**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting Somerford Keynes**

**19th May 2023**

**7.00pm - Held at the Village Hall**

Present: Cllr G. Valentine (GV), Cllr M. Keegan (MK) Cllr M.McKeown, Cllr L.Spivey, Clerk K.Josey

**1.Apologies:** - Cllr N.Hunt

2.Report received from previous Chair Mr J.Whitwell. see below –

Somerford Keynes Parish Council’s Report for the Annual Parish Meeting, May 2023.

## by John Whitwell (ex Chair of the PC)

As the work of the previous Parish Council has ended, following the local elections, I will try to summarise what was achieved and the contextual factors we had to face.

The first thing to remember is that there was an election for the PC four years ago as eight people stood for the seven places on the council. As there were four new members of the Council we decided to do a village survey to ascertain what the village wanted us to do. We had a pretty good response with 94 completed surveys. The need for a bus shelter was the most popular request. This we haven’t achieved as the expense was prohibitive with our limited funds. However, the new PC might like to reconsider this as the coffers have been considerably increased by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money.

The respondents also expressed concern about speeding traffic through the village. We have applied for a speed camera, and it looks as though this may come to fruition through the Gloucestershire speed watch scheme. We also arranged for new gateway signs to be installed at the entrances to the village. This was heavily subsidised by Gloucestershire.

Families with young children also suggested a play area. This was always going to be difficult as we don’t have the land, apart from the Parish Field which is in the wrong place. However, the new play area at Neigh Bridge, installed by the Cotswold Lakes Trust, fulfils that need, especially now that the cycleway has been extended to Neigh Bridge, creating a safe route for parents with pushchairs. I should say that this cycleway was completed in part due to the Parish Council over many years highlighting the need for this to be done.

Neighbridge Country Park continues to be both a pleasure for the Parish and a pain. The COVID pandemic and the consequent lockdown and the limitations on travel made Neigh Bridge more popular than ever. At the same time many parts of the Water Park became more security conscious. Lower Mill Estate installed fencing and locked gates to the lake nearest the village and Keynes Park did much the same thing which resulted in more people using the unrestricted Neigh Bridge. The resulting problems with parking, anti-social behavior, and litter were highlighted by the Parish Council at the multi-agency meetings which were convened to try and solve the problems in the Water Park. However, there are no easy solutions to any of these problems and it looks like we will have to cope with this as best we can during the summer months.

During lockdown, and for some time after restrictions were eased, we were not permitted to have face to face PC meetings. We discovered the joys of Zoom meetings! I took out a Zoom subscription, for about £14 a month, which meant we could have unrestricted meetings, both in terms of the number of people attending and the length of time the meetings lasted, as the free version had a cut off after 40 minutes. During lockdown we had fortnightly, shorter meetings so that we could respond more quickly to whatever emerged. I thought that the Zoom meetings were more democratic as more people “attended” than usual and everyone was on the same screen with no obvious hierarchy.

When we had to return to face-to-face meetings in the Village Hall, in mid-2021, we had got out of the usual routines and made some mistakes in procedure which were picked up by some parishioners who had been on the PC themselves. That coupled with losing our established Parish Clerk and recruiting a new person to that role, Kristy Josey, plus the retirement of Roger Sleeman after 42 years’ experience on the PC, inevitably had a similar effect. In my opinion it takes a good two years to find your feet on the PC during which you learn what you are responsible for and who to go to in the County Council and District Council to get things done. This needs to be born in mind for this new PC as several new members will need to be co-opted so I think some patience and kindness is needed while new councilors become established.

I am proud of the fact that the PC successfully nominated Roger Sleeman for an honour upon his retirement from the PC especially as it was announced in the Queen’s last birthday honours list. I believe this was a first for Somerford Keynes. It’s also worth mentioning that upon the death of Her Majesty the Queen the PC sent a letter of condolence to King Charles and received a very appreciative reply from him. Both letters are on the SK website.

Pretty much throughout the life of the last PC we had the contentious planning application for the land to be developed to the south-east of Ashland House. The PC, along with many parishioners, strongly objected to this application, largely on the grounds that it is completely at odds with the recently formally ratified Neighbourhood Development Plan. We are still waiting for a decision on this application.

In contrast to our noisy neighbour, Neigh Bridge, our own Village Lake has been an oasis of peace and tranquillity. The PC has continued to fund its maintenance and development and we much appreciate the work of the Village Lake Committee and the volunteers for making it such an attractive venue.

There were two years, 2020 and 2021, when we couldn’t hold the village litter pick because of the restrictions and risks involved. I’m pleased to say we successfully reinstated it in 2022 and it took place again this year in March. I think it’s worth saying that in the years when we couldn’t hold a village event several people did there own litter pick when out walking. Litter continues to be a problem with the mindless throwing of plastic bottles and cans out of vehicles onto the verges and into ditches. We’ve also had several serious incidents of fly tipping, especially along Ewen Lane. At least the reporting of them seems to lead to a quick clearing up.

Last year several people asked the PC to do something about the hedge in Water Lane which had been neglected for years. To re-lay the hedge would have cost a small fortune but, upon hearing about this problem, we had an offer from the Lower Mill Estate, in particular their ground staff, to re-lay it as part of their staff training programme. We eagerly took them up on this offer. Earlier this year a volunteer group formed to start maintaining it and I hope this will continue again in the autumn.

A lot of work has taken place in maintaining the footpaths in the parish thanks to the vigilance of people who regularly walk them. The biggest project was the resurfacing of the 100 metres or so of footpath that runs alongside the Kennel Bungalow. We also asked for the stiles to be replaced, in the field next to Church Lane, with Bristol gates, as many people found the old stiles quite hazardous. A handrail was installed by the steps in Church Lane and several footbridges have also needed to be repaired along with the wooden kissing gate.

We have renewed the lease for the Parish Field with Waterland, with an increase in the rent.

We arranged training in the use of the defibrillator which was well attended. The PC pays for replacement batteries and pads for the two defibrillators in the village. A small group of volunteers check the defibrillator in the phone box every week which is much appreciated.

People who lived in Elm View asked for the car park there to be made usable again as it had become completely overgrown. We pressed for this to be done and the car park was resurfaced and cleared of vegetation. However, we are still concerned about the overgrown hedge in front of the Sculpture Park which makes exiting Elm View quite hazardous and certainly risky for anyone walking along there.

We continued to liaise with the Environment Agency over the maintenance of the village’s flood defence system. Earlier this we shared a site visit with their representative and discussed their plans for future maintenance.

There are several things that we have set in motion which will bear fruit in the future. For example, making a financial contribution to Thames Head Energy in order that a feasibility study could be carried out. We’ve also supported local businesses by helping them access the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

It’s an exciting time for the PC with a substantial amount of CIL money to spend in the next four to five years. This should make being a part of the PC an attractive prospect.

I would like to thank the councillors who served with me on the last PC and Kristy for taking on the role of Parish Clerk. Your role is going to be important in helping new councillors to get to grips with their responsibilities. I would like to thank Tony Berry for the support and advice he gave us and congratulate Mike McKeown for his electoral success in becoming our District Councillor. Thanks also to Lisa Spivey for the work she’s done as our County Councillor. I would also like to thank Muriel Watkins for putting together and distributing the Chronicle. This is full of really useful information and so much better than the Parish Newsletter where Somerford Keynes hardly got a mention.

Cllr G.Valentine thanked John Whitwell on behalf of the Parish Council for his work and dedication as Chair.

Cllr G.Valentine also thanked Kristy Josey on behalf of the PC for her continued work as the Parish Clerk.

**3.** The Parish Clerk gave a brief update on the finances of the Parish Council and reported that all audited accounts are on the website and noticeboard. The Clerk also highlighted that the Parish has received a large amount of CIL monies £44,897 in the new financial year 23/24.

**4**. Report received from the Village Lake Committee – see below

**SOMERFORD KEYNES VILLAGE LAKE**

**Report for AGM 19 May 2023**

The Lake subcommittee consists of 5 members: Chairman (Mike Wilding), 2 parish councillors (Graham Valentine & Mandy Keegan), plus Lisa Willis and Nick Cartwright. In April, Nick Cartwright resigned from the committee, due to pressure of other commitments, and we welcomed Jane Hayman in his place. We meet at regular intervals, manage the Lake and carry out monthly Lake inspections, & manage volunteer mornings

1. **CALOR RURAL COMMUNITY FUND:** Of the £5000 grant received just before the Covid epidemic hit, we still have £428 left in this fund for special purposes that the committee decides upon. There was no expenditure from this fund in 2022/23.
2. **VOLUNTEERS:** During the year we have held about 3 or 4 volunteer mornings when 6 -10 regular volunteers have come along for 2-3 hours, primarily working on general maintenance such as clearing overhanging branches, and the annual bonfire in March, as well as the labour involved in the items in para 3 below. Our last volunteer morning was on Coronation Monday, when a holly and a chestnut, grown from seed by a villager, Anne Whitwell, were planted. These will be labelled as being planted on the occasion of the Coronation of King Charles III.
3. **SKPC LAKE BUDGET:** We continue to work on a SKPC Lake budget of £1050 per year, and expenditure this year was £84 under our annual budget. Money this year has primarily been on:
4. Plaque marking the time capsule buried to mark 70th anniversary of the accession of Queen Elizabeth II to the throne
5. Bulb planting (mini daffodils and snowdrops) around the plaque
6. Electrical checks on owl box camera
7. Shed preservative and brushes
8. Wildflower meadow flailing and yellow rattle seed (remainder of CDC section 106 grant money)
9. Removal of rotted gate posts and replacement: also replacement of a boundary fencepost
10. Moth trap kit, (assembled by volunteers)
11. 250 snowdrop bulbs enhancing those planted 2 years ago around the entrance gate area
12. Water plants for floating island
13. Corrugated sheets for reptile warming spots
14. Supplying and fixing of anti slip treads on the remainder of the boardwalk [as this was a special request from SKPC, the funding (£1400 exc VAT) came directly from SKPC, and not out of our annual budget]
15. **LAKE SECTION ON THE NEW VILLAGE WEBSITE:** The Lake has a section on the new village website. It will mean that news, volunteer morning dates, and photos/sightings etc. can be viewed more easily. We have a blog set up so that sightings of wildlife can be recorded, including those from motion sensitive night cameras.. A whiteboard is still set up at the entrance to the Lake, especially geared at children recording what they see. Little has gone on the Village Website this year, but we now have help with the IT side of things, so we plan to improve on this information outlet next year.
16. **WILDFLOWER MEADOWS:** Our two areas designated as wildflower areas, have progressed at different paces. The Lakeside strip between the two young weeping willows on the N side, has done well, with the seeds sown on very barren soil. The larger area in the NW corner struggled in the wet then the drought with the exception of the daffoldils and snowdrops. Removal of the dominant deep rooted weeds and some reseeding will be the next step ..patience is required on such projects.
17. **ECOLOGICAL MATTERS:** Our little grebe is still around if very shy, and nesting again this year. Our main activity on the ecological front has been the purchase of a moth trap, in kit form and assembling it. It has been trialled and works well, and we will be advertising the sessions for villagers to join in when the weather warms up. It will be interesting to see how many species we have at the Lake.

 **Mike Wilding** *Chairman- SKVL Management Subcommittee 14 May 2023*

**5.** An update was received from Mike McKeown regarding the Community Energy Scheme. Mike explained that things were progressing and thanked the PC for their support. The feasibility study has highlighted various locations which would be suitable for a solar farm. The next steps will be to contact/discuss with landowners. Renewable heating will be the next phase to consider for the project. Mike confirmed that all details of the project are on the Thames Head energy website - info@thamesheadenergy.org

**6.** Report received from Cllr M. McKeown. Cllr McKeown thanked the public for the votes he had received and was looking forward to his work as the District Councillor. He had a short report as he has only been in post a couple of weeks. He confirmed that there have been no further updates regarding the planning application for Ashlands. He was aware that the Wild Duck in Ewen has resubmitted a planning application considering the concerns of local residents.

**7**. Report received from Cllr L.Spivey – see below.

**Cllr Lisa Spivey**

**County Councillor for the South Cerney Division**

**Gloucestershire County Council**

**Annual Report 2022/2023**

In the last year I have attended all Full Council meetings and continued to sit on the Adult Social Care and Communities committee which I also vice-chair, and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee which gives me an excellent insight into the overall performance of the Council and highlights areas of concern. All those committees sit 6 times a year.

I have also been involved in 2 joint scrutiny meetings with ASCC and Health Overview Scrutiny Committee which were looking specifically at the crisis in emergency care over the winter period which saw our category 2 (life threatening or seriously injured) ambulance response times go from the 18minutes guidelines to over 4 hours.

I am also currently siting on a task and finish working group looking at Bus services in the county and how we could improve them.

As a member of the Corporate scrutiny committee I took part in a whole day scrutiny session in January where we interrogated the Council’s proposed budget for this financial year. The budget set this year was £560million. This was presented as a growth budget but in reality a vast amount of the “growth” was inflationary costs and in year staff pay award costs (due to the fact that the 22/23 staff pay award was budgeted at 2% and the settlement was 6.1%).

It made for a sobering day, as over two thirds of the Council’s entire budget is taken up by just 2 directorates – Adult Social care and Children’s Care. This means that everything else the council has to do and deliver all has to be squeezed into a scant one third of the overall budget. Until these demand led services are under control, this means that many of the things that you contact me about, mostly in Highways - the appalling state of ours roads, the inability to get speed limits reduced and the clearing of verges etc- are simply not possible to deliver due to lack of resources.

I also feel acutely that for the County Council based in Gloucester, the Cotswolds and this division in particular being on the very southern part of the County doesn’t get the attention it should. This is something that I do my very best to reverse and I ensure that I always bring up questions and issues relevant to our part of the county.

Over the last year, I have continued to focus on the 4 main issues which are the local issues residents contact me about most frequently.

They are:

1. Highway Maintenance issues
2. Road safety, especially speeding
3. River pollution
4. GP waiting times/access to healthcare services

Most parishes have a very good system of logging highway maintenance issues and have a working relationship with the Local Highways manager, Richard Gray. In the last year, I have had regular meetings with Richard (every few weeks) to keep abreast of these issues and to assist in seeing action on them.

I have actively encouraged residents and PCs to make use of the very easy to use “report it” function of the County Council website. This tool ensures that any road defects are logged in the system and will be dealt with (eventually!).

Despite motions and questions brought to Full Council, I continue to be frustrated by the lack of proper highway maintenance, including pavements and footpaths, which I do not think is delivering for residents. Residents email me on a near daily basis, telling me about road repairs either not carried out or shoddy repairs, uncut vegetation which creates safety issues, fallen down signs, abandoned road works signs cluttering the verge, debris filling gullies, potholes wreaking tyres- the list goes on.

It is clear that the Local Highways managers are not able to do all the work they would like to do and are financially constrained each year. This could be eased if the contractor, was doing a consistently good standard of work and if the maintenance schedule was overhauled.

I have tried to use my Highways Local funding to best effect, doing some patching work on some villages, helping with speed surveys, and contributing towards making walking and cycling safer and easier. I will be doing the same again in this coming year.

The adoption of a policy on ANPR systems has also been painfully slow, and the Traffic Regulation Order team are way behind on dealing with requests due to staff shortages.

In many cases in this rural part of the County, we are just given a flat “no” when asked to look at speed reductions through our villages because we do not tick the boxes by national criteria which would necessitate a speed reduction.

This is disappointing because the speed reduction would not only make our villages safer, it would also improve health and wellbeing for residents.

The new PCC has made tackling speeding a priority and has been very supportive of community speed watch initiatives and the police have been out and about with their speed guns, but they can’t be everywhere and so we need to affect a culture change where speeding is seen as unacceptable.

The legal dumping of raw sewage into our local rivers and waterways is a scandal which is gathering national attention. According to recent figures there were over 2000 incidents of raw sewage being poured out into Cotswold rivers in 2021 and there are no rivers deemed to be healthy in the whole of England. This must stop and I have been actively campaigning on this issue.

I will continue to campaign for this practise to be disallowed, for water companies to be made to increase infrastructure funding and for the Environment Agency to be built back up to be equipped to deal with this terrible situation.

The Council continues to support post pandemic recovery in communities via the Build Back Better fund which is open until 2025, please get in touch if you have a project you think appropriate for funding.

Brexit and the pandemic has had a very big impact on care home staffing, and this remains an issue for concern, with the closure of 4 cares homes in the County. This is true of nearly all areas of healthcare, especially dentistry which we brought a motion about in March’s Council meeting.

Children’s services finally moved out of Special measures after the inspection in February 2022 but continues to Require Improvement and is an enormous drain on the Council’s finances largely due to out of county placements and the requirement to use agency staff to fill social worker roles.

As ever, if there are particular issues you would like to discuss, I am available on the phone or email.

Best wishes,

Lisa

Tel: 01285 653405

Email: lisa.spivey@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Cllr Valentine then asked if there were any questions. A member of the public questioned Cllr Spivey regarding the increase in Council Tax which she stated was inline with guidance and highlighted the financial pressures of all departments/councils. Another member of the public questioned the proposed planning for the Anaerobic Incinerator in Ashton Keynes, due to the smells and general environmental concerns. Cllr Spivey responded that she was aware of the concerns and would investigate and send any further information to the PC when she receives it.

The meeting closed at 7.50pm