

**MINUTES OF ASTON, COTE, SHIFFORD & CHIMNEY PARISH COUNCIL  
MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> DECEMBER 2015 IN THE  
VILLAGE HALL, ASTON AT 7.30 PM**

**1. Members Richard Haines (Chairman)**

**Present:** Jane Everex  
Ben Lings  
Paul Sparrowhawk  
Jane West  
Phil West

**In Attendance:** Helen Sandhu – Clerk  
Hilary Fenton – West Oxfordshire District Councillor  
Steve Good – West Oxfordshire District Councillor

**Members’**

**Apologies:** John Ordish

**2. Meeting open for public debate**

Steve Good noted that the road between Aston and the A415 is becoming increasingly uneven. He also noted, however, that as the road is the responsibility of the County Council, remedial action is unlikely to be forthcoming due to the County Council’s financial constraints.

**3. Minutes of previous meeting** – on 5 November 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Proposed by Paul Sparrowhawk, seconded by Ben Lings.

Richard Haines expressed his gratitude to John Ordish for chairing this meeting in his absence and for representing the Parish Council at the Remembrance Service on 8 November.

**4. Parish Councillors – Disclosure of interests on agenda items**

None

**5. West Oxfordshire District Council matters**

Hilary Fenton told the Parish Council that the County Council is carrying out an exercise to identify the ownership of the grass verges across the county and is keen that all parishes take on the responsibility for the grass cutting in their area. Mrs Fenton said that she had been impressed by the speed with which District Council staff responded to a report of fly-tipping which meant that for a recent incident the offender was quickly identified and prosecuted.

Steve Good told the Parish Council that he attended the meeting of the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee of West Oxfordshire District Council on 2 December 2015. At the meeting he had raised a concern about the potential for the reductions in District Council staff achieved by vacancies not being filled to cause service delivery issues when the remaining staff are absent or sick. Mr Good said that he had been told that the joint working across the partnership councils means that shortages can be covered by staff being temporarily assigned from the other councils.

The District Council’s share of the council tax is likely to increase by 2% for 2016/17.

## 6. Matters Arising from Previous Meetings

### a) *County Council public consultation on a new model for children's services in Oxfordshire*

It was resolved that the Parish Council would respond to this consultation by letter. Letter to express understanding of the need for the County Council to rationalise the services and to make savings but to express the concern that removing all universal access services will mean that some families and children who are in need but not yet formally assessed as "vulnerable" will not have access to the preventative services that they currently have. This will prevent intervention and support being made available at the earliest opportunity and will increase the risk of children and young people being left in a position of increasing vulnerability before they are formally identified as in need and appropriate services are put in place.

### b) *County Council public consultation on budget saving options for 2016/17 ("Talking Oxfordshire")*

The Clerk attended the event for local councils on 9 November 2015. She advised that there was no new information from the County Council, and no conclusions drawn as to how the County Council should aim to meet its budget saving ambitions. One of the presentations by the County Council at the meeting had clarified that when the County Council talks about the "savings" that have been made over recent years, only one third of this is a reduction in the overall expenditure of the County Council. The majority of the financial changes the County Council refers to as "savings" is in reality a transfer of expenditure from one activity to another ("saving" expenditure on non-statutory services such as libraries, buses and universal children's services to spend the money released on statutory services including supporting vulnerable children and the elderly).

### c) *Anti-social behaviour*

Richard Haines reported that there have been complaints about dog fouling in the parish and an article had been included in the latest edition of Voices in response to this.

## 7. New Business

### a) *Parish Council response to Oxfordshire County Council proposal to withdraw all bus subsidies*

Richard Haines informed the meeting that he attended the Parish Transport Representatives (PTRs) meeting on 25 November 2015. There were no County Councillors present, with the main Oxfordshire County Council representative present being Alexandra Bailey, the Service Manager responsible for Business Development and Fleet Management. There was disappointment at the meeting that Ms Bailey had only allocated 45 minutes of her time to the meeting which typically lasts 2 hours, and this meant that she left at the beginning of the part of the meeting allotted to dealing with questions from the PTRs. There were therefore no effective answers to the questions raised.

Richard Haines expressed the view that Ms Bailey had made it clear that it is her expectation that the bus subsidies will be withdrawn (that the decision made by the County Council cabinet in November will be confirmed by the full council meeting in February 2016). Ms Bailey had raised the possibility that the statutory bus services which the County Council will be obliged to continue providing (the school bus services) could be opened up to take other passengers.

Richard Haines said that he had asked Ms Bailey about how the County Council had discharged its responsibility to assess the transport needs of vulnerable people before considering the withdrawal of the subsidies and had been told that this had been done

as part of the consultation. It was noted, however, that no evidence of this had been made publicly available.

The County Council will be holding discussions with the bus operators to see how services could be rescheduled to run without a subsidy. The final decision on whether the subsidies will be withdrawn will be made in February 2016.

It was resolved to write to both David Nimmo-Smith, the County Council Cabinet member for the Environment (which includes transport) and to Ian Hudspeth (Leader of the Council) to express the Parish Council's objections to the proposed withdrawal of the bus subsidies. This would leave our parish with no public transport service which would totally isolate many members of the community. This would have a serious detrimental impact on a wide range of people, including the elderly who are unable to drive, young families, college students and people who don't have access to a private car for financial reasons. The parish has no doctor and the local shop cannot meet people's essential grocery needs which means that people rely on transport to access basic services.

It was resolved to also write to West Oxfordshire District Council to highlight the impact that the withdrawal of all public transport services will have on the District Council's current assessment that Aston is a sustainable village suitable for further housing development (as has previously been stated in a Lowlands Planning Committee meeting). If Aston has no bus service it can no longer be considered sustainable and will be unsuitable for further development, particularly for low cost housing. The letter will also ask whether the loss of the bus service could have an impact on the existing outline planning permission for the two sites at the village hall edge of Aston.

It was also resolved to write to David Cameron as our local MP.

*b) Request for donation from Aston & Cote Community Trust*

The request for a donation from Aston & Cote Community Trust to cover the cost of the recent fire risk assessment was discussed. It was resolved to pay the requested donation of £420 with the Clerk to ask for a copy of their current public liability insurance certificate. Proposed by Jane West, seconded by Jane Everex.

*c) Donation request from Historic Chapels Trust towards cost of grounds maintenance of Cote Chapel*

The request for a donation from Historic Chapels Trust to cover the cost of the grass cutting at Cote Chapel in 2015 was discussed. It was resolved to pay the requested donation of £225. Proposed by Paul Sparrowhawk, seconded by Phil West.

*a) Renewal of Clerk's membership of SLCC*

It was resolved to renew this membership at a cost of £103 for 2016 – proposed by Jane West, seconded by Ben Lings.

## **8. Parish Infrastructure**

*a) Village maintenance*

The Clerk was asked to seek advice from Oddjobs about what could be done to provide clean access to the postbox at the corner of Cote Road and Bull Street (paving slab/grass mesh/tarmac?). This is laid to grass and is becoming muddy.

**Parish Infrastructure (continued)**

*b) Remedial works on culvert on Great Brook Road*

The work on the carriageway and headwalls appears to be complete; the railings are yet to be installed.

*c) Metal chicanes/barriers at footpath ends – Woodbridge Close, Cote Road, Bull Street*

The individual chicanes were discussed:

- i. On Cote Road at end of alley which runs from Woodbridge Close.  
It was agreed that it is very important that this chicane is retained.
- ii. Part way down alley between Cote Road and Woodbridge Close  
It was agreed that this can be completely removed.
- iii. Between Woodbridge Close and Saxel Close  
It was agreed that this can be completely removed.
- iv. On footpath between 50 and 52 Saxel Close  
This chicane already complies with the County Council measurements which facilitate disabled access.
- v. On Bull Street at end of footpath towards Saxel Close  
It was agreed that it is important that this chicane is retained.

The Clerk will inform the County Council of the Parish Council's decisions and provide the necessary measurements of the two chicanes to be retained but which need modifying to improve disabled access in order to obtain a price for the work.

*d) Pedestrian metal bridge over Great Brook from/to footpath to Ham Lane*

The County Council Bridge Engineer has now advised that they will be looking at the design of a replacement bridge during winter 2015/16 and that this site is one of the higher priority sites for replacement. If the County Council budget is favourable it could be replaced as early as mid-2016.

*e) Newbridge – joint meeting*

Richard Haines gave a report on this meeting which took place on 2 December 2015. The meeting was attended by representatives from all the parishes either side of the bridge (Northmoor, Standlake, Stanton Harcourt, Sutton, Aston, Kingston Bagpuize and Bampton) by our District Councillors Hilary Fenton and Steve Good, our County Councillor Charles Mathew, County Councillor David Nimmo-Smith, the County Council Bridge Engineer and representatives from OCC Trading Standards. The current weight limit was put on the bridge in 2007. Before then there were over 400 HGVs crossing the bridge daily; this fell to approximately 40 per day when the weight limit was put on. When the cameras were installed (and working), it was easier to identify and contact offending HGV companies/drivers, but there was no substantial reduction in the number of HGVs breaching the weight limit. Assessments indicate that between 10 and 40 HGVs a day continue to go over the bridge in breach of the weight limit. The Bridge Engineer reported that the movement sensors previously installed on the bridge no longer work, but that if the bridge were going to fail there would be gradual but clear signs of movement; the bridge would not suddenly collapse. There was a discussion about repairing/replacing the cameras, but the meeting was told that even if they were replaced, OCC doesn't have enough staff to keep up with the enforcement paperwork. It was noted, however, that if cost were precluding the camera replacement, then the option of sharing this cost between the local councils could be considered. Steve Good said that he had privately obtained a quotation for a camera which is much cheaper than the quotations received by OCC, and that the enforcement work could be outsourced. All present at the meeting had been asked to come forward with their own thoughts on effective weight limit management.

## 9. PLANNING

### New Planning applications

- 15/04151/HHD 3 Chimney Farm Cottages, Chimney, Bampton  
 15/04156/LBC Erection of porch extension  
*No comments.*

### Planning applications granted

- 15/03479/S73 Cote House Barn, Cote  
 Non compliance with condition 2 of planning permission W2000/1322

## 10. FINANCE

a) *Account Balances at 31 October - noted.*

b) *Bank reconciliations at 28 September – noted.*

c) *Budget and precept for 2016/17*

The first draft of the budget included in the Clerk's Briefing Notes was discussed.

It was agreed that the Parish Council should aim to keep the precept at the same level for a Band D property as in 2015/16.

It was agreed that any surplus from 2015/16 and from 2016/17 generated from keeping the precept at its current level would be put in the designated recreation reserve.

A second draft of the budget and the final precept will be considered and agreed at the January meeting.

d) *November invoices presented for approval and payment*

		Statute
Clerk's salary and working from home allowance	364.20	LGA 1972, s112
Clerk's expenses – printing – 109 sheets @ 5p	5.45	LGA 1972 s111
Richard Haines – expenses to attend PTR meeting on 25 November 2015	18.30	LGA 1972 s111
Margaret Johnson Ltd – photocopying & stationery	7.97	LGA 1972 s111
A J Mitchell – bus shelter clean on 2 November	27.00	LG(MP)A 1953, s4
The Society of Local Council Clerks – annual membership renewal	103.00	LGA 1972 s111
Aston & Cote Community Trust – donation for expenditure at the village hall	420.00	LGA 1972, s133 & LG(MP)A 1976, s19
Historic Chapels Trust – donation towards cost of grass cutting at Cote Chapel	225.00	LGA 1972 s214
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,170.92</b>	

It was resolved to make the above payments – proposed by Paul Sparrowhawk, seconded by Jane West. The cheques were signed by Richard Haines and Paul Sparrowhawk.

## 11. Parish Councillors' reports from meetings attended since last meeting

The Clerk gave a verbal report on her attendance at the West Oxfordshire District Council Town and Parish Council Liaison Meeting on 1 December.

There had been presentations about the WODC Budget, the Local Plan and Broadband.

The District Council budget is being impacted by costs and reduced income being transferred from the County Council. The District Council is planning to increase its share of the council tax by 2% in 2016/17, and residents should expect an annual increase of 2% for the foreseeable future. The first round of the hearings of the Local Plan by the

Inspector has taken place. The District Council is expecting to receive the Inspector's preliminary findings before Christmas. The second round of hearings is scheduled for February. The District Council officer would not be drawn on the question of what will happen if the Inspector rejects the Plan. The Clerk had asked whether the Local Plan could be changed to reflect the significant changes in public transport provision if the bus subsidies are withdrawn (if the Plan requires updating after the first hearing). The District Council officer had said that the Plan would not be changed for this, but that the lack of a bus service would provide a strong argument that a proposed development is not sustainable. There was an update at the meeting on the progress of the WODC Broadband project (which will fill in the geographical gaps left by the County Council/BT project). The project is on schedule, with the network design to be finalised at the beginning of 2016, connection to the first properties to be delivered in mid-2016 and the final properties in 2017. The network will provide either fibre-to-the-premises or wireless connection, which will be more future-proof than the BT network which is fibre-to-the-cabinet.

**12. Confidential Business**

*a) Clerk's salary review for 2016/17*

The Clerk left the meeting

It was resolved to increase the Clerk's pay to £13.00 per hour from 1 April 2016.

The Clerk rejoined the meeting.

Signed .....dated.....