

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SOPLEY PARISH
COUNCIL
HELD ON 21ST MARCH 2013 AT SOPLEY PARISH HALL

Attendees: Parish Councillors Shutler (Chairman), Westmacott, Rawstron & Springate.
Parish Clerk G N Lewis & 5 Parishioners

Apologies for absence: Parish Councillors Eccles, Paul, & Pease. County Cllr Rippon-Swaine.
District Councillor Woodifield. Mr & Mrs Dunn.

The Parish Clerk confirmed that the meeting was quorate. There were no declarations of interest from Members present in respect of any of the agenda items.

1) Review of the Minutes of the Meeting of SPC held on 17th January 2013 and Matters Arising.

The minutes of the January meeting were reviewed and approved. **A motion to add an addendum to the minutes of the meeting held on 17th November 2012 in order to clarify a planning issue relating to Moorlands College was proposed by Cllr Shutler, seconded by Cllr Westmacott and carried unanimously.** The Clerk will arrange for the addendum to be added to the minutes and posted on the Parish Website.

Matters Arising:

Van Sales and Vehicle Refurbishment workshop operating from Sopley Views, Ringwood Rd.

In Cllr Woodifield's absence, the Parish Clerk confirmed that she had been pursuing the matter with the Planning Department at NFDC, although the initial response from the Enforcement Team had not been encouraging. The Clerk also confirmed that the issue had previously been raised with NFDC by the Parish Council during the autumn of 2004 and this information had now been passed to Cllr Woodifield so that she could check what conclusions had been reached at that time. NFDC Planners are also currently examining aerial photographs of the site to try to establish when the workshop structures had been erected - and whether or not they require planning consent. Cllr Woodifield will report back to the Parish Council as soon as she has any further information.

2) Public Participation

Priest Lane – Deteriorating Road Surface.

Mr Dennis Tanner asked if the Council could chase HCC to repair a large pothole between Priest House and Badgers Farm. The Clerk will follow this up with the Highways Team.

3) Chairman's Report

Resignation of the Parish Clerk.

Cllr Shutler informed the meeting that, with much regret, the Council had received and accepted a letter from Mr Lewis giving notice of his intention to resign from the post of Parish Clerk. Cllr Shutler noted that Mr Lewis has an association with the Parish Council that first began in 1989 and, during that time, he has served as a Parish Councillor, School Governor, Council Chairman and Parish Clerk. Cllr Shutler proposed a vote of thanks to Mr Lewis for his service to the Council – which was seconded by Cllr Westmacott and carried unanimously

It was noted that Mr Lewis' period of notice will end on March 31st and that he was currently working additional paid hours in order to prepare a smooth transition for his successor. Until a permanent replacement Clerk can be appointed, the Council had managed to secure an offer of Locum cover from Mr Edwin Macknamara – who is the part-time Clerk for neighbouring Bransgore Parish Council. Mr Macknamara is willing to provide cover for an initial three month period, working a maximum of 60 hrs per month at the same salary point as Mr Lewis. **Cllr Shutler proposed and Cllr Westmacott seconded that the Council should Mr Macknamaras' offer and ask Mr Lewis to draw up an appropriate contract – carried unanimously.**

Ponies being grazed on Shirley Green.

Cllr Shutler informed the meeting that, at the beginning of March, the Parish Council had posted warning notices on Shirley Green giving the owners of the Ponies being grazed there without permission a 14-day period of notice to remove them – after which the Parish Council reserved the right to instruct bailiffs to have them removed to a place of safety at the owner's expense. The ponies had also been visited by the RSPCA who had expressed some concerns about their condition and welfare. To date, there had been no response from the owners – so the Council now needed to decide whether to initiate the removal of the ponies by bailiffs – or to have one further attempt to persuade the owners to move them. Removal by bailiffs would involve the Council in considerable expense – which will probably be very difficult to recover from the owners should they subsequently try to reclaim the ponies. As an added irritation, the ponies had destroyed the Oak sapling that had been planted on Shirley Green to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee last year. After discussion, it was decided not to proceed to forced removal of the ponies before the end of March – but to use the interim period to seek support and advice from the Police Safer Neighbourhood Team in order to put further pressure on the owners to remove them.

Annual Spring Clean Event.

Cllr Shutler reminded the meeting that the annual Parish Spring Clean and Litter Pick was scheduled to take place over the coming weekend and that the Parish Council would like as many residents as possible to turn out to help – so it would be appreciated if everyone present could spread the word amongst their friends and neighbours. Meeting points and times for the start of the Litter Pick in different parts of the Parish had been publicised by leaflet and, as in previous years, the event would be supported by NFDC. Cllr Shutler also drew the attention of the co-ordinating Councillors of the need to adhere to the safety guidelines agreed with the Parish Council’s insurers and recently circulated via e.mail by the Parish Clerk.

Nomination of new Parish Council representative on Sopley Primary School Board of Governors.

Following Cllr Paul’s decision to stand down from her role as the Parish Council representative on the Board of Governors, Cllr Shutler informed the meeting that the Council had received an offer of help from Mrs Barbara Pope of Sopley Court - who is willing to become a co-opted Governor acting on behalf of the Parish Council. Mrs Pope had recently met with the Chairman of Governors and is currently going through the process of formal CRB checks – which are necessary before any potential appointment can be confirmed. Subject to the outcome of these checks and the Governing Board’s official acceptance of her offer, **Cllr Shutler proposed that the Parish Council should gratefully accept Mrs Pope’s offer – which will be formally confirmed at the May Annual General Meeting. Seconded by Cllr Eccles – carried unanimously.**

Cllr Shutler also asked the Clerk to record an official vote of thanks to Cllr Paul for the hard work and valuable contribution that she had made to the Board of Governors over the past few years.

2013 Parish Newsletter.

In the wake of Mr Lewis’ resignation, Cllr Shutler informed the meeting that Cllr and Mrs Pease had kindly offered to assist with the editorship, printing and distribution of this year’s Parish Newsletter on their return from South Africa on March 20th. It is possible that the changes would cause a few delays in getting the 2013 edition to the printers and the aim will now be to publish and distribute the newsletter in time for the Mayday holiday – rather than in mid April as originally planned.

Arrangements for 2013 Annual Assembly.

Cllr Shutler reminded the meeting that the Annual General Meeting and Annual Assembly was scheduled to be held on Thursday May 16th. The Parish Clerk had managed to secure a return visit

from Mr Gareth Owen of the 'New Forest Remembers' World War 2 history project as a guest speaker and, as in previous years, parishioners will be invited to stay on after the formal business and guest presentation to enjoy a social gathering and some light refreshments.

4) **Parish Clerk's Report.**

a) **Financial Report - Current Balances and Transaction Summary**

The Parish Clerk circulated copies of the current financial summary spreadsheet and transactions report for the financial year to date which were approved and signed by the Council Chairman. He advised the meeting that the Parish account balances as at mid March 2013 were :

Current A/C £14,429

Deposit A/C £20,490

Parish Hall A/C £19,522

Co-Operative Bank A/C (Shirley Allotments Charitable Trust Income) £4,883

He also advised that the meeting that the probable year-end out-turn for 2012-13 would be a net surplus of approx £1,000 after expenditure of approximately £23,000 offset by income of £24,000. In view of his impending departure, he also circulated a summary report setting out the Council's expected financial position as at March 31st 2013. A copy of this report is appended to these minutes.

Audit

The Clerk confirmed that the date for the internal 2012-13 Audit (to be carried out by Gemma Wilks) has been provisionally agreed as Saturday June 8th. This will need to be confirmed (and the audit undertaken) by the new (or Locum) Parish Clerk.

Notification has been received that the Councils' External Auditors for 2013 will be BDO LLP (working under contract to the Audit Commission). The 2012/13 Section 1 Return will need to be submitted to BDO no later than June 30th 2013.

b) **Planning**

Recent Applications

Four applications had been determined since the last SPC meeting – all were supported by SPC

and all were subsequently approved by the Planning Authorities. One further application – for an extension at Sopley Court – was currently in circulation for Parish consultation. Summary details of all recent and pending applications were circulated by the Clerk, and approved and signed-off by the Chairman.

Merryfield Park.

Judgment in the recent High Court injunction hearing brought by NFDC against the residential occupancy of three former MoD buildings had been decided in favour of the defendants. It was not yet clear what impact this might have on the District Council's proposed planning policy for the site – the public examination of which has been rescheduled for April 23rd.

Corner Cottage, Derritt Lane.

The Clerk had alerted Planning Officers at the NFNPA following the recent removal of the chimney stacks and roof at Corner and Ivy Cottages, Derritt Lane. Deborah Slade from the NPA had subsequently visited the site and had confirmed to SPC that the buildings are not listed and no planning consent is required for the work that has taken place so far – but that she will be keeping a close eye on the site in coming months.

c) Correspondence received and sent since the previous Parish Council meeting.

Meetings and actions since the last full SPC Meeting (January 2013):

- NFNPA SW Quadrant Meeting (Jan 28th) – The Parish Clerk had attended. The main agenda items were the outcomes of a peer group report into the performance of the NPA over the past four years, the management of mass cycling events in the New Forest and an update on the progress of central government proposals to relax some current planning controls. No significant actions for SPC.
- New Forest Consultative Panel (Mar 7th) - The Parish Clerk had attended. Main agenda item was a review and discussion of the findings of the Government's Independent Advisory Panel on the Future of Forestry Management in the United Kingdom. No significant actions for SPC.

Forthcoming Meetings:

- New Forest Association of Local Councils – Quarterly Meeting of Town & Parish Councils : Thursday 11th April, 7.30pm Lymington Town Hall. The standing delegates from each member Council are the Parish Clerk and / or Parish Chairman – but another Cllr can be substituted if the Clerk or Chairman are unable to attend. Mandy Oldfield (Ringwood Town Council) will need to be advised of who will be representing SPC. Dates of future meetings

are : July 11th (Lymington Town Hall), 12th September (Appletree Court, Lyndhurst), January 9th 2014 (Hythe Town Council Offices).

- NFDC – Public Examination of the Draft Local Plan. The date and timing of the rescheduled hearing ref the SOP1 / Merryfield Park draft policy is the afternoon of Tuesday 23rd April. The afternoon session starts at 1.30pm and the SOP1 item is towards the latter end of the afternoon agenda. SPC had previously decided not to make a formal representation to the Inspector, but to send someone to observe and report back to a subsequent SPC meeting.

Misc Correspondence:

- NFDC – Had advised that refuse collections will take place as normal over the Easter period and householders should leave their refuse bags out for collection on their normal days.
- Mr Alex Wiseman had contacted the Parish Council to seek advice about preventing vehicles from parking on the footpath and verge outside of his property in Ringwood Rd, Sopley.
- HALC – An updated Introductory Leaflet covering the services available from HALC had been circulated to Cllrs.
- Navitus Bay Proposed Offshore Wind Farm - An information pack and details of the next round of public consultation had been received and is available from the Clerk. Cllr Rawstron took these documents away for further consideration and will report back to the next Council meeting.
- Environment Agency – A supply of booklets explaining the responsibilities of householders and landowners whose properties are either crossed by or directly abut rivers, watercourses, drains and ditches has been received. Copies have been distributed to the Cllrs and further copies are available from the Clerk.
- Came & Co – A copy of the Parish Insurance Brokers Spring 2013 Newsletter is available from the Clerk.
- HALC e-Updates (February & March 2013) and the regular Hants Constabulary Country-Watch reports had been circulated to the Parish Councillors via e.mail. Paper copies are also available from the Parish Clerk on request.

5) Burial Board

Cllr Springate's informed the meeting that there had been two burial interments since the last Parish Council meeting – and one enquiry in respect of the interment of a cremation urn and erection of a memorial plaque.

Maintenance visits from the Hampshire Probation Trust Community Payback Team took place on Feb 16th and 23rd – when the Cemetery was cleared of a large quantity of horticultural debris and excavation material. A crushed limestone base was laid for an incinerator to be erected in a corner of the cemetery extension and the old Primary School incinerator was moved to the site.

Unfortunately, the concrete sections of the old incinerator have been extensively damaged by frost and several are badly cracked – so a new replacement will need to be considered.

The large areas of nettle-infested lawn in the cemetery extension that were chemically treated last autumn have now been raked and leveled ready for re-seeding once the warmer weather arrives – and the gravel paths will also be re-sayed with weed-killer to suppress spring growth in the next few weeks.

The next maintenance visit from the Community Payback team is scheduled for this coming Saturday (March 23rd) and twice-monthly dates have been booked from April through to October.

6) Parish Hall Report

In Cllr Eccles absence, Cllr Rawstron reported:

The bank balance as of 7/3/2013 was £3142

Year end accounts are being finalised by Cllr Eccles.

Income for year > £12000.

No progress on fundraising. Cllr Paul arranging meeting with Graham Davies to investigate smaller bite-size options for Phase 2 of the refurbishment project..

Events since last Council:

- Community Quiz Night (winners New Forest Players),
- Christchurch Cycle club AGM,
- numerous private parties,
- Packed out St Patrick's night

Actions since last Council:

- Installation of stage lighting
- Refund received for mirrors, alternative being sought.
- Newsletter report is written in draft for review

Maintenance Activities:

- Some warranty issues being addressed – notably leaks on foyer roof and in Ladies toilet.
- Considering re-engineering the ground outside the entrance as the winter has caused damage to the surface concreting.
- Security light shining on car park needs fixing/resolving

- Check the phone connection / BT line is working (Clerk reports no dial tone) and ongoing investigation into broadband access
- Anchors for staging backdrop to be installed
- Demountable ballet barres to be installed.

Forthcoming events;

- Skittles night 5th April
- The Bluestockings 6th April
- Curry-oki 26th April
- Treasure Hunt 24th May
- Big Pub Quiz, for supporting local pubs 21st June

7) **Parish Maintenance, Footpaths, Rights of Way Issues**

Cllr Westmacott presented the following report:

The Parish Council have recently submitted a Countryside Access Grant application to Hampshire County Council and the National Park Authority for funding to replace a further 14 existing stiles on the Sopley rights-of-way network with kissing gates. The total cost of the work will be in the region of £3,000, of which – if the application is successful – about £2,200 will come from grant, with the balance being funded from part of the Parish Council's 2013/14 maintenance budget allocation. The Grant Committee will meet to consider the application in late April and the outcome should be known by the time of the May Annual Assembly.

Following a growing number of incidents and complaints about walkers trespassing on private land in the vicinity of Merryfield Park, Little Merryfield and Sopley Fields, the Parish Council have been working with the GIS Mapping Team at NFDC to produce some new direction signs to encourage people to keep to the correct routes along footpaths 25, 16, 17, 18 and 30. The new signs should be erected during late April or early May and both Sopley and Bransgore Parish Councils will be publicising them in their respective Parish Newsletters.

The following defects had been noted during the winter months and repairs will be arranged now that the weather is starting to improve :

FP5 (Avon Valley Path, Court Lane junction) Replace broken signs and missing finger-post (SPC).

FP22 – Salways - Replace broken handrail bracket on footbridge over the Ripley brook (SPC).

FP13 – Replace footbridge over flood relief ditch at Fish St (HCC) and clear undergrowth and debris from fallen tree from path (SPC)

FP25 – Leggs Row - Culvert repair (SPC)

FP8 – Thatchers Lane to Martins Copse - Improve drainage / raise path level (SPC).

Cllr Westmacott asked Parishioners to let him know of any other paths that may be in need of attention.

As announced at the January meeting, Mr Norman Hiscock – who has acted as the Parish’s Volunteer Footpath Warden and Guide for many years – will be stepping down from the role in 2013. Mr Lewis – who will be leaving his job as Parish Clerk at the end of March - has kindly offered to take over from Norman and will be working with him over the next few weeks to plan the 2013 series of Parish Walks – details of which will be in the Annual Newsletter.

The Parish Council are continuing to pursue the possibility of extending the local rights of way network through the Paths for Communities Grant Scheme and are currently in contact with the agent for the Benton Jones Estate regarding a proposal to link Sopley FP16 with Bransgore FP19 alongside Derritt Lane. Discussions with the Rights of Way Office at HCC regarding the possible designation of the old cart track at Jockerills Chute, Sopley as a right of way have been less positive – mainly because the path does not lead to or cross over any land on which the general public have access rights. Although some Sopley households have Commoner’s rights that can be exercised on Jockerills Common, these rights do not extend to the general public and consequently, a request to have the access route to the Common designated as a public right of way would be highly unlikely to succeed.

8) Highways and Traffic Management Issues

The Clerk circulated copies of the current highway defects report for the Parish. SPC are working closely with HCC to prioritise the long backlog of repair work – but HCC and their primary contractor – Amey - are struggling to cope with the large volume of repairs that are needed across the whole of the New Forest arising from the December flooding and severe winter weather.

Site meetings involving both Cllr Shutler and the Parish Clerk took place on February 15th and March 5th and a further meeting will take place tomorrow morning (March 22nd) between representatives of SPC, HCC and the Avon Tyrrell Estate to address land and highway drainage issues in Ripley and Shirley.

Because of the current focus on urgent highway repairs, HCC have advised that work on the planned extension to the footpath alongside the northbound B3347 in Sopley village (originally scheduled for Feb / March 2013) has had to be postponed. Area Highways Manager Richard Bastow has apologised for the delay – and is hopeful that the work will commence during May. He has also assured the Parish that the funding for this work has been ring-fenced and will not be lost or be reallocated to other schemes.

9) County Councillor's Report

Cllr Rippon Swaine circulated the following report :

HCC HIGHWAYS - County Traffic Management Programme 2012/13

- **Sopley** – B3347 review of trial traffic management measures – assessment of whether trial pedestrian refuge island on B3347 and kerb build out at Derritt Lane junction should be made permanent. To be carried forward to 2013/14 Programme

HCC HIGHWAYS CAPITAL PROGRAMME SCHEMES 2013-14

Integrated Transport Programme – Minor Works 2012/13 (Sub programme)

- B3347 provide a new surfaced footway on NE side of Sopley one-way system from Priest Lane junction to Derritt Lane junction.
- Provide a new rural finished surface across Priest Lane 'grass triangle'.
- Design delayed – scheme moved forward to 2013-14.

HCC – PARISH LENGTHSMAN

- An initial trial with £1,000 to 10 parish councils in Hampshire
- Works include minor drainage clearance, grass clearance from footways, sign cleaning, hedge trimming and verge cutting.
- Sopley could be included in the scheme during 2013-14.

HCC 2013-14 BUDGET

- Central Government Grant down 43% from 2010.
- HCC has saved £130m, 1800 fewer staff, but frozen Council Tax for the fourth year.
- Increased Adult Care by £10m, Children's Services by £2m and Road Maintenance by £10m
- Provided £800k for Apprenticeships for Young People in Care & those with Learning Difficulties.
- £1m increase to Adult Services for Clients requiring 2 carers, £1m extra for Discretionary Bus Fares and £300k for Troubled families Programme.

HCC CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- Children in Care Services rated Outstanding by Ofsted.
- Extra £4m funding by HCC over next 2 years.
- HCC Children's Services to link with Isle of Wight Children's Services with full support of Dept. for Education.

Cllr Rippon-Swaines' report concluded with the following personal statement: "I have enjoyed being your County Councillor over the last four years. I hope that the feeling has been mutual and I also hope that I can continue to be your County Councillor after the 2nd May Elections.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.20pm

Date of the next meeting :

Parish Council AGM & Annual Assembly - Thursday 16th May 2013 at 7.30pm at Sopley Parish Hall.

Appendix 1.

REPORT OF THE PARISH CLERK

SOPLEY PARISH COUNCIL FINANCES – PREDICTED SUMMARY POSITION AS AT 31/03/2013.

At the end of the current financial year, the Council's financial assets will be approximately:

Current Account : £14,500 – This account is used to meet the Council's working expenditure needs (salaries, purchases, payments to contractors etc). Most of the Council's revenue is paid into this account – notably the twice yearly precept transfers from NFDC that are transferred by direct debit at the end of April and September (2 x £10,000). The Council's ordinary annual running costs (salaries, insurances, maintenance costs, loan repayments etc) add up to around £21,500 per annum and these costs are just about covered by the combination of the precept transfers plus misc income (burial fees, small grants etc). The surplus balance in the current account (around £14,500 at the end of the current financial year) does not earn interest – so it may be worth considering transferring some of the surplus into an interest bearing account - but it should be noted that the current account needs to be kept at a high enough level to cover the cost of planned, one-off items of expenditure that are not included in the annual revenue budget. In 2013/14, this will include an agreed £4,000 contribution towards the next Phase of the Sopley village highway improvements work plus smaller sums for work on the Parish Website and a review of progress against the Parish objectives identified following the 2006 Parish Survey.

Deposit Account: £20,500 – Of which £10,000 is in a low interest bearing instant-access account (0.10% p.a.) and a further £10,500 is in a 1 year term deposit account (maturing in June 2013) that bears a slightly higher rate of interest (around 2.0% p.a.). The deposit account is the Council's cash reserve – which, to comply with Government Audit recommendations, needs to be kept at a level approximately equivalent to 12 to 18 months 'normal' revenue expenditure (ie £20-30,000). These recommended reserve guidelines for Local Councils may be reviewed and revised as part of the Governments' new audit regime – so the Council needs to stay alert to any future changes and be able to justify and account for the level of reserves being held if challenged by the Auditors.

Parish Hall Account £19,500. This is the balance of a £50,000 Public Works Loan taken out in 2010 over a 10 year term - and may only be used for capital works in connection with Phase 2 of the Parish Hall Project. It is important that this fund is retained intact as it will form the core of any match funding that will be needed if the Parish Council is to successfully apply for more grant funding to complete the work at the

Hall. At present, these funds are in a non-interest-bearing instant access / current account – so it may be worth placing some / all of the funds on term deposit if they are not going to be needed over the next 6 – 12 months?

Former Allotments Charitable Trust - £5,000 – Funds held in this account derive from annual rental income from the former Parish Allotments in Thatchers Lane – which is now let out on an annual basis for equine grazing (current rent £200 per annum). Under the terms of the original C19th deed of gift for the land, the funds in the account may only be used for the “relief of the labouring poor of the Parish” and any future proposals to spend all or part of the fund – or to wind-up and close the Trust – would need to be approved by the Charities Commission.

The Parish Hall Committee (which has delegated control of the day to day running of the Hall on behalf of the Parish Council) also maintains a separate current bank account, which is kept topped-up through their fund-raising activities. This account is used to meet the routine running costs of the Hall (utility bills, cleaning, maintenance etc) and to pay for one of the twice-yearly £3,000+ Public Sector Loan Board repayments (due each December). The other annual loan repayment (due in June each year) is met from the Council’s revenue budget and paid by direct debit from the Parish Council’s Current account. The Hall Committee should prepare a set of annual accounts for scrutiny and approval by the full Council – ideally to coincide with the May Annual General Meeting – and their book should also be made available (on request) for inspection by the Councils’ internal auditor.

G.N.Lewis.

Clerk to Sopley Parish Council

18th March 2013