**ANNUAL VILLAGE ASSEMBLY**

**HELD AT WATCHFIELD VILLAGE HALL**

**TUESDAY 26TH MAY 2015**

**MINUTES**

**Present:**

**Elaine Ware** - **District Councillor**

**Simon Howell – District Councillor**

**Yvonne Constance – County Councillor**

Members of **Village Hall Management Committee**

**John Kirk –** Governor of **Watchfield Primary School**

Representatives of **Watchfield** **Parish Council**

**Tom Parkinson – Local Energy Scheme**

**Phil Arnold – Wing Commander, Defence Academy**

**Toby Warren – Community Led Plan**

Watchfield residents

**Item 1: Welcome** – Sue Nodder

**Item 2: Elaine Ware and Simon Howell, District Council-**

The past twelve months have again been challenging with a significant amount of time and effort invested in representing the views of the Parishes that we represent on a wide variety of subjects. The workload seems to have dramatically increased this year and jointly we spend about 50-60 hours a week representing the Ward. Both Elaine and Simon have represented Shrivenham ward with 100% attendance at Council Meeting. Simon continued as Chair of Audit & Governance Committee and West Area Committee. Elaine continued as the Cabinet Member for Economy, Leisure, Property and Technical Services.

2014/15 has been another difficult year for our local communities. Planning issues have again been top of the agenda for all four villages and we continued to do our best in representing the views of our residents. The lack of a five year land supply has continued to cause significant concerns throughout the Vale. Speculative developers have taken advantage of the situation and unfortunately many planning applications have reluctantly been agreed. Currently there are three applications being considered for Shrivenham. These are in Townsend Road (116), Highworth Road (260) which is a strategic site identified in the Local Plan Part 1 and the Golf Course (136). These are in addition to the 410 that have already been approved. Watchfield has 120 houses currently being built in Majors Road and a further 16 have been approved.100+ houses are in the process of being built at Cowan’s Camp. The original application included a residential care facility for 50 people and two houses containing a total of 17 rooms for people with learning difficulties. However, the applicant has submitted a change to the original plan and has indicated that there is no longer a requirement for the care facilities and wishes to build an additional 35 homes instead. Currently this application is under consideration by the Vale.

Fortunately applications for Longcot and Bourton have been on a relatively small scale. Longcot has recently had 6 homes approved and a further 15 are under consideration. In Bourton Pinewood School are seeking to increase the size of the car park and replace 2 temporary storage units with a purpose built single unit. In addition a recent Environment Impact Assessment screening option for a solar farm at Lower Bourton was submitted and it was agreed that and assessment would not be required.

Of course housing in Swindon also impacts on us and the Eastern Expansion is now a reality. Following approval of Swindon’s Local Plan a total of 8000 dwellings will be built. The application for the new village of Rowborough and the expansion of South Marston is expected to be forthcoming shortly along with the Redlands Airfield site at Wanborough. “The Hub” at Gablecross has received approval and is expected to be operational within the next three years. There is of course grave concern regarding the impact that all these new homes and The Hub will have on the A420 and representations are being made at the highest level to identify how the impact on this road can be alleviated. Indeed our County Councillor Yvonne Constance has made reference to the A420 at every possible opportunity and it features as a high priority in the County Councils Local Transport Plan 4.

The Vale’s Local Plan Part 1 has recently been submitted for public examination and it is anticipated that it will be approved later this year. The submission of the Plan will hold some weight in terms of speculative applications but until a five year land supply is proven there remains a risk. The Local Plan Part 2 is expected to be consulted upon later this year. We are pleased to report that the Vale of White Horse continues to be one of the lowest crime areas in the country. The local Neighbourhood Police Team work closely with the community and indeed rural crime is top of their agenda. The have developed a close working relationship with farmers and gamekeepers to ensure that crimes such as hare coursing are dealt with in a coordinated manner. A number of arrests have been made during the past year. Elaine is a member of NAG1 (Neighbourhood Action Groups area1) and if Parish Council’s or residents have any specific issues they would like raised please let her know.

The Vale continues to be in the top three in the whole of the country for the % of recycling material and have received awards for its success.

In early 2014 many of the staff who worked in Abbey House in Abingdon moved to offices at Crowmarsh Gifford Wallingford (the offices of South Oxfordshire District Council). This move did not have any significant effect on the services provided by the Council. Most front line staff e.g., planning officers were still at Abbey House and residents continued to arrange appointments with specific officers. The main reason for the move was that Oxfordshire County Council wished to have a greater presence in Abingdon. As Abbey House had a large amount of underutilised accommodation an agreement was reached whereby the County lease part of the building for at least 10 years. The lease arrangements provides residents of the Vale with access to both levels of Local Government under one roof. It also brings significant financial benefit to the Vale which in turn assists with providing value for money services to all its residents. Although the move to Crowmarsh was successful the impact of the fire in the early hours of Thursday 15 January cannot be underestimated. The fire, which was an arson attack caused over 80% of the building to be damaged along with the loss of many irreplaceable documents. Since that time staff have managed to operate from three locations with the minimum of impact on services. Arrangements are now in place for all staff to move to 135 Milton Park in Didcot. At the end of May the Planning Department will relocate and by the end of June all staff will have taken up occupation.

Financial diligence has again enabled the Vale to keep the Freeze on Council tax for 2015/16.

Along with your local Parish Councillors we work relentlessly for our communities and deal with numerous issues that affect the area. We attend a variety of meetings and make representation to various Vale Committees, Swindon Borough Council, the County Council and other organisations. We work tirelessly to get our voice heard and our views listened to. We continue to provide assistance and advice to residents when they have any problems or concerns. We may not advertise what we do on a daily basis but as locals we have our local community at heart and will serve you all as best we can.

**Item 3: John Kirk, Governor Watchfield Primary School –**

I’m John Kirk, the Chair of Governors of Watchfield Primary School. May I offer the apologies of headteacher John Quinn, who is on holiday as it’s half term week. The last year at Watchfield has been a significant one in the life of the school. We appointed John as our new headteacher from September last year and he’s been learning about the unique challenges within our school and translating his vision into venture. John brings a fresh perspective to the school and is gradually delivering changes that are making a difference to the learning experience of the children within the school. Of note, this academic year has been the first occasion when – in certain year groups – we have had insufficient spaces to accommodate all children who have requested a place at the school. We currently have 320 children on roll comprising 300 reception to year 6 children and 20 nursery places – this is over capacity. Housing developments in the area as well as increased use of local married quarters means that school expansion is necessary. Like many people locally, we are frustrated that growth appears to be developer-led rather than planning led. Consequently our infrastructure lags the demand from local families. Our forecasts suggest that the in the Academic Year 2015/16 we will have 359 children on roll and this will rise to 391 in 2016/17 and to over 400 children on roll in 2017/18. This is more art than science as new housing creates an unpredictable demand. What we do know is that we will continue to be under pressure to accommodate all the children who want places at our school.

The building work to expand the school has commenced and should be complete by September. As this is a modular construction, most of the work is completed off-site and assembled at the last minute. The expansion will allow us to meet the increased numbers of children in the school up to the year 2017/18. There are no plans at this time to expand the school further.

We are also having a multi-use games area or MUGA constructed as part of the building work. This is relatively small and there is insufficient funding to provide a 4G surface. We have had some discussion about community use of the MUGA but operational and practical concerns mean that such use – if at all – will be limited to local clubs and groups rather than open access to the wider community. In the short term, our main focus is getting the extension to the school established and ensuring that we have sufficient teaching provision for those children who desire a place at our school.

One area we are considering for an increased provision is in our nursery. There is a paucity of nursery provision locally – particularly before and after typical school hours. The demand for such services will only increase with the housing developments under construction. We are actively considering the operational impact of increasing our nursery provision. Expanded provision would need to be on a repayment basis. It’s early days and the main school expansion will take priority but watch this space.

We are almost 2 years into our new relationship with Faringdon Academy of Schools and we are now able to leverage the opportunities that being part of an Academy offers both financially and operationally. Staff and children participate in joint training and activities with other schools and I have no doubt that we benefit from being part of a wider grouping. As a governor and teaching group, we are strong influencers within the Academy and always ensure that our voice is heard. Being part of an Academy in no way compromises the ethos, culture and values of our village school. School performance is generally ahead of national averages although tracking data in our school over the lifetime of a child is difficult as only relatively small numbers of children remain at the school throughout Key stage 1 and 2. I would add that statistics are only one measure of our school and the rich mix of nationalities and cultures give our school a character and the children an experience that is unique and positive.

Finally, we have a number of governors standing down at the end of this Academic Year. We are looking for volunteers from the local community to replace them. Being a governor is not a sinecure and requires commitment if we are to provide the challenge and support that our school requires. It is, however, a richly rewarding way to serve your local community and I would encourage anyone who feels that they might be able to fill one of our vacancies to contact me directly or through the school office.

Thank you for listening and I would be happy to take any questions that you might have.

**Item 4: Tom Parkinson, Local Energy Scheme -**

Good evening everyone. First of all, thank-you for inviting me to this evening’s meeting. As Sue has said, my name is Tom Parkinson and I’m a director of the Westmill Solar Co-operative. I’m here tonight to talk about a couple of new local community energy initiatives taking place in and around Watchfield which are being supported by the Solar and Wind co-ops and the Westmill Sustainable Energy Trust (or, as you probably know it, WeSET). WeSET is a charity which was set up at the time the Wind co-op was established for local arts and education purposes and which, as its name suggests, is developing a broader role engaging with the community on energy sustainability.

As some of you are aware, WeSET is working with a new company called Energy Local on a government-funded trial known as SWELL – which is short for Shrivenham, Watchfield Energy Local with Longcot. This trial is testing a new way of buying and selling electricity that will allow consumers to access cheaper electricity tariffs and support local renewable generation.

There are two key problems that SWELL is trying to address. Firstly, although most domestic customers pay a ‘flat’ rate for their electricity (so it costs the same amount at any time of the day), your energy supplier will be paying the generators different rates at different times of day. Suppliers already offer their large commercial customers so-called ‘time of day’ tariffs where, instead of paying a ‘flat’ rate, the customer also pays different rates at different times of day. This gives these customers the opportunity to save money by shifting usage away from peak times or using more of its power when there is a surplus of renewable generation nationally. At the moment, these ‘time of day’ tariffs are not available to domestic customers but we want to change this by helping to bring a number of households together so that they buy their electricity as a group and, from the supplier’s perspective, are like having one large customer.

The second key advantage of grouping households together is that we can ‘pool’ any local renewable generation within the group. At the moment, if you have solar PV panels on your roof, anything that is not used is ‘exported’ onto the grid and you receive around 4p per unit. This electricity travels down the grid and is generally used by a neighbour who pays around 14p for it. However if we group households together, the surplus electricity generated by one house in the group is available for use by other households in the group before being exported, keeping this 10p per unit margin within the group – it’s up to the group to decide whether the generator should be paid a bit more than 4p or the other users get the extra electricity at this cheaper rate (or they share the benefit) but the key thing is that this 10p per unit margin stays within the group and the local community rather than just benefitting the energy supplier, which is what happens at the moment.

In order to make this work though, we need two things – the first is some smart meter technology to help measure not just how much electricity a household uses but also when it is used. Secondly, there are obviously greater savings the more the group can shift its electricity use to times when prices are cheaper, either to match the cheaper off-peak rates in the supplier’s ‘time of use’ tariff but also to maximise the usage of the electricity generated within the group. So we need to understand how feasible it is for people to shift their usage around in this way.

This is the key aim of the SWELL trial – we are putting together a group of 50 households locally to test the technology and see how much money people can save by grouping together and shifting their electricity usage to cheaper times of day. We think the savings could be as much as 15% but the technology has not been available to test this before and we obviously need to see what happens in reality.

We’ve had a really enthusiastic response to the trial from everyone so far. The trial equipment is being installed in the autumn and there are no special requirements in terms of what equipment your house has or who live in it so it’s not too late to join in – and if anyone is interested, I’ve got some leaflets which give more information and I’m very happy to go through things in more detail after this meeting.

One of the nice things about the SWELL trial is that it fits in very neatly with some of the other things that WeSET are doing. WeSET has been looking at installing solar panels on a number of the village buildings and, assuming the Westmill Solar members approve the grant of the necessary funding to WeSET at the Solar AGM next month, will install solar panels on the Sports Pavilion over the summer. As well as providing a steady income stream for the village for the next 20 years, the Sports Pavilion is one of the buildings in the SWELL trial so the opportunity for sharing out any surplus electricity that the pavilion generates to households in the village as part of the SWELL trial is an obvious bonus. Going forward, we’d like to think that something similar could be arranged for this building and possibly the Primary School.

Part of WeSET’s remit is also to help people with energy-efficiency – we helped with the energy audit and insulation of this building and helping people to use less energy (whether that’s low energy lighting, improved insulation, lift-sharing or whatever) is obviously the best way to make sure that everyone’s energy bills are kept as low as possible and we reduce our carbon emissions.

This is one area that we’re very keen to develop further and it’s part of the programme planned for the Community Open Day which WeSET is organising and which is taking place on Saturday 20th June in a marquee on the wind and solar farm site. The Westmill Solar AGM is taking place in the morning but from 1pm onwards, we have the public launch of the SWELL trial, followed by a talk from Jonathan Porritt CBE, tours of the wind and solar farm plus a number of workshops on energy efficiency from a team from Brighton and hands-on activities for adults and children. The event is free and everyone is very welcome so I hope to see many of you again then. One plea is that we are looking for volunteers who might be able to help out for an hour or two with car parking and other general logistics so if anyone would be prepared to help with that, again please come and have a word afterwards and that would be much appreciated.

**Item 5: Yvonne Constance – County Council**

The recent election makes me your County Councillor for Shrivenham Division.

COUNTY COUNCIL is responsible for highways and transport, non-Academy schools, social services, and waste collection.

 New LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 4 is now fully consulted, and progressing to decision by full Council in September. It’s very important to have a new policy in place to ensure that the big developers make proper contributions to new/improved infrastructure. I chaired the LTP4 working group and we have set up an A420 Corridor Group to make sure of careful attention for this important route. We will meet on 29 Mayahead of any decisions by OCC Cabinet.

WASTE DISPOSAL may become an issue again. OCC must find reductions of £60million more and the recycling tips are on the 'long list'. There will be no change for 5 years, but I intend to press for 'pay-to-use' service to be sure we have a convenient tip at Stanford. The County is obliged to provide only ONE free tip, which would certainly be central (Kidlington or Drayton??) and I propose that all others become pay-to-use to keep them open. In my days in Craven Ward we did establish this as preferred policy, but I must be sure in my new ward too!

HIGHWAYS: hope you notice that potholes are being filled promptly all over our area. I have pressed for repairs by Network Rail to damage from diverted traffic during closure of A417. A sum has been agreed, but I have still to hear where it will be spent. I press for repairs to the road edges, which are not treated as 'potholes' but are sharp and can cause real damage.

**Item 6: Phil Arnold, Wing Commander, MoD-**

Wing Commander Phil Arnold introduced himself as the new Station Commander. In response to questions he stated that there were no immediate plans to expand military housing onto Folly Field. He explained that the Academy was likely to draw more courses and organisations from other locations due to rationalisation in the MoD with increased personnel and students. The Defence Academy is trying to engage more with Vale planners about their impact and needs regarding local infrastructure and facilities. He will investigate ways of passing information about Academy facilities and events to the village and will relay to the Parish Council for inclusion on their website.

**Item 7: Toby Warren, Community Led Plan –**

A group of residents has volunteered to collect everyone's views and prepare a community plan which will set out how we can improve the village. The plan will prompt local action on a voluntary basis, influence others such as local councils and support funding applications for village projects.

To help us understand how we can improve Watchfield together please complete this questionnaire and return it to the village hall post box or to the collection boxes in the Eagle, College Farm and Co-op, using the envelope provided by 27th June 2015. The questionnaire should only take about15 minutes to complete and everyone who completes a questionnaire will have the chance to win a Bloomfields food hamper worth £100 in a prize draw. The prize draw will take place at the end of a FREE cream teas afternoon which will take place at Watchfield Village Hall from 2pm to 4pm on Saturday 27th June 2015.

The questions are about topics that many residents have mentioned to date by completing suggestion cards or attending Community Plan events like the film night, pot luck supper and family fun event. There is space at the end of the questionnaire for further comments. If that space proves insufficient, please feel free to continue on a separate sheet (or sheets) of paper.

Questionnaires are being distributed one per household. We are looking for the views of the household, as a whole, and there are some specific questions for younger and older people in the household. However, if anyone in your household would prefer to complete their own questionnaire please phone 01793 780203 or email watchfieldplan@yahoo.co.uk for additional copies of the questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire can also be downloaded from [www.watchfield.org/watchfield-community-plan/](http://www.watchfield.org/watchfield-community-plan/).

The information provided by you in the questionnaire will be treated as strictly confidential. You will see that you are not asked for your name, full address or phone number in the questionnaire itself. There is no serial number on the form. Your replies will be anonymous. Only the overall summary of questionnaire results will be published in the Watchfield Community Plan. If you want to enter the prize draw you can provide your name and address on the separate prize draw sheet, which will be removed from your questionnaire before it is analysed. You can also use the separate sheet if you would like to help with the Community Plan.

The Watchfield Community Plan project is being supported by Watchfield Parish Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Rural Community Council.

**Item 8: Thames Valley Police, no representative –**

Statement read by Sue Nodder,

Thames Valley Police could not send a representative but has asked that I remind you of the community policing alerts that can be sent via email or to your phone that update you about local incidents or concerns and inform you of new scams etc. If you would like information on how to get these please leave your details. They would also like to alert you to the Community Speed Watch scheme which allows local communities to gather speed data in perceived problem areas. This involves speed indication device training by TVP and risk assessment of the locations, as well as loan of equipment. Watchfield currently has 2 trained individuals but, as they need to work in pairs, in would be useful to have more. Otherwise, TVP are happy to report there is a relatively low crime rate in the area as a whole.

**Item 9: Ruth Holman, Village Hall representative**.

Overview of Village Hall issues and answer to questions – No decision yet on planning application. Hall continues to be busy with clubs and societies listed. Fundraising through Village Fete, Bingo and Quizzes. Village Hall fete June 6th, any help most welcomed and donations to cake or bottle stands would be greatly appreciated.

**Item 10: Sue Nodder, Chairman Watchfield Parish Council -**

Since our last Assembly we have had Parish Council elections which were contested for the first time in many years, so thank you to all those who turned out to vote in all the tiers of elections. We now have a full complement of 8 members, perhaps we may be entitled to more members due to the new developments by next year. I would like to introduce the members to you so you can put a face to a name. We have allocated joint officers for some posts so new members can learn the ropes. Ruth Homan, who is vice-Chairman and now has responsibility for Finance, burials & estates; Anne Rawle, who is the officer for Allotments and burials, Dawn Griffiths, who has taken responsibility for the pavilion; Nigel Bayston, a new member, who is the officer for allotments and burials; Mark Douglas, another new member, who is the officer for the play area and website; Alan Stillman, another new member (although he has served on the Parish Council in the past), who is the officer for estates; and Carrie Parker, another new member, who is the officer for finance, website and pavilion.

Our previous Clerk had to leave due to personal circumstances and we were, in effect, operating without a Clerk for nearly a year. I cannot thank enough those council members who stepped up to take on extra responsibility. It has been a very difficult time and I hope never to be repeated. We now have a new Clerk in Claire Arnold and I hope it will be a long and fruitful partnership. Welcome, Claire. I would like to thank the officers of the outgoing council for all their hard work during the year, particularly those who held an office of responsibility. So thank you Sheila for your work as allotments officer. We also said goodbye to our village litter picker, Elwyn Jones, who has done sterling work over the last 12 years. He handed over to Paul Spencer-Matthews who began at the beginning of this month.

This has again been a difficult and busy year for the Council. Most of the major events have been related to planning. In relation to the major developments:-

1. Since the last report the Cowan’s Camp developers have sought to change the permission from the care facilities to additional housing. We have challenged this on the grounds of loss of local employment, facilities, additional traffic generation and additional strain on local infrastructure. No decision has yet been made. We have also lodged a formal complaint about the decision making process for this development.
2. Knapp’s field is near completion. We still have concerns about the state of the roads, pavements, street lighting, drainage, parking, public open space and the destruction of hedgerows by new residents – all of which we are pursuing.
3. The 16 house development for Mac’s field along Major’s Road has been passed but the S106 agreement has not yet been signed
4. We have just learned of the submission of a proposaĵl for the golf course for 136 houses. We shall be discussing this at and extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council on June 2nd 7.30pm at the Village Hall if you wish to come along. We have been promised hard copies of the plans for display to you and will publicise on our website, email list and noticeboards when you can view them. We have secured an extension until June 18th to enable you to comment directly to the Vale.
5. The pedestrian refuge and lighting on the A420 for the Traveller’s site have been completed and other conditions are being monitored by the Vale.
6. We commented on the draft Local Plan for the Vale, the Swindon Borough Council Plan and OCC Local Transport Plan raising the local issues particularly with regard to infrastructure following the proposed 8000+ houses and employment hub on the edge of Swindon and 3000+ houses along the A420 route.
7. We commented on the bus consultation regarding the 65 route but the service is to be withdrawn on May 31st. The provision of a Shopperbus is clearly inadequate and we are still requesting proper consideration of diverting a portion of the 66 buses through the Watchfield loop in order to serve the existing and new residents. Without a through service, the new developments are over 1km from a bus service which will only increase car use. Flyers for the Shopperbus service are at the front.
8. There remain safety concerns about the speed of some traffic through the village and along Faringdon Road, particularly close to the bus stops used by school children. We are in discussion with OCC Road Safety who are exploring measures to reduce the speed but the more people who express a concern, the more attention might be given to this matter. Again, if you would like information about how to do this, please leave your details at the front.
9. There have, unfortunately, been several incidents of vandalism and wilful damage at Watchfield Sports Pavilion and we will be looking at security options. Meanwhile, please report any suspicious behaviour immediately to the police.

In order for the village to be able to claim and spend any of the money nominally allocated to us from the developments, we have to be able to prove this is what the community wants. In order to do that, and to identify areas for improvements to the village, last year the Community Led Plan was launched, about which Toby has already spoken. We hope that the next couple of years will be a fruitful exercise in improving and adding facilities in the village to, in part, compensate for the huge amount of development.

Minutes and agenda from the Parish Council are on the village website, [www.watchfield.org](http://www.watchfield.org), which is the only official website for the village, and also on the 3 noticeboards at the pavilion, High Street/Hill Road junction and Old Bakery, High Street (thank you to Mike and Judy Hawkes who agreed to its relocation there). If you would like to publicise a local event or class, please contact the clerk.

Other events:- The Village Fete is on June 6th from 12 noon to 5 pm on the Recreation Ground. The cream tea for those bringing their CLP questionnaires will be on Saturday June 27th between 2 and 4pm.

I would like to thank all those residents who quietly contribute to the community of Watchfield every day and support the village in so many ways. Thank you.

**Item 11: Cowan’s Camp Site Manager –** did not send a representative

Sue Nodder read a statement.

The site manager was unable to attend but sent assurances that the Thames Water work at the High Street/ Major’s Road junction should be finished this week and that the verges and green would be restored. There is an ongoing dialogue between Barratts, Oxfordshire County Council and Watchfield Parish Council about HGV traffic.

Lastly, thank you to all members of the community who contribute positively in so many ways to the village. Your support is much appreciated.

Meeting closed 21.05hrs

Claire Arnold, Clerk Watchfield Parish Council

30/05/15