

SHALFORD PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes to be approved next AGM May 2009

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
21st May 2008

Present 16 members of the public
All Parish Councillors
DC Tim Wilkinson
CC Roger Walters
Cathryn Carlisle (Clerk)

Apologies
The Vicar

1 Chairman's Welcome

It is good to see a good representation from the village. This year we have a new format: we have no celebrity speaker, so to speak, so we decided that this year each councillor will say a few words on what they've been doing over the year.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 16th May 2007 were approved and signed.

Proposed Cllr Phipps and Seconded Cllr Golding

3 Report on Actions from last meeting

None

4 Bendelowe's Trust

Representatives Mr. Alex Tanner and 2 other trustees

The trust has received more money than they've spent this year; flowers and the parish tea cost £300.00 approx which leaves a balance of £200.00 approx. There will be no flowers sent out this year due to the older generation not wanting to water them.

At the beginning of August there will be the annual Parish tea which will take place in the village hall.

Equipment that can be borrowed is as follows: Wheel Chairs, Hoists, Bedpans, Crutches. Please contact Angela Tanner with regards to borrowing equipment. Donations are asked for, for the loan of the equipment.

5 Chairman's Annual report

We've had a busy year: Park End Lane, Village Signs, Church End Parking Restrictions, being the main issues considered.

The Parish Council welcome anyone to our 15 minute open forum at the start of the meeting; such a facility is for people to have their say on any subject. Minutes and agendas are posted on notice boards and also on the website.

Park End Lane

Byway/Green Lane opposite Corkers across to Hunts Farm. There's been a traffic restriction on the byway for 10-12 years prohibiting motor vehicles driving down there; its been difficult to walk, cycle, ride horses along because the surface had become very rutted and bumpy due to its (illegal) use by motor-bikes and off-road vehicles. ECC has repaired the byway (which cost approx £70,000) with road planing, which took 3 months to do. The restriction was then out of date, and ECC wanted to revoke it. Most of the village are opposed to de-restriction of the byway. The village would like to have the Byway re-designated as a Restricted Byway, which would mean that no motorised vehicles would be allowed to use it. The Parish Council await a response from ECC. We have spoken to Campaign for the Protection of Rural Essex, who are very supportive of our position.

Cllr Oates reported that some of the road planing had already worn away, particularly on the corners.

Church End Parking Restrictions

Parking Restrictions outside the school: ECC are concerned that the road is blocked by parked cars. The Parish Council would like a 20 mph speed limit outside the school, where parents can only drop off children and leave straight away; contractors would only be able to drop off people/goods and then move away from the school. ECC Highways has been to inspect the site. The Parish Council would like to have a meeting with all parties concerned i.e. Village Hall, School, Highways to discuss this matter.

Footpath Map

The footpath map has been in progress for about a year; it will be to a 1-10,000 scale and will be useful for people who like to walk along the local field footpaths. We hope that the map will be finished for the fete in September. Various other Parishes have produced maps of their own Parishes.

Footpaths

The footpath cutting will be done very soon. We have 14 miles of field footpaths some of which the farmers have responsibility for; some bridleways need cutting, which will be done by ECC.

We need volunteers to help cut these footpaths, also to assist with mending of bridges and stiles.

6 Financial Report Cllr Phipps

The financial returns have been approved by the internal auditor Mal Hanley; copies are available. There is also a copy of the budget sheet to give Parishioners an idea of the funding for the next year.

With regards to the money spent on grass cutting: last year we had one contractor, this year we have two contractors: one does the grass cutting in the village and the other does some of the field footpaths and the Causeway. The second contractor has been asked to cut the Causeway in future.

Proposed Angela Tanner Seconded by Andrew Overall.

Stoneley Park Cllr Phipps

This site together with the playing field makes Shalford very rich in terms of open spaces. But while the site has been planted with a large number of trees and looked after by ECC these past years, few people use the Park and it is not very wildlife or people friendly. A number of justifiable complaints about the site from Shalford residents were:

- The entrance is not very welcoming, it looks like it is still the entrance to the 'tip' (this fact was brought out in the recent 'Open Spaces Survey' conducted by BDC).
- There is only room for some four cars to park.
- There are no notices to say it is there.
- There are no information boards
- Wheelchair and buggy access was difficult.
- There are too many trees.
- There is little to see.
- There is nowhere to sit.

As you may know the responsibility for the management of Stoneley Park should pass from ECC to the Shalford Parish Council sometime in 2009. With a view to getting as many improvements made to the site before this shift in responsibility with the agreement of the PC I arranged a site visit with two ECC members, Crispin Downes, Manager Landscape Design and Andrew Brown, Waste Management in September 2007. During this site visit a number of items were raised. These included:

- The need to make the place more welcoming. Replacing the metal gates with a set of wooden gates.
- Erection of a notice board telling visitors about the site.
- Making it easier for wheelchair and buggy access, by piping the drainage gully just inside the entrance and removal of the grille and of part of the ridge in the pathway.

- Expanding the car-park.
- Repairing the 'Compass' and removing the vegetation from inside the 'Compass' area.
- Removal of plastic tree-guards that have come away from the trees.
- Having a notice board telling visitors that when the Amenity Site closes they have to remove their cars.
- A Stoneley Park notice to be erected.

In addition to these changes that would make the site more 'people friendly' it was thought that the site needed some improvements to make it 'wildlife friendly'.

With this in mind I arranged a further site visit in December 2007 with Luke Bristow the Essex Wildlife Trust's Wildlife Sites Officer. He recommended:

Woodland management – The creation, by clearance, of scalloped edges along paths which pass through the tree planted areas will increase the number and diversity of microhabitats for a range of wildlife most notably invertebrate species. In addition, clearance of patches within woodland, particularly focussing upon concentrations of non-native tree species, will also improve the overall structure of planted areas and provide scrubby re-growth and woodland clearings useful for nesting birds, small mammals and woodland edge invertebrates.

Grassland management – one of the most important changes which could be made to enhance the site for wildlife would be to vary the cutting regime. Suggestions include: Leaving a buffer strip of 1-2 metres around the perimeter of the tree planted areas to be cut biannually in early summer

Leaving blocks of grassland uncut among select areas of open grassland ('beetle banks') to support over-wintering invertebrate species

Deadwood piles – the creation of piles of deadwood of various sizes both in open grassland and woodland would provide useful habitat for reptiles and amphibians (hibernacula) and well as specialist invertebrate species associated with the decay of wood. In addition, the retention of standing deadwood is also to be encouraged.

Bat and Bird boxes – The young age of the current tree cover is likely to limit opportunities for hole nesting birds and bats. Therefore the introduction of boxes would be beneficial for both groups and encourage them to breed on-site. These would need to be of the 'woodcrete' type to prevent predation by wood-peckers and squirrels.

Pond – Re-profiling of the pond would be desirable to encourage the development of emergent aquatic plants, which would make it more suitable for amphibians. However, this may prove difficult and expensive due to its current design and function. The removal of trees around the pond edge would also help the establishment of emergent plants.

These recommendations sent to Peter Spurrier of ECC in January 2008. A recent correspondence from ECC stated that:

- Woodland management and Deadwood piles would start in autumn 2008.
- Grass management would start week commencing 21 April 2008.
- Gates and Notice and Site Map to be put in place autumn 2008.
- Notice for Stoneley Park to be put in place next month.
- Compass to be re-pointed.
- Weed control has been carried out.
- Pathway improvement inside gate has been carried out.
- Car park has been enlarged and will be made bigger once the Amenity Site has been closed (2009).
- No work would be done on the pond.

One item that ECC will not fund is the purchase and erection of bird and bat boxes. This being the case it is proposed that these be purchased and erected by the PC later this year. Also the PC has £1,200 put aside, in Restricted Funds, for improvements at Stoneley Park and these would include the purchase of benches.

Thus you can see that, with the Parish Council's prompting, improvements to the site have and are being made by ECC and it is hoped that with these and those planned by the PC the site will be used by a greater number of people. However with increased use come the potential problems of litter and dog mess and a plea if for users of the site to take their litter home and clear up any dog mess.

CC Roger Walters is to find out the action plan for the Amenity site, the car parking will probably be a hard car park but he's not sure.

Levelley Wood

Is it privately owned or is it owned by ECC -- the sign says ECC if you go from the school entrance. The Parish Council will only be taking over the park.

8 Speedwatch Cllr Isbell

In August 07 there was a road survey done where 195 vehicles an hour were measured doing 36-41 mph some vehicles were even doing over 50 mph. We are hoping to do the speed gun training in the next 2 weeks; if anyone is interested please let Cllr Isbell know -- we need a minimum of 3 people doing the speed checks. If drivers are reported doing speeds over 30 miles per hour at various location in Essex they will get fined by the police.

9 Website Cllr Eversden

History

Site has now been running for 4 years, initially with a company called The Local Channel; system was changed in September 2007, due to the complexity of their menus, to Essex Info based at Chelmsford.

Reports to date have indicated that most people now find it easier to find information.

Costs

No costs to the community

Do We Need a Web Site

With the demise of The Shalford News and move towards complete reliance on technology for information the present site could be a boon if used properly; it has facilities for any organisation to place their own event directly into the Diary system. Tests have been undertaken to prove this actually works.

As yet no organisation has taken advantage of this facility

Monthly visitors are averaging 275 who come back 600 times looking at 2,800 pages.

Hits on the web site have been from Hungary/Germany/China/Australia/France.

No Computer

Our web can be accessed via any computer -- no specialised software is required; libraries have free access for those that are without.

75% of UK homes now have some form of access to the Internet.

Ideas

Anybody can suggest an idea or news item

Those same volunteers then went about collecting completed questionnaires from those households who wished to participate.

10 Village Appraisal Cllr Harrison

In early 2007 the people living in Shalford Parish were asked to give their opinions on a series of locally relevant topics by way of a community questionnaire.

A small group of volunteers delivered a copy of the community questionnaire to every household in the Shalford Parish which comprised of Shalford, Church End, Shalford Green, Jaspers Green as well as homes in rural areas.

In total 165 households participated. This is a fantastic response for such an activity at with 52% of the community responding we are confident that any findings and conclusions we take from the information collected will be representative of the opinions of our Parish.

To those of you, who took the time to complete the questionnaire, thank you very much. 52% is a great response, especially when you compare it to last year's District Council elections which only attracted a turn out of 35%!

Grateful thanks once again go to those volunteers who made it possible to achieve such a great response rate.

The Next Steps

A number of meetings have been held since the start of this project within which discussions have taken place and agreement been reached regarding the style of final report. Examples of the preferred style of finished reports (2 reports) are available at the end of the meeting if anyone would like to look at these.

It had been agreed that an initial findings report would be published to keep interest and show that progress is being made, as well as to summarise detailed findings. A structured and well thought out action plan report could then be developed in due course.

All the data obtained from the questionnaires has now been analysed and the process of taking this data and deciding what is to be reflected in the final report in more detail is to be undertaken.

This is not an easy process although a number of volunteers had put themselves forward to help with this at the last meeting. It is envisaged that this will be completed in time to have a summary of key findings to show at this year's Village Fete. The initial report document can then be produced and the final stages of creating an action plan can be commenced.

Funding

When the decision was reached to embark upon the creation of a Parish Appraisal Document the costs and time involved were also carefully considered.

It was felt and still is the opinion of the Parish Council that this is an important activity to undertake as this formal process and the outcome report serves to tell those organisations, bodies and interested parties what are the key priorities and concerns of the parish, a truly representative view and not speculation. The types of organisations and interested parties include Braintree District Council, Essex County Council, etc.

Many organisations now expect this type of documentation to exist in order to justify an application for funding or support of a key initiative from a body such as the Parish Council. That is why there are a number of grants available to assist Parish Councils to undertake this huge piece of work.

The Parish Council have already been successful in obtaining funding for this project from DEFRA and the Countryside Agency and this money is currently held in reserved funds for exactly this purpose.

Current spend to date has been approximately £150 for copying of the questionnaires and around £13 for stationery. Data analysis of the questionnaire was around £300. This still leaves us a large amount of money to produce a professional and interesting report and action plan document.

The remaining expense is therefore likely to be the production and printing of the two final documents.

Your Help

Anyone who has not already volunteered and would like to help with the next steps of the process would be most welcome and should contact the Parish Council.

The chosen report format encompasses pictorial views of the parish and it is therefore requested that any interesting photographs of village locations/scenes or activities be passed onto the Parish Council.

It has also been suggested that a photographic competition be organised for the village fete to decide on which pictures are used within any final reports.

11 'Non observance of 7.5t restrictions and Speed Limits' Cllr Golding

[Cllr Golding is our newest member of the Parish Council and a 'new boy' compared to some of the villagers.]

I would like to mention two aspects that concern me; the first relates to speed limits as you approach and leave the village. As you approach the village from Wethersfield you pass from derestricted to 40mph to 30mph but as you leave the village through Church End to Shalford Green you go directly from 30mph to derestricted and I would like to see the restrictions extended to beyond Shalford Green either at 40 but preferably at 30mph.

The second aspect is the 7.5 tonne weight restriction through Church End and Shalford Green, which is often ignored by heavy lorries and has resulted in significant damage to the road verges along with the obvious hazard these lorries create for other road users.

We have spoken to Essex Highways, BDC and the police on these issues but with little success to date despite them coming to see the problem for themselves.

The one success we did have followed a letter from Cllr Phipps which was published in the local paper. This was picked up by Essex radio who sent a reporter along to do a live interview with John and myself on Victoria Hill with traffic noise in the background.

I believe that neither of these issues will be resolved overnight but we will continue to lobby for change to the speed limits and enforcement of the 7.5 tonne weight limit restriction.

CC Walters informed us that he is part of Trading Standards; they have 2 vehicles that go round and tackle the problems of overweight lorries using our 7.5t restricted road unless they are delivering in the area. This scheme has been very popular in Chapel Hill and London Road in Braintree where this problem has virtually dried up. If we have any problems let CC Walters know so that Trading Standards can take action.

12 Planning Cllr Golding

The Parish Council has a statutory responsibility for all planning applications in the Parish –which means that BDC do have to ask for our opinion but unfortunately they do not have take any notice of it. So our powers are somewhat limited.

Planning Applications can be anything from the addition of a porch or conservatory to a house to a 3000 house development as was proposed at Boxted Wood. However if we wish to raise an objection to an application it has to be on true planning grounds such as inappropriate development or over development. We can't just say we don't like the look of it.

The Parish Council receives about 50 planning applications each year and we have a subgroup that look at these.

If any residents have an opinion on a particular planning application then they are welcome to come along to our monthly meeting to talk to us.

13 Village Hall Committee Cllr Hull

The Parish Council fully support the village hall & playing field. In the last year we have given the village hall committee £1258 towards painting the outside of the hall and another £3000 towards a new mower. So far the village hall has put on a Christmas brass band, and a Barn Dance -- which turned out to be a line dance ! Charlotte Rooney Buckingham is a great asset to the village. The parish council will help with project funding, but only after the village hall committee have done their bit.

14 Tim Wilkinson District Councillor

Cllr Wilkinson gave a brief outline of the local committee which gets the public to interact in rural development in which funding is available for any recognised body can apply in Braintree/Witham/Halstead area.

With regards to Boxted Wood so far no planning application has been received.

BDC have put 4 facilities forward for the Olympic Games -- Towerlands, Felsted School, Bramston Sports and Earls Colne facilities for housing and food.

The race course at Great Leighs comes under Chelmsford not Braintree.

15 Roger Walters County Councillor

CC Walters is on numerous committees in Braintree and Chelmsford area, he also works with Trading Standards which has officers that go round detecting large Lorries using the 7.5t weight restricted roads.

CC Walters requested that we copy him on Park End Lane, Parking Restrictions.

16 Question Time

Dr Adam Cutts announced that he and his wife have brought the old shop opposite the village hall. Dr & Mrs Cutts would like to put something back into the village.

Q Why have we not entered the Best Kept Village Competition?

A When we have entered in previous years there's been no enthusiasm. This takes a lot of work; an entry will be considered for 2009.

Q Why did the contractors cut the daffodils down too early?

A The Contract probably said 'cut the grass', but didn't specify timing. Watch for 2009.

Q As it is plant a tree year, are there any plans to replace the oak on the triangle?

A The Parish Council will look into this. If anyone has any idea where trees need to be planted please let the Clerk know.

The electricity wire along the chase is being stretched by a fallen tree this has been reported to the electricity board.

17 Meeting Closed at 9.50 pm