

Annual Parish Meeting – Sibford Ferris

Monday, 18 April 2016 – 7.30pm

Held in the classroom above the Sports Hall, Sibford School, Sibford Ferris

Apologies – Cllr Robinson sent apologies and County and District Councillor Reynolds had advised he would be late.

Attendees – Tim Huckvale (Chair), Maureen Hicks (Deputy Chair), Ginny Bennett, Adrian Lamb, Anita Spencer (Parish Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer), Cllr George Reynolds (from 8.15pm), Michael Goodwin (Head, Sibford School), Keith Hicks (Sibford Village Hall), Oswyn Murray and Gil Soden (Sibford Gower Parish Council) and six members of the public.

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.

Minutes of the last meeting on 27 April 2015 – these were approved by the meeting and signed by the Chair.

Matters arising from the last meeting would be dealt with during the meeting.

The Chair invited those present to ask questions or make comment as subjects came up within reports.

Chair of the Parish Council's 2015/16 Report

There have been six meetings of the Parish Council during the year. There has been one change in membership of the Council: we said goodbye to Joanne Connor and welcomed Ginny Bennett as a co-opted member. All councillors' terms of office end in May 2018, when there will be an election.

As usual, the Council has dealt with a huge variety of issues. However minor they may seem, each one is usually very important to someone in the village, and we treat all of them seriously. My own choice of the concerns that are currently most important are (in alphabetical order) affordable housing, the Bishop Blaize, broadband speeds, and the bus service.

On the proposed **affordable housing scheme** on Hook Norton Road, the Council is very disappointed that practically no progress has been made in the last year, mainly because of disagreements amongst some of the other parties involved. As of today, this stalemate continues.

I mention the **Bishop Blaize** because, although it is out of our parish on the other side of the Sib, our residents are interested in its future. Sibford Gower has recently successfully registered it as an Asset of Community Value (ACV), which means that, first of all, the building may only be used as a pub and not (for example) as a shop or office for the next five years, and secondly that, if the property is put up for sale, a community interest group must be given the opportunity to make an offer. At present, there is no such community interest group in existence, so the Sibford Gower Parish Council is calling a public meeting on 20 June in order to ascertain the wishes of the two villages, and explore ways forward. A successful community purchase may use the Bishop Blaize not necessarily or wholly as a pub, as long as it "will further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community." In the meantime, the present owners have successfully applied for a drinks licence; we watch developments with interest.

Oswyn Murray, Chair of Sibford Gower Parish Council reported at this point that the owners of the Bishop Blaize had objected to the registration as an ACV, there had been a hearing at the district council offices and a decision was awaited. He also told the meeting that the owners had advised the new licence would be used for the hosting of private functions at the pub, which would not be open to the village.

At our Annual Parish Meeting a year ago, I reported that we were scheduled to have **superfast broadband** by December 2016; however, it now seems that we may have to wait until December 2017; I expect to get more definite information in the next month or two. The Gower have had superfast broadband since last summer and Burdrop are scheduled for it this summer. On a more positive note, everyone should have benefited from "slightly faster" broadband (approximately doubling speeds) since January this year.

While on the subject of telecoms: we have recently received notice of a new **mobile phone mast** to be situated on the B4035 just east of the villages. This should bring improved mobile phone service for Vodafone and O2 subscribers in the Sibfords and Swalcliffe, including 4G mobile data. We expect to receive the related planning application shortly. Keep an eye on the planning page of the village website to follow up on this.

Oxfordshire subsidies for **bus services** will cease in July. Indications are that our 50A service will continue to be subsidised by Warwickshire, but with a reduced timetable, from about seven buses each way down to four. We should know more about this in the next month or so.

Other matters that we have dealt with over the year:

A **Community First Responder Group** is now operational in the Sibfords. Two volunteers have completed training, one is waiting for training, one is applying for training and there are two more possible volunteers.

An important ongoing task for the Council is the maintenance and safety of the **Cotswold Close Play Area**. This year we have had problems with wooden posts rotting at ground level; these have been dealt with by replacing the junior swing altogether and renewing the bases of several posts. We also gave the wooden surfaces a good wash to stop them getting slippery. In addition, we are frequently in contact with Cherwell District Council about vehicles that appear to have been abandoned nearby.

A small, but loyal, group of Sibfordians is organising local celebrations for the **Queen's 90th Birthday**, including the first street party in the villages since 1995, two concerts and an exhibition in the church. There will be much more information about all of these on the website and in the Sibford Scene in the coming weeks.

Greens village shop: we are investigating the possibility of registering the shop as an Asset of Community Value, so that the community can have a say if the present owners wish to sell it for conversion to other uses.

We get regular reports of **fly tipping** at the bottle bank and elsewhere; fortunately, Cherwell District Council are pretty good about clearing it up, once it has been reported to them.

We discussed the provision of **dog waste bins**: opinions differ on the Council, but the consensus was that there was no pressing need. We will keep this under review.

There was an excellent turn-out for the **annual litter pick** in March this year. Carling Special Brew seems to be the tipple of choice for the most egregious litter louts.

Oxfordshire County Council floated plans for changing the locations of recycling centres, but these have now been put on hold for two years.

The County Council also initiated a scheme "**Oxfordshire Together**" aimed at passing responsibility for some services from county to parish councils. We concluded that there was no benefit to the parish in taking over anything currently on offer.

We kept the Council's **budget** amount for 2016/17 the same as last year, a little under £7000.

Following the adoption of a new **Transparency Code** for parish councils, the Council has taken on ownership of the village website, sharing the costs with Sibford Gower Parish Council. There are now more council documents available on the website. One of these is our new Complaints Procedure; we received one formal complaint during the year.

We also dealt with one **Freedom of Information request** this year. This was very time-consuming, partly because of our lack of experience in dealing with them; however, the Council has signed me up for a training course on the topic in May so that we can deal with such requests more confidently in the future.

We dealt with about 25 **planning applications**. There was a breach of planning control at a property in Main Street when a car port was erected without the permission necessary within the Conservation Area. Cherwell District Council acted quickly and it was removed less than a month later.

Consultants engaged via the Government's **Rural Community Energy Fund** have just reported on the feasibility of solar PV on the two schools, the church, the Friends' Meeting House and the village hall. The Council has no direct interest in these but, if any of the proposed schemes are taken forward, we will as usual examine those that need planning permission.

We have an ongoing issue with **HMRC** relating to a debt of nearly £500. This arose from the winding up of our previous payroll provider who took the money from us but failed to make several payments to HMRC on our behalf. Thanks are due to our Clerk for continuing to battle with HMRC over this. We may still have to pay up, but it won't be for want of trying. The Clerk now manages the payroll herself.

That's a long list of issues that this Council gets involved in. It's only possible to manage them all because of the time and careful consideration put in by the Clerk, my fellow councillors and many other people. With apologies to anyone I have inadvertently left out, I thank:

- Our Parish Clerk, Anita, for her tireless work in organising us and ensuring that loose ends are tied up
- Councillor Adrian Lamb for his repair work on the play area and fitness equipment
- My fellow Councillors for representing the Council at external meetings, at their own expense. This year they have included:
 - CDC Parish Liaison meetings
 - Banbury Rural Neighbourhood Police Team meeting
 - A "new parish councillor" training session
 - North Oxfordshire inter-parish meetings
 - Meeting with a Stagecoach manager about the bus service
 - A Cherwell District Council workshop on the Local Plan
- The litter pickers, not just the annual ones, but those who every day pick up other people's litter rather than walk past it
- Both candidates who put themselves forward for co-option to the Council
- Lynn and John for carrying out the weekly play area inspections
- Our internal auditor, Sue Rowley
- District and County Councillor George Reynolds who does his best to attend all our meetings, with invaluable advice on dealing with County and District affairs
- Sibford School for use of the room for Council meetings and assisting with maintenance of the play area. Special thanks go to the Head, Michael Goodwin, who is retiring and leaving the village this year; we thank him for his consistent moral support of the Parish Council, and practical support in joint projects such as the Multi-use Games Area and the fitness equipment.

And finally: this morning, as the Sibfords Walking Group emerged from Whichford Wood to admire the stunning view across Long Compton to the hills beyond, I was reminded again of how fortunate we are to live in such a beautiful part of the world. This must be one of the reasons why, in March this year, The Times newspaper put The Sibfords at number one in its list of the 20 best villages in the south of Britain. We don't know their criteria for this accolade but, as well as the pretty countryside, surely the willingness of so many people to contribute so much to the day-to-day running of parish business and community activities must be a contributory factor.

I will now handover to the Responsible Financial Officer for her report:

Financial Report to 31 March 2016

(Read by Councillor Adrian Lamb)

Good evening. Here is the financial report for Sibford Ferris Parish Council for the year 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. It should be noted that this report is based on draft accounts.

The receipts for the year were £8156 of which £6858 came from the precept, £790 from a New Homes Bonus and £46 from a precept grant. The reduction from last year's figure of £9595 is accounted for by the VAT refund of £1557 following the purchase of the outdoor fitness equipment and laptop in April 2014, offset by a small increase in 2015/16 in burial ground fees and other incidental additional receipts.

The payments for the year totalled £6112, considerably lower than for the previous year because of the purchase in 2014/15 of the fitness equipment at £9143 and laptop at £534 plus payment of election costs of £725. There were savings against the cost of mowing the burial grounds, the clerk's salary and play area inspections but these were offset by increases in the cost of mowing the Cotswold Close play area, payment for the Remembrance Day wreath, training, website costs, a donation towards the church clock repairs and subscriptions to Community First Oxfordshire (formerly Oxfordshire Rural Community Council). A VAT claim for £189 will be submitted in July.

The balance carried forward at the end of the year is £10379 - £2044 higher than last year which is explained by the receipts of £1298 in addition to the precept and an underspend against budget of £966. Surplus funds are held in reserve for contingencies, election costs and play area equipment refurbishment.

The bank balance at the end of the year is £10669.69, with £296.00 of uncashed cheques and one cheque of £5 not credited to the account at the end of the period.

The internal auditor for this year is once again Sue Rowley of Burdrop and thanks must go to Sue for once again agreeing to take on this role.

Wheathills Report

Councillor Maureen Hicks then read out the short annual Wheathills Report sent from the Secretary of the Town Estate Charity as follows:-

“I am very pleased to be able to say that the roadside hedge of the Wheathills field has now been laid and the hedge-layer will return sometime next year to trim the remaining part of the hedge.

The tenant of the field has been given a last ultimatum to remove the non-agricultural waste in the field. If this is not removed by 31 March 2016, he will be asked to quit.

The Town Estates Charity has now completed the purchase of the adjoining farm which is intended to be used for livery. It will enable a new access into the Wheathills field which should improve the current rutted appearance of the field.”

Village Hall Report

The Chairman of the Village Hall was unable to attend and Keith Hicks gave the report.

The Village Hall is a well-used venue, with 1251.5 hours of hiring from April 2015 to April 2016, with village organisations renting 524.5 hours, clubs and classes renting 560.5 and private hire renting 166.5 hours.

With this amount of use, it is important that we have a good day-to-day management. However, we are in a period of change with the retirement of Muriel Chandler. Muriel has been Secretary for twenty-five years and Manager for a lot of those years. It has not been possible to find someone to take over on a voluntary basis, so from 1 April 2016, we have employed Ricki Winifrith in the role of Hall Manager. Please give Ricki your support; as you will realise, Muriel is a hard act to follow.

David Allen has been co-opted onto the Management Committee to take over grant applications (another role previously held by Muriel). If successful, we hope to move forward with the refurbishment and insulation of the main hall during August of this year. With further grant applications, we intend renovating the toilets, resurfacing the car park and not forgetting recovering of the main hall roof.

The Village Hall Management Committee are committed to presenting the Hall in the best possible condition, making it a great asset to the Sibfords. We would love to encourage new villagers to this committee and, with this in mind, are reviewing our management structure trying to make involvement less onerous.

We are always grateful for the financial support of both parish councils and the Town Estates Charity.

Keith Hicks added some details to the above:

- The shingle roof had been inspected and pronounced fit for another four to five years; the intention was to replace the shingles with concrete tiles to match the small hall, with an estimated cost of £15-19,000.
- The insulation work was vital in order to qualify the hall for all other grant applications and it was hoped that it could be carried out in August 2016.
- Contributions from the two parish councils were put towards running costs, and from the Town Estates Charity toward one-off capital projects such as the stage lighting that had been very useful for the recent village production.

Sibford School Report

The Head of Sibford School, Michael Goodwin, was then invited to give an update on the School’s activities during the past year.

“This will be my last report to the Parish Council so I hope you will forgive a degree of looking back...as well as some looking forward (not least to retirement!)

When I was appointed as Sibford School’s 11th ever head since 1842 in 2004, I never really expected that I would stay here for 12 years. Our youngest daughter joined the school at the same time as a “top junior” (in Year 6); as we prepare to return home to Norfolk, she is completing her final year at university and should graduate this summer. A lot can happen in 12 years!

Back then, the school had 365 pupils, its finances were shaky and examination results at GCSE hovered around the 65% mark.

Now, we have over 400 pupils, our finances are stable (and we have significantly improved facilities) and GCSE exam results have been consistently nearer the 85% mark. I am an historian by training, so I know that history may well take a different longer term view..."why did he not do x when he had the opportunity? How come he didn't realise that y...?" But, as I prepare to hang up my chalk (none in the school these days, by the way, with whiteboards, touch screens and digital projectors), I am satisfied enough with the job I have largely enjoyed being able to do.

I pass on a school in good heart.

At the last Annual Parish Meeting, I was not able to report fully on the inspection that had just taken place, but the excellent judgements awarded to us by the Independent Schools Inspectorate gave some external validation to my sense that we were doing well...and also provided me with the impetus to think about retirement. It felt right to be handing the school on from such a strong base.

School Committee (my governing body) started the process to find my successor over the summer holiday. They bought in external consultancy support and set up a rigorous process – phone interviews, long-list interviews and a short list couple of days with panel interviews, written tasks, student forum interviews and presentations to find the best of the 45 or so applications – a strong field.

Sibford's 12th Head will be Toby Spence: like me, an historian, and, like me, 46 years old on appointment...and also like me, starting his second headship (his last one being at an international school in Kenya). Toby is married to Jill and they have three junior school aged children. The family hopes to move into Holly House during August; we plan to move out on 1 August.

Toby was brought up in a Quaker family and was at one time the Head of History at Bootham School, one of our sister Quaker schools in York, so I have every confidence that he will nurture and continue to develop that special ethos which is so hard to describe, but so clear to all of our parents and visitors.

I have been very touched by many words of kindness since I announced my retirement; parents especially have worried that "it won't be the same" and anxious that the school maintains its Quaker values. Of course, it would be an awful thing if the school were to remain the same – good schools cannot stand still, and I am sure Toby Spence will bring fresh energy, drive and vision. I am sure, too, that I am not the keeper of all that is Quaker at Sibford and am confident that my governors, my staff, pupils and their parents will continue to uphold that unique ethos. Parents have asked me what my legacy will be. What am I most proud of? The refurbished school hall? The new sports changing rooms? The very recently installed bio-mass boilers or the solar panels? The outdoor learning programme and the development of animal husbandry? Improved results? Stabilising finances through recessionary times? Extending our bursary support?

Of course, these have been important achievements, but after the business of recruiting pupils whose parents can afford our school fees, the most important job I do is to appoint new staff – teaching and non-teaching; this is the real legacy, because these wonderful, dedicated colleagues will continue to champion all that is best about Sibford School.

One last thought, since this is a parish meeting. One of my concerns back in 2004 was that the village and the school were not so close – I felt that our reputation was not so great in the village. I hope you will recognise the efforts that have been undertaken to increasingly open our doors to the community – in the use of facilities (sports hall, swimming pool and MUGA), to invite you to events – Shakespeare in the garden at Holly House, concerts, school plays, Café Scientifique; in partnerships with primary schools (science workshops with Sibford Gower for example)...the provision of meals to the Fielding Day Centre and now another local primary school. I thank you for your cooperation and support of this venture and wish you all continued success. It is a very special place (even if the Times doesn't know there is a primary school and this school in its midst)."

Report on Thames Valley Police Banbury Rural Neighbourhood Meeting 15 March 2016

Councillor Ginny Bennet had attended the meeting for the Council and gave the following report;

On 15 March 2016, representatives of many local villages attended a meeting at Banbury Police Station to meet with the Neighbourhood Police Team. Visits by police to individual parish meetings cannot be done any more due to lack of resources.

All representatives had the opportunity to voice their concerns about problems in their village. Every single village quoted speeding and parking as a problem, even villages with traffic slowing devices such as solar speed signs, gates at the roadside and rumble strips (as reported by Swalcliffe and Tadmarton). Parking congestion near schools too seems all too common. Parking is not always illegal, but often inconsiderate. People want to park outside their house even if there is no room to do so. Narrow village roads and old houses with no driveways have little space for vehicles. Some villages are used as “rat runs”. Some villages mentioned anti-social behaviour and some burglaries. No oil thefts have been reported this year so far.

Priorities the police have set for the next year:

- *Speeding* They will continue to support the community to reduce speeding with the use of Speedwatch whenever possible.
- *Parking, particularly around schools* Where parking is a big issue, they will complete high visibility patrols around the schools and will deal robustly with any road traffic offences. They are also seeking to roll out education through the schools to assist with this.
- *Anti-social behaviour* They promise to take a robust approach with ASB.

What can we do as residents of a village?

Obviously, as resources are stretched, the police want us to do as much as we can ourselves.

Speeding Drive within the speed limits – if you do it, then drivers behind you will slow down too. If you see someone going far too fast, then indicate that they should slow down. Clean the local road signs and check they are not obscured by foliage. Report any minor accidents or dangerous occurrences to police. Drivers exchange details after a bump but often do not report it so the event is not added to the statistics; if a village says there is a problem, there will be no written evidence to prove it.

Parking Monitor parking, particularly around schools, blind bends, dips in roads, outside a local shop, etc. They suggest that schools have their own lollipop person. There should be no parking on zigzag lines outside schools, or within 10 metres of a road junction. Try not to park on verges as this causes damage, puts mud on the road and encourages potholes.

Anti-Social Behaviour Lock sheds, garages and outbuildings. Lock cars, even if on your own driveway. Report any suspicious vehicles or persons. Write down registration numbers if possible so they can be passed on to Neighbourhood Watch. Put a lock on your oil tank. Install security lighting. If your neighbours are away, keep an eye on their property. Be aware that young people may hang around certain areas, so it may be prudent to check what they are doing.

Speedwatch

Communities can suggest a visit by a neighbourhood police officer or Community Support Officer to risk assess the location. Roadside volunteers can be trained to use equipment and record information. Parishes can get details from the neighbourhood team if they wish to start a Speedwatch group in their village.

If there is a serious problem, the speed van can spend some time in the location. It is well known that for a time after the van has been seen in a village, drivers are more careful, but, sadly, go back to their old habits; but it does make some people think twice. There will always be drivers who disregard the speed limits. Rubber strips can be used to assess the problem, but there are costs involved.

Finally, the police want to reassure us that they are doing what they can. They value being seen and available in villages when there is a public event going on. They are only a small team but funding has not been cut this year, although it has not gone up either. 20% of their work is dealing with crime, 80% is taken up with other issues.

Update on the Proposed Affordable Housing Scheme

Councillor Maureen Hicks read out an update received from Gary Owens, the officer at Cherwell District Council dealing with the proposed scheme:

“I have received an update regarding the proposed Rural Exception Site at Sibford Ferris and, unfortunately, there is still an issue to be resolved between the landowner and the former option holders; until this has happened, Greensquare [*the developer*] will not be able to secure the site to bring forward this development.

I regret that this is taking so long but, unfortunately, it is out of my and Greensquare’s hands at the moment.

We believe that the issue will be resolved sooner rather than later, and I am hopeful that the Parish Council can keep their enthusiasm and support for the Exception Site over this frustrating period, and I will update you as soon as I am aware of any changes.”

Councillor Reynolds commented that it was not unusual for problems to arise after planning permission had been granted and delays could be due to landowners waiting until Part 2 of the Local Plan was published.

County and District Councillor George Reynolds

Councillor Reynolds gave a report on Oxfordshire County Council as district council issues had been dealt with.

“It has been a quiet year as a backbencher as the main concerns this year have been with the budget and devolution which has now morphed into a debate on unitary councils. Both the budget and devolution were dealt with by the Cabinet with very little input or knowledge from the backbenchers.

As you all know now, the budget proved very difficult for the County as the government squeeze on spending gets tighter. This has meant less money for highways, children’s centres and buses. The amended budget that was passed may mean there is a little extra money available, but it will only be for this year and I suspect very little will filter down. This has led to OCC trying to get parishes to take over their responsibilities in the highways area; save money for OCC but make the parishes pay (council tax payers pay whichever). With the exception of mowing inside 30mph signs, there has been very little uptake by parishes due to cost and responsibility problems. Likewise, the idea of parishes paying to keep the buses running has also struggled to make headway, again due to cost but also the almost total lack of information from OCC.

Devolution was a fancy name for the government allowing areas of the County to have more say in how local monies were spent, with promises of extra cash. Despite a lot of work being done on this project, including the amalgamation of social care and some health care, it floundered on the government’s insistence on having an elected mayor for the whole of Oxfordshire. Nobody liked this idea. An alternative was to have unitary authorities (one council dealing with all functions). This has led to a difference of opinions between the districts and the county (clearly one or the other would have to go). This will roll on until the autumn when there will be a consultation for residents with the county.

It is no secret that my preference is for a local unitary where local parish councils and residents have easy access to local officers, rather than having to deal with Oxford. This is based on my firm belief in local democracy.

Once again, highways repairs have been squeezed, although we hear of extra government money for potholes. I can only repeat that all of us need to constantly and continually complain, either through the service centre or on the internet fixmystreet.oxfordshire.gov.uk.”

Any Other Matters

None was raised.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and the meeting closed at 8.35pm.