

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF FOWLMERE PARISH COUNCIL
HELD AT ST MARY'S CHURCH SOUTH ROOM ON TUESDAY 5th May 2009, AT 7:30 PM**

PRESENT: Councillor M Bates – Chairman, Councillors P Cook, A Eades, P Flynn, D Roberts and D Woods,
Councillor T Stone – Cambridge County Council, Mr R Elcock – Fowlmere School
Mrs J Wright – Parish Council Clerk

IN ATTENDANCE: Four residents of Fowlmere Village

Cllr Bates asked all members present to stand for one minute of silence in respect of a former member of the council, Mrs Dallas Roberts, who has passed away.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr W Kohler and Simon Brooks, Chair of Governors at Fowlmere School.

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF 6th May 2008

The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman. It was noted that Cllr Eades had been in attendance at the 2008 meeting although this had not been recorded in the minutes.

3. REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL – Cllr Bates

Welcome to County Councillor Tim Stone, Parishioners and fellow Parish Councillors. Since the last Annual Parish Meeting there have been changes which, combined, mean that the Council remains below strength. Those changes have meant that whilst the Council was almost up to strength, there remained a vacancy to be filled. The changes have been the retirement of long serving Councillor Philip Mullock due to health reasons and more lately, the resignation of the Vice-chairman Councillor Barrie Hawkins due to work and study commitments. The Council expresses grateful thanks to both gentlemen for their service to our community.

I return to the recruitment theme – we do need to co-opt to bring the council up to strength – there are no doubt many able people in the parish however inevitably people are fully occupied with career and family commitments and we do need two persons prepared to go “the extra mile” and volunteer for service. Should more persons put themselves forward for co-option than there are vacant seats there would have to be a bi-election. The Council consists of nine seats and although the formal process of seeking to co-opt to fill the vacant seats has been followed we have not managed to reach the desired full complement.

The Council being below strength had and has consequences, in that, as has previously been reported, the Council applied for Quality Parish Council status, through the efforts of Council Clerk and Proper Officer Mrs Julie Fletcher, however, although meeting all other conditions the fact of not having a fully elected membership, meant that the status being sought could not be awarded. It is hoped that this can be rectified as soon as possible.

Cassander Close Development

There have been significant difficulties with the planned progress towards the completion of this development, particularly with the liquidation of the developers company and with that the inherent problems for the residents, including the maintenance of the public open space which was to have been maintained with funding from the developers which has not been forthcoming.

The Village Hall

The Village Hall improvement project referred to at last year's meeting was taken forward to successful completion with funding from South Cambs District Council, Lottery funding from Awards for All, the Parish Council and their own resources and facilities are much improved as a consequence.

Congratulations are due to past chairman Peter Lake and his team for this work. The Recreation Ground and Village Hall is a major community asset and a small committee works tirelessly to maintain the facility for the benefit of all in the parish. Within an existing pattern of community activities there remains space for more community groups to meet and the committee would welcome new enquiries and additional users. The security cameras protecting the village hall as our major community asset remain operational.

Fowlmere Cemetery

With the installation of the electricity supply, the Chapel is available for non-religious gatherings concerned with burials and it is anticipated will in due course will be used for other Parish Council purposes.

A crack in the rear wall is a cause for concern and a recommended remedial course of action will be followed in the near future. Other maintenance work is being followed up and thanks are recorded to Councillor Dorothy Woods for her work with these matters. With the path from the road to the Chapel re-surfaced and the trees lining the path pollarded, the cemetery remains a quiet and peaceful site for visits by families whose loved ones are buried within.

In addition to the grass cutting dealt with by Parish Council contractors, some councillors continue with the twice yearly clean up of the cemetery and grateful thanks to those concerned for carrying out much needed work. Any volunteers to assist with this work would be most welcome. A recurring issue at the cemetery is that many of the floral tributes to deceased persons contain metal and plastic, which causes some difficulty with their eventual disposal and the Parish Council would very much appreciate such material being taken away by families caring for their family grave/graves. New refuse collection arrangements have been initiated and thanks are recorded to Mrs Pat Willis who has been most helpful with this matter.

Play Equipment

As a safety measure, the Parish Council has play equipment installed at both the Butts and the Village Hall annually inspected by ROSPA – the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and acts upon recommendations made for any remedial work required. Councillor Pat Flynn leads on such issues and our thanks are due to Mrs Flynn in being instrumental in maintaining the equipment in a safe condition for the enjoyment of village children and families.

Fire Engine Shed

Located in the south eastern corner of the Butts the shed was given a much needed face lift last year and more recently there has been an unfortunate instance of vandalism with the lock being forced off the door/frame. The shed is used for some storage of such as football goal netting.

Road Safety Considerations

Concerns continued to be raised by parishioners about road safety generally and in the High Street, Long Lane and Fowlmere Mill Road in particular. Speed restriction measures now in place on occasion have limited effect, although the period of children going to and from school does have additional electronic signs restricting speeds to 20 mph.

A serious concern remains on the sharp bend at the boundary between Fowlmere and Melbourn parishes at Fowlmere Mill Road where there continue to be 'near misses'. In recent months the Parish Council and County Council Highways Department continue to pursue what improvements to visibility at this location may be possible.

The Parish Council also attempts to restrict the passage of heavy lorry traffic through the village and this is proving a difficult process, it is one the Council intends to persevere with. There are traffic restrictions in Melbourn and it is the local view that the conditions in Fowlmere warrant such action. This is a very long and tortuous process and remains a live issue for us.

Providing Low Cost/Affordable Housing

This is a further aspiration for the Parish Council and again has been a difficult course to pursue. In seeking to meet the needs of local people shown up in the Housing Needs Survey conducted on our behalf through South Cambridgeshire District Council, the Parish Council has been seeking to find suitable land on which to see a suitable development take place.

Local landowners, having previously withdrawn their land from negotiations to this end, have more recently approached the Parish Council to offer to make land available once more. In association with a preferred Housing Association partner/SCDC the Council is hoping to see a development on land in the Triangle area between Cambridge Road and Thriplow Road taken forward. This will of course be subject to the normal planning process, as well as necessary government funding.

Round Moat

The Parish Council previously worked with the County Council Archaeology Department and the District Council Ecology Officer, utilising the services of BC Group Trust a charitable ecology organisation to undertake conservation work at the site. There is the need for this to be an on-going project and it is hoped that an application for funding to extend the work will be made in the near future.

As a result of another matter concerning the perimeter of the Round Moat, The Council has been in discussions with English Heritage and received a presentation from their Area Field Officer at a recent meeting. It is anticipated that, following difficulties with pursuing Council aims for the Round Moat, through English Heritage the hope of finding external funding will be achieved and further conservation work carried out. A further meeting has been scheduled with County Council, English Heritage and other bodies in the coming days to advance this process. Volunteers to help with such work are essential and always welcome.

Trees / Hedges / Grass Cutting

Attention has been paid to this work during the year with Councillor Bill Kohler and Councillor Dorothy Woods taking the lead. New trees previously planted are being maintained in their early growth with irrigation etc.

Thanks are due to both councillors for their work in this area as well as to local contractors involved. Also to council contractors for their work.

Senior Link

Councillor Woods instigated and leads the Senior Link work in association with Help the Aged – the Parish Council provides support to the scheme which gives peace of mind and security to a number of older residents and again thanks are due to Councillor Woods for this work.

Takdir – Formerly The Swan House Inn

The Parish Council maintains a watching brief about the operation of the business and this use will be reviewed, also by SCDC. Changes required of the owner have been made. The business has closed and re-opened in recent months with improved and more discreet signage installed. The proprietor Mr Rahman is to be congratulated on maintaining the premises to a condition more consistent with the street scene in the High Street.

Other Matters

Many villagers may be aware of the voluntary work undertaken by community minded people in Fowlmere and I record appreciation to Mr Pat Rowley (The Village Womble) and to Mr John Stamford who keeps a road bend suitably salted in frosts as well as tidying up his local area. Also, the floral tributes at the War Memorial are maintained by the Deans Family and similarly grateful thanks are made to Mrs Christine Deans for that work. This support for their community is much appreciated by all. Regrettably, one of the stone planters was damaged last year by a road vehicle and efforts to replace this have not yet succeeded although remain in hand. The problem is providing a matching replacement.

The Parish Council operates two sub committees:-

* Finance and General Purposes, which meets quarterly and

* Planning, which meets much more regularly in order to respond to requests by South Cambs District Council for the local view about all planning applications.

My thanks to all of my fellow Councillors for their work and support in Council and in Committees during the past year particularly the respective sub committee Chairmen, Councillors Deb Roberts and Dorothy Woods for strong leadership. Both Chairmen will report on their work shortly.

Similarly thanks for her work are due to the Parish Council Clerk and Proper Officer Mrs Julie Fletcher without whom, business would be so much more difficult to deal with. I report with regret the resignation of Mrs Fletcher from her position and with pleasure the appointment of her replacement Mrs Jackie Wright, one of two excellent candidates. Grateful thanks are extended to Mrs Fletcher for her work as well as good wishes for a more restful lifestyle in the future.

Present Parish Councillors are as follows:

Vice Chairman : vacant

Chairman of Finance and General Purposes: Councillor Dorothy Woods

Chairman of Planning Committee: Councillor Deborah Roberts (also District Councillor)

Vice Chairman of Planning: Councillor Pat Flynn

Councillor Bill Kohler

Councillor Peggy Cook

Councillor Anthony Eades and

Councillor Michael Bates - Chairman

We urgently need at least two volunteers who would be willing to be co-opted to fill the vacancies which exist. The commitment is to attend a monthly meeting and to support the work of the council in other ways through sub-committee work and otherwise.

Please remember also that this meeting is an opportunity to raise issues of concern with Parish Councillors - please take the opportunity.

Also the Parish Council will hold its **Annual Meeting on Tuesday 19th May at The URC Chapel School Room, Chapel Lane at 7-30 pm** at which all residents would be most welcome. At this meeting the Council elects its Officers for the coming year.

Thank you for attending this evening and we hope to see more of you at Parish Council meetings – held the third Tuesday of each month Except August when no meeting is held – Meeting Agendas are posted on the two notice boards – outside the Swan in the High Street and outside the Post Office.

4. COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT – Cllr T Stone

Potholes

Many people think that the County is about roads. Especially potholes. The booklet you had through your door earlier this year shows that ten times as much money is spent on Adult Social Services and Children and Young People than is spent on maintaining our roads. So the fortunate people who are not in need of social

services receive a very small part of the County's total budget in direct benefit. But the amount spent on vulnerable people goes a long way to making South Cambridgeshire such a good place to live.

I have helped promote the Parish Warden scheme, where individual parish councillors get special insight and training in what County Highways and Access does. It's still a bit of an experiment confined to the County's Duxford Division with representatives of five of the ten parishes. It seems to be going well with meetings at the Whittlesford Depot between the parish councillors and Highways officers thrashing out issues of concern.

Hanley Grange

The big news this last year was that we won the fight against Hanley Grange. The effort was immense with tremendous support for the Joint Action Group of 16 parish councils working under the banner of Stop Hanley Grange. I am a great believer in parish councils and by setting up the Joint Action Group we harnessed local parish power in a way that had not been tried before. The Stop Hanley Grange campaign continues as the county and its partners wrestle with where to find space for yet more development across our area. Tesco have already put in a proposal to build 14,100 houses on the site – even more than suggested for the eco-town.

Imperial War Museum

I am chairman of the Duxford Airfield Management Liaison Committee, which continues to keep the airfield on good terms with its neighbours. The County Council is negotiating to sell the land it owns at the museum to the Imperial War Museum. But it is planned that the Liaison Committee will continue with participation from Fowlmere.

County Council Election

In June we come to the end of this County Council's four year term of office and we shall have new elections. It's been a very interesting time as your County Councillor. Fowlmere Parish Council has been very helpful to me in my job and I believe your council serves you well. I hope to stand for re-election in June and welcome all the support I can get so I can continue to work for you all.

You can contact me on 01223 836527, e-mail at timothy.stone1@virgin.net or write to me at 4 Church Lane, Whittlesford, Cambridge CB22 4NX

5 REPORT BY CAMBRIDGESHIRE CONSTABULRY

We were unable to obtain representation or a report from the local police.

6 DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT – Cllr D Roberts

I am currently on two committees, (a) Planning and (b) The Scrutiny and Overview Committee. I am also on the Joint Transport Committee with Cllr Tim Stone. This committee has little financial support but it is an important voice for highway concerns and I have been particularly pressing for action at the Flint Cross junction on the A505.

There has been a 4.5% increase in Council Tax this year. South Cambridgeshire Council has a conservative majority but I should like to report that I (as an independent councillor) and my fellow Liberal councillors maintain to ensure a balance is struck and plenty of effort is put in to this effect.

The main consideration for me this year has been the potential transfer of housing stock from South Cambs. This totals 5500 dwellings and the exercise has cost £745,000 so far, including 2 DVD's. As an Independent Councillor, I am against the transfer but I feel that the existing council has not given a balanced view on both the positives and negatives of a transfer – the negatives including no security of tenure or impartiality. A self-financing group called SCAT (South Cambs Against Transfer) has been formed and successfully delivered a leaflet to every house involved, which raised money for the on-going campaign. A vote will follow soon.

South Cambs Planning Department is receiving far fewer planning applications at present, probably due to the current financial climate but there is still difficulty in receiving feedback from the planners and this has resulted in some disquiet from the general public. Fewer applications also get brought to the Planning Committee and many are now resolved by the 'Chair's Delegation Meeting' which I don't think recognizes the application's importance, especially in contentious cases.

South Cambs now also operates a 'cabinet' system, which I feel gives too few people too much power and it is frustrating when good quality input from council members is not heard.

Finally I would like to thank all my fellow Parish Council colleagues for all their help in my work as District Councillor, without whom, my job would be a lot harder and infinitely more frustrating! I would also like to personally thank Julie Fletcher for all her hard work, commitment and professionalism and wish her a very happy retirement.

It was noted by J Van Tassel that "we are very lucky to have Cllr D Roberts as part of the Parish Council, as she is very willing to speak loudly for democracy at higher levels of council".

7. PARISH COUNCIL PLANNING COMMITTEE – Cllr D Roberts

The Planning Committee meet roughly once a fortnight and we have noticed that over the course of the year the applications have become less and smaller in size. There is the on-going possibility of a Housing Association application which we will, of course, look at afresh if it transpires. My thanks goes again to Julie Fletcher for her help and support to the Planning Committee.

8. PARISH COUNCIL FINANCE REPORT – Presented by Cllr D Woods

At year-end we finished £2,197.00 under our housekeeping budget of £25,986 this covers a balance of over and under spends from the original projection. Overspends this year included extra for Clerks salary increase that had not been advised to us before setting the precept and small amounts for telephone charges, insurance, street lights plus an increase in electricity/rates and refuse collection at the cemetery. As in previous years grass cutting and tree maintenance work remains our biggest housekeeping expense.

Seniorlink system (from Help the Aged) continues to be supported by the Parish Council and the monitoring is being paid for 9 (was 12 last year). I have five spare units ready for allocation. If you know of anyone who might benefit from this service, please let me know.

This year we have managed to reduce the precept by 2%, as opposed to an increase last year of 8.1%. A modest amount, but taking into account the need to allow for extra expenses to be incurred in setting up the office for a new clerk and increased cemetery rates, I am quite pleased at this decrease. Therefore the 2009/2010 budget for housekeeping items has been set at £25,461.00.

Projects for next year:

There will be some further cost at the chapel as mentioned by the Chairman plus the cost of planting the hedge around the recently acquired piece of land. Hopefully we will be able to obtain the hedging from South Cambs District Council but will need to pay for the planting and maintenance. Whilst on the subject of the chapel many thanks to Les Thurley who has renovated the lectern and chair at the chapel. He is now about to renovate the bier.

Round Moat, as mentioned in the Chairman's report we are hoping to secure external funding with the help of English Heritage so that further conservation work can be carried out. A meeting with David Kenny, of English Heritage has been arranged for 13 May. Ongoing maintenance of trees is very expensive but we are committed to this project and have budgeted for this work.

We have also allocated a grant of £200 to Fowlmere School for the decoration of the bus shelter at the War Memorial. A very worthwhile project and we look forward to seeing the finished results.

The present bank balance and precept allows the Council to undertake and invest in the above projects for this year for the benefit of all age groups in the village.

J Van Tassel questioned the relatively high precept for Fowlmere as compared to other villages of the same population and Cllr D Woods explained that we had costs for dedicated clerk support and costs in excess of £10,000 for grass cutting and tree maintenance alone. Cllr M Bates added that after years of neglect the expense of maintaining the large stock of trees in Fowlmere was considerable. Cllr D Roberts mentioned that Foxton, for example, had additional funding from previous land-stock sold in the village which meant a smaller precept.

9. FOWLMERE SCHOOL - Mr R Elcock presented the report by Mr S Brooks, Chair of Governors

Introduction

Firstly, please accept my apologies from Simon Brooks, Chair of Governors, who is unable to attend today's meeting.

Fowlmere Primary School serves the Parishes of Fowlmere, Great Chishill, Chrishall Grange and Heydon. The roll in May 2009 is 102, 90% of whom live in the catchment area. Those living out of catchment are from Newton, Melbourn, Foxton, Barley, Royston and Shepreth. The roll continues to gradually increase (from 88 in 2001) and next year's intake, as this year's, is over-subscribed. This is very encouraging and the school is considering how best to deal with this growth in pupil numbers.

In May last year we had our latest Ofsted inspection and the inspector concluded Fowlmere to be a good school with outstanding features. These included the Foundation Stage, the extent to which children enjoy school, links with the community, and the work of the Governing Body.

We have been very pleased with the continued educational successes of the children over the past year. There were good Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 results, both in actual attainment and 'value-added'. Results in Reading, Mathematics and Science were particularly pleasing, but Writing continues to be an area to focus on. Foundation Stage remains a key strength of the school. Results at Level 4 and 5 have also been good and are back on track.

Sport continues to play a key role in the life of the school with our extensive range of clubs including athletics, netball, football, hockey, cricket and rounders. Inter-house competitions and local tournaments have been held in many sports including netball, swimming, Kwik Cricket, cross country, rugby, football, rounders and athletics. The football team won the Melbourn 5-a-side tournament and we came third in the recent inter schools' Swimming Gala.

The school is focused on delivering the School's Development Plan. This key document informs the planning of the school and contains these key strategic themes: Teaching and Learning; Personal and Professional Development, The Environment of the Future; and The School and the Community.

Teaching and Learning

We strive to provide the best possible education. The new Literacy and Numeracy frameworks have been embedded into the curriculum and we spend much time analysing test results and putting initiatives in place to further improve pupil attainment. Alongside this, we remain committed to a wide range of extra activities such as science, arts and crafts, singing, cross-stitch, percussion, and computer studies. Many of these activities are only possible thanks to the hard work of all staff and a dedicated group of volunteer helpers who bring their expertise to the school.

Personal and Professional Development

We continue to put a high priority on staff training to ensure they have the opportunity to develop in line with the priorities of the School Development Plan

Miss Caroline Hopkins and Mrs Karen Cropley joined the teaching staff in September and Mrs Diane Stewart as School Secretary in November.

We have also recently secured some additional funding for some non-class based teaching, in smaller groups which should have very beneficial results for pupils.

The Environment of the Future

As part of the continuing grounds development, the new railings were installed last year, and the new pond was dug at the rear of the school in the Easter holiday. This is a wonderful new asset and the children are now involved in the planting of reeds and a flower meadow, and the installation of a log pile and hibernactum. The PTFA obtained a 50% grant for this work from South Cambridgeshire District Council. Plans to cater for growth of the school – including provision of extra classroom space – are being considered. In addition, the fabric of the school is being reviewed and maintained – we are planning for a new hall floor to be laid in the summer.

The School and the Community

Community links remain a priority for the school. Parents receive an annual report on the progress of their children, and regular opportunities arise for discussions with teachers. The PTFA organises a wide range of events, including summer and Christmas Fayres, the end of term barbeque, safari suppers, wine tasting evenings, and the annual Art Exhibition (this year's is the 11th exhibition, on 5th-7th June).

The new Thriplow and Fowlmere After-School Club has proved very successful, with transport provided for Fowlmere children to Thriplow.

We are also working on the Bus Shelter project which is in the process of receiving funding, including £200, with thanks, from the Parish Council. Year 6 children will be responsible for planning and design, and it will include either paint or ceramics. We hope to be completed by the Summer.

Finance

School financing is a critical activity to ensure we can fund the ongoing school activities as well as our development plans. The projected funding level for this year is tighter than in previous years. The governors are grateful for the support of the PTFA to the finances of the school and would also like to thank the parents and other friends of the school for their continued generosity and support.

Conclusion

Once again the governors thank all those involved with the school for their hard work and dedication to the children who attend the school, not least the parents. We are very conscious of the central role that school plays within their community and the governors will continue to support the hard work of the staff and helpers which makes Fowlmere School the special place it is.

J Van Tassel questioned Mr Elcock on his view of KS2 exams and he replied that whilst it was generally felt by the school that they would prefer not to have the tests, but they are still in place (although KS1 and 3 tests have been abolished recently) and they had a duty to ensure that children were best prepared. He added that he felt the children had not been overly worried by test preparation and many had even enjoyed the experience. He hopes that there is more creativity in the curriculum to come, with initiatives like the ROSE Report.

J Van Tassel added that congratulations were due to the Head, teachers and Governors because of the progress made by the school.

10. VILLAGE HALL REPORT

We were unable to obtain representation or a report from the Village Hall. Cllr M Bates reiterated the need to utilise the Hall more as it needs further support, whilst seeking additional external funding. Grateful thanks to all those who continue to maintain the facilities at the Village Hall.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

J Jackson questioned the Parish Council about the plans for affordable housing in Fowlmere. Cllr D Roberts replied that we had received an indicative street scene for the proposal at the Cambridge Road, Thriplow Road triangle, a site for 10 low-cost houses and this would be available at the next Parish Council meeting. The houses would all be 'Housing Association' and none of them would be available to be sold on the open market although some may be part-buy.

The minimal attendance at the meeting by the residents of Fowlmere was questioned and the Parish Council reported that leaflet drops to every house in past years had still not unfortunately increased attendance.

Everyone was thanked for attending and the meeting closed at 8.40 pm.

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