

**MINUTES OF THE PARISH ASSEMBLY MEETING OF SPEEN PARISH
COUNCIL HELD ON APRIL 20TH 2009 IN SPEEN VILLAGE HALL.**

Present: G Foulkes (Chairman) E Vandyk (Vice Chairman) L Warner
R Tolcher A Martin K Sullkivan K Phillips P Calder J Ives (Clerk)

Members of the Public: 5 plus Newbury Weekly News

District Councillor: P Bryant

Guest Speaker: Chief Inspector Judith Johnson Thames Valley Police, Newbury.

1. WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN.

2. APOLOGIES: A Lees M Franks (DC)

3. MINUTES OF MEETING 21st April 2008. These had been circulated to the Councillors prior to the Meeting and they were approved. The Chairman signed them and All in Favour.

4. MATTERS ARISING. There were none.

5. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

I am reporting to you as Chairman of the Parish Council for the fifth year in office.

We are still short of Councillors and I do urge you all to spread the word around.

We meet bi-monthly and our work is important – planning has been quite busy this year and there will be a report later. The Precept went up to £20K last year to allow for some of the proposed improvements to Speen Recreation Ground. There will be a report from Councillor Lou Warner shortly, but we have achieved a great deal. Contractors have recently been given the go-ahead to complete the paved area around the Pavilion, in front along the steps, right round to the disabled toilet. There will be anti-climbing paint under the new fascia also installed soon. We are examining the plan to improve the swings and the Mound play areas.

Since the installation of the Mosquito alarm situated under the eaves, I am pleased to say that vandalism is at an all time low.

AFC and Braziliant are signed up for the current year and money for rent of the football pitches is coming in.

One Day cricket at Stockcross has been appreciated and will be repeated in the Summer. The Speen Fete is on June 13th. The Parish Council donates a small amount to these activities in our Parish, and also for St George's Day celebrations at Stockcross.

Our annual donations to St Johns Church Stockcross and St Mary's Church Speen for the upkeep of their churchyards, has been increased by £50 from £250 to £300.

Only 11 Members of the Public attended Parish Council Meetings this year – please do come along.

It has been agreed that the Parish Precept shall remain this year as last at the same amount £20k.

My thanks to all the Parish Councillors and our Clerk Julia Ives.

6. TALK BY CHIEF INSPECTOR JUDITH JOHNSON, THAMES VALLEY POLICE NEWBURY, “NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT”.

Judith Johnson has been Chief Inspector for the last six months, and said she was glad to be able to speak tonight. She has been 28 years in the Police, working with Criminal Justice, Child Protection and operational patrol work. She felt that it was important to increase public confidence. After answering several questions from the Public and Councillors she produced a Quiz. This proved to be a very interesting document and she explained the answers should those present be unable to get the right answer themselves. In passing she said that a new PCSO would start in our area in June and a NSO in six weeks time. She urged people to use the non emergency telephone number - 0845 8505 505. The Quiz took some time, and was informative. A discussion took place on the Neighbourhood Action Group, and Judith Johnson said that it was early days and the NAG group was important to the area and should be supported by residents to get the best out of it. There are 19 NAG boundaries she said. The Chairman thanked Judith Johnson for coming this evening.

7. WORKING GROUPS REPORTS:

(a) PLANNING IN THE PARISH. Cllr K.Sullivan advised that there had been 29 Planning Applications scrutinised in the year, 24 approved, 3 withdrawn or not required and 2 refusals. Additionally there are two recently returned applications awaiting outcome, and 3 presently being processed by the Planning Committee of Speen Parish Council. Cllr K Sullivan thanked his committee – Cllr L Warner, Cllr Annie Martin and Cllr K Phillips.

(b) RECREATION GROUND AT SPEEN.

Cllr L Warner reported: External Condition of the Pavilion

Roof tiles damaged during the past year have been replaced when required and at this moment the condition of roof is satisfactory.

During the past year the external wood fascias have been replaced and treated with a preservative. Anti-climbing paint will be applied to the fascias shortly and there will be warning signs mounted on the four outside walls of the pavilion

The door to the invalid toilet on the outside of the pavilion was severely damaged and the wooden door frame was badly rotted, these have been replaced and treated with a preservative.

The Mosquito youth deterrent device installed at the pavilion to discourage youngsters from meeting there at night is still working. The Mosquito device is on a time switch to only work in the evenings from 5pm until 3am and will only be activated by someone entering the patio area of the pavilion.

Internal:

The Changing Rooms This area needs a good clean and ideally it should be repainted, we will arrange for an estimate to do this.

The Main Room and Kitchen This area is very untidy and also needs a good clean. The toilet which was damp due to a leak from the toilet is now dry but this area needs painting.

Car Park

The area between the car park and the pavilion which was not tarmaced when the rest of the car park was surfaced will now be finished with paving slabs. The paving slabs will extend from the entrance to the invalid toilet, down the side and along the front of the pavilion. A paving contractor has been instructed to proceed with the work.

During the past year the steel fence has been removed from the car park hedge and the hedge has been cut down to a much lower level.

The wrought iron gates to the car park have been replaced with new steel gates which include a barrier to prevent travellers from occupying our recreation field. Several of the short wooden posts have been removed from around the car park, these are now in the pavilion garage. We should consider concreting these into the ground as they are too easy to lift out.

Noise

There has been a decrease in the youth activity and noise at night over the past year, probably due to the Mosquito device.

Rubbish

The brick rubbish bin next to the pavilion which had been badly vandalised has been demolished and removed. Two new steel rubbish bins with removeable, lockable steel liners have been installed, one either side of the pavilion. The two deactivated steel goal posts laying on the ground behind pavilion have been sawn up and removed from the area.

Play Ground Area

The steps leading up to the slide have been removed and made good. Access to the slide has been changed to an all weather matting on both sides of the slide. This surface has been partially torn up by vandals and needs to be replaced by the contractor in a way that it will not be damaged again.

(c) RECREATION/TRAFFIC IN STOCKCROSS

Cllr K Phillips reported: Last year's report was mainly concerned with traffic of various types. We are pleased to report that during the year much has been achieved to deal with the issues:

Traffic

30 mph speed indicators (VASs) have been erected at both ends of the village and the impression, without solid data to support, is that they are effective in reducing the speed of traffic through the village. It is hoped that data will be collated and

compared with previous speed measurements to support this. In addition school warning signs have been erected to flash during school opening and closing times, which are probably also contributing to speed reduction. Further measures have been proposed with respect to installation of an additional pinch point, moving the speed limit further west out of the village and maybe also a long raised platform. It is felt that action to promote these measures should await more concrete data on the impact of the recent installations.

School parking has not been such an issue this year. Parents are using the newly resurfaced rec. car park (see below) and are still parking in Chapel Road by the school but fewer complaints have been received. Perhaps residents are becoming accustomed to the situation?

Recreation Ground

Height restriction gates have been installed to prevent inappropriate traffic entering the car park.

The **car park has been resurfaced** with gravel thus removing the large muddy puddles forming in wet weather. Unfortunately the gravel is irresistible for some who enjoy wheel spins, usually in the small hours and accompanied by hooting on departure.

Fencing surrounding the car park has also been replaced to match the play area and improve the appearance.

Hedges surrounding parts of the ground have been pruned significantly, again improving the appearance.

In September a **football** club booked and paid to use the ground requesting two small pitches, which were granted, but so far have made no appearance. Suggestions are continuing on how best to provide a suitable pavilion / changing facilities.

The ground continues to be used throughout the year for recreation by children in the play area, dog walkers (most of whom remove their dogs' faeces), *ad hoc* football, kite flying and the now annual cricket match. And of course the tennis courts are used regularly. Even a glider made an unscheduled(?) visit during the course of the year.

Our contract with Waterers to mow the grass is running relatively smoothly.

A spectacular grass snake was also seen on the north side one sunny morning last September:

Moles do not appear to have been a major problem this year. Maybe we are on top of the situation..?! Maybe the gnomes who have taken residence under the hedge on the corner of Church Road and the B4000 have something to do with their reduction ..

8. CRIME IN SPEEN: Cllr R Tolcher reported:

- 1) There have been six Meetings of the Speen/Shaw/Donnington Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG) during the last twelve months in addition to one Public Meeting held at Trinity School. The Council have been represented at all of them. Three priorities were identified at the Public Meeting, as being Speeding Anti Social Behaviour and Criminal Damage/Vandalism.

A local community questionnaire is being prepared to give residents the opportunity to have their say, and another Public Meeting is being planned to be held at the Robert Sandilands School. The next meeting of the Speen/Shaw/Donnington NAG is due to be held at the Roberts Sandilands School on 21st May 2009. Louise Bolton is the current chairperson.

- 2) The gate in the footway between Speen Lodge Court and the A4 Bath Road has been in operation for 12 months. Local residents consider this to have been a success and there has been a very considerable reduction in anti-social behaviour since its installation. Over the past few months the lock on the gate has been vandalised and rendered inoperative a number of times. The Police and WBC are aware of this. Much of the repair work to the lock has been carried out by a local resident.

9. DISTRICT COUNCILLORS REPORT:

Paul Bryant said: I am pleased to present my report for 2008/9.

The year has had two parts. In the first all seemed to be going well. In the second world financial ruin set in and like everyone else the Council had a painful reappraisal of its services and finances.

Last year I reported that the Council has become a 3 star authority (4 is the maximum) this has been retained and the inspectors report that we are improving strongly. I dislike the national competition for stars as I do not believe that they reflect the service to the public and public satisfaction.

The new waste contract came into being with the new boxes and the collection of further recyclables. On the whole the change over went well but there were quite a few teething problems that are now resolved. The surprise was that 90% of residents used the recycling facilities whilst an uptake of 60% was expected. That led to some delays in collections. The new recycling facility at Sandleford was brought into use. This is proving to be working well and the queues and delays at Pinchington Lane a thing of the past. The Padworth site for waste processing and transfer has now been purchased and when built will be the final piece of the waste project.

In general the West Berkshire schools have a high standard and in particular Robert Sandilands and Stockcross schools have done well in their inspections. The rebuilding of St, Barts is going ahead and will be very environmentally friendly. The rebuilding of other schools are in the planning stages.

With ageing population social services is an increasingly expensive part of the Council's services. Costs are being kept under control by employing more care staff directly rather than going through agencies. After the recent publicity concerning children and the elderly we have looked at our services and are confident that similar mal-practices are not taking place.

As a result of the 2007 floods a great deal of work has been carried out to prevent a repetition having the same horrendous effect. This involved work with others such as the Environmental Agency and Thames Water to decide what should be done and by whom. Much of the work is complete. Although the flooding did not effect Speen the results of resources going into the flood aftermath has resulted in other work being delayed - in particular road maintenance.

The Council is now responsible for enforcing parking restrictions within West Berkshire. To that end there are 20 Community Enforcement Officers (in olden times called Parking Attendants). Up until now the police had been responsible for enforcement and this had been sporadic at best to the annoyance of the public. Although this may not be welcomed by those who thought that yellow lines were a form of pavement art others will welcome the freer movement of traffic.

Of note has been the start on the cinema and the Park Way development. Unfortunately these projects have caused road works that have been and are disruptive. The Wharf and Market Street projects are progressing but will not be started until Park Way and the Cinema are complete.

The Local Development Framework progresses. When complete it will define development in West Berkshire up to 2026. Currently recommendations for the areas for housing development are being finalised. The candidate areas have been well publicised and only a small number of them will be required. None of the areas are covered by Speen Parish Council

The Council expects a hard year financially. The recession will reduce Council Tax receipts, reduce car parking income, increase social care costs and benefits. So there have been some severe cost reductions. Many of these are hidden such as reducing the amount of inspections, not replacing staff and therefore reducing the work done. Others are more apparent such as the removal of travel tokens. Even so the Council Tax has risen more than we would have liked. Some see the green shoots of recovery but I tend to see several years of hardship.

It is good to see the success with the gate into Speen Lodge Court in reducing vandalism to near zero. It is disappointing that it was necessary. It is also disappointing that it took so long to accomplish. It was the first such gate in West Berkshire and it is to be hoped that further ones, if needed, will get an easier ride. I hope that the vandalism is reduced rather than being relocated to somewhere else,

The sight-lines at the junction of Church Lane and Speen Lane is unresolved. Unfortunately highways do not own the land where one would like to remove or cut back the bushes.

I am still trying to get footpath 15 extinguished. To remind you, it runs along the old Lambourn line and has been built over. The problem has been with us 10 or more years and on my plate for 7 years. I will leave the details for my memoirs. The latest problem was that BT objected saying their cables ran under the path and wanted £40,000 to relocate them. After much pressing we got them to locate their cables that

proved not to be under the path! The next stage is an application under section 118 of the Highways Act 1980. Hopefully there will be no objections or delays will continue.

Planning wise it has been disappointing that the Kersey Crescent flats were brought back into use rather than redeveloped but at least the garages have been sorted out and that should remove some unacceptable behaviour.

There have been no major planning applications and a modest number of small ones. Of note was the filling in of the railway cutting that was undertaken without the benefit of planning permission. Such practices tend to raise a lot of objections and suspicion. On a wider basis, the pressure by government to make better use of previously developed land (otherwise known as back garden development, high density redevelopment) does tend to make planners unpopular although in Speen there has not been a lot of scope as it is fairly densely developed.

The NAG has been active and I have taken part in their activities. There have been a lot of complaints about parking. This is parking on the verges or blocking the roads. It is a problem difficult to solve if we are not to get people to give up their cars and that is probably even more unpopular than bad parking.

I apologise for not being able to attend as many parish council meeting as I would like. I hope I have been of some help to you.

10 FINANCE REPORT

The Clerk (RFO) said we started the year with a bank balance of £28263. We ended with £38024.

We unexpectedly received the sum of £10890 from Section 106 monies due, and other receipts included Interest (£1183) Football Rent £1140) and Precept £20k.

We have spent, as promised on Speen and Stockcross Recreation Grounds the sum of £12942.

Other major costs included Streetlights (£1554) Insurance (£1345) Donations (£800) Clerks Salary £5100 Other Admin such as Hall hire, postage and stationery plus Audit costs, computer maintenance and subscriptions and sundries (wreath in November etc) make up the remainder.

Balances in the Banks are as follows:

Bank of Ireland: £2733.98
Lloyds : £35290.65 totalling £38024.63.

Our Internal Auditor will be inspecting the account books shortly, and after agreement with the Parish Council they will be sent to the External Auditor. The Clerk invited residents to contact her if they had any questions on the accounts.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

(a) Cllr A.Lees sent a memo asking if the Parish Council could address the holes near the swings at Speen Recreational ground, which have been left when the wooden

stakes had been removed by vandals. The Chairman passed this to Cllr Warner who is working with the clerk and Playground Services to improve various aspects of the area.

(b) The Chairman reminded the residents of Stockcross that a National Cycling Race Meeting is due to be held on Sunday 24th May and will be very active in the B4000 area.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 8.50 p.m.
And the AGM is scheduled for MAY 11th at 7.30 p.m. in Speen Village Hall.