

COTTENHAM PARISH
Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
22nd April 2004
Cottenham Village College
8pm

Apologies for absence:

Present: Present in the hall were 202 local electors, 14 Parish Councillors, 4 SCDC Councillors, 1 County Councillor, 2 Officers from SCDC and James Paice MP.

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present.

Minutes: The minutes of the 2003 Annual Parish Meeting were read, Cllr Leeks proposed that these were a true account of the meeting, seconded Cllr Norman, all agreed.

Matters Arising from these Minutes: The litter bin is still to be installed in the layby by Church Hill. Village Pound, signage to be looked into re the history of the pound and limiting time cars can be parked there.

Chairman's Annual Report

The Council presently stands at 15, after the resignation of one member earlier in the year we co-opted Mr Anthony Harding who joined us at our January meeting.

Earlier this year Mr David Norman stood down as Chairman and I would like to thank him on behalf of all the members for his contribution and commitment during these last few years. I would also like to thank him for his support and help since I took over as Chair.

We will this year be having a number of short reports from Councillors on the various projects which the Council has been trying to progress during this year, as with most things in life everything tends to take a little longer then we would like but we intend to complete these successfully in the near future.

106 Agreements

We still have been unable to complete transfer on both sites to date. However progress is being made on Tenison Manor where residual works have been agreed and we are in the process of negotiating a second commuted sum in order that the entire site including the balancing pond and the drainage ditches which lead to it, become the responsibility of the Council.

Transfer on Brenda Gautry Way has been slowed down due to a dispute regarding the ownership of the adjacent watercourse. Discussion is on going albeit slowly.

It is hoped that residents realise that transfer has to be undertaken on the most favourable of conditions for the Council so as to reduce any financial commitment which may arise in the future, as any unexpected future costs can only be covered by an increase in the precept for the village.

King George V Playing Field

Notice was placed in the local newspaper regarding the transfer of land between ourselves and the King George V Playing Fields Association. As stated before once this process is complete the ground on which CUSSC and Ladybirds pre-school stand will become the official property of the Parish Council.

Ladybird Pre-School/ Ladybird Pre-School/ Youth Provision

The Council fully supports the expansion of this facility and has offered financial help and councillor time to endeavour that this project proceeds successfully.

Along side this project the Council is supporting an expansion of the youth provision which runs at the village college, during both holiday and term time.

Other Organisations Supported by the Council

The Council has been able to support various groups and organisations during the year. These include Toy Library, Open Air Swimming Pool, Citizens Advice Bureau, Mobile Warden Scheme and the Air Ambulance.

County Farms

Currently the offer to lease this extra land still stands however as of today the Council has not signed any lease agreement. The situation will be reassessed towards the end of the year. We are still waiting a business plan from the various user groups to help justify the financial commitment of the lease.

Highways Issues

Rooks Street was an area which was highlighted as a problem area. Subsequently all 108 homes were circulated a letter seeking their views on this continuing problem. Twenty two letters of response were returned. As a result the council asked the County to consider some scheme for Rooks Street under the Jointly Funded Minor Improvement Schemes for 2004/2005. We have yet to hear from them. It has also been suggested that additional traffic calming along the high street may be appropriate; we are waiting further details of any such scheme.

Councillors also met with David Brace, Senior Traffic Engineer CCC, to discuss any further calming measures in Rampton Road, as part of the A14 Corridor Villages Scheme.

Smithy Fen

As you are all aware we are currently awaiting a public enquiry in relation to an appeal for an additional 18 approved pitches down on the Fen. In this case as in all other such planning applications which aim to increase the size of the Traveller site, the Parish Council as a statutory consultee has always rejected such applications. We have already made representations to the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol for the forthcoming appeal.

We would like to take this opportunity to state that although the Planning System is very slow and arduous we cannot as a Council condone the non-payment or withholding of council taxes. We do have serious concerns that as SCDC has a statutory duty to collect these taxes, in pursuing non-payers in Cottenham, you may be diverting resources in the Legal Department away from the necessary work involved in preparing robust cases for the forthcoming appeals. We do however find a policy which removes statutory obligation of local authorities to provide suitable sites extremely unhelpful, as a direct consequence of this is to encourage travelling families to purchase any available land which puts them into direct conflict with neighbouring communities.

We feel that if the Planning Inspector deems such growth to be appropriate then a condition of permission must be a 106 Agreement which allows for funds to follow improving the infrastructure and services for the communities which will be affected. The provider of these funds could either be the local authority or the appellants themselves.

To further the various aims of the village the Council has been in constant dialogue not only with South Cambs District Council but also the police and our local MP, James Paice, who is with us here tonight.

Greater Police Presence

We have for sometime, in addition to the Police Reassurance Team, had the services of PCSO Steve Gilbey.

I attended the October Police Consultative Meeting, here it was confirmed that 2 PCSO's had been jointly funded and that allocation had been based on the number of calls to the Sector, Cottenham figured highly so we were allocated an officer.

All I would like to add that this response was a direct consequence of all the calls residents had made. Taking the trouble to report incidents or actions can have a positive benefit for the community. The presence of PCSO Gilbey also appears to have had a positive effect on perceptions of personal safety within the village and for this we should all be grateful. We are also aware that currently this funding is only on-going for two years, so we will have to see what happens in the future.

It was with much sadness that the Council learnt of the death of Peter Stone at the end of last year. As with all residents we extended our sympathies to his family. The police inquiry is still an on-going and active case with a considerable amount of resources, manpower and finance alike being targeted at the investigation. We all have to wait patiently for a satisfactory conclusion to this unhappy incident.

As you all know a Memorial Fund was set up to benefit Peter Stone's family, this has now been closed and the funds passed to them.

Thank you to:

Finally there are a number of people we would all like to thank.

The first has to be Peter Sanderson and his wife, whose patience and dedication have enabled the Council to run smoothly for 30 years.

In the interim we have been very fortunate to have had the help and expertise of Eric Smith, without whose input the continuing work of the Council would have been very tricky to say the least.

We have recently appointed Julie Groves as our Assistant Clerk to initially work alongside Eric, who has agreed to remain as our Responsible Financial Officer for the time being.

To Mr Duncan, also retired, as our village cleaner, for all his hard work keeping the village clean and tidy, a responsibility which falls to us all, and to Mr Rice and his team, who care for the Recreation Ground and all our open spaces.

I would like to thank you all for showing an interest in the work of the Parish Council and hope you find the following reports from my colleagues informative.

Play Park – Cllr Pauline Allin

Good evening, my name is Pauline Allin and I'm a Parish Councillor with a particular interest in children's playparks.

Each year the equipment at the recreation ground is inspected by ROSPA. ROSPA produce a risk report and the Parish Council takes any action it needs to keep the risk to an acceptable level.

During last year some pieces of equipment were re-painted and general maintenance undertaken. We await the ROSPA report for this year.

Also during the year a grant has been obtained from the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. And together with a bequest from the late Doug Ralph and Parish Council funds, this money will be used to create a Toddler Area.

The Toddler Area will be at the recreation ground. It will be a fenced in space and within it will be the existing small slide and 3 new pieces of equipment. There will be additional benches and a picnic table. The cost of this area is approximately £20,000. We expect this to be completed by the end of June.

Generally the equipment at the recreation ground has served the village well, but it is in need of improvement and replacement. So during this next year I expect to apply for grants from two Landfill Tax Credit Schemes, as we are in the catchment area for both the Milton and the A10 landfill sites.

Two equipment suppliers offering free design services have visited the site. They will produce plans which can be used for public consultation and give us ideas of what children want from their park. So change is on its way.

Thank you for listening. (I've brought along with me various catalogues and pictures of play equipment. I am happy to take questions or recommendations from you after the meeting).

At this point a member of the public requested that the agenda be rearranged as the majority of the public are here due to the current situation at Smithy Fen. It was requested that James Paice MP be allowed to speak next. This was agreed and Cllr Johnson introduced James Paice.

James Paice MP

Introduction

Very conscious of the importance of the issue, probably currently half my constituency correspondence. There are clear links to the related developments in Rampton and Histon. I regret very much that I have no direct authority but have tried to influence those who have and have raised the issue in Parliament on many occasions. I am concerned at the very high emotions now running and I do not want to do or say anything to exacerbate the tension. It would be very easy to say a lot of things which might get short-term acclaim but will do nothing to resolve the situation.

Situation at present:

35 longstanding pitch approvals – unlikely to be revoked

4 (?) appeals upheld – unlikely to be revoked.

18 appeals outstanding.

11 new applications.

Irish travellers appear to have legally acquired their sites. They are spending considerable sums on developing the sites.

Planning/Enforcement issues.

SCDC can serve enforcement notice on anyone carrying out development for which approval has not been obtained. Basically it requires the restoration of the site to its original condition. The developer can appeal to the Secretary of State against an enforcement order; such an appeal effectively becomes a planning application. SCDC can also serve a stop notice if development continues after the service of an enforcement order. Breach of a stop notice carries significant penalties but I understand that the courts very rarely enforce a stop notice until the planning process has been completed, i.e. until the appeal against the enforcement order is decided.

I understand that in most if not all of the above cases that is the present situation. The appeals already upheld have been largely on human rights grounds. It appears that the Inspector did not challenge assertions about family relationships or lack of anywhere else to go.

My actions to date.

Debate in the House of Commons on the outcome of the first appeal.

Meeting with responsible Minister

Invitation to John Prescott to visit

Meetings with PC, SCDC, travellers, police etc.

Amendment to Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill to create Temporary Stop Notices although how effective is questionable and will only apply to future development.

Number of questions to ministers re: planning and tax issues.

Issues to consider

Policing – further meeting with Supt. Needle next week.

Challenging the appeals. SCDC must ask for police help on property ownership. Need to challenge assertions about relationships. Need to challenge the scale of development and the maximum number on any site.

Possibly take up travellers offer to fund CCTV and gating of Setchell Drove.

Continue to press John Prescott for action.

Ensure that SCDC serve all relevant orders and notices.

Jim Paice MP. April 22nd 2004

Points raised: It was stated that a maximum of 4 caravans per pitch was the legal limit. That writing to the inspectorate re appeals would have an impact but any objections need to be based on valid planning grounds. Concerns were raised over South Cambridgeshire District Council's actions with regard to Council Tax payments by residents on the traveller's sites at Smithy Fen. SCDC stated that all council taxes had been collected from all authorised pitches, SCDC also stated that there are problems collecting from unauthorised sites the general feeling of the meeting was that SCDC need to be more pro-active in collecting council tax from unauthorised pitches. In addition the Police Authority had assured SCDC that all traveller vehicles were now taxed and insured. SCDC also stated that they had been directed by central government to carry out a quality needs assessment for travellers in this county. It was also felt that central government, from a planning perspective, needs to look at the travelling communities need for sites in the same way as it deals with the settled community when it considers new housing schemes. Other comments made included the legitimacy of installing utilities on pitches with no planning permission. The anti-social behaviour from travellers and the "fear factor" whereby the village feels somewhat under siege. The need to identify new sites for travellers, the need to reduce the size of the site at Smithy Fen. Cottenham Residents Association has collected over 200 letters and 400 signatures on a petition; these are to be sent to the Inspectorate.

In conclusion James Paice stated that he was available to help in any way that he could and that he will continue to work with the Parish Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council and with central Government to find a resolution to these problems which continue in Cottenham.

Cllr Johnson thanked James Paice and informed the meeting that if anyone wished to contact SCDC would they please contact the Parish Council for contact details.

Skateboard Park – Cllr Mudd

An open meeting was held in July 2002 and skateboarding was discussed. Initially the site was to be at Cottenham Village College but after discussions and meetings with the Head teacher, Governors, Students, District Council and County Council it was decided that the site offered was not entirely

ideal, due to access, management and control and insurance issues. After further discussions with the District Council and the skateboarders it was agreed that the recreation ground was considered to be more suitable site with access for all, help available for funding and less legal and insurance issues, as the land is owned by the Parish Council. The proposed site is to be behind the slide, this will hopefully be decided when the District Council visit on the 5th May 2004. A committee was formed in January 2004 and comprised, skateboarders, residents and councillors, called the Cottenham Skateboard Project Committee. 4 construction firms have visited the site and have put in quotes; these will be opened at the next Council meeting on 27th April 2004. A decision will then be made as to whom shall be appointed. It was decided at the last committee meeting to use tarmac for the base and quotes will be obtained based on a base specification.

Funding, we hope to obtain a grant from SCDC of up to £10,000, other contenders include Living Spaces, Countryside Agency, Sport England, Foundation for Sports and the Arts, Awards for All (small lottery grants) and Wren. Cottenham Parish Council have given a grant of £15,000 also students from the college are fundraising.

We hope that the project will be completed by the end of September 2004; further information will be available in the April/May edition of the Cottenham Newsletter.

Questions and Comments:

One resident voiced concerns that the location of the skateboard park could lead to vandalism. Cllr Mudd stated that this had been considered very carefully and he made the following points, that the location had been carefully considered and it was felt that the right choice had been made and also that the equipment chosen must be as vandal proof as possible. In addition users need to be vigilant and report any damage that they find. Cllr Norman stated that there is really only low levels of vandalism on the recreation ground.

Parish Plan – Cllr Tony Nicholas

What is a Parish Plan?

In February 2003 the Parish Council, with guidance from Cambridgeshire ACRE and funded by the Countryside Agency embarked on producing a Parish Plan. A Parish Plan is a statement of how a community sees itself developing over the next few years - a plan for the future. In order that everyone could have their say a committee of 12 volunteers from the community set about organising a relevant questionnaire for distribution in Cottenham.

Every household in Cottenham received a questionnaire in late autumn of 2003. Of the 2214 delivered over 60% were returned fully completed. The questionnaire gave everyone the chance to have their say about social, economic and environmental issues affecting the village. It will help to identify which features and local characteristics people value; identify local problems and opportunities; spelt out how residents want their community to develop in the future.

What will the Plan look like?

There is no standard format for a Parish Plan and no prescriptive list of subjects it should address. However, devising a suitable questionnaire will produce data that is relevant to Cottenham. A report on the findings of the village questionnaire and conclusions that can be drawn from it, will be given to every household in Cottenham. From the report a list will be compiled of issues that require some form of action planning.

The responsibility for implementing these action plans rests with a number of authorities and organisations, within and outside of the village, as well as residents themselves.

A consultation exercise is planned during which residents will be given the opportunity to discuss, prioritise and the relevant people and organisations identified to take them forward. Details to be announced through the Cottenham Newsletter.

District Councillors' Report – Cllr Rex Collinson

Report on behalf of Cllr Nicholas and myself as district councillors for Cottenham.

Smithy Fen

Our role in this as the local members has been to ensure that the council is made aware and kept aware of the problems and to press members and officers for the most effective possible action to be taken. This we have done from the time when the problems started to occur in the spring of last year. As a result of our concerns and that of officers, enforcement officers went down shortly afterwards and started serving planning contravention notices requiring the travellers to say who they were. Subsequent to that Stop and Enforcement were served and have gone on being served and we have constantly pressed for injunctive action to be used wherever possible – but in the case of the latter have had to be guided by legal advice from the council's lawyers about the practicalities. The current position was summed up by the Legal Director on Monday when he pointed out that at Smithy Fen there is no traveller living on any site which does not either have planning permission or is subject to enforcement action by the council.

The travellers have appealed these enforcement notices and a significant number of appeals – 13, in fact, are scheduled to be heard at a Public Inquiry on 20th July. We have made written representations in support of the council in relation to all these appeals and, if we still represent Cottenham at that time, will make oral representation to the hearing, as we did to the McCarthy hearing in January. To date there have been 4 appeal decisions, two of which the council has lost and two of which it has won – although in the case of two which have been won there are other matters still to be determined on the land in question. One of the appeals in which we were unsuccessful, the Boswell appeal, was determined with a significant emphasis on human rights considerations as well as planning land use criteria, and the council has raised concerns about the relationship of these areas of legislation with government and with our colleagues and representatives in local government. Decisions by Planning Inspectors can only be challenged in the High Court on points of law. The council was advised by a senior planning barrister that there was no hope of mounting a successful challenge to the Boswell decision but the council *is* challenging the McCarthy decision in the High Courts on grounds of law relating to the question of traveller status.

In bringing concerns about the situation at Smithy Fen to the attention of the council we have had strong support from all the various groups on the authority, as well as from Cllr David Bard as Planning Portfolio Holder and Cllr Mrs Deborah Roberts as the Portfolio Holder with the responsibility for travellers. We have pressed successfully for a special consultative group to be set up which has already provided an important forum for determining action and policy, and we have also pressed successfully for the authority to take on a specialist and very experienced lawyer in these matters as a consultant to advise how best to proceed. We have joined with other members in pressing successfully for the council to be represented at all future hearings by barristers as opposed to our own appeals officer and solicitor, and together with other members, we have pressed successfully for a dedicated team to be set up to deal with traveller matters. As well as a Traveller Officer, the council now has three enforcement staff and has retained a firm of bailiffs to work with them, and a decision has been taken to appoint a further officer to lead and co-ordinate the council's planning strategy with regard to these issues.

Finally, we have constantly pressed upon the police for the need for action with regard to law and order issues and, together with representatives of the Parish Council, have had regular meetings

with them. The feedback from them suggests that they have managed to bring about a significant improvement in this respect.

In all these concerns and actions we have been strongly supported by the Parish Council.

The District Local Plan

This has been approved after 5 years of consultation and inquiry and keeps the Development Framework for Cottenham virtually unchanged. The government is bringing in a new system of Local Development frameworks to replace local plans, and work has already started on the one for South Cambridgeshire.

It is likely that, at some stage, this will open up the possibility for representations to be made regarding more development in the villages and it is very likely that Cottenham will see developers putting forward proposals at this stage so we shall need to be vigilant. The framework will, of course, include provision for the new town of Northstowe centred on the former Oakington airfield.

Council Tax

There has been no increase in the District Council's element of the tax this year, which remains at £70 per annum for a Band D property. The council faces some tough financial choices for the future, however, and it looks inevitable that council tax will have to rise next financial year if services are not to be cut back.

Office Move

As you probably know, the council is moving after 30th April to new offices at Cambourne. A small Cambridge city centre office will be maintained at Mandela House in Regent Street and we understand there will be a video conferencing link available there which will enable residents to talk direct to officers at Cambourne if the need arises. All telephone enquires will be routed via the new contact centre which will deal with both district and county council enquiries. Details of the new telephone numbers appeared on page 3 of the last South Cambs magazine and we included them in the last Cottenham Newsletter. We will also put them into the forthcoming Newsletter.

Wheeled Bins

This is one area where we don't seem to have had quite the problems that there have been in some other villages, but we know that concerns remain about the fortnightly collection pattern. The council has made a number of special arrangements for Cottenham residents with disabilities etc. If you do have any problems, get in touch with us or the council's environmental health department and efforts will be made to sort them out – although I'm afraid at the moment that the policy is not going to change.

Residents Participation

Three residents groups continue to be active at Coolidge Gardens, Orchard Close and Stevens Close/Victory Way. The last of the three has not perhaps advanced quite as far as the other two but significant strides have been taken in involving residents in dealing with problems and securing improvements to these areas. All the groups are open to owner-occupiers as well as tenants. We're very grateful to all the residents who have got involved and to Pat Daniels, the Neighbourhood Manager, for all her support.

We've continued to hold regular surgeries, deal with resident enquiries and put regular reports in the Newsletter. There will be elections on 10th June when three district councillors will be elected to

represent an expanded Cottenham ward which will include Oakington and Westwick as well as Cottenham and Rampton.

Finally, we would like to thank the members of the Parish Council for all their help, to thank Paula Johnson who has already shown herself to be a very capable Chairman even though she only took over recently and to thank David Norman, the previous chairman, who helped us enormously and worked tirelessly for the Parish at an extremely difficult time. Peter Sanderson, the Parish Clerk for over thirty years, retired a Christmas and was a tower of strength and experience, and Eric Smith, highly experienced as clerk to Rampton and Longstanton, has done a fantastic job in stepping into the breach as acting clerk so far this year. Finally we would like to thank Jim Paice, our MP, for all he does for us, much of it only known to the residents concerned, and to say a special thank you to him for his active and concerned involvement in the problems with Smithy Fen and for the very measured way in which he has continued to deal with them.

Points raised: The need for a quality needs assessment – why does this need to be undertaken? Cllr Collinson replied that central government has dictated that this be done, also a requirement due to appeals soon to be heard.

County Councillor's Report – Cllr Peter Stroude

Cllr Stroude thanked the Parish Council for inviting him to the meeting. Cllr Stroude informed the meeting that Cambridge County Council had recently been inspected by the government and had achieved a score of 2. Councils are scored on a basis of 1-7, 1 being the best. Therefore obtaining level 2 is an excellent result.

CCC are currently involved in a survey on mental health services for the county, an area which is under funded.

Cllr Stroude further stated that the village of Cottenham had his full support with regard to the current situation at Smithy Fen.

Cllr Johnson thanked Cllr Stroude. Cllr Johnson then asked the public for any further questions.

General Business

There was a query regarding the number of times the green is cut, the Parish Council will look into this, plus the problem of dogs fouling on the green.

It was confirmed that Cllr Smith is the Parish Councillor to contact with any questions in regard to the Internal Drainage Board.

The meeting was closed at 10.40pm