

Cosgrove Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Parish Meeting : 17 May 2023

1. The Meeting opened at 19.00. David Smith, Chair of the Parish Council welcomed everyone. Approximately 70 people attended.
2. Apologies for absence were received from Cllr William Barter, Mr and Mrs Chris Stokes, Mr and Mrs Ben Hewetson and Mr AG Hickey.
3. The Meeting received the Chair of the Parish Council's report for 2022. There was general consternation about the speeds being recorded by the Speed Indicator Devices; there was one vehicle recorded at 70 mph. An appeal was made for any witnesses to incidents at the Castlethorpe turn on Yardley Road to continue to be reported to the Parish Council via the village Facebook page or by calling 07494855422 or by email to clerk@cosgroveparishcouncil.org.uk. There was a quick run through of the features of the Village website and everyone was encouraged to sign up for email notification of updates.
4. The 2022 Financial Report of the Parish Council was delivered. There were no questions.
5. Ward Councillor Ian McCord gave his Report and noted Planning continues to take up a great deal of Ward Councillors' time. There was one question from the audience about a village plan. (A Neighbourhood Plan is a community-led framework for guiding the future development and growth of an area. Cllr McCord thought a Neighbourhood Plan for Cosgrove might take around 3 to 4 years to compile. It was an expensive project and could, unless handled sensitively, be divisive. If there is a Local Plan in place then Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), when applicable, could increase from 15% (capped) to 25%. The Parish Council in Ashton had a Neighbourhood Plan and were hopeful they would receive a sizeable quantity of CIL. Cllr McCord recommended getting actively involved in any consultations on the new West Northants Local Plan as this could provide some protection from future large scale developments.
6. Ms Jude Busari, Executive Head of Cosgrove Primary School and Ashton Church of England Primary School gave a short presentation. There are only 47 children currently on roll at Cosgrove which is very low. School funding is based on roll numbers and careful budgeting is needed. 8 pupils, all resident in Cosgrove, were expected in September which is good news. Efforts to market the School are being made to attract new families. The School has a stable and dedicated staff team with a very low turnover. The School has a very good reputation locally in catering for children with Special Educational Needs. The local authority has recently awarded a grant of £15,000 to refurbish and develop the Early Years area. The Jubilee Garden continues to develop. Cosgrove Park had made a donation which paid for the children to go to the pantomime and the Parish Council contributed towards the cost of cutting back the perimeter hedge. Both gratefully received.

The School would welcome closer links with the community and the Parish Council. Villagers wanting to attend the annual Autumn Fair held in September and the dress rehearsal of the Christmas show would be very welcome. Volunteers to be School Governors were invited as the Governing Body had vacancies.

7. During the Open Forum the following matters were raised:
 - The length of the grass on the Castlethorpe junction – responsibility of WNC. Raise concerns via FixMyStreet.
 - The deterioration of the bridge over the canal – responsibility of the Canal and River Trust (CRT). Raise concerns with CRT who will then make an assessment and, if necessary, carry out repairs.
 - Where has the bench on the towpath next to the bridge gone? Removed by CRT. Clerk to find out if it will be replaced. If not, sponsorship to be sought to replace it.
 - Why had the poplars, next to the linear mooring at the Old Brewery, been cut down? An arboriculturist had assessed them as being dangerous (only 30% of the trunks still alive) and they were reduced in height for safety reasons.
 - How would emergency access to the Church be possible now the space outside was being used for private parking? The area does not belong to the Church but residents of the mews cottages were approachable and happy to move vehicles for Church events.

- The area next to the mews cottages has been cleared but no application for parking has been made. Concerns about cars being parked on the verge opposite at risk of causing an accident.
 - What was happening on the land below the lock adjacent to the tow path where it has been extensively cleared of trees. General agreement and dismay that large trees had been cut down. It is believed the land has been cleared to reinvigorate the lake for fishing. Enquiries of WNC had revealed no breach of planning, no tree preservation orders on any of the trees and it was not CRT land. The Forestry Commission is investigating the oak tree which had a number of large branches removed.
8. Cedric Brasey, Chair of the Village Hall, gave a presentation which was well received. The Village Hall Committee are looking for volunteers to join the Committee.
 9. The Buckingham Canal Society (BCS) and Trustee, Terry Cavender, gave his presentation highlighting the work of the Society. Follow up discussions included:
 - A request to stop leaks from the rewatered section of the canal which is causing issues on adjacent farmland – BCS are working closely with hydrologists from CRT, the landowner and the tenant farmer. Any rewatering is under their supervision and involves, among other things, patching of the clay lining and identifying if there are leaks. Once identified these are then sealed but it is not a quick process.
 - Whether BCS had been approached by the proposed warehouse developers to come to an agreement – developments happening along the whole BCS restoration corridor and insufficient funding to buy adjacent land so they work with landowners to achieve and maintain access.
 - What benefit will accrue to BCS from the proposed warehouse development – the archaeological surveys carried out by the developers as part of their application means the canal can be diverted to avoid a burial mound by using the proposed country park and will cross the stream slightly higher than originally planned
 - Why has the BCS chosen not to comment on the proposed development – never publicly comment on any development as outside their charitable objectives, the first of which is to promote the restoration of the Old Stratford and Buckingham Arms of the Grand Union Canal.
 - Whether there was an increased flood risk with the rewatering to a nearby warehouse – BCS work closely with the CRT team including hydrologists and would always seek to avoid problems by gradual, supervised reintroduction of water.
 10. The final presentation of the evening was given by the Furtho Pit Opposition Group (FDOG). Additional information was provided by Cllr McCord who had been pressing the WNC Planning Case Officer for an update. Key points raised were:
 - Unlikely to go to the Planning Committee before July 2023.
 - Local Highways are content with the timing and length of the data collection used in the transport assessment.
 - National Highways no longer object about the cumulative effect of increased traffic on the strategic road network (A5) which is not predicted to be severe.
 - Still major issues around flooding and its mitigation. The Environment Agency (EA) maintains the flood risk assessment of the developers is not fit for purpose. It is understood the applicant is working to address the issues raised by the EA. The EA has stated if their concerns are not satisfactorily addressed then they can refer the decision to the Secretary of State who could decide to “call it in” (The Secretary of State has the power to take the decision-making power on a planning application out of the hands of the local planning authority (LPA) by calling it in for his own determination.)
 - Of the three fields earmarked for the proposed development one is denuded and two are green field meadows
 - The developers must provide adequate attenuation ponds on the same side as the development and not the far side of the existing culvert.
 - The flood risk over the life of the application must be dealt with – usually at the point of the application only.
 - Balancing lakes are to restrict waterflow but unclear how the attenuation pools shown in the country park will achieve this. The higher the level of the Dogsmouth Brook, the more likely flood water will be pushed back upstream to Stony Stratford as well as down to Newport Pagnell.
 11. A Vote of Thanks was given to all delivering presentations and also to those attending. The Meeting ended at 21.05