

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 17th January 2022 at 8pm in the Margaret Gimblett Pavilion

Present Pat Sutlieff (Acting Chair), Neil Jackson, Mike Heath, Narinder Ryatt, Matt Walker and Hilary Jones

Apologies for Absence Jane Hartley

Absent

22/7774 Open Forum

Three residents attended, one who was concerned about Planning Application No. 214109, one who wanted to listen to the discussions, and a third who is standing for co-option.

The resident attending about the planning application ran through the history of the site, and how it has affected his property, including concerns about how the Borough has approached the applications on this site, and whether they were consistent in the way they dealt with each application. He explained that there is currently an enforcement investigation because the latest extension does not appear to be according to the approved plans and is not happy that another application had been put in without the current issues being addressed. Regarding this application, he feels it extends the wall of brick on his boundary yet further, and the proposed brick pillar will be right outside his kitchen door, eating into his property's light further. The resident stayed for the rest of the meeting.

The resident who was attending as a possible Parish Councillor introduced himself as Rob Jones. He is already involved in the Neighbourhood Plan group and would like to see the policies that will be drawn up as part of this group, through to completion by the Parish Council. He would also like to represent the north side of the A4, as this area has no representation currently. He has analytical skills and writing reports. Now that his company has adopted hybrid working, he feels he has the time to contribute. The Chair thanked him, and he stayed for the rest of the meeting.

22/7775 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

22/7776 Minutes of the Council Meeting of the 13th of December were approved

Finance

22/7777 Finance Reports

It was resolved to recommend approval of the reports which was done unanimously.

22/7778 Authorisation of Payments

It was resolved to recommend approval of the payments of invoices, including S137 and grant donations as follows, which was carried unanimously.

£15 to A1 Locksmiths
£61.94 to Aquacare
£109.46 to the Assistant Clerk
£192 to AMP Roofing
£1331.12 to Berkshire Pension Fund
£38.33 to British Gas Services Ltd
£500 to Citizen's Advice, Wokingham (Grant)
£660 to Drain and Able
£89.75 to Everflow
£1416 to Herald Graphics
£26.87 to Opus Energy
£162.38 to the Clerk
£250 to Homestart Wokingham (S137)
£400 to The Link Visiting Scheme (S137)
£250 to Twyford and District Volunteer Drivers (S137)
£33.80 to Scottish & Southern Energy
£378.61 to Smartest Energy
£1031.11 to Sunshine Commercial Services
£110.35 to Tivoli Group Ltd
£3540.39 in Payroll

22/7779 To note the Minutes of the Finance Committee on Mon 10th Jan 2022

These were noted

22/7780 To approve the recommendation to ban cash payments and to introduce a £10 handling fee for cheques

It was explained that with bank closures and more people paying by BACS, it was not good use of the clerk's time trying to find an open bank. It was agreed that users will be given six months' notice to set up BACS payments, and if they have real difficulty with this, then they can arrange something on a case-by-case basis.

22/7781 To approve the recommendation for the Parish Council Budget

The main change in the Budget was to allow for an extra member of staff, as it has become clear that staff are currently under great strain, and with projects such as the Neighbourhood Plan, and the redevelopment of the pavilion, it has been agreed that an extra employee is needed. It was resolved to approve this which was passed unanimously.

22/7782 To approve the recommendation for the Precept for 2022-23

It was resolved to approve an increase of £11.34 per Band D property to £59.43, an increase of 23.57%, which was approved unanimously.

22/7783 To approve the re-appointment of Claire Connell as internal auditor for 2022-23

It was resolved to approve this appointment, which was passed unanimously

22/7784 Planning, Environment and Highways Committee (PEH)

The following planning applications were considered

- 213798 Application for the proposed development of a loft conversion with front facing dormer at 8, East Park Farm Drive – there was no Parish Council comment
- 214109 Application for the proposed erection of an infill front extension following demolition of the existing front porch and replacement columns at 14, Chiltern Drive

The clerk was asked to comment as follows:

1. *The increased size of the porch, together with the change of material from predominantly glass, to brick, and the change of columns to brick, are going to lead to an overbearing effect, and will also affect the light of the neighbouring properties. By building a bigger structure in front of the building line, it adversely affects the street scene, as it reduces the stagger of the original street line.*
2. *Given that there are ongoing enforcement issues with previous applications, the Parish Council feels this application should not be determined until these other issues have been resolved.*

The following Planning Approvals were noted

- 212128 Application for the proposed conversion of existing dwelling to 3no. 1-bedroom self-contained flats and 1 studio self-contained flat, associated parking and amenity space, plus changes to fenestration. (Part Retrospective) at 36 Park View Drive South
- 213386 Application for the proposed erection of a first-floor rear extension with 1 no. Juliet balcony at Inglewood, Beggars Hill Road
- 213510 Application for the proposed erection of a single storey spa room attached to the converted double garage at Nikunj, Waingels Road
- 213539 Householder application for the proposed erection of a two-storey front extension and first floor side extension, plus alterations to existing single storey roof at the side at Uplands, Park Lane

To note the withdrawal of the following application

To consider the Parish response to the Local Plan Consultation

The clerk was asked to respond as follows:

General Approach

Charvil Parish Council supports the general approach of the Borough in trying to concentrate development in larger “garden villages”, as this offers the best opportunity to build sustainable communities, provide adequate infrastructure and encourage active travel and public transport.

Of the three large sites considered, the Council is broadly supportive of the choice of Hall Farm/Loddon Valley, although there are concerns that if the flood mitigation plans are not as effective as hoped, locations downriver like Charvil could suffer the consequences. One measure that could be considered, is to improve water use efficiency, as this would help to reduce the likelihood of flooding downstream and would help mitigate the effects of climate change.

We would not be supportive of the Twyford/Ruscombe proposal, as this is not only in the greenbelt, but no adequate plan has been suggested to mitigate the effect of extra traffic on both Twyford Village Centre or travelling through Charvil and Sonning to Reading.

We are not so supportive of the apparent abandonment of the ranking of villages in terms of their sustainability – so previously, Sonning and Charvil were both regarded as “limited development locations” due to poor infrastructure, but this no longer seems a concern despite the only change since the last plan has been the

opening of a single form entry primary school designed to meet the existing population, not a growing village.

While we understand the fact that there is more pressure on smaller villages due to the loss of the Grazeley scheme, many of the stated aims of building sustainable, high-quality environments do not seem to have filtered down to the smaller developments proposed.

This is of great concern to the villages to the north of the Borough, who are due to accommodate around 400 dwellings in the Local plan, and at least another 100 from “windfall” development, with little or no improvements to any of the infrastructure, numbers of school places and doctors that could improve their sustainability.

Charvil sites

Sites to the east of Park View Drive North (CV001)

The Parish Council welcomes the slight reduction of housing numbers on this site, and the affirmation that any development will not take place in the flood zone 3 parts of the site, but nevertheless, considerable concerns remain about this location.

Much of Charvil is low-lying, and its eastern boundaries particularly so. Technically, this site is in flood zone 1, but any development here, unless very carefully managed, is likely to have a negative impact on nearby homes that are already vulnerable – namely, the dwelling at Newland Farm and the easternmost homes on Charvil Meadow Road and Thornbers Way. Given that the Environment Agency have taken the trouble to source a temporary flood barrier for these areas to be used in times of need, is clear evidence that this part of the A4 corridor is particularly vulnerable to flooding and explains why so many residents are exercised by this proposal.

While much has been made of the possibilities to improve the diversity of the river area in the Hall Farm proposal, no such undertaking is mentioned in Charvil, which is unfortunate.

Concerns also remain as to how the site will be accessed and how it will connect to the rest of the village. It lies to the east of what has always been considered the boundary for the built environment, and will appear incongruous visually, but of greater concern is how the development will impact on the traffic levels and air quality on the A4. Sustainability is a great buzzword but building a development with little scope for active travel to Twyford, let alone Reading or Henley, is only likely to lead to most journeys being by car – and could well reduce the current level of walking and cycling by adding in another hazardous crossing on the National Cycle Route 4, used by many pupils of the Piggott school.

The Parish Council has never supported the inclusion of this site in the Local Plan, and if it must remain, then the issues raised by us and residents need to be addressed to avoid it being nothing more than another anonymous development tacked onto a village, of which there are many depressing examples all over the country.

Site West of Park Lane (CV002)

This site was probably in receipt of most of the objections received by the Borough from the first Consultation period, and we again welcome the reduction in numbers of dwellings allocated.

There remain concerns, however – mainly around the effects on local traffic and air quality, particularly close to a school. Consequently, we welcome the mention of encouraging active travel around this site and into the Country Park but feel this needs to be extended to a cycle track to Twyford Station and with a link to the National cycle route 4, as these could potentially cut car journeys substantially.

One issue that has come to light with the current development of 25 dwellings on this site is the displacement of the wildlife that had made this area its home since it was taken out of agricultural use. This is most obvious with large mammals like deer, but there are many others that would be less visible. Because of this, we would like there to be a “green corridor” east to west, so that animals can move freely from the Country Park west to the areas of ancient woodland, the golf course, Paddick’s Patch, Ashenbury Park etc.

Issues relating to both sites

The Neighbourhood Plan survey is only in the early part of being analysed, but one point that was clear from many respondents was the need for smaller, more affordable homes – both for the young to be able to afford to stay in the area, and for the old to downsize to without leaving the village where they may have lived for many years. Both developments imply they will be adding to the high percentage of large family homes as these are the most profitable, but the need seems to be for more modest dwellings. We would welcome some movement in this direction.

A second issue is that neither site is particularly close to public transport links, and the local bus service is inadequate. In the recent bus consultation, it was pointed out that our bus service is not fit for purpose, so again, any development in either Sonning or Charvil (and to a lesser extent, Twyford) will put pressure on the roads unless direct action is taken to make public transport more attractive.

Other local issues

The Parish Council raised objections to the proposal at Bridge Farm on traffic and impact on the flood plain. The combined effect of all the developments on the A4, with new junctions etc, will change traffic flows completely, with the need for reduced speeds, crossings etc., and even if the Borough were minded to improve the road to reduce the impact, the fact remains little can be done to mitigate the effects of Reading on traffic flows. We support the idea of a third bridge over the Thames, that might help reduce congestion in the area, but also, there need to be radical changes to the cycle/pedestrian/public transport network to reduce the reliance of the northern parishes on the car.

The other main concern of the Bridge Farm development again relates to the possible effect on the flood plain and possible knock-on effects on Charvil. Any flood mitigation plan on the part of the developer needs to consider whether the flood plain can withstand developments both to the east and west, without impacting on existing properties. Assuming both Bridge Farm and the land to the east of Park View Drive North are developed, there is a need for both plans to be considered together to ensure the safety of low-lying homes nearby.

Additions to the Local Green Spaces

Charvil are supportive of the local green spaces included in the Borough, and would like to take this belated opportunity to suggest sites that could be included in Charvil

Charvil Country Park and East Park Farm Playing Fields

While one is for formal sport and the other is for other physical recreation, it is important to view these two together as they tend to be used by many Charvil residents for enjoyment and exercise.

Being so close to both The Hawthorns and East Park Farm, many residents walk their dogs, enjoy the peace and quiet, and the wildlife that exists so close to their homes.

Charvil Meadows

Charvil Meadows are widely used by residents living on the Old Bath Road and provides access to less formal public open space than East Park Farm, and larger open spaces than around the Country Park.

Its biodiversity is slowly increasing, with the help of traditional meadow practices, and is much loved by many residents.

Park at The Hawthorns

While this is somewhat smaller, it is important to the residents of The Hawthorns as a safe place to take children to play and is also the only public green space that is free of dogs, which makes it popular for parents of younger children. It is also home to the new Community Orchard.

St Patrick's Recreation Ground

This is the only area of public open space in the north of the village, as it is leased by the Parish Council from Reading University.

It is consequently well used by many families and dog walkers.

Land to the east and north of Park View Drive North

Although privately owned, this area that has not been included in the Local Plan for development, is important to many residents due to the lack of public open space in the area (St Patrick's is not very big and does not serve the needs of the community on its own). It is an area of open farmland, with two ancient monuments on it, which could be made more of if access was formalised. It is well used for recreation, with many well-defined paths running round and across it. Part of it has been recognised in the LPU as a valued landscape.

22/7785 Amenities Committee

To consider whether the Parish Council should introduce preferential rates for residents purchasing a tennis pass, and how would this be managed (how can we prove residency) Also, to consider how many passes should be available to residents and non-residents

It was resolved that the current limit of 80 passes would remain, and that 70% would be reserved for residents, who will need to provide proof of address. It was further resolved to offer residents the current rate and non-residents a rate of £50 (both subject to price increases, yet to be decided, for the beginning of April. This was approved unanimously.

To consider a request from ballet for free use of the Committee room during exams

It was agreed to allow free use providing the room is left clean, but the Council reserves the right to charge for cleaning if it is not in an acceptable state.

To note the theft of the bolts that secure the ballet barres

This was noted, and replacements will be purchased *Clerk's Note: Replacements were eventually found but they are not very readily available.*

22/7786 Report from the Borough Councillor

There was no Borough Councillor report this month

Items for Consideration

22/7787 To hear an update on the Neighbourhood Plan Progress

All recent efforts have been to prepare for the Open Meeting on Saturday 5th Feb at the Village Hall. Robert Jones, the Chair of the group, has been liaising with local journalists to get it mentioned in a timely fashion, and other publicity is being undertaken. The main aims of the day are to liaise with the public, generate interest, and hopefully recruit people to join the working/focus groups on each theme. So far, four have been identified: housing, transport, environment, and Community Hub/engagement.

22/7788 To hear an update on the Pavilion project

There is a draft tender/brief which will need approval at the next Full Council meeting. So far, two architects have expressed an interest in tendering, and at least one more is needed to enable the Council to fulfil its obligations under its Financial Regulations. It should then be a case of appointing an architect in March, who would then take the plan through the feasibility stage, updating the cost plan and reaching the planning stage. At that point, the Council will need to choose between the Procurement route, or Design and Built. The initial fee will be in the region of £5-6K, with an extra £1k for quantity Surveying. At that point, the Parish Council would start to look at what funding is available through grants etc.

22/7789 To consider whether Council needs a WhatsApp group policy

It was agreed that the easiest way would be to update the Social Media Policy to cover WhatsApp. The main issue is that if WhatsApp is to be used as a communication tool with the public, then anyone acting on Council business needs to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Council's GDPR policy. Cllr. Walker was to investigate whether WhatsApp is subject to GDPR regulations.

22/7790 To note the intention of running internal training sessions on Council processes

The idea is to run sessions of around 30 to 45 minutes on such topics as Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, or other topics that seem useful. These would be held before the start of a meeting. It is intended to start these when the Council is closer to full strength.

22/7791 To Consider how the Council would like to mark the Platinum Jubilee and when

It was agreed that the Council would look to do something at East Park Farm, even if it is just to facilitate a "Picnic in the Park" – it would probably need some organisation, and it was agreed ideas would be brought to the next meeting. Whatever is done, will take place on Sunday 5th June.

22/7792 To consider what needs publicising this month

It was agreed to advertise the Neighbourhood Plan meeting on 5th February.

22/7793 To note the resignation of the Caretaker

This was noted and it was agreed to advertise for a new one. *Clerk's note: Before advertising, the job description has been sent to the staff reviewer to see if it could be usefully amalgamated with other roles.*

22/7794 To note the receipt of £344 from Charvil Women’s Club to go towards the signs in the Country Park

This was noted, and the Council expressed their thanks

22/7795 To decide whether to write to East Park Farm residents regarding access to the park from their gardens and about vegetation in the park

It was agreed that the clerk should send a letter based on the one from the University to residents who back onto the East Park Farm area managed by the Parish Council

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.55pm

Chairman’s Signature