

**MINUTES OF THE PARISH ASSEMBLY MEETING HELD ON 10<sup>TH</sup> APRIL  
AT SPEEN HALL AT 7 P.M.**

**Present:** G Foulkes (Chairman) J Booth (Vice Chairman) A Snook C Woodhead  
R Tolcher A Lees M Lavelle. J Ives (Clerk)

**District Councillors:** P Bryant M Franks

**Members of the Public:** 11

**Apologies:** P Calder H Ashburner L Warner E Vandyk Newbury Weekly News  
Representative

**Introduction:** The Chairman Welcomed all those present and explained how a Parish  
Assembly is different from a normal Parish Meeting.

G Foulkes then introduced Mrs Angela Money, a representative from Newbury Police  
and Chairman of the local Neighbourhood Watch.

Mrs Money started by explaining her role in crime prevention, wearing three 'hats' a)  
Newbury West Co-ordinator b) Chairman of a group for crime prevention and c) part  
time Officer with Newbury Police, in the administration department. She talked for 35  
minutes on crime prevention, stressing quick communication and reporting to the  
Police, and vigilance in keeping an eye open for the unusual which may develop into  
a crime. All help is invaluable. When one is absent from the home, take precautions  
such as leaving the TV on and a light on upstairs, and no keys visible from the  
outside. If telephoning the Police with a Crime – 999, 112, or 0800 555 111 to report  
any information later.

She said that it is important to shred ones bank statements and private details. If you  
are situated in a Neighbourhood watch area you could get discounts from Insurances.

More support is needed in Marsh Benham, Bagnor and parts of Speen. If you offer to  
help please contact her.

Mrs Money finished a very interesting and invaluable talk by asking those present to  
help themselves to the leaflets and information she had brought with her.

There was then space of 10 minutes for people to collect leaflets and talk to Mrs  
Money.

**1. MINUTES** The Minutes of the Parish Meeting on 11th April 2005 were agreed  
after circulating, and signed by G Foulkes.

**2.. MATTERS ARISING:** NIL

**3. . CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Good evening Councillors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The last Speen Parish council Assembly was on April 11<sup>th</sup> 2005 when we had 10  
Parish Councillors - tonight we have 12 Councillors, nearly a full compliment. We

are still able to co-opt one more. So if anyone knows of a person who would like to join the Council, and is interested in Local Government please direct them to the Clerk, Julia Ives.

At the May 2005 Meeting, following the AGM, we had to deal with a contentious planning application. This had aroused some considerable interest in Speen and 21 members of the public came to lend their voice. Sovereign Housing were proposing to demolish several garages, and build two houses in the space. We had a great deal of discussion and the Parish council decided to reject the proposal.

Also at the May Meeting the Accounts were 'signed off' i.e. approved for submitting to Hacker Young in London - Auditors. Also at that meeting I reported on the merging of two old established charities – The Relief in Need of Speen and the Majendie Charity for the Poor of Speen. You may not have heard of these Charities; they both have done good work for many years and support those in Speen when it is considered appropriate.

The June Meeting was cancelled because of holidays. In July the decision was taken to uplift the two crickets wickets at Speen Recreation Ground. following the departure of the Cricket team to Douai Abbey. We were lucky to get interest from a Football Coach - Keith Butcher, and he promised youngsters the opportunity to play at weekends at Speen and Stockcross. Agreements were drawn up and play began. Many residents remarked how good it was to see so many enthusiastic youngsters playing football. The parking of cars became a problem - later on we had the Speen Recreation Ground car park enlarged and surfaced. "Partek" footballers who had been playing at Stockcross, sadly had to leave due to lack of facilities and rulings.

About this time we were conscious of the Donnington Grove Country Club plans, regarding footpaths near to the golf fairways. The applicants wanted the footpaths moved, and local residents did not. Eventually on 17<sup>th</sup> October an Open Meeting was held in Robert Sandilands School, 72 members of the public attended. This followed a satellite meeting between a representative of Donnington Grove Country Club and the Parish Council - the matter was discussed. Later in the year the Application was refused, and the residents of Speen could breathe again!

In September last year we heard that Brackley Primary Health Care needed ground for a new proposed larger Medical Centre - for St Mary's Surgery. Brackley Primary Health Care approached Speen PC with a request to purchase part of the Speen Recreation Ground. After discussion - within the Council and having sought advice from Sutton Estates, the request was rejected. Apparently Brackley Primary Health Care are still looking for somewhere, having been unable to secure land at Shaw-cum-Donnington.

Over the last year work has completed to comply with a ROSPA report - contractors have been fencing and clearing trees. The new look at Marsh Benham and Stockcross, with new swings has attracted attention from parents and children.

The Churches have been given £250 each (Speen and Stockcross) for help with the upkeep of the Churchyard. In June last year the Speen Village Fete was a resounding success - held on Speen Recreation ground. This year the Fete is on June 17<sup>th</sup>, so make a note of it in your diaries!

Stockcross has gone from strength to strength with social programmes in the village – a Street Fair is planned for this year on 29<sup>th</sup> July, and multiple events in the Suttons Hall have attracted our financial support.

During the year it was agreed with Highways Dept. of West Berks Council, to name the next available road in Speen after Monica Harries who died of cancer. She was a well liked resident who did great works near the Lambourn Road - gardening and generally tending the area- for many years. This is still our intention and the first new road that needs a name in Speen - will be named after her.

The Precept for 2006-2007 has been set - after much deliberation at £13620 - a lower figure than the previous year – 2005/6.

This brings us up to date – we are working with Stockcross Primary School to try and help them overcome their parking problems. We are dealing with; planning applications as they come in and tentatively testing the water for starting a Parish Plan. Many of our neighbouring Parishes have already begun this exercise. This will not deflect from our VDS – Village Design Statement. I worked on this with other members of the Parish Council – the VDS group was chaired by Mary Lavelle - who joined SPC last month.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking my fellow Councillors and our Parish Clerk for their contribution and hard work – during the last 12 months.

Thank you also for your support. I hope that you will attend the Annual General Meeting on May 15<sup>th</sup> when Council Officers will be voted in for the coming year.

#### **4.. REPORTS FROM THE COMMITTEES:**

- **Stockcross Recreation Ground and Car Park and Marsh Benham :** A Snook gave an overview of this area of the Parish's responsibility. He was pleased with some of the work contracted for RoSPa but felt that the fence at Marsh Benham was a poor job. The Bark has not yet been delivered for Marsh Benham swings. The Bin at Stockcross needs fastening more securely. He said that the football at Stockcross was still going along well, although complaints are coming in because bad language is used loudly.
- **Speen Recreational Ground.** A Lees reported in the absence of L Warner who has recently submitted an Action Plan. This will be discussed in detail in the May Meeting. A Lees suggested a priority list – a) To tarmac the rest of the Car Park b) replace fascia of Pavilion c) Fix light fittings in Pavilion d) Repair the damp loo e) external woodwork needs attention. He then gave a comprehensive list of other works to be done.

- **The Ladywell, The Pound and the War Memorial.** A Butcher reported that the Ladywell and Pound were looking neat and tidy and pretty with daffodils and primroses. The Pound has been cut quite recently. The damage to the War Memorial in recent winds is very disappointing. The Clerk said that Wright & Son were coming up with a quote to repair, if indeed that is possible. We will know more in the May Meeting. The Clerk said that she had filed for an Insurance Claim.

## 5.. PLANNING

J Booth reported a much quieter year than last year in respect of private homeowners requiring extensions, conservatories, conversions, new builds etc.

Larger projects that involved the SPC were:

### **Battle Close**

Sovereign Housing applied to build two semi-detached three bed houses in Battle Close. This meant the demolition of eight garages, which had been used by the residents over the last 45 years, the loss of resident off road parking and visitors parking. Due to the narrow roads that service the Close, this would mean that no parking facilities would be available at all. After several meetings with residents, it was obvious to SPC that this could not possibly go ahead and we voiced our objection with WBC. The Planning Application was refused.

### **Medical Centre – Speen Recreation Ground**

A lot of interest against the application was shown from Speen residents who attended one of our meetings. The application was refused.

### **Medical Centre – Donnington**

Brackley Associates turned their interest to a plot of land in Donnington, again this Planning Application was refused.

### **Donnington Grove Country Club**

SPC objected to the closure of the footpaths and WBC Legal Department agreed that the footpaths will remain open.

### **Plot Two – Speen Lane**

This appears to be an on going application to build two houses. It has been agreed by SPC and WBC that the plot is too small for two houses. Planning Application has been refused.

## 6.. FINANCIAL REPORT:

J Ives reported: I will present a short overview of the Finances, at this moment of time, bearing in mind that Bank Statements have only just arrived for the year end.

The Returns have arrived from Hacker Young and will be completed when the accounts are submitted to the Parish Council in May. The Internal Auditor will be helping me, and checking my progress, and he has been asked to make a report to the Parish Council in May.

We started the financial year with accumulated funds of £28,428.

We ended the year with accumulated funds of £25,532.

The Precept for the year 2005 – 6 was £14,985.00

The Precept for the year 2006-7 has been set at £13,620.

I have just claimed the sum of £295.88 for VAT refund, and this will be in our account shortly.

VAT claimed throughout the year has amounted to £1632.51, not including the above mentioned. We have received the sum of £1,124 in interest from the Bank of Ireland. Football has realised the sum of £1,205.00, and Tennis rent £25.00

On the payments side we have had charges for the Street Lights of just under £1k and S137 has been £250 for both of the Churches – Speen and Stockcross, and £100 for the Stockcross Street Fair which is held in aid of the Sutton Hall. Insurance was £1,177.97 and this year's invoice has just come in at £1245.00. There is only the one place to get Insurance – Allianz Cornhill do specialise for Parish Councils. We had a broker last year but they could not better the arrangements we have with Allianz Cornhill. Incidentally we are just processing a claim for the War Memorial which lost part of the pinnacle in high winds recently, but this will go through in the current year. Recreational grounds maintenance, including electricity to the Speen Pavilion, water rates, litterpicking and repairs and landscape contract came to £9785.23 and Administration costs – which include everything not already mentioned, were £7,678, all these figures are net of VAT.

These details will be presented in full to the Council at the May Meeting.

There will be an opportunity for the members of the public to view the accounts at the Clerk's home, between two dates – a few weeks will be available – and details of this will also be on the notice boards in due course. Photocopies will be charged for in the usual way.

## **7..DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT**

P Bryant reported:

The change in leadership of the West Berkshire Council has now been in place for about a year. Changing the way an administration works is a slow task and for long periods nothing seems to be happening. However, there have been many changes that we hope will improve the well being of the West Berkshire Residents. Of course, many aspects of the Councils work were and are working well and "if aint broke don't fix it".

Of great concern is the level of the Council Tax. This year the increase has been limited to a modest 2.9% increase. This was achieved despite a miserly increase of 2.1% from government (last year 11.3%). Also despite the upset of the premature demise of the Amey contract. West Berkshire is no longer the highest taxing authority in Berkshire and the comparative D-level figures for the six Berkshire are: -

Slough ?1101.77  
Reading ?1097.66  
Newbury ?1063.31  
Windsor ?912.46  
Bracknell ?875.70

From which you will see there is still room for improvement and this is the policy.

The work behind the scenes has been immense, as we have scrutinised the vast number of budget items to see where reductions can be made without damaging the front line services. It is notable that a year ago no one knew how many people the authority employed. This is now known and savings are being made by, for example, attempting to employ permanent staff rather than contract staff and also ensuring that staff employed for specific projects leave rather than being absorbed into the organisation at the end of their project.

On a more visible note we are putting far more money into roads that are recognised to be in a very poor state. This amounts to over ?2M. We hope that this trend will continue into future years. The current contract for road maintenance is coming to a close and we are currently in a tender exercise for a new contract. Much work has gone into defining this contract from which we hope to get savings and an improved service. Again, not all that visible to the public but roads are vital to our well being. Interestingly we are insisting that waste material from road works will be recycled. Savings have also been found to release an extra ?2.4M for services.

Planning has had a revolution. From being one of the worst performing authorities we are now one of the very best. The government targets are now being met to the benefit of all. This has been achieved by better procedures and also by a reduction to two planning committees and by delegating more applications. This has raised the moral in the department and that has improved the quality of work and also help the retention of staff. An additional benefit has been the ability to concentrate on issues that have been sadly neglected such as improving the procedures and service to applicants.

The Local Development Framework is progressing to a conclusion. I hope this and other parish councils will take an interest in the work, as this will shape the future of West Berkshire. This plan is more like a loose-leaf document that will be updated from time to time as circumstance demand. It will not go through the public examination by an inspector but be ratified by a much lighter process. The Supplementary Planning Guidance documents are being revamped to correspond to the LDF. An important input to the LDF has been the Village Design Statements and Parish Plans that many parishes now have. We are proud that West Berkshire has achieved Beacon Status for the development of these plans and it is a pleasure to acknowledge the hard work put in by the parishes. The Local Transport Plan has now finished its development and is now with the minister. Again, a document you may like to study if you have the stamina.

We discovered that a lot of S106 money was not being collected or was being wasted. We have now employed an S106 officer to ensure that the moneys are collected and spent. We have also produced a tarrification scheme for

calculating contributions that is expected to charge down to the level of one dwelling. We hope to accumulate funds for some large schemes over a period of time. We also welcome suggestions from parishes for the use of S106 moneys when developments take place in their areas. This is ground breaking work that is being watched with interest by the ODPM and other authorities.

Education is an expensive but well prescribed service. It receives much so-called advice from government. It is a bottomless pit for expenditure particularly regarding the poor quality of the buildings that were built cheap many years ago. None the less we are making good progress. The Denefield complex of schools is destined to be rebuilt and we hope to tackle some others in due course. We have been faced with demographic changes. In particular the reduction in the number of children that has resulted in some school mergers that have met some opposition but have been inevitable. School transport has been difficult in a large rural area. This is particularly apparent in the light of parent choice and the specialisation of schools. This is a problem yet to have a satisfactory solution. I guess this is one of the unintended consequences of government edicts.

Social Services have had a good performance rating. We provide a high standard of care. Unfortunately we can only meet the needs of those in the more severe category of need for home helps. Government has been pushing care in the community that has moved the pressure from the NHS to Council. We have been pushing "direct payments". This allows a client to organise their own care package. This is particularly useful for the younger disabled who are capable of dealing with the financial and other aspects of employing their own carer. Progress has been rather slow in building up the numbers. It gives the opportunity to clients of using neighbours or friend to deliver the service. The number of places for the elderly has been restricted in the light of the policy of care in the community that is cheaper and the desire for most of the elderly.

Crime and disorder remains an area of concern. The statistics show a depressing rise of 3.25% against a target of a 12.5% decrease by 2008. The Council is in partnership with the police and other organisations. A significant success has been the warden's schemes in Greenham and now in Tilehurst/Calcot. We are searching for funds for further schemes.

The vision for Newbury continues to be implemented although a number of aspects of it have attracted adverse comment. You will be aware of the differing views on the Park Way, Market Place and Northbrook Street schemes although these schemes had a high level of consultation and agreement. The Council has tried hard to follow what the public want. It would be difficult to develop a strategy such as the Newbury Vision consult on it and then rip it up when it came to implementation. The Park Way development has now reached the stage of a planning application and the Market Street development is at the stage of selecting a preferred developer. The Wharf area is still at a early stage.

The current contracts for waste are coming to an end and new arrangements have to be made. A lot of work has taken place over the last year and we hope that we are now near to selecting a contractor. However there have been many difficulties to do with the intricacies of Waste Credits, methods of finance and the changing regime dictated by government. Whilst there was a proposal for a waste transfer station at Padworth, a number of other options are being looked at that have promise. You will also be aware that the Pinchington Lane site is likely to close and be replaced by one at Abbots Farm. This will ease the congestion in Pinchington Lane as it is far easier to access. It is expected that Rivar, the owners of the Pinchington Lane site, will develop it for housing.

As far as Speen and Stockcross is concerned the highlight of the year has been the concern with the future of Donnington Grove that is under new ownership. As part of plans for its future there were plans for changes to the footpath that attracted adverse comment and that the WBC refused. We await the results of appeals by the applicant. In addition to the Battle Close telecom mast there are two further ones. The one at the shell garage attracted much opposition but was difficult to refuse. Following the refusal of the Parish Council to sell part of the Speen recreation ground, the applicant sought permission on another open space just outside of the Parish in Oxford Road. This was refused and I understand that a site is still being sought. We understand from Sovereign Housing that the Kersey Crescent flats will be demolished and rebuilt. The exact date for this is unclear.

In summary it has been a very busy year and with a lot of progress.

## **8.. MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION AND INFORMATION**

The Chairman read a letter from West Berkshire Council with information on repairs to be done on B4000. A diversion will be indicated. Access will be allowed. All details available from the Parish Clerk.

**The Meeting closed at 8.45 and the next Meeting will be the AGM on May 15<sup>th</sup>.  
All Electors Welcome.**