**ANNUAL VILLAGE ASSEMBLY**

**HELD AT WATCHFIELD VILLAGE HALL**

**TUESDAY 12TH MAY 2016**

**MINUTES**

**Present:**

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

**Simon Howell – District Councillor**

**Ian Wright –** Governor of **Watchfield Primary School**

**John Quin -** Head of **Watchfield Primary School**

**Toby Warren – Community Led Plan**

**Marilyn Pack – PCSO, Thames Valley Police**

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

Members of **Village Hall Management Committee**

Watchfield residents

**Item 1: Welcome** – Sue Nodder

**Item 2: Marilyn Pack, Thames Valley Police –**

The Neighbourhood Policing team are working very closely with social services at the moment and are working hard at improving children’s welfare in the area.

The policing team will be present at the Effington Show and Shrivenham Fete.

Three large PWITS investigations currently underway. Sadly there is an increasing drug problem seen in the area and the policing team ask the community to be vigilant and call the police if you witness suspicious behaviour especially around cars where drug dealing is possible.

Oxfordshire policing team are now working with Wiltshire Police on both sides of the border and therefore there are now extra patrols available with a higher visibility especially at night.

The policing team are looking for a volunteer for admin work for Thames Valley Police.

**Item 3: John Quin and Ian Wright, Head and Governor of Watchfield Primary School –**

Current Context of the School;

* Current number on roll: 333 (38 have left since January).
* Non Mobile Children: 110 (was 72 September 2014)
* Service Children: 223
* International Service Children: 96
* Our admissions number is now 60 in each year group with a capacity of 420.

Pre School:

* Running two sessions am and pm
* Able to take more children than before due to new building
* Currently we have 30 children with a nursery place 26 in the morning 4 in the afternoon
* We are also offering additional hours to those in the morning at a cost to parents of £12 per session for the afternoons
* Makes the afternoon sessions viable and uptake is increasing.

Wrap around Child Care:

* Currently we do not offer breakfast or after school childcare
* Lack of space has been the issue in the past
* We now have space that we can use and we will be looking into to viability of offering wrap around childcare and the logistics of how it should work

Up Coming Highlights:

* International Week in 2 weeks’ time
* A Monarchy Week to celebrate the Queen’s birthday with a mock Street Party
* Arts Week 20th June with the theme being The Beatles – lots of fun activities planned for the children and some big surprises in store
* Mini Olympics Week – we will be holding our own version of the Olympics. Children will have the opportunity to compete in sports such as sailing and fencing

Visits to School:

* We welcome everyone in to school
* Happy to give anyone who would like a visit to see the school a tour
* A fantastic opportunity to see the school at work and just have a nosey around

Just pop in to arrange a time, give us a call or email office.2572@Watchfield.oxon.sch.uk

**Item 4: Elaine Ware and Simon Howell, District Council -**

The 2015 Local Election included boundary changes within the Vale. The Shrivenham Ward was expanded from four (4) Parishes to twelve (12) and re-named Watchfield & Shrivenham Ward. Elaine and Simon were re-elected to represent the new ward which comprises Watchfield, Shrivenham, Bourton, Longcot, Fernham, Ashbury, Little Coxwell, Great Coxwell, Coleshill, Buscot, Eaton Hastings and Compton Beauchamp.

Once again the past twelve months have been challenging with a significant amount of time and effort invested in representing the views of the Parishes that we serve on a wide variety of subjects.

Following the election Simon continued as Chair of Audit & Governance Committee and the Faringdon Area Committee. Elaine continued as a Cabinet Member but with a change of responsibility to Corporate Strategy including grounds maintenance and Waste.

2015/16 has been another difficult year for our local communities. Planning issues have again been top of the agenda and we continue to do our best in representing the views of our residents. The lack of an adopted Local Plan and 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. Where applications have been refused developers have been quick to appeal and the results so far have not been positive.

Currently there are a number of major applications under consideration in the Watchfield & Shrivenham Ward and we will make representations to the Planning Committee when these are considered.

Of course housing in Swindon’s New Eastern Villages will have a significant impact on our villages and the Eastern Expansion is now a reality. Following approval last year of Swindon’s Local Plan a total of 8000 dwellings will be built in 8 villages and South Marston will expand. “The Business Hub” now known as Symmetry Park at Gablecross is currently under construction. It will provide new industrial/warehouse facilities over an area of 1,000,000 sq.ft. and is expected to be fully operational in the not too distance future.

There is of course grave concern regarding the impact that all these new homes and Symmetry Park 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 it is included as a high priority in Oxfordshire Country Council’s Local Transport Plan 4. A major concern that has been forthcoming in the last few weeks is the proposed number of traffic lights from the Oxfordshire boundary to the White Hart Roundabout. The proposal is for six (6) sets.

The Vale’s Local Plan Part 1 has been through its inspection and the final report is awaited. The Inspector has requested some additional information and some modifications which may require further consultation. Should the Plan be confirmed as “sound” it will then be adopted by the Vale later this year. Once adopted the Plan will hold weight and therefore be a tool to resist speculative applications. The Local Plan Part 2 is expected to be prepared and consulted upon after the adoption of Part 1.

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. They 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 is No.2 in the whole of the country for the % of recycling material and has received awards for its success. The No.1 council is South Oxfordshire with whom the Vale shares its services. The latest initiatives with the recycling of old textiles and small electrical items have been a great success and residents are encouraged to use these new services.

The Vale has entered into a contract partnership with four other local authorities namely, South Oxfordshire, Hart, Havant and Mendip for the provision of a number of back room services. The services include HR, IT, Car Parking, Property Management, Accountancy, Revenues and Benefits. The services will be provided by two suppliers – Capita and Vinci. It is anticipated that over the 9 year period of the contract there will be savings of in excess of £50m for the five councils. The Vale and South Oxfordshire will be the first Councils to use the new contracts commencing on 1 August.

Following the fire at the Crowmarsh Gifford offices of South Oxfordshire DC in January 2015 arrangements were made to take a four year lease on offices at 135 Eastern Avenue Milton Park. Staff moved into the new offices during May and June and have settled well. This has given staff some stability after the upheaval of the fire and working in temporary accommodation.

Shortly there will be a change to the telephone numbers at the Vale. It had been expected for these to change in early May but unfortunately there has been a delay and new numbers will not be available until later in the month or early June. There will be a press release once the date is confirmed.

At the end of February details were announced of a proposal to Government to create 4 Unitary Authorities for Oxfordshire. The authorities would be Cherwell with South Northamptonshire, West Oxfordshire with Cotswold, Southern Oxfordshire (Vale and South) and Oxford City.

Currently expert consultants PricewaterhousesCooper (PwC) have been engaged to examine proposals and report back by the end of June. The proposal has created some concern amongst local communities and indeed Oxfordshire County Council who, although invited to join with the other authorities, has decided to undertake a report of its own. Further information about the devolution proposal is available on www.oxford.gov.uk/devolution

David Buckle will be retiring this summer and recruitment is currently taking place to replace him. David has been CEO for both the Vale and South Oxfordshire for over 8 years and has dealt with many interesting, challenging and changing times. Once an appointment has been made there will be a formal press release.

Financial diligence has again enabled the Vale to keep the Freeze on Council tax for 2016/17.

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 5: Toby Warren, Community Led Plan –**

Community led plans or community plans can help a community assess what is good about living in a village and what needs to be improved. This evidence helps when bidding for funds to improve a community.

Because of the rapid change that is taking place in Watchfield now is the right time to have a plan for the village, so despite the changes, the village remains a good place to live.

After alot of hard work by a group of volunteers and lots of input from residents the Watchfield Community Plan was publicly launched at the village hall on 6th February 2016.

The plan shows what villagers think is good about the Watchfield and what needs improving:

• The recreation ground and green areas including the Folly Field, stand out as being very important to most respondents. Improvement projects need to focus on these areas.

• Most respondents considered that integration between the civilian and military communities is important and there was strong interest in activities and events to encourage integration and learning more about the work of the Defence Academy. Possible projects could be a welcome pack for new students and residents and to ask the Commanding Officer Shrivenham Station (which includes Watchfield) and ‘The News’ to provide regular updates on community activity at the Defence Academy. With organisers of village events reciprocating by providing details for the Academy’s ‘Grapevine’ newsletter.

• The location of more dual dog waste/litter bins around the village would be appreciated by most of the respondents. The location most frequently mentioned for an additional bin was outside the primary school.

• There was strong interest in using trees and other planting to enhance the appearance of all parts of the village. A possible project could be to carry out a planting survey with detailed recommendations on where planting could take place, and volunteers then undertaking some of the planting.

• Respondents had a preference for public art, funded by house developers, to be ornate benches or some other kind of seating. There were also interesting ideas for other types of public art.

• A large majority of respondents were in favour of the preparation of a Watchfield Neighbourhood Plan, with policies on the development and use of land in the village.

• A third hall, internal improvements and additional activities would be likely to result in a significant increase in the use of the village hall.

• Respondents supported improvements to the pitches, play area and pavilion on the recreation ground.

**Item 6: Ruth Holman, Village Hall representative**.

Watchfield Village Hall

Introduction Registered charity management committee

Hall usage:

Cheeky Little Monkeys, Gymnastics, Aikedo, Pilates , Zumba, Church, Friendly Club, Acorn Club, Yoga and Dog training, Private parties Elections, children’s parties very popular venue booking for next January.

Forthcoming use Ti Chi starting June 6th 1pm Mondays £3.00 per session.

Extension update Planning approved. We are now seeking an architect for building regulations and to help the committee to take the project forward.

Events - Bingo, Quiz, Flower Show Show 10th September, Christmas Fayre, possible free village party June 18th if we receive funding.

Next event the fete June 4th, Events will include Ferret Racing, Sheep dog herding ducks, Majorettes, Magic show, an Aikedo display Punch and Judy Live music and the Rio Olympics for children, Bar , BBQ Refreshments , Ice Cream stalls/ car boot, Tombola, Coconut Shy and cake stall.

**Item 7:** **Yvonne Constance, County Council -**

**Sue Nodder read out the following statement.**

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) has been rethinking provision of all services in response to unexpected reductions in its grant from central Government. Savings of £292 million per annum have already been made, but the grant was further reduced by £70 million between Dec 2015 / Feb 2016. A transition allowance of £4 million was allowed in time for the budget-setting Council on 16th Feb which will be used to ease the reductions in social services.

OCC has increased its Council Tax by 1.99% plus 2% permitted specifically to meet the impact of Living Wage from April 2016, but the impact is severe and OCC now spends 50% of its revenue on 2% of the population (adult and children’s social care.) The Council has decided to withdraw from providing services within the villages and all bus subsidies and negotiate with bus companies serving rural areas.

Pot hole patching will continue as necessary and Gov. has made special funds available.

OXFORDSHIRE TOGETHER : aims to agree formal arrangements with Town/Parish Councils to support them to develop their own grass-cutting, gritting and snow-clearance within the villages; OCC will continue to cut grass on the verges outside village (2 cuts per year) and to grit and snow-clear on major routes (mainly bus routes). Some villages are planning to provide this service also.

By April 140 Town/Parish Councils have expressed interest and will now sign S.101 Local Agency Agreements for formal transfer to undertake highway services, initially for 3 years. It is promoted on basis of:

• providing services according to local priorities, with local decision-making;

• improved quality of service from more responsive service;

• generating local employment opportunities;

• ‘ownership’ of local area;

• increased satisfaction and pride in local area

OCC will continue to provide highway safety services.

BUS SUBSIDIES: OCC has withdrawn all bus subsidies from July, and is negotiating with the bus companies to re-route and consolidate services (possibly with school bus service) to keep open some connections for rural villages. Bus 66 is already commercially viable; Bus 67 will continue on A417 Wantage to Faringdon on developer funding, but there is currently no plan to serve villages along B4507. The schools service may be adapted.

 2.

STANFORD TIP: is again reprieved until 2024! I am requesting that some developer money (S.106) be spent to improve the facility.

RESTRUCTURING LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN OXFORDSHIRE: Reduced Gov funding makes clear that local government must reorganise to better use the funding available. OCC report in 2014 showed that £25-£32 million is tied up in two-tier administration and a unitary authority is a better solution. In December, OCC and the health commissioner (OCCG) together applied for devolved powers and budgets, but Gov. requires Unitary or an elected Mayor for devolved powers.

The Oxfordshire District Councils with Oxford City organised themselves to propose 4 District-based unitaries in February 2016 and have commissioned PWC to conduct a viability study, expecting a report by end of June. The County Council has decided to conduct a separate study on the case for a single county-wide unitary, One Oxfordshire, which is still to be announced.

There are advantages in District-based unitaries: more local decision making reflecting local needs more closely (better roads and infrastructure and closer management of S.106 agreements!) but not clear how best to provide county-wide social services effectively and efficiently from 4 Districts with no experience of delivering these services currently.

A single One Oxfordshire structure with 650,000 residents currently, and expected to grow to about 850,000 by 2030, would be the biggest unitary in the country (currently Cornwall with 550,000 is the biggest.) That structure would have to provide for local input in the districts (esp. for planning decisions) and we await proposals after OCC’s study. I support the decision to get a separate OCC study. Despite the spend in very tight times, ‘opposing’ proposals will deliver best evidence of each proposal and better decisions will be made. This will be the new structure for Oxfordshire for the next generation- we must have best evidence to make it! The decision lies with Secretary of State (Greg Clark at DCLG) who expects to have clear proposals to consider by the end of the year. I will keep you informed.

**Item 8: Sue Nodder, Chairman Watchfield Parish Council –**

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

Watchfield residents would like to thank the parish council greatly for all their efforts and hard work in such difficult times.

Meeting closed 21.00hrs

Claire Arnold, Clerk Watchfield Parish Council

12/05/16