

BULKINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Mrs F A Price 1 The Croft Urchfont Devizes SN10 4RT

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
held in the Village Hall at 7.30pm
13 May 2015

Present: Cllr Mrs S Oliphant in the Chair

Cllrs S Barratt, Mrs C Crawford, R G Elliott and Mrs A Read

Cllr J Seed [Wiltshire Council]

Pc Emily Thomas, Pcs Helen Wilson (who will replace Pc Thomas during her maternity leave)

No member of the public

Clerk Mrs F A Price in attendance

The Meeting started at 7.30 with

1. **Apologies for Absence:** received and accepted from Cllr Ogilvie who is on holiday abroad, and Mrs Flynn, who has informed the Parish Council that she has to resign. **See Chairman's Report.**

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2. Minutes of 2014 Annual Parish Meeting: confirmed at July 2014 Parish Council Meeting

3. Chairman's Report:

As in previous years, **pressure on our budget** has been a focus for us as costs increase and we strive to manage our expenditure without requesting an increase in our Precept. So, I would like to start by thanking my fellow Councillors for their unanimous decision not to increase our Precept. Thanks also to our diligent Clerk for tirelessly shopping around for the best deals and her excellent management of our funds.

My thanks also to Cllr Jonathan Seed for his ongoing support, and the Melksham Area Board for their financial support of groups and projects within the Village - Bulkington Remembers (WWI anniversary commemoration) and the Village Hall Committee (repairs to this community asset).

And of course our thanks to the Policing Team for their sustained commitment to maintaining a policing presence in our Village.

I would also like to thank my fellow Cllrs for their ongoing focus on applying the 10 Principles of our Code of Conduct (Integrity, Leadership, Objectivity, Judgement, Accountability, Openness, Respect, Stewardship, Lawfulness and Selflessness).

There is another principle that I would like to add and that is Engagement. Villagers rarely attend our Meetings, which is probably a reflection of the busy lives that we all lead. However, as Councillors we are representing the needs and views of the people who live in Bulkington. So we must make sure we find out what people think and bring those views to the Meeting to ensure we have a balanced debate and that the decisions we reach don't reflect the views of the one person who voiced an opinion.

For more details on the rôle of the Parish Council please see www.Bulkington.org.uk

The recent **Housing Needs Survey** was commissioned precisely because we did not feel we understood enough about the housing needs and aspirations of villagers, whether for new homes, affordable homes, upsizing, downsizing or retirement homes. The Survey results will enable us to understand whether there is an issue with the range of homes available and, if there is, develop a plan to ensure that any housing development would be of benefit to Bulkington and its residents.

We have seen a number of **Planning Applications** and I thank my fellow Councillors for their objective approach and their local knowledge, which I am sure the Planning Dept at Wiltshire Council find most helpful when determining an Application, although from our perspective it often does not feel like that. Applicants have a basic right to expect that when they submit a Planning Application it will be approved unless there are justifiable grounds to refuse it (not the other way round); whether Councillors like an Application or not is irrelevant.

The Parish Council is not a Planning Authority and *does not have executive powers to accept or reject Applications*, but under the Local Government Act 1972 *is able to make observations* to the Planning Authority (Wiltshire Council) upon Applications in its Parish.

The meetings where we review Applications are open to all members of the public and we will make an objective review of all aspects of the Application including its position in relation to the existing and neighbouring buildings, its design, whether it creates a loss of privacy or light to nearby properties, its appearance in the street scene, whether it affects local drainage or parking and the overall needs and requirements of the village.

My rôle as Chairman is to ensure that the Parish Council is completely objective and any Councillor directly affected by an Application must declare this and if they wish to comment on it specifically, they must declare either a personal or prejudicial interest in the outcome of that Application and will not be allowed to participate in the vote. Indeed they will be asked to leave the room while the Parish Council votes on the application.

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Although our **Playing Field Committee** has a healthy Bank balance it is struggling for membership as well as support for activities other than the annual Fireworks fundraising event. The Parish Council pays for the grass cutting, but all other maintenance is self-funded and undertaken by volunteers.

This year the Committee was delighted to receive 2 new benches commemorating the anniversary of the start of World War I, given by “Bulkington Remembers” and dedicated by the Rev Maureen Allchin as part of the Remembrance Service.

We are very grateful to Melksham Area Board for providing funds for these benches.

Thanks to Councillor Ogilvie and Bto Mrs Suzanne Barratt for the ongoing work they put in to www.Bulkington.org.uk our fabulous website.

For those of us who are not so technically minded, I hope the newly installed **Noticeboard**, funded by the Parish Council and a donation from the Marsh Farm Solar Development Company, will be a valuable resource.

Sadly, Jan Flynn leaves us today. Being extremely busy with all her work and family commitments, Jan feels that she is not able to give the time to her duties as a Parish Councillor.

Thankyou Jan for giving your time and sharing your thoughts and opinions.

We will complete our search for a replacement and appoint a new Councillor as soon as possible.

Finally, our thanks as ever go **to the farmers and landowners** who manage the land, hedges, ditches, lanes and footpaths around the Village. It is easy to take our surroundings for granted and we count ourselves lucky that our landowners take their responsibilities seriously and give their time and resources to improve our environment.

Can I ask everyone to keep to keep to marked paths, and dog-owners to pick up after their animals.

4. **Financial Report** by the Clerk Mrs F A Price:

2013-14 Annual Return was accepted by the External Auditors Grant Thornton in June 2014, no fee, fee for the Internal Auditor Mrs MA Kimber, £30.

Summary figures for the last 2 years, all rounded to nearest £ – *nb 2014-15 not yet externally audited.*

	2013-14	2014-15
	£	£
Balance Brought Forward	6,133	6,900
+ Precept	4,500	4,500
+ Other Receipts	2,710	2,540
- Staff/Admin Costs	1,814	1,880
- Other Payments	<u>4,629</u>	<u>4,303</u>
Balance Carried Forward	6,900	7,757

Total Fixed Assets remain unchanged at £50,080 – this will be revised if some Playing Field equipment is replaced, at higher or lower valuation.

This year's Accounts were complicated by paying *two* invoices for Grasscutting – Balfour Beatty took over as contractors from Wiltshire Council at the end of May 2013 but did not invoice Bulkington P C, despite repeated requests, until May 2014 - £686.22 inc VAT for June 2013 to the end of May 2014.

For the rest of the 2014 season, and future years, the PC called for tenders and appointed AW Services, who quoted a charge of £60 per fortnightly cut ex-VAT. Their bill for 2014 came to £600, and was paid in January 2015. This took the total actually paid for grasscutting to £1,286.22. [Wiltshire Council had been paid £145.99 for April-May 2013 in July 2013]

Less was spent on such things as trees, bench for the Playing Field, Village Hall hire for Parish Council and Planning Meetings; plus more VAT was paid in 2013-14, reclaimed in 2014-15, and a £500 “wayleave” for laying a solar power cable under Fullwood Lane, so in spite of these problems the Accounts show a rise in the amount Carried Forward of £857. This will even out over years to come. The £500 “wayleave” was a one-off payment, spent as agreed towards a new Notice Board – this forms part of the 2015-16 Accounts.

Reserves of approximately £7,750, or £3,250 more than Precept, will protect the Parish Council against some rises in costs – for example, grasscutting will be £1,008 for a full year if/when AW Services is registered for VAT (£840 + £168 VAT) – but there is no room for complacency, especially if central Government imposes big cuts in its payments to main Local Authorities such as Wiltshire Council.

As there were no members of the public present, the Meeting closed at 7.45 and the Parish Council moved immediately to its Annual Meeting.