

# Covingham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015  
In Covingham Park Primary School, The Harriers, Covingham

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**Present:** Cllr Osbourn, Cllr Benfield, Cllr Curtis, Cllr Foss, Cllr Short, Cllr Haigh, Cllr Hayward,

**In attendance:**

Gemma Cheal (parish clerk), members of the public

**1. Apologies**

Received from Cllr Sandle and Cllr Davis.

**2. Declaration of Interests**

None declared.

**3. Approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2015**

Minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2015 were approved and signed, subject to one amendment to Item 13.

**4. Matters arising from the previous minutes**

Cllr Benfield asked if any progress had been made with updating the Parish website. At the last meeting, the Chairman agreed to ask Scott Wichall if he would be willing to update the site. The Chairman informed members that Scott had agreed to help, but would need the username and password to access the site. The Clerk agreed to pass the information to Scott.

**5. Public Forum**

No questions or comments.

**6. Clerk's Report**

Members noted the following report from the Clerk:

**Play park repairs – carpet strip update**

We are still waiting on a date for delivery and installation for the carpet strip to be repaired on the play park. I have chased up a date with the company. Update at the meeting: Estimated delivery date given of 23<sup>rd</sup> November.

**Handyman Report**

Members noted a report from the Handyman.

**Police Contact**

I have contacted the Police to relay concerns of residents raised at the October Covingham Parish Council meeting as actioned.

**Special Expenses Form from Swindon Borough Council**

As in previous years, the Borough has sent through a form to be completed, of Statutory Provisions where the Parish Council is likely to incur expenditure in 2016/17. This has been completed and returned to the Borough.

**Quote for the adult exercise equipment to be relocated**

A quote has been received. This has been included as an agenda item for the November Parish Council meeting.

**Parish Van Update**

The Van was put in for an MOT on 13<sup>th</sup> October and passed. An advisory note was given for the rear tyres (recommend replacement) which we have actioned, with the agreement of the Chair and Vice Chair, to ensure safety in the colder weather.

**7. Verbal Update from the Chairman**

The Chairman informed members that he received a telephone call from a local resident during an evening, to complain about approximately 20 to 30 abusive young people at Covingham Park. The Chairman advised the resident to call the Police. The Chairman followed this up immediately by telephoning the Police to report the problem. The Police arrived at the scene not long afterwards and arrested approximately 5 young people.

**8. Police Matters (Update from local neighbourhood policing team)**

No update received from the Police this month. The Clerk informed members that an email had been sent to the Police regarding concerns raised at the October Parish Council meeting about anti-social behaviour.

**9. Discuss bringing forward future Parish Council meetings to the first Monday of the month**

Cllr Benfield informed members that he requested this item due to the tight deadline of getting an article ready for the Handymag. At the moment, Cllr Benfield has to type up meeting notes on a Tuesday morning after the monthly Parish Council meeting to meet the deadline. Members agreed unanimously to move the date of future Parish Council meetings to the first Monday of each month. Members noted that the next Parish Council meeting will be held on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015 at 7.30pm. The Clerk agreed to email all councillors with future meeting dates.

**10. Discuss Potential transfer of services from Swindon Borough Council to Parish Councils – implications for Covingham**

Members noted correspondence received from Kirsty Cole, Swindon Borough Council and a 'thoughts' papers circulated by Cllr Benfield.

Members noted that at present, Swindon Borough Council probably undertakes work equivalent to around one to one and a half full-time members of staff in Covingham and it is undertaken by varying different teams to recognise the differences in the type of work. If Covingham parish council was interested in taking over more work, there are different operating models that could be explored whereby Covingham Parish Council could directly employ extra employees or sub-contract it along with other work in the area.

Cllr Benfield pointed out that one to one and a half of full time employees, assuming their costs would be £12,000 per annum, would mean a final increase in our precept of in excess of 60%. The Chairman commented that this is gross double taxation and certainly something we should be defending on behalf of the residents of Covingham.

Finally this is such a significant change in the organisation of local government in our town that it would be profoundly undemocratic for a few dozen councillors to take this decision.

**Councillors unanimously agreed to reject the borough's proposal to potentially transfer services to Covingham Parish Council.**

The Parish Council also agreed that, if the proposal is taken forward by the Borough Council it should not proceed without a borough wide referendum to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to fully understand and vote on the borough's proposals.

Councillors noted disappointed that no Borough or Ward Councillors were at the meeting to present the proposals.

**11. Reports from Parish Council Committee Chairs:**

- Environment Committee (Chair Cllr Sandle):

Members noted a report from Cllr Sandle. Cllr Benfield presented a report on behalf of Cllr Sandle in her absence. Members noted that the painting of the bus shelters has now been completed by the Handyman.

Cllrs discussed the possibility of painting the seats around the parish to smarten them up. The Handyman is willing to paint the seats in the Spring, with the agreement of the Parish Council. Members agreed unanimously for the Handyman to paint the seats in green in the Spring. The Clerk noted a future agenda item to discuss the possibility of installing more seating in the Parish.

Cllr Benfield informed members that the seat at the end of Heronscroft in memory of a local elderly couple is still in progress.

Members noted an issue with Swindon Borough Council grass cutters causing some damage to the flower boxes in the Parish with mowers. Members noted that it is the responsibility of the residents to maintain the boxes and the surrounding area.

- Finance Committee (Chair Cllr Benfield):

Members noted the following report from Cllr Benfield:

**Precept for 2016/17.** This needs to be discussed as we will be experiencing financial pressures both on our everyday services and also on our capital reserves.

We need to hold a meeting of the Finance Committee to formulate next year's budget. This could be a straight forward statement recommending a percentage increase to the current precept and when we have a clearer vision of the financial performances of our current cost centres then some adjustments/changes could be made for the next year.

One example being our contribution to Wanborough Parish Council, for the administration of their allotments. This was negotiated by the Environment Committee and now we pay pro rata the number of allotments Covingham residents rent.

Note our current precept is	£36,300
A 2% increase would generate	£726
A 3% increase would generate	£1,089

Currently the Council Tax for a Band D property in Covingham is made up as follows.

Swindon Borough Council	£1130.70
Covingham Parish Council	£ 29.40
Combined Fire Authority	£ 64.88
Wiltshire Police & Crime Commissioner	£ 163.98
Total	<b>£1388.96</b>

A 3% increase to the Covingham Parish precept would, as stated above, generate £1,089. This would mean an increase for Band 4 dwellings of 88 pence per year or 1.7 pence per week. You also may be aware that we have the third lowest Parish Tax in the Borough of Swindon. I appreciate this does not compare "like for like" as some parish councils have different responsibilities but with fugal management and contract negotiations we have not increased our Parish Tax for quite a few years. Possibly with the wisdom of hindsight this was a mistake.

Members agreed to hold a meeting of the Finance Committee to set the budget and precept in December. Cllr Foss asked for information about the % rate for Swindon. The Clerk agreed to find out in time for the Finance Committee meeting.

- Recreation Committee (Cllr Haigh and Cllr Osbourn)

Cllr Haigh informed members that he has not yet looked at the area in the park that could be the location for the possible re-siting of one group of adult exercise equipment. Members agreed to leave the adult exercise equipment in its current location for the present time.

Improvements to the basketball area will be considered next year.

- Parish Plan/Highways Committee (Chair Cllr Curtis):

Members received a planning committee report from Cllr Curtis. Members noted that four parish councillors attended a meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> November with Swindon Borough Council Officers, regarding the New Eastern Villages development. The meeting included information relating to progress on planning applications for the New Eastern Villages and South Marston.

The committee report also contained the following key information:

Thames Water pipeline is progressing. A planning application has been submitted for a new pumping station in 'The Marsh', Wanborough. Considered to be a relatively minor development. The positive from this is that the infrastructure will be in place first.

White Hart Roundabout – SBC are on track to submit the business case for the already guaranteed funding in December. Hopefully monies will be allocated in the spring. SBC confirmed that lessons had been learnt from the Barnfield Road delays, caused primarily by the lack of information available for services laid under the roads. They had information about 8 service pipes/cables; however, once digging was underway they found 24.

Alignment of Southern Connector Road – This will be a lengthy process due to the number of landowners involved. There are currently four options. A public consultation, similar to that undertaken for Greenbridge redevelopment, will be carried out in the New Year.

Masterplanning work which covers land use, rather than the detail, road use and road connections. The NEV is considered to be in broad accordance within the masterplan.

Drainage Strategy – A framework for all developers to work within is due to be distributed for consultation to all interested parties. There are some concerns that the developers will try to do their 'own thing' and of particular concern is the areas between the developments. It is critical to get this right.

Cycle Paths/Tracks –SBC are working with a national cycle group to provide suitable routes for both commuters and pleasure cyclists

Canal – SBC are looking for value engineering opportunities. The canal Trust are looking to outside sources for funding

SBC have set up a generic email address for any comments or questions that is manned by the relevant experts. The email address is NEV@Swindon.gov.uk

Members noted that a copy of the Proposed SuDs and Drainage Strategy for the NEV has been received. This document needs to be given serious consideration by the Parish Council. Members noted that the Covingham Flood Group will be compiling a response to go back to the Borough and agreed that an extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council may be required in to go through the document in detail to compile a response. The Clerk will liaise with Cllr Curtis after the Parish Council meeting to look at possible dates. Members also agreed that Gareth Hawkes of the Covingham Flood Group could provide technical expertise in order to help with a response.

- Covingham Flood Group report (Cllr Curtis):

Members noted that a Multi-Agency meeting took place on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2015. Cllr Curtis informed members that a report/update will be given next month.

**12. Planning Matters**

No planning applications received this month.

**13. Transfer of the Redrow Estate to Covingham Parish on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 with no funds for the following 11 months.**

Members noted that as the changes to the boundary of Covingham will not become effective until May 2016, the increased Council Tax income from the change will not be felt until the financial year 2017-18.

Clarification is needed from the Borough to establish what reimbursement Swindon Borough Council are going to give to Covingham Parish Council for funding the additional work they expect the Parish Council to take on, with the expansion of the Parish to incorporate the Redrow Estate.

**14. Financial Matters**

- Approve financial summary and cheque list  
Members approved and signed the financial summary and cheque list.
- Receive and discuss quote for relocation of adult exercise equipment.  
The Clerk received a quote for the relocation of the adult exercise equipment of approximately £2000. Members noted the quote and resolved to leave the adult exercise equipment in its current location to stand the test of time.
- Consider any grant requests received (money available £850)  
None.

**15. Correspondence**

Members noted the following received correspondence:

Received from	Subject
Kirsty Cole, Swindon Borough Council	Potential transfer of services to Covingham Parish Council
Swindon Borough Council	Draft SuDS Vision for New Eastern Villages

**16. Matters for consideration**

Cllr Osbourn suggested the idea of purchasing a plaque to thank Scott Wichall for his hard work and dedication to the Parish Council over the last 13 years. Cllr agreed unanimously for a plaque to be purchased and presented to Scott Wichall at a future Parish Council meeting.

Meeting closed at 20:54

*Signed (Chairman):*