

DUNCHURCH ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY MINUTES

Held in Dunchurch Community Library, School Street, Dunchurch on Wednesday 1st April 2019 at 7.00pm

PRESENT:

Cllr D Roberts [Chairman of meeting]

Cllr H Morshead

Cllr N Jones

Cllr H Roberts

Cllr N Sodhi

Clerk to the Parish Council:

Miss L Foster

OTHER:

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC:

27 members of the public

First Community Responders

The meeting started at 7.02pm.

1. TO ACCEPT APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Carolyn Watson Merrett

Ann Wright

Cllr Eccleson is running late but is en route Vice Chair Cllr D Roberts to chair the meeting.

2. TO CONFIRM MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 23rd MAY 2018

The Minutes from the Parish meeting held on 23rd May 2018 were proposed by Cllr Sodhi and seconded by Mr Morshead and were confirmed as a true record. We proceeded to confirm everyone's approval of the minutes. Everyone confirmed the minutes and the minutes were signed by Councillor Roberts (Chair).

3. PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2018/19

Delivered by Cllr D Roberts on behalf of Cllr Eccleson.

I would like to thank our Clerk, Lyndsay Foster and our Responsible Financial Officer, Tricia Knowles for their ongoing support throughout the year.

I should also like to thank my fellow Parish Councillors for their support in this voluntary role and their attendance at Parish Council meetings throughout the year.

Dunchurch Parish Council has a good track record of providing benefit in many ways through our decision making. Parish Councillors, like school governors, are trying to do their best for the community that they serve.

Sadly, I must report that two Parish Councillors felt forced to resign following abuse from some members of the local community. Finding people who will put their heads above the parapet as a volunteer for election to public life such as the Parish Council is not easy at the best of times. We have are required to follow the Nolan principles and expect nothing less than civility from the community. I don't want to witness abusive behaviour from members of our community when they disagree with a decision that has been democratically made by members of the Parish Councillor on their behalf and deemed to be in the best interests of the community at large. How can we attract new Parish Councillors if it means that as our elected or volunteer representatives, they are going to be either at risk of verbal or personal abuse just

because their democratic decision-making process did not result in an outcome that some of the community wanted? Why would anyone bother to put themselves forward for that?

The Parish Council remains under strength as does the Neighbourhood Plan team which is developing the plan for Dunchurch. Which gives us cause for concern.

The community has to understand that the Parish Council must follow a strict Code of Conduct and rigorous guidelines financially and ethically thus managing its assets strictly against an agreed budget.

In summary, our council members are very positive about the work they do. Decisions taken do not always satisfy every member of the community and we are not beyond question. However, we expect our members to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence or abuse towards members of Dunchurch Parish Council or anyone appointed by the Parish Council to work with, for or on behalf of the Parish Council is unacceptable and will be dealt with accordingly.

DUNCHURCH LIBRARY

The continued success of our library is totally dependent on a number of dedicated volunteers and I should like to formally thank them for their ongoing hard work. Numbers have fluctuated throughout the year and there is always a need for volunteers to come forward to undertake the regular or even the odd shift. Funding has been secured by the Parish Council to maintain the operation of the library for some years to come.

YOUTH SERVICE

This Parish Council remains dedicated to the success of the youth club and will continue to support it from mainly grant funding. Although numbers have been slow to recover following the demise of the Warwickshire Youth Service, we believe it is an important service to the village community. Rugby Play-Rangers, who we now contract with to operate the Youth Club are embarking on a programme to attract more young people to this facility.

CRIME, ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND SECURITY IN DUNCHURCH PARISH

Generally, levels of crime in our Parish remain relatively low, however there have been one or two quite frightening burglaries of late where there have been attempts to steal car keys following forced entry into a property. The Parish Council subscribe to the view that residents should not be complacent in terms of their security and welcome moves towards the establishment of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme in Dunchurch.

LOCAL COMMUNICATIONS

Parish Council Website.

Despite an upgrade the Parish Council web-site, dunchurchpc.org, has proven challenging this year. The Clerk is still battling with the developer and hosting company to make it easier to manage. We have made a decision to incorporate the Library website within the Parish Council site since it is a service offered by us. It will have its own page as will the youth service and any other service we offer now and in the future.

PARISHIONERS FORUM

The Parishioners forum has now been a part of the official agenda for the monthly Parish Council meetings for some years. There have been a few 'regulars' participating in this forum with the occasional delegation when a contentious issue arises.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

I would like to thank Robin Aird and his Committee for their work on the Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan is progressing with the assistance of Consultants but as always, Robin is still seeking volunteers to assist with the workload.

LOCAL PLAN

This Parish Council was opposed to and attended a number of meetings back in 2010/2011 when the Rugby Borough Core Strategy was first launched for public consultation we continued to oppose various issues within the Plan throughout the 'Examination' period. This Parish Council made public its concerns that there would be a high level of development around Dunchurch with the resultant increase in traffic

and pollution in the village. We still subscribe to that view and continue to challenge both Rugby Borough Council and Warwickshire County Council on their plans for development around our village. The Local Plan has been through its examination stage and in general was found to be legal and sound. Rugby Borough Council have made amendments and modifications in line with the Government Inspectors recommendations.

We have challenged development in Thurlaston for the DB Symmetry logistic site. Planning for this site has reached a standstill whilst Warwickshire highways examine access to/from the site and the impact of traffic through Dunchurch. We would like to think that the Parish Council has influenced this action. Traffic and pollution are our main concerns as a result of major development in the region as is erosion of the 'village life' to which we all subscribe. This Council asserts ownership of a few parcels of land considered as 'village green'. The most important of these being the land upon which the Lord John Scott memorial sits since this is where the developers of the Ashlawn Road estate plan to modify the Dun Cow traffic junction to cope with increased traffic volumes. This will entail reducing the land at this point and possibly re-siting the statue. The Parish Council will continue to legally resist any attempt to undertake such work. However, Warwickshire County Council may resort to a compulsory purchase of the land which again will be resisted. The latest feedback from WCC is that work on this junction is due to commence 'any time after April'. It is also our understanding that plans will include modification to the junction as far back as the green area beyond the Dun Cow entrance. We await detailed plans and will seek to challenge such plans and delay these beyond July if possible, to avoid the centre of the village looking like a building site during 'Rugby in Bloom'.

Our desire is that the plans to build a 'temporary relief road' from Rugby Road to Coventry Road will happen in advance of any major developments. We understand that WCC are seeking Central Government funding to undertake such a project.

VILLAGE GATEWAY SIGNS

All of the signage to the village entrance and exits is to be replaced at a cost to the Parish Council. We have had an extended period of negotiation fraught with difficulties with Warwickshire Highways to get these signs approved. The whole process has taken 2 years to be agreed. I am pleased to report that work will start imminently. The works order has been placed on the Contractor by WCC Highways and the Parish Council is being kept 'in the loop'.

WAR MEMORIAL

The Parish Council secured funding to renovate our War Memorial in time for it to be rededicated in celebration of the end of the Great War. Plans were subject to approval by the War Memorials Trust. I would like to thank Cllr Henry Morshead for his diligence during this process and for his providing drawings etc for scrutiny by the Trust during the project.

The Parish Council has also secured "Public Realm" funding to completely renovate the thatched bus shelter back to its original state. Any additional cost above that secured will be made up by the Parish Council.

LOCAL AUTHORITY DIALOGUE

We are fortunate in having the two Cllrs Roberts on our Parish Council. Liaison with, and access to, local council officials is a regular part of the Parish Council's activities'.

Parishioners should be aware that if RBC needed to take responsibility for the PC it would initially put in borough councillors to make it quorate, then hold an election and as a last resort attempt to merge with another parish council. RBC will not immediately take control of our finances.

PARISH AMENITIES

Playgrounds

The play facilities are regularly inspected, and faults and vandalism are rectified expeditiously.

Village Benches

The Parish Council have successfully lobbied RBC to repair benches owned by them in the village and we have appointed our own contractor to repair the benches which belong to the Parish Council. This work will be done during May.

Village Handyman

Matthew Lee continues to provide us with excellent service as Village Handyman and we thank him for his efforts during another year. Matthew also provides us with updates as to the general condition of play equipment and is often seen picking up litter in the village.

VOLUNTEER GROUPS

Dunchurch is a busy village and traffic flows are high. The Parish Council supports positive action in and around the village and welcomes initiatives in that respect. However, we are also concerned with the safety of not only those individuals undertaking improvement works but must also be mindful of the safety of other individuals within the vicinity of such works. It is therefore imperative that such volunteer groups carry out safety audits as a matter of routine to protect themselves, other pedestrians and motorists alike.

Some recent publications from Friends of Dunchurch distributed around the village or on a website contained distorted facts, mis-information and complete fabrication regarding the activities of the Parish Council. Despite a challenge from the Parish Council the editor of the publication concerned refused to acknowledge that the content was untrue and unfounded and stood by it 'Editorial Integrity'.

It is clear that the Secretary of FODS has difficulty understanding the limitations of the duties of the Parish Council despite these having been explained. We understood that 'additional grass cutting, litter picking, flower planting etc was why FODS was formed' yet we are criticised for not undertaking this work.

This is a rather worrying development since rather than working with the Parish Council some members of FODS seek to undermine work done by us without wanting to understand it. The Parish Council will publicly expose any distortion of the facts in FODS Newsletters in the future.

PERSONAL SUMMARY

Whilst I have no desire to labour the point about abusive behaviour towards Parish Councillors and our Parish Officers. However, this year has seen an increased and totally unacceptable level of abusive behaviour towards our Clerk and others from a small outspoken minority in the village.

Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. Violence also includes behaviour or language (whether oral or written, including electronic) that may cause us or anyone working with/for us to feel afraid, threatened or abused. This aggressive or abusive behaviours include, threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, personal written (including electronic) or texted abuse, derogatory remarks and Rudeness. In one instance involving our Clerk and a member of the community it was necessary to involve the police. The Clerk magnanimously decided to take no legal action but was issued with a personal alarm by the police at that time.

It is very easy to sit outside the Parish Council and criticise its actions. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined. In fact, we accept that being persistent can be a positive advantage when pursuing an issue. However, I would remind you that we have a legal 'duty of care' to members of the Parish Council. With the exception of the Clerk and RFO our Councillors are unpaid volunteers and give of their time regularly and freely to this village and abusive behaviour towards them will not be tolerated.

Thank you.

4. REPORTS FROM OTHER BODIES

Community First Responders

The group will cover the Leam Valley area and will be run by volunteers. There is currently a gap in the service that covers Dunchurch. The group is trained by West Midlands Ambulance service. Support from the community is required in order to promote the scheme and fundraise for equipment needed.

Training courses could be run in the local area to show how defibrillators are used. The Cllrs considered that the library building could be used. All Cllrs would like to carry this item forward for discussion at a Parish Council Meeting. This may include training with young people at our youth club. The Parish Council could help to promote the First Responders.

Neighbourhood Plan Committee (NP)

The very detailed questionnaire is complete. Assistance in its compilation has been provided by a specific group at Stratford upon Avon DC headed by Simon Purfield. The group has extensive experience in the NDP field having been actively involved with many parishes within and outside Warwickshire.

The questionnaire is extensive and includes a section for response by local businesses even if the owner is not a resident in the parish. A housing needs survey is also included.

The questionnaire has been loaded into SNAP software in advance of its use for the on-line edition of the survey. Quotations have been provided for the production of hard copy questionnaires and for the processing and evaluation of the data to, inform the final NDP report.

On the basis of these quotations grant application is underway but it was not possible for it to be submitted until today's date at the earliest.

As soon as the PC hears the anticipated acceptance of the grant application a date for the survey to be distributed will be chosen- hopefully it will be in early May.

The number of dwellings in the Parish is now in excess of 1,600 and everyone should be encouraged to respond to ensure the assured validity of the collected data.

Newcombe and Spier Alms-houses Charity

The charity was founded in 1690 based upon the legacies of Spier and Newcombe and six alms-houses were built. The charity has run continuously since then for the benefit of Dunchurch and Thurlaston residents and Dunchurch and Thurlaston Parish Councils are able to propose trustees. The houses were largely rebuilt in 1817 during the reign of George III and extensive bathroom and kitchen additions were made in the 1950s. As with old properties and buildings with listed status, there is a continuous requirement to repair and refurbish and the trustees arrange for all the work to be carried out. Guidance on what might be required is taken from a Quinquennial surveyor's inspection report, which is a mandatory requirement for alms-houses, and from suggestions from residents and the trustees themselves. The aim is to make the houses as habitable and comfortable as possible and meet the expectations of the present day. All properties are currently occupied.

During the 2018 financial year (calendar), further work was undertaken, particularly damp proofing work on No3 and a bathroom renovation at No2. New storage heaters were supplied in two of the properties and general decoration and maintenance was applied in other houses.

Administration of the requirements of the charity and the keeping of its accounts are carried out by a clerk who is paid an honorarium in respect of the time spent on these tasks. Income is from the residents' "maintenance contributions" and the charity's reserves. The accounts show a deficit for the third successive year due to the extensive renovations that have been made during this period, but the deficits have been compensated for by increases in the charity's long-term investments. Overall the Charity's funds remain in good and healthy order.

During the year application was made to the Charity Commissioners to increase the possible number of trustees by two- there are currently five trustees. This was to facilitate easier succession planning as the trustees become older. The charity has already had one suitable applicant but would be grateful to hear from any other community minded people who believe that they might be able to usefully contribute their time.

Friends of Dunchurch

Friends of Dunchurch would like to see lighting columns painted within Dunchurch to coincide with Dunchurch in Bloom. The Council confirmed that the lighting columns require a structural survey and painting will not be considered until after this takes place.

Friends of Dunchurch would also like the listed bus shelter repainted, the Parish Council stated that any works would require listed building consent. The Parish Council have secured funding to renovate the bus shelter. The bus shelter was not listed in its original state.

Friends of Dunchurch would like to see the design of the village gateway signs. The Clerk will upload this to the website, these have been available at previous Parish Council meetings.

Friends of Dunchurch have created a magazine, e-newsletter, Facebook page, litter picking, and grass cutting groups.

5. OTHER MATTERS RAISED BY AN ELECTOR OF THE PARISH

Concerns were raised about promotion of the work the Parish Council does and how meetings are advertised. The meetings are advertised in the Post Office, the Noticeboard, the Library and on the website. One resident would like social media to be used more.

Concerns regarding the benches were raised; all benches will be refurbished in May.

The appearance of The Heath is a concern for residents. The Parish Council to follow up how many cuts the Heath will receive each year due to conflicting information.

One resident committed to helping deliver questionnaires to the village if required.

There is concern around the condition of the play equipment at Arkwright Field. The inspections are carried out daily and a yearly inspection is carried out by Wicksteed and report provided.

There is a concern surrounding bus services to Dunchurch. The 580 service has been retained and is subsidised by Warwickshire County Council. Dunchurch Parish Council will be assisting to promote dial a ride schemes where possible.

Mr Waller proposed a motion that a draft version of the minutes be placed online within a month, Sseconded bt Mrs Kember agreed by all.

The meeting ended 8.35pm

Signed:

Chairman

Date: