

MINUTES of the Islip Annual Parish Meeting, held in Islip Village Hall on Tuesday, 8th April 2008.

Present: Mr M Coleman, Mrs E Henebery, Mr K Milner, Dr J Sargent, Mrs J Stephenson, Mr R Venables, Mr M Wilkinson (Clerk); Mr T Hallchurch (CDC)

Apologies: none

Welcome: The Chairman welcomed Mr T Hallchurch and villagers, and noted that his report would be published in the Parish Newsletter. He explained the structure of the meeting, and asked the Clerk to read a summary of the minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held in Islip Village Hall **10th April 2007**.

Minutes: The minutes of the meeting of **10th April 2007** were approved and signed.

Chairman's Report: The Chairman noted that the Council's business returned to perennial issues, but that 2007 had brought new beginnings. The Chairman continued as follows:

In April last year I concluded my Chairman's report with a warning that the integrity of Islip was under threat from developers who wish to exploit the Green Belt surrounding the village by seeking to build upon it. Within weeks that threat became a reality when the Church Commissioners, who own most of our open land, applied to develop three large fields (IS1, IS2 and IS3) west and north east of the village. This outraged many residents who wrote objecting to the proposal. Although Cherwell District Council, our planning authority, will not announce whether it will permit development until later this year our objections remain and the Parish Council wishes to thank all who supported us in this way.

Regrettably, the threat intensifies. Two months ago the Church Commissioners proposed that another large area (IS4) north of the houses in Kidlington road should also be used to build an estate of 100 – 150 dwellings. Understandably, at a meeting of residents, the proposal was condemned. However, it was recognised that a limited number of low-cost houses and sheltered accommodation would be welcome. To this end the Parish Council has objected to the overall proposal but has sought a meeting with the planning officers to explore the possibility of using a "brown field" site or infilling to accommodate the latter.

The threat to our future way of life is compounded still further by the proposal to build an eco-town centred on Weston on the Green. The 671 hectare site would include Weston airfield to the north, extend south of the A34 into Charlton-on-Otmoor parish and fill the area between the B430 and the M40. Many of us thought this proposal too outrageous to be taken seriously but central government has included it in the 15 short listed sites from which 10 will be chosen for development. Were it to become a reality the new town would be the size of Bicester, cause unimaginable traffic congestion through Islip and destroy forever what tranquillity remains in the area. The Parish Council will campaign with others to prevent this replacement of countryside with urban sprawl and we will look to every resident for support.

Turning to more pleasant aspects of this review I wish once more to thank the Councillors for the diligent way they have conducted Council business along with our clerk, Michael Wilkinson who, among other responsibilities, keeps us apprised on legal aspects of our work and ensures that our finances are well managed. Yet again we have kept unchanged the village precept while the costs of other authorities which are included in the council tax have moved steadily upwards.

Praise too for our band of volunteers. For Janet and Brian Nash for their daily updating of our 3 notice boards. For our litter pickers who might one day become redundant, but regrettably not yet. For our Neighbourhood Watch team. For Bridget Tuffrey for supervising the parish allotments. For the team who prepared our entry for the District Village of the Year Competition in which they won two cash prizes - sufficient to purchase a bench outside the Red Lion and 4,000 daffodil bulbs which were planted by another team of volunteers at the entrances to the village. For the continued high standard of front garden maintenance the annual prize for which was won by Mrs Beedell. And for our team of archivists who now have a safe store for their collection and are engaged in researching the history of houses and their occupants throughout the village. Councillors Johanna Stephenson and Mike Coleman have revised the Islip Directory and Mike is to be congratulated in maintaining the Islip website (<http://www.cherwell-local.org.uk/site/islip/>) in a professional manner – best stored on a computer’s list of Favourites or Bookmarks.

The Playing Field is now protected in perpetuity as an open space. Although no progress has been made towards installing one or more tennis courts Councillor Richard Venables has arranged promises of grants sufficient for a makeover of the Children’s Playground. We expect this work to be completed this year.

The Parish Council maintains a close relationship with the Village Hall committee. At last the Parish Room has been completed with financial help from the Council through the supply of furniture and floor covering with further covering on the stage.

The Council also helped with the installation of stage curtains through an interest-free loan. Repayments are being made through income from musical events in the Hall. We are already indebted to Dr Julie Tranter for staging music from Gilbert & Sullivan operettas and to Simon Taylor for an evening of French jazz.

Another addition to the Village Hall facilities is the installation of a powerful audiovisual system. This has been donated to the Hall by the Council with support from Dr South’s Charity. A series of free monthly film shows on the 12’ screen has been arranged by Councillor Eileen Henebery. New, well-upholstered chairs have made events of this kind even more enjoyable.

Once more thanks are due to the volunteers who serve daily in the Village Shop providing a service for young and old alike who find it difficult or inconvenient to travel out of the village.

Much has been achieved in Islip over the past year but as a community there is still more we can do.

Do we have to tolerate over-weight lorries cutting through the village?

Do we have to tolerate dog mess on our paths and playing Field?

Do we have to tolerate litter on our streets?

Do we have to park on pavements or squash out our green verges?

Do we have to display our wheelie bins at times other than on pick-up days?

Care for our village and thought for others would solve these problems. Lets try to make Islip an even better place of which we can be proud.

Financial Report by the Clerk

The Clerk reported as follows:

A formal report is necessarily out-of-date, as it concerns the previous year – in this case that ended 31.3.07. This is because the current year to 31.3.08 has only just ended, and the accounts have been presented in draft form only to the Parish Council. Figures quoted for the year to 31.3.08 are therefore subject to acceptance and audit. The Parish Council, is, of course, presented with financial reports as appropriate. The accounts proper are audited by an outside firm as legally required, and they are published (on the village notice board) each year. The accounts are open (by appointment) to examination at any time by villagers.

In brief, the Council opened '06-7 with a balance of £24K, and ended the year with a balance of £32K. In '07-8, the opening balance of £32K was maintained at £32K at 31.3.08. The village element of the Council Tax set for '07-8 was unchanged for five years – and will be unchanged for '08-9. The balance in hand consists partly of a general reserve, which any organisation must maintain to meet unforeseen contingencies. Part of the reserve is also set aside to meet the requirements of the burial ground; the fitting out of the parish Room in the Village Hall; potentially a major contribution to the tennis courts and the refurbishment and re-equipment of the playground.

Otherwise, funds are held against potential applications for grant by village organisations. The Parish Council makes a regular grant to the Village Hall of about £1K, and has this year contributed to the provision of an audio system for the Village Hall at some £5K, and to chairs for the Parish Room at £700. A loan to the Village Hall for the new curtains £6K will have been repaid by the year-end.

The Council considers its role as *enabling*, so rather than devise and pursue its own projects, it welcomes approaches from villagers with proposals to enhance village life. Applications for funds will be judged on their merits.

Apart from the precept (or *rates*), the Council gets a recurrent grant for grass cutting and rent for the Swan carpark, each amounting to more than £1,000 a year. Major non-recurrent expenditure arising in '07-8 not previously mentioned was:

- the final £4K to the Environment agency towards the creation of the Millennium Bridge
- £2K for Church Commissioners' surveyor's fees relating to the Millennium Walk

- some £750 for three new dogbins.

The benches were of course paid for from prizes for what was the Best-Kept Village.

Large recurrent costs are the grass cutting, hedge cutting, and other maintenance works (just over £4,000 in '07-8), and the Clerk's salary at a little over £2,000. T

Total income and expenditure in '06-7 were £22K and £13K, whereas for '07-8 income is £26K [including loan repayments], and expenditure £26K [including loans].

A statement of income and expenditure and a balance sheet for the two years will be posted with the minutes of the meeting on the village notice board. Please let the Clerk know if you would like a copy of these.

There were no questions on the accounts.

Open Forum:

Mr Stephenson said that he would like to raise some matters of principle related to finance. He wondered at the relationship between the PC and the Village Hall, which had been the beneficiary of PC funds provided from the precept, and asked whether the PC considered that funding tennis courts from the precept is a good idea. Mr Stephenson said that the PC should consider reducing the precept rather than providing specialist provision from the rates.

The Chairman explained that the Chairman of the PC is *ex officio* Chair of the Village Hall Trustees; when acting as Chair of the VH Committee, the Chair must set aside his interest in the PC; when Chairman of the PC, he must set aside his interest as Chair of the VH Trustees. The PC also nominates a member of the VH Committee, currently Mr Milner.

The Chairman explained that subsequent to the recent refurbishment of the Village Hall, the VH had been short of cash; the PC had decided to make this year an interest-free loan for the purchase of the stage curtains this loan has now virtually been repaid. The PC had agreed to free film-shows provided by CDC, but the limited hardware provided by CDC had led the PC to provide the current equipment. The equipment had been given to the Village Hall Committee so that the VH as owner would be responsible for the insurance and maintenance of the equipment. The PC has not so far committed any funds to the capital project, but has provided funds to allow the feasibility of the proposal to be tested.

Any request to the PC for funds is decided on its merits, and the Council must take responsibility for its decisions

Mr Delafield raised the problem of the erosion of verges in Mill Street. Mrs Henebery reported that the verge in Mill Lane north of the crossing is badly damaged. The PC is to raise the problem with OCC to try to arrive at a coherent policy. The Chairman noted that the posts opposite the Old Post Office and in Church Lane had been a success; the posts outside the Village Hall had not been put in properly, and this is being pursued.

Closure of meeting: The meeting then closed to allow the Parish Council meeting to take place.