

**MINUTES OF THE SPEEN PARISH COUNCIL ASSEMBLY HELD ON
11TH APRIL 2005 AT 7P.M. IN THE SPEEN HALL**

Present: G Foulkes (Chairman) J Booth (Vice Chairman) E Dineen A Snook
W B John P Calder L Homersham K Rai J Ives (Clerk).

District Councillor: P Bryant

Members of the Public: 9 plus Newbury Weekly News

1.. **Apologies:** C Woodhead. M Franks E Vandyk.

2.. **Welcome:** The Chairman G Foulkes welcomed all those present and hoped they would enjoy the proceedings. He then welcomed Mrs Sandy Briscoe from Patient and Public Involvement in Health, West Berkshire, and invited her to talk and show visuals.

3...Mrs Sandy Briscoe opened by explaining that more Members were needed in the work with **Patient and Public Health Forums**, These have been set up by the Government to be independent from the NHS but help to review and support the decisions that affect local hospitals and dentistry. She said “ it gives the opportunity for the community to voice what they would like to see from the Health Service”. “The Forums have the legal power to monitor the NHS”. “If you have a minimum of two hours to spare, and you are over 18 years old, you could be a member of the Forums.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Bristoe for coming down from Oxford to talk, and the Newbury Weekly News representative took notes to include in the next edition.

4...**MINUTES:** The Minutes of the previous year’s Parish Assembly were read by the Clerk. They were agreed by the Parish Council and signed by the Chairman.

5.. **MATTERS ARISING:** There were no matters arising.

6...**CHAIRMAN’S REPORT APRIL 11TH 2005**

Thank you all for attending this evening’s Parish Meeting.

The Agenda for this evening has been posted on various Notice Boards around the Parish and the Clerk, Julia Ives, can answer any questions on that Agenda, and has a few additional copies should you require them.

During the last year, since the last Parish Meeting, which was on April 19th 2004, Council has gained during the year two more Councillors, and there is still room for more. I would urge any eligible individuals to approach the Clerk or any other Councillor for further details.

Planning over the period has been reasonably straightforward – list of the most recent applications are now placed on the Notice Boards with the Minutes. We have an extra person on the Planning Committee.

The most contentious issue has been the proposed new Medical Centre on Speen Recreational ground. This was discussed at some length at the Parish Council Meeting 7th March, with 32 members of the public present. A Vote was taken and all members of the public voted against it. The Council then voted and unanimously also voted against any proposed building work.

As was mentioned last year, we still have problems with regard to recreation facilities. These problems have now been overcome, and the footballers have changed areas with beneficial results. To help the congestion at weekends, the Council has extended the car park area at Speen. It is good to notice that some 50 plus players are now enjoying our facilities. We still have a problem with the gates at Stockcross Playing Fields, and this is under constant review.

The Speen Village Fete was held in June last year on Speen Recreational Ground and was successful. A repeat performance is planned for June 11th .2005.

The Council were asked to record the garden work of a lady who was very ill with cancer. I am pleased to advise you that the next road that is built in the Speen area, will be named after her - Monica Gardens.

7. .REPORTS FROM THE COMMITTEES:

- a) **Stockcross Recreational Grounds and Car Park.** A Snook said that there would be more discussion at the next Meeting. The opening of the gate and the rota to close/open it was discussed in some depth.

b) Speen Recreation ground and Car Park. A Snook reported: This year has seen some considerable steps forward to offset the major cost of running the recreation ground by allowing junior footballers to use the grounds and pavilion for organised football training and football games on Saturday and Sunday mornings from @ 10.0am until @ 12.30pm. all supervised by qualified football coaches, one being a local person who having an ear to local knowledge is valuable for local information.

This has saved the pavilion from being considered for demolition as the estimated £1000 + per year upkeep was considered to be an expensive, un-used luxury for parishioners to pay for.

I feel this a move that we should all welcome as it is now being used to accommodate probably more than 100 young people, many from Speen itself and almost self funding, an achievement not to be ashamed of.

This use has caused concern regarding cars being parked on the road. To this end and for other functions that attract a number of cars there, we have made the car park bigger so to accommodate more than double the amount that could park there, for very little effort and relative cost.

While extending the park, the netting fence, that not only was nearing the end of it's useful life and could be considered a safety hazard, has been removed and replaced with barrier poles and a secure gate.

The next planned move is to remove the cricket matting and the granite scalplings beneath, then fill the hole with the re-claimed soil saved from the car park works, then reseed with grass seed. The old cricket net area will be similarly dealt with at the same time.

Other maintenance work for this next year is to check over and repair the fence bordering the houses on the east side, some security work and decoration to the pavilion.

Safety inspections on all the play equipment, has been carried out and any item requiring attention has been done. Clerk has the details.

On the aspect of security, there have been fewer reports of ASB and vandalism.

- c) **Ladywell and the Pound and the War Memorial:** A Butcher (member of the public) reported on the snowdrops at the attractive area known as Ladywell. Wild violets and primroses, kept it looking good. Some public walk there and deer as well abound. A Butcher looks after the Ladywell, Pound and War Memorial for the Council along with his other duties, and the Chairman thanked him for all his efforts. A Butcher noted that two pillars at the War Memorial need repainting now, and the kerb needs attention.

8... PLANNING Planning Report 2005 By A Snook..

This year we have received the regular amount applications and have approved the majority.

The most contentious of these were:

1. A house at the end of Grove Road which we considered too big for the plot and too close to the road. This is in Donnington Parish but as neighbouring PC we were consulted. The application gained approval from WBDC after a number of amendments.
2. Flats applied for then changed to a house at Coxeter Road which we considered did not have adequate off road parking and too close to the adjoining properties. WBDC approval given after various amendments.
3. In Speen, a garage applied for with storage over. This looked like two flats, with an outside staircase to decking, with patio type doors to the store. A building of this height, in this position will seriously overshadow the neighbour due to it's height and mass. It gained approval by WBDC.

There are only two outstanding issues at the moment, that being concern over trees being felled at Bagnor Fish Farm and an appeal regarding a conservatory at Woodspeen

9...FINANCIAL - report by J Ives (Responsible Financial Officer). The Balances in the Bank are as follows: Bank of Ireland £27098.90 and Lloyds TSB plc £1687.97. VAT during the year had been reclaimed to a total of £919.38. The Accounts balance at the year end and the paperwork is imminent from UHY Hacker Young. The Audit in London starts 30th June. There will be an opportunity to view the accounts in the

Stockcross Post Office in May. £1150 has been received from Football and Tennis.
£1176.26 Interest has been received from The Bank of Ireland.
S137 Charity/donations has been given to the sum of £730. The Precept for the current year has been set at £14985.00.

10.. District Councillors Report.

Paul Bryant, West Berkshire District Councillor for Speen

Before I write my annual report I look back at what I said last year. What is striking is that the hot topics then are largely the same ones as this year. How long problems take to solve - how slow progress often is.

For example. last year I reported that Amey, who have a contract to undertake a lot of the administrative work in the Council were in trouble and had been taken over. This prevented their aim of getting business in other councils and thus preventing the economies of scale from which we expected to benefit. This, unsurprisingly, has now come to a head as Amey are making a thumping loss. Ideas of a turn round plan have not come to a satisfactory conclusion and it looks like the contract will be ended. The work now limiting the damage to services and staff and that includes your tax. Although the press release takes the view that the contract was a bold step from which both parties have learnt a lot the reality is that there will be a lot of hard work, heartache and costs sorting things out. Not least is the fact that Amey paid better salaries and these same staff will now have to be taken back or made redundant which will cost a lot.

Another example is the problems with meeting government targets in the planning department. It is only now solving them with the very late reduction to two planning areas and the abolition of the overarching Planning committee. Also the rules are changed - applicants are expected to sort out any problems before an application is submitted rather than negotiating after. Developers may be surprised when their proposals are rejected by time out after negotiations have dragged on. Targets are almost being met although at some cost to democracy and not before severe threats from the ODPM.

Sadly government is pressing us even harder to build at greater housing densities and this is resulting in what I call the rape of the Andover Road with houses on large plots being replaced with blocks of flats. Not only the Andover Road it is going on everywhere. The real problem is the failure of government to encourage development in the north rather than in the south-east which has put so much pressure on places like Newbury.

The long term planning is changing. The old local plan goes and now we have the South East Regional Spatial Strategy taking us to 2026 (when I will be 88). Then follows the Western Corridor & Blackwater Valley Sub-regional Strategy. And at the local level we have the new Local Framework which is now to be a sort of loose leaf document with a lot of it taken over from the current local plan. And then the Parish ones. It might seem complicated to you, it is mind boggling to me. Whilst this may or may not be better it

does mean a lot of work to sort it all out. The carrot for parish councils to produce Village Design Statements and Parish Plans is that if you do not then you have less influence on planning and less likely to get S106 and other grants for parish purposes.

The second year of working with a split council has continued peacefully. Although there have been some differences in opinion. The level of the Council Tax, economies and items such as the proposed Cinema and the St John's roundabout. I think my comment that a hung council is likely to be unexciting is still true although a bit of heat is being generated from the Park Way and Market Place developments. We now have the prospect of a Market Street development although this is in its infancy. The problem up till now has been Network Rail that went into some sort of purdah in their recent financial troubles. Currently there is a substantial planning brief for developers to work with.

My problem with the town developments has been the schizophrenic attitude to traffic. Having busses and taxis in the centre ruins the benefits of pedestrianisation yet the public transport lobby is strong. I think that total pedestrianisation or put back the traffic are the real alternatives.

One thing is certain that government gets more complex every year. It is no surprise that people don't understand what is going on. Even those in the know, know little of the whole picture.

Licensing is now with the council and this has absorbed a lot of effort with little financial support from the government so more on the Council Tax. Surprisingly very few licences have been applied for and there may be a lot of pubs and clubs closed down in the very near future. It seems the warnings have not been headed.

In education there have been a couple of contentious issues.

The government "inclusion" ideas have had a hard ride locally. This policy sees many of those with special educational needs being distributed round the main stream schools. The idea was to distribute the Castle School around 3 or 4 main stream ones. This attracted a lot of adverse comment and has now hopefully been dropped. We can be very proud of the attainments of the Castle School although the buildings are past their best.

Another contentious issue has been school amalgamations because there is excess capacity. In general this has meant combining infant and junior schools as in the case of Winchcombe. This has been a complex issue but it was made a lot more sensitive by a rather poor consultation. We are trying to investigate how much this is going to cost and ?3.8M seems the answer.

On the whole the West Berkshire Schools are in good shape educationally although some of the buildings leave a lot to be desired.

There are likely to be a couple of changes in social services again as a

result of government ideas. The first is the idea of a "care Trust". The essence of this is for the PCT and council to pool some of their resources. In our case the PCT will be in charge of the trust. There is also the possibility of a children's trust where the council will have the lead in the pooled budget. We wait to see how this works.

Looking after old folks has developed after being scrutinised. The emphasis is now on keeping people in their homes for as long as possible rather than moving them to homes. This is achieved through home care workers. People do better in their own homes and it is also cheaper. The pity is that the Council only has enough money to provide care for those in the critical category.

At last the Pinchington Lane waste site is being sorted out. The inconvenience for green waste and the long queues to get in are legendary. New arrangements for getting rid of our waste are about to be finalised with a new contract. We have run out of holes and the contractor will have to get rid of it. The new arrangements will be based on a new waste transfer station at Padworth. A lot of effort has been put into increasing recycling with only modest success. Whilst the curbside collections are useful there are many who will not participate and there is still a lot of waste that does not get sorted - litter for example. I recently visited the Isle of Wight where as well as curbside collections they have automatic separation equipment. Metals and glass separated out, wet matter goes for composting and dry stuff for incinerating. I think this must be the eventual solution here.

In Speen and Stockcross it has been relatively peaceful year

Regretfully the Battle telecom mast was eventually built at Battle Close regardless of our efforts to get it moved to the A34/A4 roundabout. The whole issue was a farce. Land that should have been transferred from Sutton Estates to the Highways Agency and thence to the Council had not been done. The Council failed to issue its refusal notice in time. Sutton Estates refusal to negotiate. Curiously the operator came out reasonable since they were prepared to move the mast if a site could be found. Now it is built it is one of the more curious resembling a telegraph pole. As an aside, putting up a mast that looks like a telegraph pole causes outrage whilst BT can put them up in thousands and without a murmur.

The mast at the Shell garage also caused a lot of concern over safety issues with petrol. These were examined in minute detail but we could prove no safety issues. The point is that it is one thing to claim a danger and quite another to prove it. That mast has also been erected.

Marcus and myself have had problems with the Kersey Crescent flats. These are expected to be redeveloped and are slowly being emptied. This has caused rubbish to pile up outside of them and has brought rats. On a few occasions we have got the mess cleared but back it comes. The loss of this architectural monstrosity will be welcome but we still have to see what

they will be replaced by. I call this style of architecture the "white hot technological revolution" (remember Harold Wilson?) era. The era of oblong boxes with flat roofs, and no character.

The planning applications have all been relatively small but as always developments inevitably effect neighbours and it is often impossible to please everyone. The development of a new clubhouse for Donnington Grove, although in Shaw, affects Speen as it has an entrance onto Grove Road. The concern here is on the traffic coming onto this busy road near a bend. However, since the current entrance is also on Grove Road the total traffic should be the same but split between entrances.

We have also dealt with a lot of problems people have been having with the Council where we hope we have sorted things out.

Finally, it has been a pleasure to work with you and I admire the job you are doing for the parish.

11.. MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION AND INFORMATION.

- a) G Foulkes reported on the recent amalgamation of the Majendie Charity and the Relief in Need Charity. There would in future be one representative from the Parish Council on the new body.
- b) The Chairman announced the resignation of R Wilson as a Councillor and thanked him for his work during the past year. He also announced that Mr Lou Warner and Mr Andy Lees have offered to stand as Councillors and they would be signed in at the Meeting in May. Both gentlemen reside in Speen.

The Meeting closed at 8,45 p.m. and the next Meeting scheduled is the AGM at Speen Village Hall at 7 p.m. on 23rd May.