

THE PARISH COUNCIL OF MERTON M5/2022

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL HELD IN MERTON VILLAGE HALL
AT 19:30 ON 13 JUNE 2022

PRESENT: David Richardson (Chairman) DR
Martin Smith, R. Gurprashad, Paul Stubbs (Councillors) MS/ RG/PS

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

1. APOLOGIES: Accepted from County Cllr. Callum Miller and District Cllr. Angus Patrick.

2. PARISH COUNCIL:

2.1. Election of Vice-Chairman: No volunteers.

2.2. Vacancies: No applications.

2.3. Election: Parish Council Election May 2022:

a) DPI Registration: Reminder to Cllr. R. Gurprashad to submit to C.D.C.

2.4. To Receive Disclosable Pecuniary Interests: None.

2.5. Welcome Pack:

RESOLVED

• That draft was approved and ready for publication. MS

2.6. Merton Village Neighbourhood Plan:

a) Joint Neighbourhood Plan: Cllr. M. Smith to establish boundary definitions; footpaths and identify flood risks. MS

2.7. Platinum Jubilee Celebration: The event had been successful and off of the back of it a social group is to be set up. WM

2.8. Code of Conduct: PC to be aware that there is a new draft Code of Conduct to be circulated once published. All

2.9. Fraud Awareness/Internal Control Policy: Information previously circulated:

RESOLVED:

• To adopt the Policy as a working document. Clerk

• Check list to be completed by Cllr. M. Smith.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

3.1: The Chairman welcomed District Cllr. Gemma Coton to the meeting:

a) County Council: Reported on behalf of County Cllr. C. Miller as follows:

I. 20mph Applications: Officers are working through.

II. Flooding: Apologies no confirmation of date of meeting yet.

III. Islip Bridge: The one-way system and three way traffic light system to commence late June/beginning of July for eight weeks.

IV. Ploughley Road: Ambrosden continues to hold meetings.

V. Community Refugees: Support programme for families in place.

b) District Council:

I. Rail Freight Interchange: Reminder of the proposals for the interchange at Junction 10 on the M40; consultation running up to 4 July 2022.

II. Funding:

• Community Ownership: Launched by the Government.

III. Cherwell Volunteer Awards.

IV. Council Tax Rebate: Reminder to apply if not paying by Direct Debit.

4. MINUTES:

4.1: That the draft minutes of the Annual meeting of the Parishioners of Merton held on 9 May 2022 at 7.30pm were accepted and approved by the presiding Chairman Cllr. David Richardson.

4.2: That the draft minutes of the Annual Parish Council meeting held on 9 May 2022 at 8.05pm were accepted and approved to be signed by the Chairman Cllr. David Richardson.

5. ASSET MANAGEMENT:

5.1: Recreational Field/Play Area/Allotments:

a) Village Hall:

i. Air Source Heat Pump: The pump has been serviced and is reported to be running fine. The engineer does not deal with the water side of things but did point out that the immersion should be connected to heat the water in order to prevent legionnaire's disease. PS

ii. Recycling Site: M. Day has confirmed that she wishes to continue under the 'Adopt a Site Agreement'.

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- iii. Village Hall Cleaner:
 - Contract and job description: C/fwd.
- iv. Stock Check: Cllrs. D. Richardson and M. Smith to carry out.
- v. Changing Rooms:

RESOLVED:

- That Cllr. P. Stubbs carries out the work to remove the urinals and fit new lighting and two extractor fans; material costs only.
 - That Cllr. P. Stubbs removes loose plaster and re plasters; coats with stabilising solution in order that decorating can be carried out. PS
- b) Adopt a Site Agreement:
 - i. Update: See 5.1—a-ii. Following a report by a parishioner that there was glass on the car park surrounding the recycling bins/bottle banks; the clerk contacted M. Day who kindly cleared the glass.
 - ii. Confirmation of Responsibilities: As per the agreement with C.D.C. it was confirmed that this is part of the responsibility under the 'Adopt a Site Agreement': Clerk to advise M. Day. Clerk
 - c) Allotments
 - i. Tenancy Agreement: The Tenancy Agreement has been updated with the relevant regulations with regards to the use of Nitrates; and tenants notified along with the change of bank details. It was noted that Allotment No's: 7 & 8 have been paid twice, as confirmed on the bank statements from Unity Trust; one payment to be paid back; see 8.3-h.
 - ii. Concerns: Leaking tap to be repaired by Cllr. P. Stubbs.
 - d) Football Booking: The enquiring team are to continue to train for free where they are currently and will be looking to hold matches with facilities from September (they have been advised that hiring will be on a first come first served basis) it is proposed to invite them to a meeting nearer the time to discuss details. WM

6. COMMUNICATIONS

6.1: Merton Facebook Page:

- a) To consider/approve matters for Publication:
 - Parish Council vacancies.
 - Welcome Pack.
 - Islip Bridge.
 - C.D.C. Volunteer Application.
 - Information about claiming the Council Tax rebate.

7. COMMUNITY:

7.1: Planning Applications: None.

7.2: Decision Notices: Noted.

- a) Application No: 22/08855/F
Proposal: Single storey rear extension
Location: 3 Gulley Row, Merton, Bicester, OX25 2UH
Parish(es): Merton
Permission For Development Subject To Conditions
Date of Decision: 17th May 2022
- b) 6 The Butts, Merton, Bicester, OX25 2NN
Application No: 22/00473/F
Applicant: Mr & Mrs Bell
Proposal: Single storey rear extension
Recommended for approval

7.3: Planning Matters:

- a) O.C.C. - Notice of Definitive Map and Statement Legal Event Modification Order 2022: Noted that the legal document 20/3 referring to Merton is an historical change; the proposed changes to the footpath Merton PC has already objected to.
- b) C.D.C. - Green and Blue Infrastructure in Cherwell - Give us your thoughts on the priorities – before the 22nd June 2022: No comments recorded.
- c) O.C.C. - Invitation for Parish/Town Council representatives to a briefing on Oxford transport plans: No attendance.

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

DR/TC

- a) 20mph Limit Application: Waiting for feedback.

7.5: Bus Stop Light: Land Registry Search: Cllr. R. Gurprashad to follow up.

RG

- a) Light/Solar array and LED fixture: C/fwd.
- b) Book Library: A book shelf has been obtained; needs Perspex front before it can be sited. MS
- c) Roof Tiles/Painting: C/fwd.

8: FINANCE:

8.1: Receipts: -

- a) Petty cash and Bookings:

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- May 2022: £100.00 to be banked.
 - b) C.D.C. – Remittance Advice 30011954 - £160.00 – Hire of Hall Elections May 2022.
 - c) Allotment Rent 2022/23 - £32.00 + £32.00 – Plots 7 & 8: Confirmed received payment twice; one to be repaid.
 - d) VAT Reclaim submitted for 2021/22.
- 8.2: Account for Payment Prior to the Meeting: None.
- 8.3: Accounts for Payment:
- RESOLVED:**
- To approve the following accounts for payment: To be set up with Unity Trust Bank.
 - a) Clerks Pay/Exp. May 2022: - £172.85.
 - b) Clerks overtime 2021/22 – 73.77hrs overtime - £784.14 (Time is averaged out over the year).
 - c) Village Hall cleaner – 20.4.2022-18.5.2022 - £82.50 Cleaning - £8.88 Materials – Total £91.38.
 - d) Good Energy – Inv. No: I-0174958 - £630.46; noted renewal due 7 July 2022 with 28 days' notice required; Cllr. R. Gurprashad to review. GP
 - e) Jane Olds – Inv. No: JO180 - £190.00 – Internal Audit.
 - f) M.R. & J.S. Cross - Inv. No's: 93 - £222.00 (grass cutting recreational area 5.5.2022) – 94 - £156.00 (grass cutting Woodland 30.5.2022) – Total £378.00 – Repayment of Inv. No's: 83 - £156.00 (Grass cutting Woodland 20.4.2022) – 82 - £222.00 – (Grass cutting and strimming Recreation Ground – 20.4.2022) – Total £378.00 – Total payment £756.00.
 - g) Reimbursement Materials for changing rooms – P. Stubbs £170.51 (Inv. City Plumbing £38.16 – T.L.C. (Oxford) - £132.35 – Costs to be met by the Village Hall Fund.
 - h) M. Smith – Reimbursement £32.00 allotment rent.
- 8.4: Reissue of Payment/Returned Cheques:
- a) M. R. & J. S. Cross – Inv. No's: 83 - £156.00 (Grass cutting Woodland 20.4.2022) – 82 - £222.00 – (Grass cutting and strimming Recreation Ground – 20.4.2022) – Total £378.00 – Cheque No: 101644 had not been paid by Barclays due to the closure of the account and transfer of funds to Unity Trust.
- RESOLVED:**
- To reissue payment through Unity Trust Account see 8.3-f.
- 8.5: Membership:
- RESOLVED:**
- Not to pay a subscription to the membership of Wild Oxfordshire.
- 8.6: Quotes:
- a) Laptop: C/fwd. TC/DR
 - b) Electrical Check and Safety Alarms: Cllr. P. Stubbs is working through the report to try and resolve as many issues as possible before obtaining a quote for the completion of the works i.e., sockets in the changing rooms to be terminated. PS
 - c) Merton Woodland:
 - New Fence: No quotation received; c/fwd.
 - d) Football Posts: This was listed as an item on the agenda for consultation with the village at the Annual Meeting of the Parishioners of Merton. In order to encourage the continual use of the facilities on offer.
- RESOLVED:**
- To approve the purchase of dual purpose posts and nets; Clerk to place order.
 - Nets to be stored unless there is a match scheduled.
 - Hirers to pay a refundable deposit.
- e) Wheelie Bin Locks:
- RESOLVED:**
- To purchase two locks from Amazon £24.99 each as the bins are being misused.
- 8.7: Funding:
- a) Queen's Jubilee £3m fund to help English village Halls: Gemma Coton will forward information.
- 8.8: Spending under COMF Parishes
- i. Fund: Progress Form: Completed form to be submitted to C.D.C. TC
- 8.8: Training: None. TC/PS
- 8.9: Banking:
- a) Unity Trust Application: Application is complete and the account is set up for use; councillors have access through their passwords.
 - i. Signatories:
- RESOLVED:**
- To remove previous Cllr. Andrew Yearsley as a signature.
 - ii. Access to Bank Account: Ability to authorise payments (AP); ability to set up a payment (SUP); ability to view everything, especially statements and transactions (VE); master control – capability to add or remove users(MC) the following powers proposed to users; clerk to clarify if can have two MC users as there is to be one administrator on the account:
 - D. Richardson: AP, SUP, VE and MC
 - R. Gurprashad: AP, SUP and VE
 - P. Stubbs: AP, SUP and VE

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- M. Smith: VE (Audit checker)
 - RFO/Clerk: SUP, VE and MC. Clerk/RFO
- b) Barclays Bank Account:
- i. Closure update: Bank account confirmed closed 1 June 2022 and transfer of funds to Unity Trust.
 - ii. Allotment holders; C.D.C. and HMRC notified of change of bank details for BACS payments.
 - iii. Returned Cheques: See 8.4-a.
- 8.10: Financial Reports and Bank Reconciliation: Were accepted and approved:
- RESOLVED:**
- Cllr. M. Smith verified the reconciliation and reports:
- | | |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Balance B/fwd | £22,255.46. |
| Balance B/fwd | £21,272.19 |
| Add Total Receipts | £ 9,379.00 |
| Less Total Payments | £ 2,436.22 |
| Balance C/fwd | £28,214.97 |
- 8.11: End of Year Accounts 31 March 2021: Ongoing; some raised again in report for year End 31.March 2022; see 8.12-a.
- a) Action from Audit:
 - i. Review of Risk Assessment: MS/TC
 - ii. Payroll Controls: C/fwd. Clerk/RFO
 - iii. Asset Controls: Deed and Titles: C/fwd. Clerk/RFO
 - iv. Reserves: To provide detail: C/fwd.
 - v. Pension Regulator: C/fwd.
 - vi. County Archives: C/fwd. Clerk/All
- 8.12: End of Year Accounts 31 March 2022:
- a) Internal Auditor Report: Consider recommendations and as actions required: The report was read and the following noted for advisory or action:
 - Annual Return Section:
 - i. C. Review of Internal Controls – Risk Assessment: Recommendations and actions: *The Council should review and update it annually using the JPAG recommendations (2022 version - starting at 5.84) and publish it on the website. Attention should also be given to the recommendation at 5.92 relating to the assessment matrix.*
 - 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.*
 - iii. G: Payroll Controls: As mentioned last year: *The Council, as an employer, is required to register with HMRC and to record all payments to its employees with HMRC regardless of whether any tax is due (HMRC advice note from 2011 supplied). It is imperative that this is rectified as soon as possible.*
 - iv. H: Asset Controls: *Establish the Deeds and Titles for the land and buildings owned and publish on the Asset Register.*
 - v. 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.*
 - vi. L: Information published on website: *Ensure that the menu structure is re-installed.*
 - vii. M: Exercise of Public Rights: Published on website and noticeboard, but did not comply with the first ten working days of July requirement: *Ensure that the Electors' Rights dates are for 30 working days and cover the first ten working days of July. Note that the earliest date for 21/22 is 1 June due to the Jubilee Bank holiday.*
 - Transparency Compliance:
 - i. Compliance with Transparency Act 4) Explanation of difference between Box 7 & 8 if applicable: *the difference could be avoided if the change was made to Receipts and Payments.*
 - ii. Compliance with Transparency Act 8) Details of Public Land and Building Assets: *Establish the details and include in the Asset Register.*
 - iii. 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. Training.*
 - *The Clerk and the Councillors should be encouraged to take up the training offered by OALC and SLCC to increase their knowledge and expand the Clerk's professional development. Recommend including a regular agenda item and budget for training.*
 - *Financial Responsibility*
While the Clerk / RFO is responsible for the day-to-day running of the Parish, the Council should be reminded that, as a corporate body, it is the Council which is responsible for financial governance and this responsibility should not be taken lightly. Cllr. M. Smith has been appointed Councillor Responsible for Internal Financial Control.
It was noted that a Councillor, on occasion, had made purchases on behalf of the Council. The Council should be reminded that while the Clerk may have delegated authority (generally in conjunction with the Chairman / Vice Chairman) to approve emergency spending (for matters such as health and safety) between meetings, no Councillor may act to authorise any expenditure individually.
 - *Budget Setting*

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I should like to see more significance made of the budget and precept setting. The overall budget (both income and expenditure) totals should be minuted and published for consideration. For clarity, once the budget has been considered, the total amount of Precept should also be minuted. It then helps to clarify the amount requested is the amount deposited by the District Council and also makes sure that the outturn at the end of the year is in line with expectations.

- **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.
 - **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.
 - **Reserves**
I recommend that the Parish considers earmarked reserves and agrees to adopt a full Reserves Policy which should be reviewed annually. Guidance can be found in the latest edition of JPAG.
 - **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.
An IT budget and reserves should be considered for the future.*
 - **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.
 - **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.*
 - **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.
 - **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.
- iv. **Councillor Email Accounts**
As part of GDPR, it is recommended that all Councillors should use email addresses provided for them by the Council
- b) **Certification of Exemption:** To consider/approve whether or not the Parish Council meets the qualifying criteria for exemption.

RESOLVED that:

- During the financial year 2021/22 the higher of the authority's gross income £20,335 for the year or gross annual expenditure £13,028 for the year did not exceed £25,000.
 - The Parish Council was able to confirm the required statements and certified itself exempt.
- c) **The Annual Governance Statement:** Completion of Section 1. Items 1 to 9 were read by Chairman Cllr. D. Richardson:

RESOLVED:

- That the PC approved the following answers:-
 - 1. Yes.
 - 2. Yes.
 - 3. Yes.
 - 4. No: Explanation: *The Parish Council published the exercise of public rights on the website and noticeboard. Unfortunately, the dates were not compliant and did not cover the required 30 working days. It is to ensure that the dates are for 30 working days and covers the first 10 working days of July and the notice is posted on the noticeboard, published in the Finance section of the website, and that the dates are agreed and Minuted (See f) below) prior to publication.*
 - 5. Yes.
 - 6. Yes.
 - 7. Yes.
 - 8. Yes.

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- 9. N/A

d) The Accounting Statements: Completion of Section 2: Items 1 to 10 were read; figures checked against accounts.

RESOLVED:

- That Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2021/22 were accepted and approved; previously signed by TC and dated 9 May 2022.
- e) Following approval, the Chairman and Clerk of the meeting sign the Annual Governance Statement and the Chairman signs the Accounting Statements:
 - The Chairman and Clerk/RFO signed Statement 1; Clerk to enter the recorded minute reference.
 - The Chairman signed Statement 2; Clerk having previously signed; to enter the recorded minute reference.
- f) Exercise of Public Rights: RFO setting the Commencement of Exercise of Public Rights on 1 July 2022 to 8 August 2022; to be published on the notice board 30 June 2022.
- g) All required documents to be published on the website before the 1 July 2022.

8.13: Scribe Accounts: No update.

TC/DR

9. GENERAL

9.1: The Clerks Contract and Job Description: Review: C/fwd.

DR

9.2: Correspondence for Action: The lists of correspondence M.P.C. 312 (May 2022) was considered prior to the meeting; all matters for decision added to the agenda.

9.3: Matters for Further Information or Discussion:

- a) Matters for Further Information:
 - Village Hall: Noted that the ants have gone.
- b) Matters for Further Discussion:
 - Invoices – Reimbursement for ant traps to be presented for approval at next meeting.

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

10.1: 11 July 2022 –7.30pm - Parish Council Meeting:

There being no other business the Chairman closed the meeting at 21:27.

Draft Minutes subject to confirmation:

Approved and Signed by the Presiding Chairman

Date