterson - Whilst recognising that Mrs Paterson absented herself from discussions on the Church Hall Mr Horton asked if she has offered any advice orally or any other way as to how people may act?

2nd Question to Ian Hill - Mr Horton asked is there was anything to report on the discussions to secure Masons Wood as an open space for the community and whether an agent had been employed and if there were any implications for planning for the future owners of the scheme?

3rd Question to Tony Williamson - Mr Horton asked why the expenditure figure was not published on the leaflet sent out with the council tax. He also commented that 20 years ago central services were less than 10% but are now well in excess of 40%.

4th Question to Roger Beattie - on the Operations Report. Mr Horton commented that he was pleased to see that there are plans to enter Britain in Bloom. He also commented that he thought the car park was not kept sufficiently clean.

5th Question to Rodney Mann - on Refuse Collection. Mr Horton asked what the arrangement for wheelie bins was in Quarrington Place, The Lilacs and Chestnut Place.

6th Question to Roger Belson - Mr Horton asked if the County Council intended to repair potholes, commenting that he thought the condition of roads in this particular community has never been so poor.

A Q1. Angie Paterson - Mrs Paterson said that she had not been involved with discussions about the Church Hall either formally or informally. She commented that she is fully aware of the Code of Conduct on such matters.

A Q2. Ian Hill – Mr Hill reported that the land at Masons Wood is owned by the Icknield Masonic Lodge. They are emphatic that they do not want it built on and are keen to have the WPC take it over. This issue is in a confidential stage at the moment. The Parish Council are very keen for it to remain as it is.

Dave Tindale - also commented that it was reported in the Confidential Minutes of the Parish Council in May last year that we were looking at how to protect Masons Wood. This led to where we are now, but such things move slowly.

A Q3. Tony Williamson – Mr Williamson said that half of the Central Services expenditure is salaries of the staff, clerk and assistants and the other half includes gas supply, audit, insurances, grants, CAB, youth club and the Parish Plan. Anyone is welcome to see the detailed figures.

A Q4. Roger Beattie - Mr Beattie agreed that the car park was not as clean as we would like and that the issue was in hand as is minuted in the Operations Committee minutes for last month.

A Q5. Roger Belson - Mr Belson said that work is being done on potholes and we are doing the best to repair holes as quickly as possible. This year has been particularly difficult due to the damage caused by the extreme weather we have had.

Linda Nicholson added a comment in relation to Mr Horton's first questions. She said that she is not a church-goer, and wanted to reassure the meeting that all discussions on the Church Hall issue are handled with scrupulous care. She confirmed that Mrs Paterson, Mr Tindale and Canon Williamson had not suggested anything to the Council and that all work independently.

A Q6. Rodney Mann – In response to the question on bins he said that he would find out. I can't give you an answer to bin problems, because you haven't asked me before. I will find out the answers.

Q. Terry Jackson - re changing of bins to wheelie bins. Mrs Jackson asked if small wheelie bins could be provided. We produce hardly any landfill rubbish and try not to produce recycled rubbish. We think the size of the bin is inappropriate.

A. Rodney Mann - responded that in the initial phase the same size bin was being delivered as standard to 50,000 homes. However it may be possible to change at a later stage.

Q. David Dibbens - Mr Dibbens asked if there could be a meeting twice a year.

A. Angie Paterson - Mrs Paterson replied that if people wanted to come to more meetings they are always welcome at Parish Council meetings. Full Council meets 11 times a year and questions raised at these would enable the Parish Council to respond more quickly. She also told the meeting that a forward plan was being prepared which would enable everyone to have more notice of what is coming up and when.

Q. Alan Keen - Mr Keen asked if the meeting could be at a different venue next year due to noise from other rooms.
There were no further questions.
Angie Paterson again thanked everyone for attending

The Meeting closed at 21.54pm