

*SWALLOWFIELD PARISH*

MINUTES OF THE  
**ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**  
HELD ON TUESDAY 15<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2008 IN  
SWALLOWFIELD PARISH HALL AT 7.30 p.m.

Present:

Mrs. A. King (Chair, Swallowfield Parish Council)

Parish Councillors: Mr. M. Bowker, Mr. G. Collender, Mr. M. Goldsmith, Mrs. M. McDonald

Parishioners: 50

1. Mrs. King welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave the following summary of the Parish Council's year.

Our Annual Report includes a Record of Achievements, a Finance Report, The Parish Plan for 2008/09 and my report.

I would like to welcome Margaret McDonald to the Council. She joined us at the end of last year and I am sure she is known to many parishioners.

This Year has been overshadowed by the July 07 floods. Many of our homes were completely flooded and there are some residents who have only just recently moved back into their houses. We were all taken by surprise by the unusual rainfall especially as in 2006 the cry was to save water in the face of drought.

I expect you all have a story to tell for the 20<sup>th</sup> July. Celia and I were at a meeting in the Parish Office and we laughingly said that we had better make our way home or we will be trapped in the hall. I paddled across the car park and drove home via Riseley, as Part Lane always floods, but I realised that this was much worse than we thought. I telephoned the office but too late Celia was trapped and eventually had to be brought home on a tractor.

There was a great spirit as residents helped each other. Only the inconsiderate drivers who raced through the floods caused concern, but as we found out later it was the same all across the Borough.

Once the water receded and we could see the damage, the Parish Council called a public meeting and a questionnaire was sent to households. We, or rather Lorna Collender, collated the information and we were able to send this to Wokingham Borough Council, who had not realised that we were in any trouble at all as the Council relied on people calling in for help. We found that it did not occur to our residents to call WBC (or Thames Water) as they were trying to save furniture or stop the water from entering the houses.

We called a meeting in September which was attended by representatives from the Environment Agency and Wokingham Borough Council. This was very successful as the Environment Agency agreed that the Parish had a major problem and were able to liaise with the Borough to initiate work. As you may be aware drains have been cleared or replaced in The Street. Ditches have been cleared by landowners, including the Parish Council. Flooding is now a regular agenda item at our meetings and we have a monthly update on progress to date.

The Parish Council has drawn a map showing the drainage system across the Parish and we will be meeting with the Environment Agency to discuss a strategic approach to water run off. Our aim is

to try to channel the water away from Riseley, down the hill to the river avoiding Swallowfield village en route.

We are also in contact with Thames Water who is planning to replace some equipment in the Russell pumping station in Swallowfield and we will also be talking to them about clearing the balancing ponds on Swallowfield Meadow.

The work needs to continue before we all become complacent and forget the effects of the floods. The ditches in the Parish are the responsibility of landowners and house owners, which does mean that if your garden is adjacent to a ditch it is likely to be your responsibility.

The other concern this year has been the retention of the Post Office. I am pleased to report that the Post Office will continue and that new owners for the shop have been found. I would like to thank Frances and Patsy on behalf of the parish for working so hard to retain the shop, without their courage all those years ago the Shop would have closed. I am sure they will both continue to be involved in the shop some way over the next year, but we wish them well in their retirement.

At the last Annual Parish Meeting the Parish Council wanted to start a register listing the assets of our Parish: wildlife, vegetation, landscape, trees, historical houses etc as a reminder and aide memoir of the reasons why the Parish is such a great place. We did not have enough volunteers to carry out the work. However, this year the government has introduced regulations on the conservation of biodiversity and we are auditing the wildlife resources and will include this work in the Parish Plan.

We have had success with the introduction of a 30mph speed limit in Swallowfield and a variable speed limit through Farley Hill. It is more problematic to enforce a 30mph in Riseley, but the Parish Council, with the Neighbourhood Action Group, will continue to push for change.

J11 looms large for potential traffic problems in the Parish. The work began in February with the cutting down of all the trees. The Parish Council did complain about lack of information and a meeting was called. There is a map at the Parish Office showing the plan of the new junction which should be completed by 2010. It is hoped that all the through traffic will go onto the bypass and miss the villages.

During the year we sent out a questionnaire to ask about the housing needs of the residents and 22 households reported that they had a need for local affordable housing. The Parish Council has taken note but until the planning restrictions, relating to mitigation measures for the Thames Heaths Basin Special Protection Area, are lifted we can go no further.

CCTV has been updated at the Parish Hall and two young people were caught vandalising the MPG court. The Police have taken proceedings. Our excellent relationship with the Police has continued and PC Adie Hodges held his first surgery last month. It was well attended and he plans to hold more.

Our great success this year was in installing floodlights, new kickboards and basketball posts in the MPG court. This was at the end of some years of work. Celia compiled a booklet called "How we got Here" and it tells the history of the MPG court. It also shows the hard work carried out by councillors and their tenacity and that of the Clerk to keep on trying until the goal is reached. The new court was officially opened by Laurie Sanchez and the Scouts put on a basketball tournament demonstration.

I would like to thank all who work for the Parish Council especially Celia, who is always enthusiastic and ready to help all who ask and who gently steers the Parish Council. Thank you to all those who are volunteers such as Lorna Collender, Barbara Baker and Clive Walden who help with the newsletter. Thank you to your councillors who give their time freely and often with little praise.

This Parish is a beautiful place. We should be thankful that we are lucky enough to live here and we should be vigilant in protecting it.

The Finance and Planning reports which were contained in the Annual Report:

Financial Report Year for year 2007 to 2008

The Parish Council's investment portfolio as at 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008 stood at £1,954,713 compared with £2,146,993 this time last year, a reduction of £192,280 or just over 9%. This drop is solely due to the fall in the stock market as a consequence of the 'credit crunch' and the sub-prime write-downs. In spite of this fall the anticipated income from our investments is in the order of £75,000 which is approximately the same as last year. The capital loss will therefore have no effect on the Council's expenditure over the coming year.

The final figures for the Council's Income and Expenditure for the year 2007/08 have yet to be finalised, but provisionally the income was £142,728 against a budgeted income of £142,500. The expenditure, including the sinking fund sum of £26,000, will be close to the Council's Income, and at this stage it appears that there may be a marginal surplus of a few thousand pounds.

The Council has decided to change its budgeting procedures, and any deficit or surplus will be carried forward into the budget for the following year, and the expenditure amended accordingly. Previously any surplus was added to the reserves, whilst any deficit was taken from reserves. The new system will focus the Council's attitude as it will now be obvious as to whether the Council is over or under spending year by year.

It remains the Council's intention to have a balanced budget such that income matches expenditure. In order to achieve this the Council has to ensure that all expenditure is vigorously examined to ensure best value is achieved, and income has to be maximized whilst at the same time aiming for Capital Growth in our investments.

The budget for the year 2008/09 has been set at an income level of £143,000. It will be noted that this is only £500 more than for 2007/08; substantially less than inflation. This will create a challenge for the Council if it wishes to remain within its budget, one that I am sure the Council will rise to.

Planning Report for year 2007 to 2008

This past year has probably been the quietest year the Parish Council has had for the last 10 years with regard to Planning.

The total numbers of houses to be built in the South East has still to be agreed, and in particular Wokingham Borough's allocation. Until that has been decided it cannot be known exactly where the houses in the Borough will be built. However it is still anticipated that there will be no major schemes in this Parish. Shinfield/SpencersWood/Three Mile Cross may well continue to suffer ever more housing, only time will tell as to how many dwellings will be allocated there.

The Thames Valley Basin Heath Special Protection Area (TVBHSPA) continues to cause problems for any new development in the Parish as it has now done so for several years. This has meant that

not a single new house has been built in the Parish over the last year unless it was a replacement for a demolished dwelling. However the end would appear to be in sight, as mitigation measures have been consulted upon. When they are finally agreed it may be expected that a small deluge of planning applications will descend upon us!

Until the TVBHSPA has finally been resolved the Council cannot pursue the provision of affordable housing through the Rural Housing Trust. However the Council does hope that some progress can be made later this year, always provided it decides that there should be provision of low cost housing on exception sites.

The matter of farm diversification continues to be important as local farmers attempt to find alternative income sources. Meetings have been held with farmers and with Wokingham Borough to try to ensure that any such diversification is acceptable on planning grounds, whilst at the same time achieving income growth for the farmers. Some progress has been made, but it will remain a problem until farmers receive reasonable monies for their labours.

Enforcement continues to be a major problem – both with the amount required due to what appears to be a growing trend of landowners/residents trying to get away with ignoring planning requirements, and also the difficulty Wokingham Borough has in enforcing it all, possibly due to too much work load on individual staff. We shall persevere to try and ensure that Swallowfield Parish remains a pleasant rural area!

Also contained in the Annual Report were the PC's Record of Achievements 2007-2008 and the Parish Plan. A financial report from the Calico Trust was available at the meeting.

Mrs. King then introduced the two speakers.

2. Presentation by Mr. Barry Morrison, Environment Agency (EA) on flooding.  
Mr. Morrison explained the powers and responsibilities of the EA regarding rivers and those of the landowners regarding water courses, where people should have regard to channeling water from one side of their property on through to the next. Landowners were also responsible for banks, trees, debris etc in their ditches. Since the July 2007 floods, the EA has been working hard, with Wokingham BC, to resolve the problems identified within the parish and this work continues. Reducing the risk of flooding was also an area which was being addressed and Mr. Morrison provided information on a new warning system which would be in place in the autumn. In addition, future flood warnings would be on a much more local scale and relevant to local communities rather than to a wider area. The EA was also advising people to be prepared in advance and leaflets were available with more information on this. The Loddon catchment area was to be surveyed and the team would be working closely with the EA and Wokingham BC to try and minimise flood risk in the area. However, the July 07 incident had been surface water flooding not river flooding.
3. Presentation by Mr. Ian Gough - Wokingham Borough Council  
The presentation centred on climate change and its effects; and what measures people could take in their own homes to help reduce carbon emissions and save energy (and money at the same time).

A question and answer session was held after each presentation. Mrs. King then thanked both speakers for their contributions to the evening.

4. Open debate

There was general discussion regarding surface water flooding and the state of ditches in the parish. Mrs. King agreed that the Parish Council would look at ditches in Lambs Lane and highlight problems to Wokingham BC. Wokingham Borough Councillor Munro spoke on behalf of WBC regarding pot holes and asked for forbearance while a new Highway Inspector became familiarised with the area. SPC Councillor Mrs. McDonald reported that the Parish Council was working very hard on flooding on behalf of residents, and would continue to do so. There was further discussion regarding the river and whether there were any controls further upstream which might affect river levels in the Parish. Mr. Morrison confirmed that there were not, although recent work in Arborfield meant that river levels would now be slightly lower.

5. Motions put by parishioners –

Kingsbridge – there was concern that the bridge was very old and had not been painted for a long time. It was agreed that care of the bridge would be put forward as a formal motion and the Parish Council would pursue the matter with Wokingham Borough Council.

Fly tipping – this was discussed and that the problem had been particularly bad in Barge Lane recently. Councillor Munro reported that recently, dumped asbestos had been removed from the area, costing Wokingham BC a considerable sum. However, cameras were being used throughout the Borough and it was hoped that a prosecution would be made before long which would act as a warning to others.

Parish Stores/village shop – Mrs. King provided an update on the situation regarding the shop, where the PC was negotiating with the tenants of The Crown Public House over a new lease for a larger area (to include the adjacent front office area). Further information would be provided in the next PC newsletter, once details were finalised.

6. Close of Meeting – Mrs. King thanked everyone for attending. The meeting was declared closed at 9 p.m. and all were invited to light refreshments.