Crawley Parish Council

Minutes of meeting 18th March 2021

Present: Colin Dingwall, Sue Bremner-Milne, Mark McCappin, Tony Connell, Graham Howkins, Sheena Derry, Kieran Mullins, Liam Walker (joined at 18.45)

1. Apologies: James Walker

2. The Minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2020 were approved.

3. Declarations of interest: None

4. Matters arising: all matters arising are covered elsewhere in the Agenda.

5. District Council Report (Kieran Mullins)

* Kieran announced that he will be standing down at the May elections, so this would be his last meeting. He thanked everyone for their support.
* The Budget has been discussed and has gone for ratification. There will be a £5 increase in the council tax for a property in Band D to help with the financial shortfall in these difficult times, but there will be no reduction in services in the coming year.
* There is a big push for WODC to become carbon neutral by 2030. They have taken delivery of their first UBICO electric vehicle and plan to replace their whole fleet by 2030. The fleet of bin lorries is fairly new, and they are expensive, so replacing them is likely to have to wait until after 2025.

6. County Update – postponed until Liam Walker joined meeting.

7. Treasurer’s report

* Margaret Cooper has handed over the account records and cheque book to SB-M, so she is now able to sign cheques.
* The adjusted balance at the end of the year is £2,241.
* SB-M has a dual role in that she is both treasurer and a councillor, and this has been agreed by WODC. While payment by cheque is still in use, a second signature is needed. She is not allowed to vote on matters that require payment.
* SB-M thinks she needs to spend some time looking at the Financial Risk Assessments, which are elderly and may need revising. She will bring this back to a later meeting.
* SB-M is looking into whether it is worth reclaiming VAT for a parish of our size.
* The End of Year finances need to be signed off and returned before the next PC meeting. SB-M suggested a short additional meeting when she has everything ready. This will probably be via Zoom. At present online meetings are permitted until 7th May, although that may be extended [the current roadmap to lifting coronavirus restrictions would allow up to six people to meet indoors no sooner than 17th May (up to 30 outdoors), with all restrictions lifted no sooner than 21st June].
* SB-M has been investigating moving to online banking and has the relevant forms to fill in from HSBC, who make no charge for this service. She has also looked at Unity Bank, but they make a small charge of £6/month, which mounts up for a small parish like Crawley. If the change is made, she proposes sending an email to another councillor to get approval for any payment. This would leave a paper trail for audit. The move to online banking was proposed by MM and seconded by CD, with all councillors in agreement.
* The accounts are currently in paper format, but SB-M plans to put them into a spreadsheet.

9. Annual Parish Meeting. This is scheduled for 13th May 2021. It is unclear whether we can hold this via Zoom. Details to be confirmed.

10. Review of the website

* James Walker has put in a lot of work to build a new website. All councillors had the opportunity to visit the new site to ‘try it out’ before the meeting. MM suggested adding a calendar and two more headings: Social Events and Planning Permissions. CD asked for the contact details for all the PC members to be visible. Everyone was happy with these suggestions and with the format and appearance of what James had done. The PC wanted to make the change from the original website to the new one as quickly as possible. MM will contact James and ask him to make the changes suggested, then make the new site ‘live’ as soon as possible. SD will notify everyone on the mailing list and put a notice on the notice board as soon as it goes ‘live’.

11 Emergency Plan

* The current plan was developed many years ago and CD felt there is a need to revisit and revise it some time in the next 6 months. WODC, OALC, and other parishes may be able to help. CD to follow up. CD has already obtained two ‘Flood’ warning signs for use in the village.
* The revised plan will be put on the website together with the numbers for people to contact in the event of an emergency.

12. Update on traffic through the village

* Earlier work by MM and others to get a 7.5t weight restriction through the village was put on hold when OCC said it would not consider further applications from individual villages pending a wider review of traffic in the Windrush Valley.
* Deborah Triff (Leafield) convened a group of, initially, 8 parish councils to join forces and present a case to OCC when the Burford weight restriction is first reviewed. This group calls itself the Windrush Valley Traffic Advisory Group (WiVTAG) and has grown to 19 PCs, TCs, and Cotswold DC. The group has been invited to attend the OCC Cabinet meeting to review the Burford weight limit on 22nd June and present an appeal statement. A subgroup of four (including MM) has been working on the statement and an executive summary. MM is optimistic of a good audience, and Liam Walker is backing the initiative.
* MM and another member of WiVTAG, Colin Carritt, will also attend a meeting of the Witney Advisory Traffic Committee on Tuesday 23rd March and make a small presentation.
* CD advised that the land purchase for the proposed 4-way Shores Green Junction on the A40 on the east side of Witney is complete and funding is available. The scheme is due to go to planning in November, with construction scheduled for 2022. When complete this is likely to increase traffic on Oxford Hill and West End. The North Witney Action Group is campaigning against the proposed new housing in north Witney, which would also fund a new bridge connecting Hailey Road to Mill Street. The group claim that the new bridge would not be needed once the Shores Green Junction is built because traffic could go out to the bypass and on to Ducklington. CD advised that the new bridge would facilitate a one-way system across the river in Witney, reducing congestion, and would help to protect Crawley from use as a rat run.
* CD thanked MM for his work on WiVTAG.

6.45 Liam Walker arrived. County Update (item 6 on the Agenda)

* Oxfordshire has been named top county for recycling for the 7th year in a row.
* LW reiterated the news that the Shores Green junction has been given the go-ahead and the Burford HGV restrictions are due to go to OCC Cabinet in June. Other work already underway on the A40 includes the building of new bus lanes on the approach to Oxford.
* Flooding. OCC advises that in the first instance PCs should contact landowners to remind them of their responsibilities to maintain ditches etc. If this is unsuccessful, they can then take action. CD asked if there is any budget for flood prevention work and any surveyor officers who can advise. LW said that there is money, but the demand is great, and Crawley is a relatively low priority. Priority is given where properties are flooded.
* Local elections will take place in May, in a covid-safe environment. LW will stand again for County Councillor.
* CD thanked LW.

13. Update on drains and sewers

* MM showed a map of the village highlighting the main problem points. Drainage maintenance in the centre of the village is OCC’s responsibility, and they are aware of this. On the outskirts of the village ditch maintenance is the responsibility of the riparian owners. MM has accepted this with respect to ditches along Foxburrow Lane, but he has challenged this position for the ditch beside Dry Lane (east side, from village to bridge). OCC’s position remains unchanged.
* CD has reported problems with all the drains on Foxburrow Lane from Ivy Cottage to the war memorial, using Fix My Street. The drains in the centre of the village have been cleared, but most on the hill remain blocked. There are markings on the road near Inglenook Cottage, but these appear to be for road patching.
* CD and MM will contact all riparian owners to remind them of their responsibilities and try to get cooperation. There are likely to be some sections where nobody is willing to take action. In this event the matter will be referred back to the PC. Options include referral to OCC for enforcement and organising work parties within the village to address the problem.
* Thames Water sewage pumping on Dry Lane continues. The repair to the sewer on Foxburrow Lane in December was unsuccessful (too badly damaged for the method attempted) so Thames Water are waiting for a price to rebuild it. MM should hear about this soon. If Thames Water need to dig up Foxburrow Lane it would be sensible for OCC to do any repairs to the drains at the same time. In the summer, when the ground water levels are lower, Thames Water have confirmed that the pumping station will cope with the sewage volume without the need for tanker support.

14. Litter pick. The next litter pick will be on Sunday 2nd May. SD will make the necessary arrangements.

15. Post lockdown village event. It was agreed that it would be good to have a village celebration of some sort post lockdown but restrictions are unlikely to be fully lifted until the end of June, so the item was left until the next meeting in May.

16. Future dates

* 13 May 2021 (Parish Meeting)
* 24 June 2021
* 23 September 2021
* 09 December 2021

17. AOB

* War memorial. MM will get a list of the names on the memorial. CD will get quotes to restore them.
* Community Library. SD had been asked by a parishioner about the possibility of having a small ‘community library’, e.g. like the one in Freeland. Everyone agreed it was a lovely idea, although the problem is where and how could we keep books safe and dry. Can we get an old phone box? GH will investigate. CD proposed that we allocate up to £300 to buy one. Seconded by TC.
* Defibrillator. MM reported that this had been checked recently and is in good working order.
* Bunker. MM showed some photographs of an old war bunker on the road between Crawley and Delly End. This is in a bad state of repair, potentially dangerous, and needs to be made safe. The bunker is recorded in historical records and may be listed. CD will contact the landowner to determine who is responsible.
* Dog mess. This is an increasing problem that has been raised by a parishioner. There are already notices around the village reminding people to clear up after their dogs, and there is a waste bin at the bottom of Farm Lane. SB-M has notified WODC about the rubbish (not dog waste) bin in the graveyard, which is overflowing with dog waste. It is not clear what else we can do, but SD to see about putting something (polite) on the website.
* Crawley Inn. Since the fire, the occupants have been living in caravans on the land opposite the pub. [WODC Progress on Enforcement Cases, June 2019: *Given that unfettered residential uses in the open countryside are unlikely to be supported in housing policy terms you Officers intend progressing this matter as expeditiously as possible over the next few months*.] TC has been in touch with WODC Enforcements, but it is considered a low priority. They did respond last week and are following up on tracing and contacting the owners. CD and TC will write a letter for the PC to send to WODC.
* CD asked if Margaret Cooper still wants to be involved in PC meetings. SD to contact her and ask.