

The Civil Parish of ALVESTON including Rudgeway & Earthcott**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
Held on 16th April 2014 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall**

Present: - John Cutland (Chairman), Cllr Mike Webb, Cllr Marcus Fry, Cllr Phil Squires, Cllr Ann Wilkins, Cllr Steve Blick, Cllr James Sumner, Cllr Paul Caddick. Mike Josey, Brian Lee, Ivor Bryant, Les Forrest, Chris Casey, Peter Waller.
21 members of the Parish Community. Adrian Dyer, Nigel Dyer Andrea Tucker, Graham Smith (Clerk to the Parish Council).

Apologies: - Cllrs. Allison Peters, Terry Hunt, Maggie Tyrrell, Shirley Holloway (South Glos Council)

1. Welcome by the Parish Chairman

Mr John Cutland gave apologies to the meeting as Ms Alison Peters was unable to attend and was asked by Ms Peters to chair the meeting.

Apologies were also given from Shirley Holloway, Maggie Tyrell and Cllr Terry Hunt.
The meeting will be presented as per the agenda and the invitation to ask questions or raise issues will be item 7 – Open Forum.

2. Presentation of the “John Dyer Award”.

Mike Josey, chairman of the John Dyer Award introduced the 2014 award.

The JDA Certificate was presented by Adrian Dyer on behalf of John Dyer's family, Andrea Tucker and Nigel Dyer. Thank you to all three members for attending - they are very keen to remain involved despite living some distance away. Information you need for the minutes:

The John Dyer Awards for 2014 was presented to Elaine Lee by Adrian Dyer

The committee of 6 ladies made a majority vote of 4 to 2 in favour of Elaine Lee - so the Chairman's vote was not required.

The nomination form listed a large range of community service commencing quite some time ago with help within St Helen's School helping children to read. She became a Badminton Coach to children in the Youth Centre for around 5 years caring for the parish Council sports kit. Elaine is a stalwart of The Helmet parish magazine covering its compilation, advertising and billing which she continues to date. More recently with the evolving Alveston Parish Plan Elaine became involved and took the lead role forming the Community Forum and the associated Community Show for 4 years. During this period she produced the Village of the Year entry which has been awarded to Alveston for 3 successive years. Elaine has been involved with the Flower Show committee and still is an important member of the Litter Busters campaign in the community. Another important aspect of her community work was her running of the Alveston Trust for 4 years. Up to date, Elaine again took the lead role in recently formed group to raise funds for a Community Defibrillator which was a success culminating in the installation and opening of the unit at Jubilee Hall recently. Elaine has been a keen member of The Alveston Twinning Association and she continues to support the Ladies Badminton Group.

3. Community Reports.**3.1. Jubilee Hall Management Committee**

Report given by Brian Lee the chairman of the JHMC.

Two major challenges this year: - low committee strength and legal issues.

COMMITTEE STRENGTH

- There were only 5 people present at the April 2013 AGM. It was agreed that the existing committee members would continue for a further year. If no new volunteers came forward, the committee would all resign in April 2014 and the hall could close. The Gazette ran this story, and fortunately two new volunteers joined the committee. Whilst good news, this enabled two committee members to take a back seat, so the committee strength still remains too low.
- We're advertising for new volunteers at the shops, in Helmet and the Thornbury Magazine, and the Thornbury Volunteer centre. The response has been disappointing. This lack of volunteers isn't unusual: as you will hear later, the Alveston Community Forum have had the same problem. If anyone present knows of someone who might join the Jubilee Hall committee, please let me know.

LEGAL ISSUES

- The Jubilee Hall charity owns the land which comprises not just the Jubilee Hall, but also the village car park and the Youth Centre. Both the car park and the Youth Centre have been leased for the past 22 years at a peppercorn rent. This lease expired towards the end of 2013.
- Jubilee Hall solicitors are in the process of updating the Youth Centre lease to cover a further 22 year period, at the same peppercorn rent. This isn't a problem.
- What is a problem is that the Parish Council declined a renewal of the lease in August 2013 and expected the Jubilee Hall committee volunteers to do additional work to maintain the village car park. However, we cannot do this; we haven't got the resources, and more importantly our Charity scheme prohibits spend other than for the Jubilee Hall. Had we undertaken any car park maintenance, the trustees would have become personally liable. Our legal advice was either to close the car park, or we would all resign. Sadly, relationships between the Parish Council and Jubilee Hall have sunk to an all time low.
- In September, the Parish Council passed a resolution to fund car park maintenance, so whilst this resolution remains in place, the car park remains open. But the Parish Council can revoke this resolution.
- I will write to the Parish Council in the next few months to ask them to reconsider the more permanent solution of a lease for the car park. This would then comply with all the legal advice, and it's what the Youth Centre are doing.

3.2 Youth Centre Management Committee

Report given by Ivor Bryant, the chairman of the YC Management Committee.

3.2. Alveston Charities

Report given by Les Forrest, chairman of Alveston Charities.

(Attached document)

3.3. St Helen's Church of England School Board of Governors

Report given by Chris Casey.

(Attached Document)

4. Alveston Community Forum

Report given by Peter Waller, chairman of Alveston Community Forum

(Attached Document)

5. Parish Council Chairman's Report

Report given by John Cutland, on behalf of Alison Peters Chairman of the Parish Council

It has been an interesting year for the Parish Council. It has faced a number of new challenges whilst striving to maintain the high standards that have been set in the past.

Firstly, I would like to thank all of the many people who volunteer and play a vital part in representing the interests of local people and improving the quality of life and the local environment. (I include the Parish Councillors in this). They are too many to name but contribute significantly to making the Parish an attractive place in which to live. We still have two vacancies for Councillors and would welcome enquiries, to the Parish Clerk, from people who may wish to contribute to the Parish. We welcome two new members, Ann Wilkins and Paul Caddick.

I believe we face two key challenges as a Council.

- Maintaining our standards whilst our budget (the precept) in real terms decreases whilst but encouraging new ideas and initiative.
- Ensure Parishioners options are effectively sought and communicated to appropriate conclusions.

South Gloucestershire Council continue to have large amounts of savings and some of this has filtered down to Parishes who are being asked to take on responsibility for what has previously been undertaken by South Gloucestershire Council. Needless to say no additional budget allocation comes with this transfer. There is no doubt in my mind that this is a trend that will continue and likely to increase.

An example of this is the cutting of highways verges is now the responsibility of the Parish. This is significant increase on our Grounds Maintenance Budget and overall budget. Consultation with residents through notices and an article in the Helmet lead to the conclusion that people would prefer to keep the standards as they were and were prepared to pay additional precept to ensure this. This leads me to the observation that it is unlikely that we can increase the precept for every additional cost that the Parish inherits. However, more importantly for this meeting what is the best way to communicate issues and consult Parishioners? This is an idea that the Parish Council will be considering in the future and would welcome your views.

The Committee Chairman will present a report on their areas of responsibility in order to bring you up to date with what is happening in the Parish. However, I would like to end with a further heartfelt thank you to all the volunteers whose significant efforts make the Parish of Alveston a wonderful place to live.

6. Parish Council Committee Reports

6.1. Parish Budget & Finances

Report given by John Cutland on behalf of Terry Hunt, vice-Chairman of the Parish Council

Last year it was reported that the Council had been able to “freeze” the Parish element of the Council tax for the previous three years, but unfortunately, because of the changes in the manner in which the Government Grant to local authorities, and to maintain existing services, it was necessary to set the precept for 2013/14 at £46,519, an increase of 9.5% on Band D properties.

However, because of careful management and savings in costs e.g. maintenance contracts and administration a small surplus was achieved.

The reserve account balance at year end 2013/14 will be in the order of £52,342. A large part of these Reserves are allocated specifically to make provision for expenditure to assist in reducing the demands on the annual precept in future years.

The Council is committed to continue to serve the local community and to maintain its facilities where ever possible, but pressures from rising costs on contracts and to need to make provision to potentially take over services from the District council will need to be born in mind in considering the finances of the Parish Council in future years.

6.2. Planning Committee

Report given by Cllr Mike Webb

Planning Consultations

The Planning Committee met 22 times in the year to consider all the planning applications made in the Parish under our role as formal consultee.

We considered 47 Planning Applications.

After careful consideration, the committee objected to eleven of the applications..

We made "no objection" to the remaining 36 planning applications.

The committee objected strongly to applications relating to the Brindles and 1A Lime grove.

Public Participation

Several meetings were attended by people within the Parish, generally to share their objections with the committee.

6.3. Playing Fields & Open Spaces

Report given by Cllr Phil Squires

The Playing Fields & Open Spaces Committee concentrates its attention on four key areas of Parish Council business.

1. The maintenance and management of the Lime Kiln and Jubilee Playing Fields and Youth Centre Car Park.
2. Maintaining the Millennium garden near St Helen's Church.
3. The management of the Parish Cemetery in Costers Close.
4. The functionality, safety, maintenance and development of the two play areas at Lime Kiln and Cross Hands.

There is really not a great deal to report as the majority of the budget for PF and OS is made up of maintenance, but as a committee we strive to keep costs within budget, although year on year those costs increase. An example of this is the new grounds maintenance contract which is for a three year period and was renewable this year not surprisingly at a higher cost although competitive quotes were obtained.

Usage of playing fields remains similar to previous years and although weather conditions have been exceptional, with the co-operation of field users the fields have remained in good condition.

We adopt an almost 'belt and braces' attitude to Health and Safety and apart from general maintenance we have taken the opportunity to repair certain play equipment in both Limekiln and Cross Hands play areas identified in our annual check of all play equipment. I am pleased to report that there was nothing requiring urgent attention, but we did take the opportunity to take on certain tasks now and plan to deal with low grade risk items over the next 2 years.

We have also undertaken some work at the cemetery to thin out over grown hedging, which we hope will allow other shrubs to reinstate themselves over the summer and we will then look to replace any bare areas with appropriate slow growing shrubs.

Although maintenance is the key area of the Committee's responsibilities, we are looking to see what other enhancements can be made, in fact a restricted fund became available and a certain area of Alveston was canvassed about the idea of outdoor gym equipment, however this was not well supported and we are looking for other ideas in that regard. The theme of other funding is of interest more particularly in the playing field areas although not exclusively and if appropriate, we will seek further funding on any capital projects. This is therefore an open invitation for any relevant project ideas.

6.4. Footpaths and Allotments Committee

The footpaths and Allotments Committee help us ensure.

1. Our allotments are successfully managed.
2. The networks of footpaths that criss-cross our Parish are well maintained, accessible and promoted.
3. Bus shelters and other street furniture in the parish are effectively maintained.

Allotments

The thirty five allotments continue to be cultivated successfully by local families and individuals and during the year our allotments have become more established. Highlights include

- The Allotments Association continues to flourish in ensuring the allotments are kept tidy, supporting each other in growing food, encouraging habitat diversity at the site and promoting sustainability across our parish. Good involvement by plot holders continues and many thanks for those that have volunteered in the twice yearly inspections.
- The usage of a limited number of half plots is now occurring allowing those with limited time or resources the enjoyment of growing their own food
- We anticipate approx 10% of the plots will be given up each year and so far new plot holders have been filled from an active waiting list
- We've secured funding for improvements for site access. Access to the site has become challenging at times during the previous prolonged wet spell (s) especially when requiring equipment, materials or produce to be brought/ taken from site. The allotments association formed a working party to improve the pathway, laying a geomatic membrane and scalping on top. Last winter proved a very testing time and I'm pleased to say that access has been greatly improved. The AAA is looking to extend the membrane a further 20metres and improve access in the allotment areas as well this year.

Footpaths

The footpath network of pathways in the parish continues to be regularly used. We continue to be informed about problems and obstructions on paths and try to take action on these issues.

Following the completion of the allotment project the focus of the committee has turned to the re-launch of the council's local walks information.

The committee have begun to look at the walks one by one to ensure that they are passable and to revise the information in the walking guide books. A second open parish meeting was held explaining our plans and seeking support for a footpath group aimed at developing local ownership and ideas for how we can improve usage. The long term plan is that guides will be available on-line and provide useful information not only for walkers but also to other groups who use outdoor space or have an interest in the area, eg runners, families etc. We aim to link our on-line walks to websites providing information on outdoor activities in the South West.

Bus Shelters and Street Scene

The long term project of renovation and upkeep of bus shelters continues with the refurbishment of more bus shelters. This continues to be a piece of work that will be phased over several years. We're aware of improvements to bus shelters by First Bus over the next few years and will champion the benefits of improving our shelters to them over the next few years.

Our village has six dog waste bins helping dog walkers keep Alveston clean and tidy. The bins were funded by both South Glos Council and APC. With South Glos looking to rationalise and improve economies with their waste services ownership has now passed to us to maintain. Following a consultation through the Helmet we gained support to carry on maintaining the bins and for the next year will continue to do this. However, during this time we will review their usage and identify if the service is still providing value for money. (NB Animal wastes can now be disposed in normal waste bins and home refuse.)

A challenge for the councils will be ensuring that our street cleanliness and waste hygiene is maintained with secure funding and responsible behaviours. We'll monitor the impact that opting out of the green bin service may have on green waste fly tipping and encourage parishioners to highlight any fly tipping occurrences'.

Conclusions

This year has seen the completion of the final loose ends with regard to the allotment project. This has been a huge project and has been a great success. In 2014/5 with similar energy being put into the footpaths project it is hoped that the committee can report on another successful project next year.

My thanks also go to the Footpaths and Allotment Committee members for their support over the last year and I look forward to their continuing support for next year.

7. Open Forum – Questions and Discussion

7.1 The Parish Council was asked to look at and carefully consider the location of litter bins with dog waste signs next to seats, which will become particularly unpleasant in the summer heat.

7.2 The Parish council were asked to remove shrubs on the A38 which blocks the view of oncoming traffic when turning left.

7.3 The Parish council were requested to reconsider the lease arrangement concerning the Jubilee Hall Car Park

8. End of Business

The chairman in closing the meeting thanked the members of Alveston Women's Institute for providing the refreshments.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm.