

**Minutes of the Thorverton Annual Parish Meeting of Wednesday 3rd May 2017
held at the Thorverton Memorial Hall at 7.30pm**

Present: 66 members of the public, including Parish Councillors, the Clerk, D/Cllr Deed and C/Cllr Squires.

Apologies for absence: received from Mr G Culshaw, Mrs J Flaxington, Mr R Kershaw, Mr E Greed, Mr P Colebrook, Mr & Mrs M Stannard, Mrs S Carcillo, Mr & Mrs T Cole, Mr & Mrs S Crebo, Mr & Mrs I Walton.

Minutes of the 2015/16 Annual Parish Meeting: this meeting was held on Tuesday May 17th 2016 and the minutes were read out by Parish Council Chairman, Cllr Crang, and it was agreed that they be signed as a correct record of the meeting (R Turner and S Spivey).

Matters arising from the Minutes: The 2008 Parish Plan update had been circulated to all households in the parish but, disappointingly, only 25 replies had been received. The main concern was speed limits in the village.

Report from the Parish Council Chairman, Cllr Stuart Crang, regarding 2016/17: The Parish Council (PC) held 12 monthly meetings during the past year, at the Thorverton Memorial Hall, and several members of the public had attended various meetings. Two Extraordinary Meetings had also been held, plus one informal meeting with the Parochial Church Council (PCC), and a Public Meeting regarding the potential for development at a site near to Broadlands. The Public Meeting had been attended by 45 residents during which the Agents for the Church Commissioners (CC) had spoken on the pending pre-planning application for 16 new residential homes.

The Clerk, throughout this period, was Mrs Alison Marshall. During the year Cllr Jan Wills had resigned – thanks were extended to Jan for her input to the Council - and Cllr David Reygate had been co-opted.

In November the PC adopted the General Power of Competence – introduced by the Localism Act 2011 – meaning that the PC can now do anything that an individual can do and, as a result, is less restricted in its activities by Law. To achieve this Alison gained the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) and became a Qualified Clerk and two thirds of the total number of Council members had stood for Election.

The PC has been required to take on tasks from higher Authorities, such as Devon County Council (DCC) Highways, and so the precept had needed to be raised to cover the extra duties.

The PC had consulted with Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) regarding the street naming of the Court Barton site and due to the recommendation that historic names be used for new housing developments the suggestion of 'Rack Park' was submitted. The Developer, Westhaven Homes, was against this name and so MDDC was left to make the decision and named the site Court Barton Close. Due to the heated correspondence on this matter MDDC has now re-written its street naming policy.

In February this year a written complaint was received regarding Police parking leaflets which had been delivered to Silver Street and Jericho Street by the PC. As a result, and after further consideration by the PC, it was resolved that the Parish Council would not to get involved further in village parking matters.

The annual precept, as already mentioned, needed to be increased again to just under £20,000. In 2009, before the Parish Council started to raise funds from the precept for the potential new Cemetery, the annual precept was £6,000. The new amount now represents £52 for a band D property in the parish which

is £2.50 for every £1,000 the PC spends. The cost of the PC actually just existing – as it must by Law – with meetings, insurance, Clerk salary etc. – is around £5,000 per year alone. The PC has ‘ring-fenced’ funding for items such as the proposed new Cemetery and has now also moved to formalise reserves for new play and gym equipment at the Recreation Ground which will, at some point, need replacing. The new Rec equipment cost in the region of £30,000 last year and the total replacement costs of all the equipment would total around £50,000. It was felt important, therefore, to start building reserves for replacement items. The Recreation Ground ‘Open Day’, held last June, was attended by Lord Lieutenant David Fursdon and a good many families and Parish Council members. A good time was had by all and the PC received some excellent feedback on the event.

The PC resolved to increase the scope of grants awarded last year and a policy was adopted accordingly. The annual grant to the PCC, for graveyard maintenance, was increased to £600 and £200 was given to both the Citizens Advice and Ring and Ride as both had evidenced ongoing support and services to Thorverton parishioners. The Memorial Hall received a grant of £650 for replacement chairs and £750 was given to Thorverton PTFA for some new IT equipment. Finally up to £4,000 was agreed to support the re-opening of Hulk Lane as a new bridleway and as DCC was not able to commit any funding to re-open the road.

A new PC employee had been taken on, by way of Colin Marshall, as a Road Warden and village Handyman. Colin works on a zero hours contract with no ‘guaranteed’ work and with work being assigned monthly, at Parish Council meetings, by the PC. His line manager is the Clerk but the PC is the employer of both the Clerk and the Handyman. Colin has gained his City and Guilds Road Warden, Chapter 8, and Spraying Qualifications – at no cost to the PC – and his duties are to maintain the village in general and to replace DCC Highways work no longer covered. MDDC grant funding, by way of TAP (Town and Parish) funding, of £1400 was gained for new Handyman tools and equipment and secure storage space for these has now been offered, and accepted, in the village centre.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) has advised that it is not going to continue being involved in running a Graveyard in Thorverton when the existing Churchyard is full. The PC, therefore, needs to decide whether to take on the running of a new burial site or not – it is legally already a burial authority. At last year’s Annual Parish Meeting the Church Commissioners had already been approached regarding the purchasing of some land, off Dark Lane, and it has agreed to sell this land. A Pre-Planning Application was submitted to MDDC last year, by the PC, which gave positive results and required, as the next step, an archaeological dig on the land and. A decision as to whether to proceed with this is pending. The funds raised by the PC, to date, for a new Cemetery is £30,000. Councillors have been divided on how to spend the funding and as to whether further burial space is wanted by residents and this is why the subject is on the agenda for discussion this evening. Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) has been approached and has advised that as the PCC has pulled out of being involved with any future burial facilities in the parish then this is reason enough for the funding to be put to some other use, but still for public benefit, should the PC so decide. DALC also strongly advised that the public should be consulted on this matter and so the Parish Council has delivered leaflets through every door in the parish asking for feedback and inviting attendance at this meeting.

The Chairman asked for comments or questions from the floor:

1. £50,000 had been spent over the years on play equipment in the Recreation Ground – which will need replacing – but that additional burial space would remain permanent. Funding has been given through the precept on the understanding that additional burial space will be made available and so it should go towards the proposed new Cemetery.

2. If you have, for example, a child that has died you want a grave to go visit – it is not just about old people it is about people of all ages.

3. There is a historical need to visit graveyards and this meeting should be used to set out a legacy for our children and their future - this is an opportunity to make a legacy decision and the wrong decision would mean no future graveyard.

4. It was agreed at a public meeting to put £5,000 a year towards a new graveyard from the precept and work has begun on getting this started. The site is easily accessible and ashes from cremations can also be put there. No burial place at Thorverton means going to Tiverton – how many people would wish to do this? No one attending the public meeting in 2010 wanted this. There should be no decision to make – the funding should go towards new burial space and a.s.a.p. as the current churchyard is nearly full.

5. There is confusion – there is a currently a Churchyard which is getting full then there could be a new Cemetery put in place, by anyone, but for everyone to use. The Churchyard has to be full and shut before any new burial space can be opened. If the proposed new Cemetery is not agreed now it will never happen.

6. It is down to a persons choice – if there is burial space available people can choose to use it or not.

7. How much land is involved and why, specifically, has £30,000 been raised? Any funding left over could be spent on keeping the existing Churchyard maintained.

Answer: The area of land which may be purchased for a new Cemetery is about 1/3rd acre and the Church Commissioners (CC) Office has said that the purchase price would be in the region of £20,000 an acre. The Cemetery would then have to be created and walls would need to be built, for example, which would cost a fair bit of money. A new Cemetery at the Dark Lane site is subject to a farm tenancy which causes complications as compensation would need to be paid. In addition to the cost of an archaeological survey, walls, gardens, water would need to be considered so it is not just the cost of the land. There is also ongoing maintenance. It is almost certain that the CC will also expect its legal costs to be paid by the Council.

8. This project would be a cost negative to the PC as it would charge for burials and so there could even be money made on the venture.

9. I am not happy with putting funding into the pocket of the CC when a new Cemetery could have been included within the Court Barton Agreement. There is the possibility of another CC sponsored development at Broadlands and so land for a new Cemetery should be considered within that Agreement.

10. The CC is not open to discussions and will not give land away – it's a charity and has to 'sell' land.

Cllr Crang clarified that the CC is NOT the Church. It is a statutory body and is represented in Parliament and is subject to the Law. It is the secretariat for the Church of England.

It is the Parochial Church Council which has decided not to go ahead with further burial ground because it cannot afford the cost of it.

11. It is a community resource and so it is not the responsibility of the Church to provide burial ground.

12. Can I clarify that the Churchyard, when full, will be the responsibility of the PC and that the PC will then decide whether to transfer it onto the District Council and once transferred to District it cannot be given back? Cllr Crang confirmed the statement.

13. I am worried as the existing Churchyard is an asset to the village and community but when it is deemed full it will be closed and passed to the PC and/or District Council and so may not be well maintained due to cutbacks. Hearing that burying the dead can be a moneymaking activity could the two be matched together and could further existing space in the Graveyard be identified and used so that more funds could be raised to maintain the existing Graveyard?

Cllr Crang commented that it is not the PC's business to run the existing Churchyard, it is the PCC, and so this question should be directed to the PCC.

14. The Church does get funding for burials which goes towards maintenance but it does not make a profit.

15. Burials are not a moneymaking venture and maintenance is not easy and costs money. Creating more space has not been tested but the dioses will make it impossible for the reuse of graves and, when every suitable space has been used, the existing Churchyard will be closed.

16. The PC has £30,000 so has it approached any other land owner in the parish for a possible site?

Cllr Crang responded in that the land identified is near to the existing Graveyard and so is convenient. MDCC has responded positively regarding potential planning permission approval. This site is smaller than other Cemeteries and so would mean lower costs.

17. When the Churchyard is full and can't be used anymore and the PC has a Cemetery who then maintains the current Churchyard?

Cllr Crang again confirmed that either the PC or the District Council and if the DC then it may not be maintained as well as parishioners would want. The PC will have to make decisions on this if the time arises. Current costs of maintaining the existing Churchyard is said to be around £1500 per year for basic work, with voluntary work on top of this, plus a £600 grant from the PC.

It was clarified that when the existing Churchyard is closed there will still be burials for those who have already bought plots, or for double graves, as identified in the closure order. It will only be closed to new burials/plots.

The land identified for a proposed new Cemetery is off Dark Lane, up towards the Drill Hall/Courbet Court buildings, which would cost in the region of £5,000 for around 1/3rd of an acre at £20,000 an acre.

It was clarified that the PC is automatically a burial authority and that some Cllrs are hesitating regarding the taking on of this new task. The PC will decide on the way forward at its usual monthly meeting next week after taking into consideration the public feedback received at this meeting, on e-mail, and in response to the leaflet delivered to every household in the parish. The PC cannot make a decision on whether it will keep hold of, or transfer on, the existing Churchyard when full as yet.

18. The public are asking the PC to take up the new Cemetery project for the future of the village and anything other than this is not applicable taking into account the feedback from this meeting.

19. Everyone wants value for money and before decisions are made the PC should put costing options into the public domain then ask for comments.

20. I support the new Cemetery as it is an important facility for the village to have. On charges - the cost of running a new Cemetery would be less than running the old Churchyard – there is nothing, for certain, that can be shared regarding costings at this point until the planning consent has been granted. If the archaeology survey results are not favourable then the PC will need to review the situation.

21. I have not heard any counter argument tonight – is there anyone here that could give this?

22. I am concerned about the ongoing cost of running the new Cemetery and about committing the PC to expenditure that may exceed its income. Whilst it could pay for itself that is dependent on the number of burials per year. The commitment to the PC is for the next 50 years or so which requires deep consideration.

23. On the issue of funding being short some years is there the opportunity for families to buy plots? If so this would help build up a pot of funds.

24. At your next full council meeting please consider that there has been no one speaking against the new Cemetery here tonight. All Councillors should be made aware of this fact prior to voting on the matter.

25. There are 2 sides to a coin in that £5,000 for 1/3rd acre for agricultural land is huge. I think that most people prefer to be cremated these days and there is a piece of land just across the path, called Barliabins, which could be suitable for a memorial garden. There are alternatives to be considered for less money.

26. There is probably no-one in the village against a new Cemetery but is the Dark Lane option the best option? There is other land that could be purchased and I request that the PC explore this to ensure that the funding is spent in the best possible way.

27. Sandford, Newton St Cyres and Stoke Canon have been given land so their situations are different.

There were no further comments on this matter.

Hulk Lane bridleway – an update from Roger Cashmore representing TABSCAP

A report was provided regarding the land and the slippage that caused the highway to be lost in 2013. TABSCAP have worked with DCC to restore this road for the community. Due to this road being so far down the DCC priority list TABSCAP have stepped in with the aim of keeping the lane open. A geotechnical report was gained then a specialist land drainage engineer was involved. Once agreement was gained for work to be completed, involving matched funding from DCC, Thorverton and Brampford Speke PCs pledged support along with C/Clr Squires. A local Contractor has been hired and work is due to start on June 12th this year to make the road into a bridleway for all to use. This will provide a useful facility and could attract visitors into the community. This will also be the nearest walk available to the new Court Barton Close estate. There will be a summer event to raise further funding and an opening ceremony will follow. Updates will be posted in Focus and on local social media. Gilly and Ed Greed are the land owners and Stuart Luxton is the Contractor.

New homes at Court Barton Close – an update from D/Clr Deed

Approval was given by MDDC for this development as an exception site with cross subsidy and so this village is allowed to have new houses built within it. There is a settlement boundary and so special planning

approval was required meaning that because of the Housing Needs Survey the affordable housing had to be offered to local people. MDDC admitted to omitting this clause in the S106 Agreement and have said that they will pay to correct this mistake. Westhaven Homes, the Developer, has agreed to the amendment but Devon and Cornwall Housing (DCH) have refused to sign a new Agreement at this time. The Parish has no say in resolving this. After speaking with MDDC Planning, who have said that DCH cannot sign a new Agreement as this could affect their funding, verbal assurance that initial allocation will provide priority to people with local ties has been gained. If DCH signing a new Agreement means that they will be in breach then this does not add up as if they do not agree to correct the position they are already in breach so there does not appear to be any defence. The problem being that when the houses come up for re-let or re-sale then this verbal agreement may well have been forgotten.

Q. Why is there a black clad property with a red roof in a Conservation Area? There is no existing property like this in the village. There are also other new properties out of keeping within the Conservation Area.

A. It went through the planning process and was accepted so nothing further can be done.

Other matters raised by those present:

Q. 43% increase in the Precept – why has this happened?

Cllr Crang replied in that this had already been covered in the aforementioned report, an explanation had been issued in Focus, and the meeting minutes had also documented the reasons. At the PC meeting the budget was reviewed and a large amount of funding was agreed for local grant giving for the likes of Hulk Lane with £4,000 given to this project costing each band D property £10. When setting the precept there is increasing pressure on Highways work with gritting, pot holes, more demands coming in future and at the moment the precept can be raised but next year there could be limits. There may be several ways in which the funding may need to be spent but if this does not happen then the PC would need to rethink its plans. Bus services are being adjusted and so the PC may need to support these for example.

The County and District Councils used to do a lot of things around the village that are no longer being done and so the Handyman/Road Warden has been employed. PC is not 100% sure what it will need to pay to cover these duties for this year so has raised the precept in case of need.

Q. After the Hulk Lane funding has been given is there anything left for other grant giving?

A. Yes we have a new grant giving budget for this new tax year.

Q. Signage is required in Jericho Street to stop HGV's using it - what is happening about this?

A. DCC Highways will meet on 28th June to discuss the matter and, hopefully, agree to the signage proposed by the PC.

Refreshments

End.