**ANNUAL VILLAGE ASSEMBLY**

**HELD AT WATCHFIELD VILLAGE HALL**

**THURSDAY 23RD MAY 2013**

**Present:**

**Guy Sawyer** – Station Commander of the Defence Academy

**Simon Howell** – District Councillor

**Yvonne Constance** – County Councillor

**Nick Sheppard** – headmaster of Watchfield Primary School

Members of **Village Hall Management Committee**

**Acorn club** representative

**Colin Bell** from WESET

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

**Item 1: Welcome** – Sue Nodder

**Item 2: Guy Sawyer** – Overview of Defence Academy issues and answer to questions.

Busy with courses and external events (189 last year). The wider MOD is centralising facilities. Defence School of Languages will move to the Academy at end of July to begin courses in September. There will be 50 extra permanent staff (25 military) requiring quarters. Approx. 180 additional students (short term accommodation behind wire). 68 houses on Hill Road and High Street due to Brize Norton expansion. Watchfield & Shrivenham have about 100 families from Brize here long term (5 years). The clubs and facilities on site are available to the local community, but there is a process for getting passes. There may be an increased security presence in married quarters due to incident in Woolwich. Guy to look into using the grapevine etc. to advertise civilian events for the community. No immediate plans for building more quarters – will look to take up empty stock first, then options for expansion within wire, then Folly Field. Guy has put an input into the VOWHDC Local Plan as the Academy has been ignored. Brownfield sites within the wire are being redeveloped subject to money.

Guy leaving in August and SN thanked him for his efforts to involve the military and civilian populations in Watchfield.

**Item 3: Simon Howell -** Overview of District Council issues and answer to questions. The past twelve months have been particularly challenging for all Vale District Councillors. Both Elaine and Simon have represented Shrivenham Ward with 100% attendance at meetings and taken on significant additional responsibilities.Simon has been appointed Chair of two committees – Audit & Governance Committee and West Area Committee.Audit & Governance is the committee that oversees all financial policies and procedures and ensures that the Vale meets all laid down legislation. The West Area Committee deals with the allocation of small grants for specific projects in the Western Vale.

Elaine continues as the Cabinet Member for Economy, Leisure, Property and Technical Services. This is a large portfolio and covers measures to stimulate the economy in terms of shopping and tourism. Providing high quality leisure facilities, monitoring the extensive property portfolio and included in Technical Services are flooding, drainage, mobile home parks, internal building maintenance and car parking. The introduction of two hour free car parking in our three main towns and Botley has proved to be a major success and has encouraged more users to the Vale’s car parks. Planning- Following the abolition of the proposed Interim Housing Supply Policy and the introduction of the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) the Vale found itself in a difficult position. The Vale does not have a 5 year land supply nor does it have a Local Plan (previously referred to as the Core Strategy). The reason for this position is historical and we are where we are without going over old ground.

During the past year our towns and villages have received applications from speculative developers to take advantage of the situation. Our local area has been one of the main targets and to date (21 April) the following permissions have been granted:

Shrivenham: 31 homes in Townsend Road/Station Road

36 “ in Highworth Road

Watchfield: 120 homes in Majors Road

100 “ on Cowan’s Camp + 50 residential care flats and two houses containing 17 rooms for people with learning difficulties

In addition permission has been granted for 8 hard standings, 8 travelling caravans and 8 day rooms at the Gypsy Site located opposite Cowan’s Camp just off the A420 bypass.

Currently under consideration is an application for 73 homes off Colton Road in Shrivenham. It is anticipated that there will be more applications for Shrivenham in the near future.

We will continue to support our Parish Councils and local residents during this period of uncertainty. We are also conscious of the Swindon Eastern Expansion and this is high on the agenda. Indeed Elaine, together with the Leader of the Vale Matthew Barber and Roger Cox Portfolio Holder for Planning, met with Swindon Borough Councillor Dale Heenan to discuss their latest proposals contained in the Borough’s Local Plan to 2026. Elaine and Simon and Vale Planners have commented on the proposals and will attend the Planning Inspection meeting when convened. Policing -We are pleased to report that the Vale of White Horse continues to be one of the lowest crime areas in the country. We have a new Police Crime Commissioner Anthony Stansfeld and one of his main priorities is rural crime. Faringdon Police Station has recently taken delivery of a Land Rover which will help tremendously when having to go “off road” to deal with incidents in remote locations. Most of the incidents are for poaching or hare coursing and the offenders are often from outside the local area. 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. Recycling -The Vale of White Horse has received several awards and recognised nationally for the recycling programme. Indeed the Vale can proudly say it holds the top position for the % of waste recycled across the whole country. Also the Vale and South Oxfordshire District Councils scooped the Best Improved Recycling Rates prize at the LARAC (Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee) Celebration Awards 2012. Council Tax -Financial diligence has enabled the Vale to keep the Freeze on Council Tax for 2013/14. Conclusion - The Vale of White Horse has been identified as 8th from a total of 119 rural local authority districts as one of Britain’s most desirable places to live according to the Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey. The survey looked at living standards, the labour market, housing, the environment, education and health. The Vale ranked highly for employment, average earnings and low crime figures. We are delighted to have achieved this position and will work hard to maintain our local area as a “desirable place to live”. Stanford-in-the-Vale tip is not closing (Yvonne Constance stepped in) but there may be a charge for using it. Sustainability of developments remains contentious – utilities are starting to say developments are not sustainable without infrastructure improvements. Simon is championing the WVV Transport Survey which highlights the problems of the A420 and prospect of congestion and accidents following development.

SN thanked all those who responded to the consultation on the Local Plan Part One. Thanked those who responded to the proposed boundary changes where it was proposed Watchfield be lumped in with Faringdon and separated from Shrivenham. This was not adopted and Watchfield is still in a ward with Shrivenham.

Thanked Elaine and Simon for represented Watchfield at Planning Committee meetings.

**Item 4: Yvonne Constance** - Overview of County Council issues and answer to questions. Yvonne has only just been elected as our County Councillor. £73 million has been earmarked by OCC for road improvements in the next 1-4 years. Problems are fixed by importance, not date of reporting. Locality Committees have been set up for some elements of roads/schools etc. but Watchfield is lumped in with Wantage and Faringdon. Sustainability is a question Yvonne will be concentrating on believing things should be cumulatively, not in isolation. She believes there should be improvements to the A420 in terms of access and flow and realises this has not been considered in the Local Plan. She is putting store by the WVV Transport Survey. She admitted that County doesn’t know what District is doing and *visa versa*. S106 money to County has to be site related and Yvonne thinks, if not needed on site, money should be available for elsewhere. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will replace S106, based on the square footage of houses, but excluding affordable houses. Yvonne will look into the A420 in terms of the Watchfield roundabout accidents and the 6000+ extra cars predicted per day. There are problems with dualling the carriageway with Acorn Bridge and the Watchfield Anglo-Saxon cemetery.

SN encouraged reporting potholes/streetlight problems to OCC. Can do on their website and hopefully Watchfield will soon have a link on the village website to do this. If not able to do this via internet let the Clerk or SN know all the details and they can do it on your behalf. But the PC is not responsiblefor repair.

**Item 5: Nick Sheppard** – Overview of Watchfield Primary School issues and answer to questions. Number of service children in the school has risen from 190 to 220 and now is 250. There are 315 children in total. 2 consultations at the moment. The governing body is consulting on joining Faringdon Academy Trust. The 2nd consultation is regarding the expansion of the school to a 2 form entry. The extra houses will generate extra children and there are concerns over the safety of the children on the roads outside the school – lots of near misses. Mentioned the school carnival this week – procession at 2pm along Hill Road on Friday 24th May. Part 1 OCC consultation is very big picture – there will be a further consultation but no timescale yet. Looking at a 4 classroom block on site, probably on playing field site, against Sports England advice. OCC are looking at a MUGA, possibly as a shared facility with the Parish. No decisions had been made regarding the location. There is no joined up thinking between the different areas of building and planning. The move to Academy status will not give the school a right to refuse expansion as OCC still has an obligation to provide spaces.

SN stated that details of the consultation about Stage One for school expansion were available in the room and encouraged villagers to reply deadline June 12th.

**Item 6: Ruth Holman** - Acorn Club representative. Overview of Acorn Club issues and answer to questions. Meet once a month and provide friendship for the older people of the village and surrounding area. Meets on 3rd Monday of the month for coffee, activities, singing, quizzes, games, sherry, 2 course lunch. The helpers are also aging and called for younger volunteers. Sign-up sheet was available. Anyone interested themselves or knowing someone who might benefit was invited to speak to Ruth or leave contact details.

**Item 7: Sheila Skeffington** – Village Hall representative. Overview of Village Hall issues and answer to questions – Hall continues to be busy with clubs and societies listed. Fundraising through Village Fete, Bingo and Quizzes. Knapp’s Field S106 money included £75,000 towards extension and improvements. The Management Committee has done some preliminary work on possible designs for extending towards the rear for larger kitchen facilities, improved storage and a third hall.

**Item 8: Thames Valley Police** – not represented but sent a statement that the threat level in the area had not increased as a result of the incident in Woolwich, London. They reinforced the need to report all incidents.999 for emergencies, 101 for non-emergencies. The level of patrol cover Watchfield gets is directly proportional to the incidents reported.

**Item 9: Colin Bell**– WESET representative. WESET is a charity which is part funded by the Westmill Wind Farm. WESET has helped the Village Hall with insulation and advice on heating and economy and is looking into the possibility of Photovoltaic Panels on the public buildings of the village. The costs should be covered by grants or individual investments with Feed In Tariff going back to the village facilities. Colin proposed a public meeting in a few months’ time and informed the room of WESET’s attendance at the upcoming Village Fete.

**Item 10: Sue Nodder** - Parish Council**.** Members of Watchfield Parish Council: SN – reluctant chair. Thanked Ruth for her stint as Chairman and for remaining as vice, recreation ground, play equipment and burials officer. Colin Bell – new member and finance officer, David Shepherd – new member and website officer, Sheila Skeffington – allotments officer, Anne Rawle –pavilion, recreation ground and burials officer, Kenton Bush and Aggie Bailey. PC is a voluntary, part-time organisation. Councillors don’t do this for personal gain, recognition or thanks but because they want Watchfield to remain a nice place to live and improve the facilities available. Cindy Matthews is the Parish Clerk and the only paid member of the Council. She is non-voting and independent and works part time (approx. 7.5 hours a week)

It has been a busy and stressful year due to the amount of planning issues. Parish Councils were not designed to cope with this level of paperwork and the associated deadlines and meetings. Problems with National Planning Policy Framework (no proportionality), and lack of Local Plan and 5 year land supply at Vale. Major applications have 1000s of pages of documents and technical information to plough through. It must be reinforced that the Parish Council is only informed of planning applications and can put in a response and speak at planning committee meetings (for 3 minutes only). However, WPC feels it right to represent the majority view (as expressed at the open meetings) and give a comprehensive response.

There have been **3** main planning issues.

The Traveller’s site on the other side of the A420 which was passed for 8 permanent pitches and 8 travelling pitches. The permission is conditioned on a central pedestrian refuge being built in the A420 hatched area at the expense of the site. WPC objected on safety grounds and, despite the permission being granted, has lodged several complaints with County and District about how the crossing point was deemed to be safe. County came back saying that, even though they exceeded their safety guidelines by 66% on some issues, they are allowed to as they are only guidelines. The district complaint is still on-going.

The Knapp’s field site on the land opposite the Shrivenham 100 on Major’s Road was passed for 120 houses – 40% of which will be affordable. Work has obviously already started even though planning conditions which should have been complied with prior to the commencement of development have not been. This is also the subject of complaint to the Vale and Elaine Ware is investigating why planning enforcement are not doing their job. Part of major developments is Section 106 money which the developers have to give to the Vale and County to lessen the impact of the development. Most of the money goes to things like schools, police, roads, buses etc. but the Parish puts in a wish –list of money. PCs have to base this on quotes and justify it in terms of impact on the community. WPC also has to ensure that we are not saddling the village with facilities that we cannot afford to maintain or replace in future years. Sometimes money allocated relates to this wish-list, sometimes it does not.

There areguidelines from the Vale regarding the open space and sports requirements for residents. Even though the quotes form part of the allocation we do not have to spend the money on exactly the equipment in the quotes – just equipment in the same category.

As part of Knapp’s field agreement the Parish has been allocated £58K towards play/fitness equipment for older children and adults; £22K towards improvements to the sports pavilion, £48K towards sports pitch improvement, £75K towards village hall improvements. Not specifically allocated to Watchfield is £24K towards tennis courts and £25K towards public art both of which WPC would like to pursue for Watchfield. WPC is not given this money as a lump sum – we have to apply for it from the Vale at different points during the development process and clearly show that it is being spent on the items for which it was secured. To put this into perspective Shrivenham Parish is to receive NO money from the Station Road development. The Travellers’ site did not draw any S106 money as it only applies to permanent developments of 10 houses, or above. But they have to fund the street lighting and crossing on the A420.

Cowan’s Camp has been passed at outline stage for a maximum of 100 houses, a 50 bed extra care facility and a 17 bed learning disabled facility. This establishes the principle for development on the site and the maximum numbers. The developers have to now apply for Reserved Matters to fill in the detail of the development. We understand that this will also go out to public consultation. There are conditions on the outline permission, including getting reserved matters settled within 6 months and development started in 12 months. Also, landscaping issues, habitat protection measures, drainage, ecology, and soil decontamination and others. Notwithstanding the Parish Council’s objections to the development we had to submit a wish-list again for Section 106 payments. WPC tried to stress our need for the retention of open space within the village and we have now been told that the signed agreement includes a package of land towards the Oxford Square end of the site of about 1.25 hectares (just over 3 acres) and a lump sum of money to maintain the land of over £200K. In addition WPC believes (although we have not had absolute written confirmation) that there is a contribution of £18K towards the sports pavilion, £52K towards sports pitch provision and £20K towards public art.

The management of this money is going to be a major issue and this, along with other issues, means that WPC is going to set up some information gathering advisory groups for the parish council. WPC invited villagers to put their names down if they thought they might like to get involved without committing themselves to anything. It would be a way of letting villagers know the areas under consideration and inviting them to participate in gathering information on that topic for the Parish Council. There is a wealth of expertise, experience and local knowledge in the village and it should be used. There were 3 main areas; planning, sports and leisure and environmental. Signatures were invited for those requesting to be kept in the loop. WPC are also considering other issues such as improved drainage, continuing to improve the hedgerows and wildlife corridors and green technology options.

Parish council meetings are open to the public and there is always an opportunity for comment so come along to see what goes on. Agendas are put up on the noticeboards. The increase in size of the village should mean an eventual increase in funds and number of Parish Councillors.

Village Green update – not PC. The application was deemed to have been duly made (ie all paperwork correct). Now out to public consultation which closes on June 18th. Details available on how to submit comment in writing – either supporting or objecting. SN thanked everyone who helped so far.

SN offered a huge thank you to everyone who had supported the village at Planning Committee meetings and taken the trouble to register comments on consultations and applications.

Meeting closed 21.35pm

Sue Nodder

Chairman Watchfield Parish Council