

ALTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of meeting at the Coronation Hall, 7.30, February 13, 2014*

Present: Steve Hepworth, Peter Emery, Kate Fielden, Ben Owen, Jayne Drew, Robert Carpenter Turner, Polly Carson, Jenni Bickerdyke
Apologies: Councillor Paul Oatway. In attendance: PC Richard Barratt

001/14 Minutes: The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed (proposed Robert Carpenter Turner, seconded Polly Carson) and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising not on the agenda:

002/14 Precept: As agreed at the previous pc (minutes 105/13) Jenni Bickerdyke presented a breakdown of the figures relating to the precept, to be included as an annex to these minutes.

003/14 Flooding: A number of properties in the parish had been affected, including the Bank, Oxford Cottages, properties in Brown's Lane, and Shell Cottage. Others were vulnerable. Steve Hepworth had phoned Wilts Council about sandbags. He understood householders should not have to pay for bags, but was still waiting for a call-back. Lightweight gel sacks might be a better alternative, particularly for the elderly and disabled. It was suggested the pc appoint a flood warden as point of contact with Wilts Council. Ben Owen said that in discussion with Claire Perry MP (see 009/14 below) it emerged that landowners are legally liable to clear ditches. Agreed that Jayne Drew be flood warden, that this be publicised in the forthcoming parish newsletter and the pc website, and that she should report back to the next pc meeting.

004/14 Police report: PC Barratt said there had been no crime reported in the parish this year so far. Thefts from outbuildings, high last year, had shown a dramatic fall. But he urged that any suspicious activity be reported either on the police 101 number or – in the case of any activity under way – to 999. **Hare coursing**, to which the pc had recently been alerted, remains a serious issue; big business with big-money gambling. Perpetrators destroy crops, cut fences, steal from barns. Any sighting even if hare is not actually being chased, should be reported via 999. Agreed that the information and phone numbers be included in the next parish newsletter and on the pc website. SH thanked PC Barratt for his attendance.

005/14 Rumble strips / road surfacing: Reporting back, SH said traffic over rumble strips could cause noise nuisance up to half a mile away. Did the pc wish to push ahead, and had residents been consulted? After brief discussion it was agreed not to proceed. SH reported that the

road surface through Alton Priors is still in an extremely poor state. Repairs to potholes were no longer being properly carried out, squared and sealed. Below- standard patching deteriorated within weeks. Members agreed the situation is very unsatisfactory, SH to pursue with Wilts Council again.

- 006/14** **Pewsey Community Area Partnership:** SH said that though there was a danger the organisation could become a talking shop it could also allow groups of parish councils to work together and agree about the main concerns of the area. Agreed that SH raise state of the road in Alton Priors with PCAP and the Area Board and with Councillor Oatway.
- 007/14** **Donations to good causes:** Charles Reiss (Clerk) said the parish received an increasing number of requests to give money to local good causes, most recently a strong appeal from the Citizens Advice Bureau. He felt the pc should decide how it wanted to handle these, particularly in view of the pressure on the precept discussed at the last pc meeting. Members pointed out that they were dealing with taxpayers' money and questioned whether the parish, with its extremely limited resources, should be spending, even for a worthy cause. It was agreed that the default position should be to refuse unless the circumstance was quite exceptional. In that case it would be up the clerk to discuss with the chairman whether the case should be put to the parish council
- 008/14** **License, Rectory Close:** Jenni Bickerdyke reported that the annual cost for the access license would be £285, to increase each year in line with the RPI. Agreed.
- 009/14** **Meeting with Claire Perry, MP:** Ben Owen reported on the meeting between the MP and representatives from parish councils and other local bodies. It had been a good meeting with topics including the floods, extra funding for roads and the rollout of high-speed broadband. Claire Perry was keen on setting up neighbourhood plans but some thought that might encourage unwanted development.
- 010/14** **Community asset transfer:** JB presented a cheque for £774.00 due to Wansbroughs, solicitors, legal fees for the transfer of the playing field to parish ownership. Proposed Steve Hepworth, seconded Ben Owen. Agreed.
- 011/14** **Wits Countryside Access consultation – response:** pc members approved the response drafted by Kate Fielden, to be communicated to Wilts Council. It highlighted concern that any moves which might attract more visitors should only be made *after* the appropriate infrastructure, such as toilets and car parking, is in place.

- 012/14** **Community Infrastructure Levy consultation – response:** members approved the response drafted by Kate Fielden to be communicated to Wilts Council. They noted that money from the charge, levied on each square metre of new development, would go to Wilts Council but stressed that it is essential a percentage goes to the local community. High-speed broadband was cited as one worthwhile option.

Planning applications

- 013/14** **13/07053/FUL The Old Smithy, Alton Priors, new two bed dwelling:** Kate Fielden declared an interest, as the applicant, and asked the chairman's consent to speak. This application was largely the same as the application submitted last year (13/03451/FUL) which the pc supported but Wilts had refused. There were changes to make the development even less obtrusive and details of car parking had been supplied. Two documents had been added: The Altons VDS, which expressed the need for housing for older and younger people in the village; and a letter from a Kennet Planning Officer which, although stating that the proposal did not meet planning policies for the area, also indicated that a proposal might be considered, should certain criteria be met. KF then left the meeting. In discussion, members still felt the design of the building was good and in keeping with the village; and that there was wide support for properties which would allow older people to live within the community or younger people to stay. However they noted the robust refusal by Wilts planning. They also noted the policy, reiterated in the Village Design Statement, to restrict new housing to the existing built area of the village. This proposal could not be classified as infill and it extended the built area of the village to the East and breached that policy. If pc members accepted this breach the precedent set could present serious difficulties in refusing another proposal in breach further down the line. The breach of policy was a decisive factor. Members voted by a majority not to support the application.
- 014/14** **Fernbank and Honeystreet Mills, update:** CR reported that there was still no date for a decision by Wilts planning officers, nor for a hearing by the Planning Committee.
- 015/14** **Twin towers update:** The fertilizer tanks above Alton Priors remain in place despite denial of planning permission and order to remove. Agreed that the pc email Wilts planning to ask them to enforce the decision, or give a date by which it will be enforced.
- 016/14** **Spring Newsletter:** Contents discussed and agreed.

017/14 **Annual General Meeting date:** In view of the unavoidable absence of the clerk on the intended date of May 8, agreed that the AGM be rescheduled to 7 PM on May 22, with a parish council meeting immediately afterwards.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 9.11pm.

* minutes subject to confirmation at the next pc