

# THE PARISH COUNCIL OF MERTON M7/2022

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL HELD IN MERTON VILLAGE HALL AT 19:30 ON 10 OCTOBER 2022

PRESENT: David Richardson (Chairman) DR  
Martin Smith and R. Gurprashad (Councillors) MS/RG

IN ATTENDANCE: T. Charlesworth; (Clerk/RFO) TC  
District Cllr. Gemma Coton GM  
Wendy Meads (Village Hall Bookings Clerk). WM  
County Cllr. Callum Miller CM  
One parishioner.

1. APOLOGIES: Accepted from Cllr. Paul Stubbs and District Cllr. Angus Patrick.
2. PARISH COUNCIL:
  - 2.1. Meeting Scheduled 12 September 2022: Cancelled due to the 'Death of a Senior' under Local Government Act 1972, s243.
  - 2.2. Election of Vice-Chairman: No volunteers.
  - 2.3. Vacancies: No applications.

Clerk

- 2.4. To Receive Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:
  - a) Cllr. R. Gurprashad declared a pecuniary interest in Application No's.: 22/02819/LB and 22/02821/F and took no part in discussions regarding the applications.
- 2.5. Merton Village Neighbourhood Plan:
  - a) Joint Neighbourhood Plan: Ongoing. MS
- 2.6. Code of Conduct: Review:
  - a) Training: C.D.C. holding on 23 November 2022 at 6pm; further details to follow. All
- 2.7. Civility & Respect Pledge: The following matters carried forward until Code of Conduct adopted.
  - a) To consider passing a resolution to sign up to the pledge.
  - b) To review statement and proposed policies. Clerk
- 2.8. GDPR Policies: Documents circulated prior to the previous meeting for review. C/fwd. All
  - a) Privacy Notice
  - b) Communication Policy
  - c) Data Protection Policy
  - d) Document Retention Policy
- 2.9. Policies Review: Documents circulated prior to the previous meeting for review. C/fwd. All
  - a) Social Media Policy
  - b) Disciplinary and Grievance Arrangements
  - c) Equal Opportunities
  - d) Expenses
  - e) Health & Safety
  - f) Sickness & Absence
- 2.10. Reserves Policy: To be reviewed and amended for adoption.

### 3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

- 3.1: The Chairman welcomed Parishioner; District Cllr. Gemma Coton and County Cllr. C. Miller to the meeting:
  - a) Parishioner: Offered his support with any of the following ideas and also confirmed that he is now helping the Footpath Warden.
    - i. Dog Faeces: The following ideas were proposed to deal with the current issue of dog faeces either not being cleared up or poo bags being deposited in the play area bin:
      - Play Area: Clearer signage that no dogs are allowed in the area and the bins to have signs stating 'no dog faeces'.
      - Establish the cost of having more dog bins in the village; noting that there is also an ongoing cost for emptying the bins.
      - Holding a meeting with dog owners to address the problems.
  - b) County Cllr. C. Miller:
    - i. 20mph Speed Limit Application: The Parish Council had been advised of the consultation for the Merton (Bicester) proposed 20mph Speed Limits which closes on 14 October 2022; the proposed Traffic Regulation Order has been advertised in the Bicester Advertiser and on the Parish Council website. Once completed the County Council will review the responses and if necessary (i.e. if objections are received) prepare a report to be presented to the Cabinet Member for Highway Management at a meeting scheduled for later in 2022/early in 2023. This will be a public meeting at which members of the public may apply to speak. The 'Traffic Calming Working Group' will make arrangements to hold a meeting to discuss any further proposals for SID's etc., given that O.C.C. will have no further money available; parishioner present to join meeting. County Cllr. C. Miller to establish if SID's can be hung on the

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- same posts as the speed limit signage as the cost of erecting posts was not accounted for when the working group originally put forward proposals.
- ii. Flood Forum: This took place on 26 July 2022; County Cllr. C. Miller to follow up at the end of November.
  - iii. Islip Bridge: The experiment is now complete and all the data will be collated and displayed in an exhibition to be held in Islip Village Hall.
  - iv. A41 Scheme: There is to be a public meeting on 20 October 2022 in Ambrosden regarding the scheme and its extension for completion.
  - v. Councillor Funds: County Cllr. C. Miller still has some funds left which need to be commissioned by the end of January; details to be forwarded.
  - vi. County Council Policy Level:
    - Local Transport and Connectivity Plan – Consultation closes 13 October 2022; proposals to reduce the use of cars and promote the use of public transport/bikes and walking in Oxford.
    - County Budget: Consultation 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> (details to be forwarded).
- b) District Cllr. G. Coton:
- i. Local Plan 2040: The District Council will be staying with the local plan and a workshop has been arranged for the 19 October 2022.
  - ii. Noke Farm: Being monitored.
  - iii. Annual Canvassing: Councillors, carrying ID, will be knocking on doors.
  - iv. Cost of Living: The District Councillor is pushing towards Pension Credit making sure those eligible are able to access.
- c) Village Hall Bookings Clerk:
- i. Village Hall Heating and Hot Water: Reported as not working; PC to action as may affect bookings.
  - ii. Caravan Club(s): Booked the weekend just gone and again in December and January.
  - iii. Exercise Classes: Being held every Tuesday up to Christmas.
  - iv. Football: Bicester Vets to be invited to meeting; a line machine has been bought from petty cash at a cost of £10.00; need hot water resolved. The changing rooms are looking fabulous and posts have been purchased and need erecting in the correct place and old ones removed.
  - v. Allotment Enquiry: To pass on Clerks contact details.

## ***District and County Councillors along with parishioner left the meeting.***

### 4. MINUTES:

4.1: That the draft minutes of the Annual Parish Council meeting held on 11 July 2022 at 7.30pm were accepted and approved to be signed by the Chairman Cllr .David Richardson.

### 5. ASSET MANAGEMENT:

#### 5.1: Recreational Field/Play Area/Allotments:

- a) Play Area:
  - i. RoSPA Report: To review next meeting.
- b) Recreational Area:
  - i. Bicester Vets Football Club: They will require the field for training on a Wednesday evening, there will be no training once the dark nights draw in. They will not require the hall and will have access from the back to the toilets and changing rooms; the use of showers and there will be a cleaning cost to the PC. Ball park figure of £40.00 per match and £10.00 per training session to be discussed with club.
  - ii. Rugby/Football Nets/Goal Posts: Update on installation: PC needs to find someone to erect correctly.
- c) Village Hall:
  - i. Immersion: C/fwd as P. Stubbs absent. PS
  - ii. Village Hall Cleaner:
    - Contract and job description: C/fwd.
    - Windows: Village Hall cleaner to ask how much a local window cleaner would charge. WM
  - iii. Stock Check: Cllrs. D. Richardson and M. Smith to carry out. DR/MS
  - iv. Changing Rooms: Work is complete. PS
  - v. Electrical Checks/Safety Alarms: In hand. PS
  - vi. Disabled Toilet: Repaired.
- d) Allotments
  - i. Leaking Tap: C/fwd. PS
  - ii. Vacancies:
    - Allotments 3 & 4 have been re-let with Tenancy Agreement signed; 1<sup>st</sup> payment required April 2023.
    - Allotments 1 & 2; Clerk to email tenant to terminate Tenancy Agreement and to confirm if there is any outstanding payments. Allotments to be re-let if no response by Friday. Clerk
  - iii. Confirm when Tenancy Agreements should commence from when half way through the year:

### **RESOLVED:**

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The cut off time for a new tenant to pay rent for the year will be June as crops will be growing by this time, therefore any new tenant after June will not be expected to make their first payment until April the following year.

- e) Woodland: Cricket Bat Willows – Enquiry from supplier: Copy of email/letter to be emailed to the Chairman who will discuss with the Chairman of the Woodland Committee. Clerk/DR

## 6. COMMUNICATIONS

- 6.1: Merton Facebook Page: To establish if the Parish Council Facebook page can be linked to the Village Facebook page. Clerk

- a) To consider/approve matters for Publication:
- Parish Council vacancies.
  - Play Area Bins: Advisory: that it has been brought to the attention of the PC that the play area bin is being used to deposit poo bags; a) faeces should not be in the children's play area b) the amount of poo bags being deposited is making the bags too heavy to be emptied.

## 7. COMMUNITY:

### 7.1: Planning Applications:

- b) Application No.: 22/02447/F

Proposal: Removal of existing timber workshop and construction of new garage and annexe Building

Location: 2 Manor Farm Close, Merton, Oxfordshire, OX25 2NA

Parish(es): Merton - Comments by 14 September 2022.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- The Parish Council had no comments or objections.

- c) Application No.: 22/02821/F

Proposal: Reinstating opening between kitchen and store to create dining area with raised floor and conservation type roof lights to roof. New glazing to front, rear and side elevations. Replacement windows to first floor bedroom on side elevation

Location: West End Farm, West End Lane, Merton, Bicester, OX25 2NG - Parish(es): Merton

Comments by 7 October 2022.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- The Parish Council had no comments or objections.

- d) Application No.: 22/02819/LB

Proposal: Reinstating opening between kitchen and store to create dining area with raised floor and conservation type roof lights to roof. New glazing to front, rear and side elevations. Replacement windows to first floor bedroom on side elevation

Location: West End Farm, West End Lane, Merton, Bicester, OX25 2NG

Parish(es): Merton

Comments by 7 October 2022

#### **RESOLVED:**

- The Parish Council had no comments or objections.

### 7.2: Decision Notices: None.

### 7.3: Planning Matters:

- a) C.D.C. - Cherwell Local Plan Review 2040 - Invitation to Re-scheduled Workshop – 7pm – 8.30pm on 19 October 2022 - either in person at Bodicote House or virtually via Microsoft Teams: Noted.
- b) O.C.C. - UPDATE! Oxford transport proposals - We are also hosting another virtual event on 4 October at 5.30pm to explain the proposals in more detail: No attendance.
- c) O.C.C. - Revised Proposed Diversion Under the Highways Act 1980 s.119 - Merton Footpaths Nos. 2 & 3 (parts) at Merton Grounds Farm – Comments by 9 November: No comments.

### 7.4: Traffic Calming: Report from 'Working Group':

DR/TC

- a) 20mph Limit Application: See 3.1-b-i.
- b) Speedwatch: To enquire if Islip Parish Council would be willing to share its speed camera: C/fwd until decision is made by O.C.C. regarding the 20mph Limit application. Clerk

### 7.5: Bus Stop Light: Land Registry Search: PC to obtain quotes from a professional source to carry out land registry searches on the bus shelter and surrounding land; the woodland; playing field; village hall/car park and access route. MS/Clerk.

- a) Light/Solar array and LED fixture: C/fwd.
- b) Book Library: Complete and situated in the bus stop.
- c) Maintenance: No roof tiles need replacing now that the ivy has been removed. Painting C/fwd. MS

### 7.6: Dog Bins: To discuss issues: See 3.1-a-i.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- To obtain quotes for:
  - a) One sign for the play area gate.
  - b) Two sticker signs for the play area bins.
  - c) Arrange a meeting for all dog owners to discuss issues.

Clerk/DR

### 7.7 Overgrown Trees: Report of overgrown trees in The Butts. Clerk reported parishioners concerns to C.D.C., with no response to date; Clerk to follow up. Clerk.

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## 8: FINANCE:

### 8.1: Receipts: -

- a) Petty cash and Bookings:
  - August 2022 - £671.00: Banked.
  - September/Oct 2022: £377.50 to be banked.
- b) C.D.C. – Remittance Advice (Ref: 10026072) - £160.00 – Hire of Hall
- c) HMRC – VAT Reclaim - £2,161.07.
- d) C.D.C. – Remittance Advice – CS001987 – Precept payment final £8,240.00.

### 8.2: Account for Payment Prior to the Meeting:

- a) M. R. & J.S. Cross – Inv. No's: 109 - £222.00 (Grass cutting and strimming recreation ground – 5.7.2022) – 110 - £156.00 (Grass cutting woodland – 25.7.2022) – Total £378.00.
- b) Good Energy Ltd – Period 9.5.2022 to 1.8.2022 - £392.02 - Good Energy - Government support for non-domestic energy customers.
- c) C.D.C. – Inv. No: 20007006 - £100.00 – Uncontested Election costs.
- d) Playsafety Ltd – Inv. No: 65318 - £109.20 – RoSPA Play Area Inspection

### 8.3: Accounts for Payment:

#### RESOLVED:

- To approve the following accounts for payment (list presented to councillors prior to meeting): To be set up with Unity Trust Bank.

- a) Clerks Pay/Exp. July/August/Sept 2022 - £497.29.
- b) Grass Cutting: No grass cutting August.
- c) Zurich Municipal Insurance - Zurich Town and Parish policy is due for renewal – Inv. No: 517276023 - £934.60:
- Review of Policy Documents:

#### RESOLVED:

- Documents accepted and approved.
- d) Verve Creative Solutions – Inv. No: 2121 (Change to website to acknowledge the passing of HM Queen Elizabeth II - £30.00.
- e) Decoration of Village Hall Changing Rooms – approved reimbursement of £168.13 to P. Stubbs for materials only.
- f) Village Hall Cleaner – Inv. No's: 04 - £115.13 (Incl. Mats £2.63 – receipt presented) – Period 1.6.2022 – 31.7.2022 – 05 - £52.67 (Incl. Mats £11.42 – receipt presented) – Total £167.80.
- g) M. Day – Adopt a Site Agreement – April-June 2022 - £59.62 – Approved for payment – C.D.C. has confirmed that the payment will be processed.
- h) Castle Water – Inv. No: 7863102 - £186.36 – Period 1 Aug 2022 – 31 Jan 2023.
- i) Cherwell District Council – Inv. No: 20007961 - £190.48 – Emptying 3 dog bins @ £1.85 per bin plus 10% admin fee half yearly invoice.
- j) Contribution to MPCC:-

#### RESOLVED:

- To carry forward approval of Contribution to MPCC; awaiting request letter.

8.4: Good Energy Ltd – From the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022 the new standing charge will be 60.91 p/day; the new day rate 61.92 and the new night rate 53.63 – The estimated annual consumption is 7744.6 giving an estimated annual cost on new rates of £4827.82 all prices exclude VAT where applicable.

### 8.5: Quotes:

- a) Laptop: Dell Technologies have provided two quotes; one to include Microsoft 356 (this will also incur ongoing annual costs) and the other Office Home Business – Cost £1,071.05 and £987.50 incl. VAT; the Clerk was tasked with comparing this to a Microsoft Surface Laptop Go 2 for £519.00. Clerk to forward information regarding VAT reclaim for PC.  
Clerk/All
- b) Electrical Check and Safety Alarms: Outstanding works from report.  
PS/MS
- c) Access to Church Clock: Parish Council to be provided with more information to be able to consider.
- d) Scribe Accounts:

#### RESOLVED:

- That the PC did not approve the quote from Scribe Accounts.
- e) Grass Cutting-Woodland Meadow.

#### RESOLVED:

- To accept and approve the quote: to mow, rake and collect the grass cuttings at the meadow area then deposit the cuttings on to the edge of the woodland in the sum of £250.00 plus vat @ 20%.

Clerk

- f) Generic Emails:

#### RESOLVED:

To accept the quote of £10.00 for the provision of each councillors generic email address.

Clerk

### 8.6: Funding:

- a) Queen's Jubilee £3m fund to help English village Halls: No further information available.
- b) SPARK Funding: C/fwd.

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## 8.7: Spending under COMF Parishes

- i. Fund: Progress Form: Completed form submitted to C.D.C; awaiting response. TC

## 8.8: Training:

- a) Code of Conduct: See 2.6-a.

- b) PAT Testing: CFO on 31 October - £95.00 for non-members:

### RESOLVED:

- To approve spending if Cllr. P. Stubbs is able/willing to attend. Clerk

- c) Internal Controls – 20 October 2022.

### RESOLVED:

To approve attendance for Cllr. M. Smith – Cost £66.00 incl. VAT. Clerk/MS

## 8.9: Banking:

- a) Unity Trust Application:

- i. Signatories: Removal of A. Yearsley as a signatory completed.

- ii. Changes to Access to Bank Account: Changes completed and Cllr. R. Gurprashad now signed in.

- iii. Unity Trust Ltd - FSCS - local authority eligibility confirmation: Completed and returned as eligible.

## 8.10: Financial Reports and Bank Reconciliation: Were accepted and approved:

- a) Bank Reconciliation 1.7.2022 – 30.9.2022:- (Unity Trust St. No: 006/007)

Balance B/fwd £25,634.43

Add Total Receipts £ 2,861.07

Less Total Payments £ 3,554.88

Balance C/fwd £24,940.62

Bank Reconciliation 1.7.2022 – 30.9.2022:- (Unity Trust St. No: 008)

Balance B/fwd £25,634.43

Add Total Receipts £11,101.07

Less Total Payments £ 3,572.88

Balance C/fwd £33,162.62

- b) Budget Comparison:

- Payments: Everything in-line or under budget with the exception of the Clerk's overtime.

- Receipts: In-line with budget.

- c) Balance Sheet: Accepted:-

Debtors £758.04

Add Bank/Cash £33,162.62

Less Funds £24,042.27

Less Creditors £2,384.26

General Funds £7,494.13

- d) Verification by Internal Financial Control Cllr. M. Smith able to access bank statements now; verification c/fwd. MS

## 8.11: End of Year Accounts 31 March 2021/2022:

- a) Internal Auditor Report: Actions from report (including those carried over from 2020/21).

- i. C. Review of Internal Controls – Risk Assessment: Recommendations and actions: To action.

- ii. F: Petty Cash Controls: Ensure that all receipts are accounted for: *Consider closing the petty cash account and requesting all items of expenditure via invoice*: PC to look at alternative options. Clerk/RFO

- iii. G: Payroll Controls: To action: Clerk/RFO

- i. H: Asset Controls: *Establish the Deeds and Titles for the land and buildings owned and publish on the Asset Register*.. Compliance with Transparency Act 8) Details of Public Land and Building Assets: *Establish the details and include in the Asset Register*. In hand.

- iv. J: Accounting Statements: *While Income and Expenditure method is 'correct' it is unnecessary for a small Parish Council. Receipts and Payments would be far more appropriate*. Clerk/RFO to review. Clerk/RFO

- ii. Further Recommendations: Noted for action.

- *Following the completion of the Internal Audit, the Council should undertake a review of effectiveness as per Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. A blank form can be supplied. A review of effectiveness is carried out each year: This is actioned.*

- *Banking: Recommends that the Council reviews the bank mandate annually as part of its review of finances in April. Additionally, as the Council has electronic banking provision, an electronic payment procedure should be adopted as a matter of urgency. To action.* Clerk

- *Debit / Payment Card: The Council still holds petty cash. However, the Council should consider the provision of a debit card or charge card on the bank account in the Clerk/ RFO's name in order that items such as Office 365 or antivirus software can be bought in the Parish's name without the need to resort to the Clerk or another Councillor having to use their personal accounts. With the appropriate safeguards and procedures this would be acceptable: Add to next agenda.* Clerk

- *Provision of Equipment: I noted that my recommendation about purchasing the appropriate IT equipment is yet to be implemented. This should be rectified as a matter of urgency. In hand.*

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An IT budget and reserves should be considered for the future. To action.

Clerk/RFO

- **Staff Appraisal**

The Clerk is employed by the Council and the Council, therefore, should be mindful that it is, as a corporate body, an employer. I recommend that the Council form a staffing committee, of at least three members, which is able to perform an annual review of the Clerk's employment. Employment training provided by the County Association should be undertaken: To be actioned.

Clerk

- **HMRC:** As mentioned in last year's report, the Council, as an employer, is required to register with HMRC and to record all payments to its employees with HMRC – regardless of whether the salary is below the tax threshold. This has not been implemented. The HMRC advice note from 2011 was supplied last year and is, again, attached to this report.

It is imperative that this is implemented as a matter of urgency. I recommend that the Council engages a payroll company experienced at dealing with Parish Councils to ensure that the correct procedures are followed. OALC will be able to give details of their employment adviser.

Clerk

- **Home Working Allowance:** The Clerk is entitled to the Home Working Allowance, particularly as the Council does not incur the costs of a Parish Office. I recommend that the Council budgets to pay the Clerk for the full – HMRC agreed – £6 per week.

Clerk

- **Document Management:** In our discussions, I noted that the Clerk is in possession of many of the Parish Council Minute books. As these books are the only record of the meetings and should be kept in perpetuity, I strongly recommend that just the last five years or so are kept with the Clerk, with the rest being deposited with the County Archive for safety. A review of other documents, both paper and electronic, should also be undertaken following adoption of a Document Retention policy.

Clerk

- iii. **Councillor Email Accounts:** As part of GDPR, it is recommended that all Councillors should use email addresses provided for them by the Council: See 8.5-f.

8.12: End of Year Accounts 31 March 2022/2023:

- a) **Internal Auditor:**

- i. **Letter of Engagement:**

**RESOLVED:**

- To accept and approve the Letter of Engagement with J. Olds.

- ii. **Terms of Agreement:**

**RESOLVED:**

- To accept and approve the Terms of Agreement with J. Olds.

Clerk

8.13: External Auditor: To consider option to opt out of the SAAA central external auditor appointment arrangements.

**RESOLVED:**

- Not to opt out of the SAAA central external auditor as recommended by OALC.

8.14: Budget 2023/24: To commence process; PC to consider projects and proposed costings for the coming year. All

## 9. GENERAL

9.1: The Clerks Contract and Job Description: Review: Draft to be circulated and reviewed next meeting. All

9.2: Correspondence for Action: The lists of correspondence M.P.C. 315 (Aug 2022) and M.P.C.316 (Sept 2022) was considered prior to the meeting; all matters for decision added to the agenda.

- a) MPC315(10): South Central Probation UPW Consultation Survey.

- b) MPC315(19): OUH Annual Public Meeting – Thursday 22 September 2022 at 7pm.

- c) MPC315(37): EWR Co Bicester Town Local Representatives Group – register and fill in the meeting poll.

- d) MPC316(02): CFO - Community Engagement and Town and Parish Councils \_ tell us about your experiences in a short survey.

- e) MPC316(03): Kidlington NHPT – Thames Valley Police - The proposed forum meeting on the 14th September has had to be postponed due to an unforeseen event.

- f) MPC316(33): EWR Co Bicester Town Local Representatives Group – confirmation of date and invitation for the next meeting 27 October – 6pm-8pm Virtually.

9.3: Matters for Further Information or Discussion:

- a) **Matters for Further Information:**

- Damaged culvert along the Merton to Ambrosden road has been reported on 'Fix My Street'.

- b) **Matters for Further Discussion:**

- None.

10. NEXT MEETING: All meetings to be held in Merton village hall in-line with Government guidelines.

10.1: 14 November 2022 –7.30pm - Parish Council Meeting:

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There being no other business the Chairman closed the meeting at 22:10.

**Draft Minutes subject to confirmation: Approved 14 November 2022 – Minute Ref: M9/2022-4.1**

**Approved and Signed by the Presiding Chairman: D. Richardson**  
**Date 14 November 2022**