

Ashton Keynes Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting held at Ashton Keynes Village Hall on Wednesday 23rd October 2024 at 7.15pm

Present: Cllrs D Wingrove (Chairman); M Carter; G Carter; T Romback; D Ventham.

In attendance: Wilts Cllr Berry; Fiona Ryder – Clerk.

24-25/095 Public Section

There were no members of public in attendance.

24-25/096 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Crawford, Hill, Inzani and Low.

24-25/097 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

24-25/098 Parish Council Vacancy

There is currently one vacancy to be filled by co-option and one notice of vacancy still active.

24-25/099 Minutes of the Council Meetings held on 18th September and 9th October 2024

The minutes of the meetings held on 18th September and 9th October 2024 were approved and signed.

24-25/100 Actions from Previous Meeting

24-25/062 – A Neighbourhood Plan Review grant application has been started, an update will be provided in October. This action was carried forward.

Action: Cllr Crawford

24-25/082 – The White Hart Inn will be re listed as an Asset of Community Value.

Action: Cllr Wingrove

24-25/084 – The Insurance has been renewed.

24-25/085 – A Salt Bin survey will be carried out.

Action: Cllr Crawford

24-25/101 Chairmans Report

APP/Y3940/W/24/3344456 - PLANNING PUBLIC INQUIRY - PL/2023/03298 - Land at Wheatleys Farm, Ashton Keynes, Swindon

At our meeting on 18 September 2024, we were of the understanding that Wiltshire Council were still intending to defend their refusal of the application to quarry sand and gravel at Wheatleys Farm, at the upcoming appeal on this matter. Almost immediately after that meeting, we learned that Wiltshire Council had decided, at the eleventh hour, not to defend their refusal. We immediately alerted Parishioners to this. A lot of people expressed their concerns forcefully at a Wiltshire Council (Malmesbury Area Board) Meeting which happened to be being held in our own Village Hall on 24 September. Recognising that we, the Village, suddenly had to fight this alone, a public meeting was hastily arranged for the following evening. A plan of action was devised, and a team formed, made up of Parish Councillors and concerned Parishioners. It was very gratifying that so many people volunteered their time to support the cause.

The Appeal Inquiry, to be heard by an independent Inspector, was due to start on 15 October. Because, through no fault of our own, we had very little time to prepare our case, our first objective was to try and get the appeal postponed. However, despite putting forward a strong legal case (drawn up by three solicitors who had volunteered their services), the Inspector

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rejected our request. Anticipating this possibility, another part of the team had been working, in parallel, incredibly hard, to enable us to put up the best defence of our case at the Inquiry. We also embarked on a campaign to raise public awareness of our plight, culminating in a visit by a television crew from BBC Points West who filmed and interviewed villagers at an ad hoc protest by our Best Kept Village sign. The resulting programme was broadcast at least three times.

The Inquiry itself, held over a four-day period in Chippenham, was challenging for us. The Appellant had a barrister (a KC) supported by a team of expert witnesses and we also found ourselves effectively being opposed by Wiltshire Council, complete with a barrister. We were further hampered by a very inefficient administration in the Planning Inspectorate, and an Inspector who, at times, appeared to be very hostile towards us. Nevertheless, we fought hard all the way and, in boxing parlance, 'landed a number of good punches'. The issues that we raised centred around the need for a quarry at this particular site (given that it has been acknowledged that the material extracted will be of poor quality), flood risk, noise and dust, transport concerns, ecology issues and, of course, the proximity of the proposed quarry to the houses in Maisey Mews and Heavens Rise. As well as our own team, we were grateful for people with specialist skills who volunteered to speak in our support.

We are grateful to the many parishioners who showed their support by making written submissions and also attending and speaking at the Inquiry. However, because of lack of an agenda until just before the start of the Inquiry, and because of the inflexibility of the Inspector, a number of parishioners felt that they were not able to make their points as clearly as they would have liked.

The Inquiry finished on Friday 18 October 2024 (Actually it was adjourned until 28 October, but this was just a technical adjournment to allow for certain administrative matters to be cleared up.) We still have rightful indignation at the way that we have been treated by Officers at Wiltshire Council, the Planning Inspectorate administration and indeed the whole process. To say that the odds were stacked against us is an understatement. We are now considering what, if anything, we can do in that respect. Along with the injustices, we have identified several legal discrepancies which we are reviewing to see whether there is scope for taking any further action. Our MP, Roz Savage, is also pitching in on our behalf and alongside our late representation, will be writing to the Planning Inspectorate.

I would like to conclude by thanking the 'defence' team for all their work. They put in long hours, both before and during the Inquiry, often working late into the night. Their passion and enthusiasm remained undimmed throughout the whole process.

I would like to thank Parishioners for all their support and also those who contributed to the crowd-funding appeal which helped fund our activities.

Notwithstanding any last-minute efforts to thwart the process, we now await the Inspector's verdict, which may take a few weeks.

Cllrs Berry and Grant are taking up the issues with Wiltshire Council and the perceived failings.

24-25/102 Clerks Report

The Clerks report had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The Parish Steward has dug out the channel on the Spine Road and cut back trees and bushes at the Thames Path pedestrian crossing of the B4696. The Parish Steward was called away to deal with flooding and fallen trees.

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The external auditors have completed the review of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the year ended 31st March 2024. The external auditor report states that the "AGAR is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met". A notice of conclusion of audit has been displayed on the noticeboard and website.

Due to the amount of CIL money held by the Council, the external auditor's charges were £630.00 plus VAT this year instead of £315.00 plus VAT last year.

Email received regarding concern of overhanging trees and vegetation in the river – responded asking for clarification as to location.
No further information supplied.

Email received regarding relocation of the Ashton Keynes sign to incorporate the new development. This was agreed with Wiltshire Council in March 2023 and I have been regularly chasing ever since.

Email received asking for ditch clearance near the entrance to the Church to improve visibility when leaving the car park.
Wiltshire Council Highways have confirmed that this is the responsibility of the Church as landowner.

Email received requesting bridleways be cut back. No specific location given, advised to report to Wiltshire Council and passed on to the Footpaths Working Group.

Email received regarding lack of visibility looking left as you cross the B4696 on the Thames Path towards Lower Mill.
The Parish Steward has carried out cutting back.

The Council noted the Clerks Report.

24-25/103 Financial Report

The finance report was circulated prior to the meeting.

Income since the last meeting:

CIL 20/03599/FUL	£ 5162.07
Wiltshire Council Precept	£ 19086.50

Expenditure since the last meeting:

Scribe	£ 42.00
Castle Water	£ 15.58
HMRC PAYE	£ 10.20
Community Heartbeat Trust	£ 120.00
T Romback Mileage	£ 37.80
Elan City	£ 263.81
PKF Littlejohn	£ 756.00
Payroll	£ 10.90
Clear Councils Insurance	£ 1995.48
HJ Carter	£ 500.80
OSM September	£ 10.40

Payments for approval:

Cost of Banner supplies	£ 54.80
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Unity Account Income

Interest	£ 1558.88
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Playing Fields

Income since the last meeting:

Playing Fields Hire	£ 210.00
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Expenditure since the last meeting:

Bradstone Cleaning	£ 120.00
Castle Water	£ 15.58

The Council approved the finance report, income and expenditure and payments.

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24-25/105 Quarry Appeal Inquiry

The quarry appeal inquiry team have done tremendous work and spent many hours putting a case forward on behalf of the village and are continuing to do so. The Parish Council agreed to recognise the work and time spent by way of a Thank You Buffet in the White Hart Inn using Chairmans Expenses.

Action: Cllr Wingrove

24-25/106 Planning Applications

- Application: PL/2024/08755
Proposal: Installation of roof mounted solar panels to two buildings.
Address: North End Works
Comments: No objection
- Application: PL/2024/08683
Proposal: Removal of existing conservatory and existing utility room. Proposed single storey side and rear extensions.
Address: Ashlar
Comments: No objection

24-25/107 Storage Unit for Parish Council

The Parish Council has accumulated items such as Gel Sacs and temporary road signs that are kept in various places around the village. A lockable storage unit is a good idea and will need further consideration as to where it would be located. It was agreed to carry this agenda item forward.

Action: Clerk

24-25/108 Playing Fields Committee

The committee met recently, minutes will be forwarded to all.

Action: Clerk

24-25/109 Committees, Working Groups and Representatives' Reports

- a) Planning Committee (SH) – Minutes and Agenda circulated.
- b) Internal Affairs Committee (SC) – Nothing to report.
- c) Village Hall () – Nothing to report.
- d) Cotswold Lake Trust (ML) – Nothing to report.
- e) School Governors (SC) – Nothing to report.
- f) Police (DW) – Nothing to report.
- g) Highways (SC) – Nothing to report.
- h) Footpaths, Cycle Routes and Waterways (BL) – Nothing to report.
- i) Ashton Keynes Charities (NI) – Nothing to report.
- j) Parochial Church Council () – Nothing to report.
- k) Millennium Green (NI) – Nothing to report.
- l) B4696 Road Safety (SC) – Nothing to report.
- m) CIL Funds (TR) – Nothing to report.
- n) Flood Protection Initiatives (ML) – Nothing to report.

24-25/110 Matters for the next meeting

Councillors were reminded to contact the Clerk with any items to be put forward for the agenda and to submit any reports for the Committees, Working Groups and Representatives section at least 10 days in advance of the next meeting.

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24-25/111 Date for the next meeting

The next Parish Council meeting will be held on 20th November 2024 at 7:15 p.m. at Ashton Keynes Village Hall.

The December meeting will be arranged for the 11th December, hopefully at the school.

The meeting concluded at 8.15pm.