

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting for Sonning Common held at the Village Hall Wood Lane on Wednesday 20 May 2015 at 19.30 hrs.

The meeting was chaired by Mr John Stoves, Vice-chairman of the Parish Council.

Those present included 10 representatives of the parish council, the Henley Standard and 25 members of the public. The chairman of the parish council, Mr Douglas Kedge, was absent due to illness. Vice-chairman of the parish council, Mr John Stoves, officiated instead.

The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 12 May 2014 were approved.

APM 1. There were no matters arising.

APM 2. Chairman's address. Mr Stoves welcomed everyone to the meeting and said he hoped they would all hear something of interest about activities in the village and of the parish council.

APM 3. Oxfordshire county councillor David Bartholomew gave a presentation entitled, 'Abolition of district councils for a unitary system?' Cllr Bartholomew outlined the separate roles of the county council and of South Oxfordshire District Council; his role as a county councillor; key issues facing the county council, including the council's multi-million pound deficit and funding pressures. He presented the strategic financial case for a unitary structure of local government in Oxfordshire.

Cllr Bartholomew provided details of the county's long-term transport plan; and the results of an Ofsted inspection into children's services provided by the county. He then listed specific improvements in Sonning Common, which he had supported, including installing dropped kerbs in several locations to improve disabled access around the village and providing a blue badge for the FISH community transport scheme.

He concluded by providing a brief update on the proposal for a third bridge across the River Thames at Reading.

APM 4. Councillor Barrie Greenwood, chairman of the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan (SCNDP) Working Party, outlined the main aims of the SCNDP: to spread Sonning Common's housing allocation as evenly as possible between the north and south of the village; to provide a recreation and sports ground, more affordable homes and a better balanced housing stock; and to improve traffic flows and parking in the village.

He mentioned the 18 public meetings which the working party had held over the previous two years; the 28 meetings with landowners, agents and developers concerning individual sites; and the 14 meetings with other councils and local organisations.

He outlined the reports completed by the team on the character and design of the village, local landscape, ecology, site access and concept designs for individual sites. He ran through the proposed housing numbers at each of the allocated and reserve sites before explaining the process for the submission and examination of the SCNDP Draft Plan and the referendum that would follow once it passed its examination.

He explained that the SCNDP, if approved by residents at a referendum, would become a legal document which would be administered and applied by the parish council and used to help determine local planning applications.

APM 5. There followed a series of six short presentations on how the parish council functioned.

Planning Committee – Councillor Leigh Rawlins talked about the history of the UK's planning system; explained the national and local planning policy framework; outlined the demand for new housing; and the local planning structure and planning application process.

Finance Committee – Councillor John Stoves explained the role of the parish council's Finance Committee as being to monitor and manage the parish council's income and expenditure and to make recommendations to the Full Council on financial matters.

The Parish Office – Deputy Parish Clerk Ros Varnes explained the responsibilities of the Parish Office, including the management of the play areas, the skatepark, the allotments, grass-cutting and street-cleaning and the provision of bins and signage.

She said the role of the Parish Office was to support the 12 members of the parish council by providing professional advice, administrative support and by implementing members' decisions. The office also had a project management role to play, she said, for example, in relation to Village Hall improvements and Sonning Common Skatepark.

Widmore Pond – Councillor Jane Diwell spoke about the work of the Widmore Pond Committee and the on-going management of Widmore Pond under a policy of ‘benign neglect’, as had been recommended on a training course attended by Councillor Diwell.

Sonning Common Skatepark – Councillor Carole Lewis spoke about the construction of Sonning Common Skatepark by Wheelscape during May 2015 and of the new facilities which would be provided.

Role of the Full Council – In Councillor Kedge’s absence Councillor Stoves welcomed two additions to the parish council – Stan Rust and David Richens. He explained that the parish council was non party-political and that the chairman and vice-chairman had been re-elected at the recent Annual Meeting of the Parish Council. He briefly outlined the roles of Full Council and of the council’s Planning and Finance Committees and explained the General Power of Competence which the parish council holds.

Councillor Kedge concluded by saying that it was a privilege to chair such a proactive and committed parish council and one that was ably supported by the Parish Clerk and Deputy Parish Clerk.

Questions and comments were invited from residents afterwards.

Chairman Dated