

BULKINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

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

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Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
held in the Village Hall at 7 pm 18 May 2016

Present: Cllr Mrs S Oliphant in the Chair
Cllrs S Barratt, Mrs C Crawford, O Coles, G Elliott, and Mrs A Read
Cllr J Seed (Wiltshire Council, Summerham & Seend)
No member of the public

Clerk Mrs F A Price in attendance

The Meeting started at 7.05

1. 1. **Apologies for Absence:** Received and accepted from Cllr C Ogilvie, who is away
1. 2. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 13 May 2015: Accepted as a true record and signed by the Chairman at the Parish Council Meeting on 15 July 2015

1. 3. **Chairman's Report:**

This year we have seen a change in the composition of the Parish Council, as we said goodbye to Cllrs RG Elliott and Mrs J Flynn and welcomed Cllrs O Coles and G G Elliott. I would like to reassure all homeowners in the Parish that we followed the advised process and with 2 vacancies and 2 candidates were able to co-opt our new Councillors without the cost of an election. I believe our Council now better represents the community of this working village: 2/7 are landowners in the parish, 3/7 are in full-time employment, 3/7 are parents of children attending local schools.

As in previous years, pressure is on budgets, and again our unanimous decision was not to increase our Precept. Those of us who were able to attend Wiltshire Council's budget presentations understand that the Council has to review all aspects of service it provides as its budget shrinks. We have seen an emphasis on pushing responsibility for services into the local community, particularly to voluntary groups, and a drive to prioritising services according to greatest need. Although we welcome the return of the Parish Steward in general terms, as a small rural Village it is difficult to see how our requests will ever be prioritised and it is interesting to see neighbouring Villages beginning to undertake certain tasks within their own community.

In the future, working with other Villages may well enable us to achieve greater results – we have worked with Keevil and neighbouring villages to secure a share of a Speed Indicator Device, with Worton and neighbouring villages to request road safety improvements to the C20, and with Steeple Ashton to identify the potential threat Fracking may cause to our communities. And I would like to remind all homeowners in Bulkington that the Seend Link Scheme is available to assist anyone who cannot access public or private transport.

I would like to thank Cllr Jonathan Seed for his on-going support and of course the Policing Team for their sustained commitment to maintaining a policing presence in our village – with the exception of an attempted break-in and the vehicle damage in the High Street, unlike some of our neighbouring Villages we are fortunate that no crimes have been reported in Bulkington – despite this, I would encourage all home owners to take appropriate steps to secure their homes and property.

We have only had 2 Planning Applications this year, the mobile home at Seend Piggeries whilst the development is completed – after 10 years that is something we all welcome, and the timber conservatory at Tudor Cottage. I believe our powers with regard to Planning Applications are widely misunderstood – 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 the Parish. The meetings where we review applications are open to all members of the public and we will make objective review of all aspects of the application – whether individual Councillors like an application or not is irrelevant. I thank my fellow Councillors for their objective approach and their local knowledge, which I am sure the Planning Department at Wiltshire Council continue to find helpful when determining an application.

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I would like to thank Mr Bennett for the information he provided regarding the footpaths in the Parish that has given us the opportunity to review our own activities and re-instate the annual review of footpaths. My thanks to Cllrs Barratt and Ogilvie together with Mr John Scott for their review, report and photographs, which is published on the website. As ever, I would like to thank the farmers and landowners who manage the land, hedges, ditches, lanes and footpaths around the Village. The Parish Council has reminded all walkers to keep to the marked footpaths, dog owners of the need to clean up after their dogs, placed reminder posters at key locations and is actively monitoring the requirement for additional bins (the purchase and management of which will be funded by the Parish Council) and has written to all landowners reminding them of their responsibilities.

Although our Playing Field Committee have a healthy bank balance, they are still struggling for membership as well as support for events other than the annual firework fundraising event. The Parish Council pays for the grasscutting, but all other maintenance is self-funded and undertaken by volunteers. I would like to thank Cllr Barratt for the work that he has done to equipment following the RoSPA report and remind everyone of the Party in the Park on 2nd July.

Other groups within the Village have been active this year, planting trees on Gaston Green, setting up a Motor Club and working with RAF Brize Norton to re-establish track days at Keevil Airfield. And we now have a detailed Emergency Plan for the Village – my thanks to Cllrs Ogilvie and Barratt for the work they and other interested parties put into the development of this resource. Thank you to Cllrs Ogilvie and Barratt for the on-going work they put in to www.Bulkington.org our fabulous website.

Whilst all of our Meetings are open to the Public, it is rare that any homeowners attend – a reflection of the busy lives we all lead, but possibly the lack of interest in Local Councils. In contact with homeowners, it is clear that many do not understand the scope of our responsibilities or the way in which we conduct ourselves. Publishing our Minutes in Spotlight as well as on the website and noticeboard may help homeowners understand what we do, but not necessarily how we go about it.

We are bound by a Code of Conduct and adhere to policies and procedures developed by Wiltshire Council - my rôle as Chair is to make sure that we adhere to these principles – Integrity, Leadership, Objectivity, Judgement, Accountability, Openness, Respect, Stewardship, Lawfulness and Selflessness; that we have a balanced debate where the views of all are heard and that any decisions we make do not simply reflect the views of the loudest voice and that we are objective when considering Planning Applications – the area that householders have least understanding of our powers.

We all give our time voluntarily and all homeowners are welcome to come to any of our meetings to find out what we are doing and to challenge anything that they feel is inappropriate – indeed I welcome constructive criticism because it gives us the chance to improve – and on that note I would like to thank you all for your commitment over the past year as well as the year to come.

4. Clerk's Financial Report:

The Annual Return for 2014-15 was accepted by the Auditors, Grant Thornton, on 26 June 2015, no problems or queries. There is no fee for External Audit for Small Councils, and this remains true under the slightly changed regulations now in force. The Internal Auditor's fee remains at £30.

Summary figures for 2014-15 and 2015-16, nb *2015-16 not yet audited*:

	2014-15	2015-16
	£	£
Balance Brought Forward	6,900	7,757
+ Precept	4,500	4,500
+ Other Receipts	2,540	2,521
- Staff/Administration Costs	1,880	1,818
- Other Payments	4,303	5,157
Balance Carried Forward	7,757	7,022

Total Fixed Assets – Playing Field and Equipment, War Memorial and Bus Shelter – remain unchanged at £50,080. The Equipment is insured at £32,250.

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£19 less in Other Receipts is largely the result of a reduction in Wiltshire Council “top-up grant” - in its final year – and is more than offset by £62 saving in Staff/Administrative costs

Other Payments are £854 up – this is almost entirely the £788 cost of the new Notice Board; the remaining £66 includes £35 for Spirals and Canes for saplings given by the Woodland Trust, and a number of small payments such as £12 for an Audit Seminar run by WALC.

However, the reduction in the Balance Carried Forward is only £735, less than 10%.

More than usual was paid out under Section 137, eg a Donation towards replacing water-damaged floor boards in the Village Hall, but remained well below the £7.36 per voter limit. At this figure the Parish Council could spend over £1,500, but it actually spent £580, ie about £2.65 per voter.

With a small increase in the 2016-17 Precept - as a result of a change in the number of Band D properties the Precept can be raised without affecting the Parish share of tax paid by individuals - the Parish Council can be reasonably confident about its finances; no big expense is expected

5. There were no members of the Public present to raise questions or make comments, so the Chairman asked Cllr Seed if this was common among the Parish Councils in his area of Summerham and Seend: he replied that it is not unusual for there to be very few or even no householders at their Annual Meeting – to get a large attendance there needs to be an exciting or worrying issue in the Parish.

In fact, Bulkington's Council must be doing a decent job of looking after the Village's interests. Cllr Mrs Crawford commented that actually Bulkington is an easy village to care for.

The Parish Council immediately went on to the Annual Meeting of the Council