

Minutes of Haydon Wick Parish Council Annual Assembly held 16th April 2018

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillors L Brown (Chairman), S McDermott (Vice-Chair), E Baker-Lee, P Booth, S Callen, P Eagle, J Fuller, E Gerrard, R Hailstone, S Heyes, D Smith, M Whelan and R Worman

WARD COUNCILLORS: None present

CLERK: Terry Powell

Public: There was one (1) resident present

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillor P Martin

Apologies were received from Councillor D Renard

2. WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Councillor L Brown welcomed all those present to the meeting and explained that this is not a formal Parish Council meeting so our Standing Orders do not apply, I expect everyone to continue to act as though they do. The Annual Assembly is a meeting that we are legally required to hold each year between 1st March and 1st June. For the newcomers, it is best described as the annual shareholders meeting where the Directors (us the Councillors) tell the shareholders (you the residents) what we've done, what we want to do and to give a brief financial overview. Any votes taken are not binding on the Parish Council although they are considered at the next meeting of the parish council. Only registered electors can vote on an issue. As I said earlier, this is an informal meeting, during which questions may be asked. Any registered elector, including Councillors, may ask questions of the Council, which we will try to answer here. If we can't please leave your name and contact details with the Clerk. An elector may also make suggestions and comment on anything pertinent to the people of Haydon Wick Parish, this is the whole purpose of the meeting. Normally just the Chairman of the Parish holds the meeting but, as in the past, I'm sharing the responsibility with the Vice-chair, Cllr McDermott and the Chair of Policy and Finance, Cllr Callen.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the Annual Assembly held 26th April 2017 were proposed to be accepted.

Proposed: Councillor
Vote: Agreed

Seconded: Councillor

RESOLVED: That the minutes be approved as a correct record

4. ACHIEVEMENTS 2017/18

Councillor L Brown as Chairman spoke to this item.

In the past year we have continued to learn about the areas for which we are now responsible and, more importantly, for what we are not. There is still an assumption

at the Borough Council that problems in a parish are Parish Council problems. For example, the latest area of contention is the small patch of land near the Manor Farm pub where the footpath cuts across to the new toucan crossing. Previously cut by the pub, it is owned by SBC but was never shown on the grass cutting map. Consequently the area, one of many, was not covered in the quote. The Parish is now assumed to be responsible for cutting the grass there with no funds transferred to cover it. Although this might seem like a picky point over a tiny piece of land, the principle is the same. After all, why should Parish Councils be expected to work for free? No one else does.

On a similar vein, the Parish Council was asked again to consider funding five hours opening of North Swindon library. Our concerns are still the same as when we were initially approached two years ago and are still unanswered. The amount we were asked to fund was inconsistent with the proportion of parishioners who use the library, just under 25%. We also see libraries as a Borough Council responsibility. So again we refused the request, as have Blunsdon Parish Council and St Andrew's Parish Council has now also withdrawn funding resulting in SBC reducing the opening hours yet further.

Many of you will have seen the new gang out mowing the parish. Due to the poor level of service we received from our previous contractors, we triggered our get-out clause and have been able to recruit and tool up an in-house team using the remains of the money from the old contract. Despite the vagaries of an English spring, snow (twice!) and torrential rain, grass cutting has started. Positive comments have already been rolling in. So congratulations to the new team. I would also like to commend our office team on dealing with a stressful situation, handling all too frequent complaints via email and telephone or drop-ins, which took up way too much of their time.

We have continued to provide grants to worthy causes which provide services and facilities to parishioners. We have made an effort to spend all the money this year rather than carrying it over again. We have given grants to Swindon 1st Sea Scouts

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Again this year, we have had a small precept rise, £1-20 a month. Parish Councillors should be justifiably proud of the way a low precept has been maintained with a higher standard of work being delivered.

As more and more people come to realize that they live in Haydon Wick parish, calls for us Councillors to recognise the newer areas continues. There is a perception that if we are going to spend any money, it will be in the old village of Haydon Wick itself. Renovation of the outlying play areas has put some dent in that preconception but still more needs to happen. But there also need to be some acknowledgement that the village is old, as in ancient, and that some of its facilities came off the ark.

We have just refurbished another two play areas, Wick Farm Orchard and Heaton Close. We continue to ring-fence the £70,000 that we added to the precept two years ago for this project. Part of the Wick Farm Orchard renovation was the establishment of a small community orchard. Well, it had to be done, with a name like that! Five semi mature fruit trees, three apple and two pear, have joined the ancient apple tree that stands near the play area. We will continue to look for other areas where more fruit trees can be planted.

In closing I would like to add that as we approach election day, I am keenly aware of this may be, for some, their last year in office. For many years this Council has

been justifiably proud of being apolitical. Yes, some of our Councillors are card-carrying members of various political parties. But on the whole, those party affiliations remain outside the door. Councillors are here for the benefit of their communities not any political parties.

5. AIMS & OBJECTIVES 2018/19

The Vice-Chair Councillor S McDermott gave a summary of the expected aims and objectives for 2018/19.

The most visible aspect of the Parish Council's activities is the maintenance of our public green spaces and provision of play parks.

Last year's problems with ISS, and the complaints generated went to show how much the residents of the Parish appreciate well-tended grass, controlled weeds and pruned shrubs. This coming year the Parish Council will work hard at getting ourselves back into our residents' good books, by getting on top of any outstanding issues left over from last year's growing season and then providing a consistent service throughout this year's growing season, providing green spaces that both Parish Council and residents can be proud of.

Unfortunately the weather has hampered the first few weeks, snow and then rain have turned some areas of the Parish into quagmires preventing the newly created in-house grounds maintenance team from cutting grass in a methodical and planned manner. Instead of starting at one end of the parish and working across to the other, they find themselves working across the whole Parish identifying those areas fit to be cut, and then leaving those patches that are too wet. Hopefully, as the weather improves, and the ground dries out the team will begin to work to a planned schedule, providing cuts every 3-4 weeks, throughout the growing season, however long that might be. And once they have stopped cutting grass, they can start tackling the brambles that are running rampant in many parts of the Parish.

This coming year will again see the Parish Council refurbish some of the play parks which we are responsible for. In the previous two financial years the Parish Council has managed to refurbish three parks in the first year and two in the second. This year attention is being focused on the skate-board park located on Westfield Way, dependent on cost this maybe the only play area refurbished. There are several reasons for the council's decision to focus on the skate park. In the previous years we have paid attention to the play parks used by our younger residents, pre-teens, this year it was felt that the council should pay attention to the needs of our teenagers, and at present the only facility that is provided for that demographic is the skate park. This isn't the only reason, the skate park is a few years old and is beginning to look it's age, it's construction of metal sheets on metal frames is noisy and getting harder to maintain, and the best way forward is to replace it with a concrete park, similar to other parks in town, West Swindon for example. The concrete construction should be easier and cheaper to maintain, and local residents to the park should notice some reduction in noise.

The Parish Council is also wanting to continue the development of the land at Tadpole Lane. Due to external circumstances there has been a delay in providing a safe vehicle access to the site. Once this has been completed the creation of much wanted leisure gardens (allotments) can begin.

The Parish Council is also considering the idea of providing a community orchard on the site, this will be dependent on the success of the orchard recently created at

Wick Farm Orchard.

Having talked about the visible aspect of the Parish's work, here is the invisible. The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), will come into effect in the UK from 25 May 2018. This new package of legislation will increase the workload in the office, hence the employment of another administration assistant. GDPR is not something that can be ignored, the Parish Council must be ready for it, or potentially face heavy fines.

Not only will the administration assistant handle GDPR, but provide support to the magazine editorial team, by ensuring the office staff understand the magazine production process when the make-up of the Council changes next May, ensuring the information is available for the new Councillors who take on the role of Editors. i.e. succession planning.

As if the Admin Assistants haven't got enough on their plates the workload of the Assistant Clerk will be reassessed and some tasks moved to the Admin Assistants, freeing the Assistant Clerk up to take on some of the Clerk's duties, allowing the Clerk to look at some of the bigger projects the Parish Council would like to instigate i.e. extension of the Parish Council Building to provide additional community rooms, sign posted walks through the parish etc.

6. PRECEPT 2018/19

As Chair of the Policy & Finance Committee, Councillor S Callen, explained the detail of the 2018/19 budget which had been clearly laid out in magazine and the resultant precept levied on the Borough Council.

As my colleagues have already touched on, this last year has been very busy and a time of change. This has given the Policy and Finance arena many challenges which has been viewed as "opportunities for improvement".

Due to the Grass Cutting service being terminated with the original supplier who were unable to provide the contracted services, we took these services in house which meant the head count in the Parish Council increased. Funding needed to be identified and agreed to provision equipment to ensure a good service is provided to our residents. With the increase headcount, this gave us an opportunity to review and revise all the existing staff procedures, for example the disciplinary and grievance procedures which had never been designed for a large team. With the new changes to data protection and the GDPR legislation, this was deemed both timely and necessary works ensuring staff, managers and councillors are aware of their day to day responsibilities and expectations of behaviour.

The grants committee meet several times this year and awards were made providing assistance across a range of residents from the young to our older residents. For example, Scouts and guides were provided monies to assist with equipment and educational visits and crockery was funded for a community group for those young at heart. This year, the majority of the available grants funding was allocated and going forward we need to ensure that community groups are aware of our ability to help where needed.

Of course, leading up to this time of year, the Precept discussions and our plans for next year have involved us in many discussions, some passionate, to come to the decision on what we should be charging our residents this coming year. As mentioned by my colleague, the elections are due next year to elect the councillors to represent the residents for the next 4 years. With this in mind, this year we have

tried to keep the increase to the minimum possible, putting on hold some projects we would have liked to progress. This does not mean they won't be actioned this year, but just that if we do progress them we will need to fund them from other budgets or reserves.

Full details of the Precept have been published in the SPRING edition on the centre pages numbered 31 through 34. In summary, the decision made was to increase the precept by £12.04 per annum for a Band "D" property. This brings the weekly charge for such a property to £1.20 a week. Examples of the service areas and the services provided are also detailed on these pages. Considering the additional services that the in-house teams are planning to provide, it has been a success that we have been able to absorb these within the current budget constraints (obviously as the original contracts funding is now available) and that no additional costs have been sought as part of the precept increase.

This precept and project commitments for the forthcoming year should leave the council in a healthy and stable state for the elected councillors in 2019.

An article containing these details had been published in the magazine which is delivered to all households in the parish sought to give a clear and understandable explanation to residents on how the budget is discussed and set

7. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A number of questions were raised.

Councillor R Hailstone – Asked when the large areas of grass left uncut at present will be visited. *Response When the waterlogged areas dry out sufficiently to take the weight of the equipment*

Councillor P Booth – Asked how the success of the community orchard will be measured. *Response From comments received from the residents and the amount of fruit produced*

Councillor R Worman - Will the grass be cut around the trees or left to grow as a wild grass area. *Response Area will be cut as usual to allow children to continue to play in the area*

Councillor E Gerrard – Asked if the trees will be regularly watered. *Response The trees will be watered on a regularly basis once the ground has dried out and the warmer weather arrives*

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.25 p.m.