

# **West Swindon Parish Annual Meeting**

**Held online via Zoom on**

**Monday 26 April 2021**

Chair: Cllr Nigel Gibbons

## **Present:**

Members of West Swindon Parish Council: Cllrs Mike Burtenshaw, Steph Exell, Nigel Gibbons, Prakash Khaitan, Tim Makofu, Nick Martin, Mary Martin, Trish Philpot, Tim Swinyard, Caryl Sydney Smith, Keith Williams

Swindon Borough Council: Cllr Matthew Courtliff

Parish Manager/Clerk: Paula Harrison

Residents: Six

## **1. Welcome**

Cllr Nigel Gibbons welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.

## **2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Minutes agreed – copy attached.

## **3. Annual Review: West Swindon Parish Council**

Cllr Nigel Gibbons gave the following presentation on the work of the Parish Council during 2020 to 2021. Slides are attached to these minutes.

It has been a challenging year for the Parish, challenging but in many respects rewarding.

The pandemic has hit many of our residents very hard and continues to do so. But it has brought out the very best of us. The Parish has managed a way through and adapted to remote working, Zoom and how to use the mute button. The unfailing commitment of front-line workers and voluntary groups continues to be an inspiration.

The Borough Council, without warning, served six months notice on the Parish Council last Spring to discontinue their provision of grounds maintenance and street litter services. This gave the Parish Council a period of only up to the end of July to establish a direct managed service, a tall order given the multitude of hurdles to clear: the scoping of a new service, procurement of equipment, transfer of staff, service contracts with suppliers and a new offices and depot. To establish a service in six months in a market facing and managed way has tested the Parish Clerk's team. The Services Working Group [ SWG ] was tasked with supporting and steering the numerous processes involved. We successfully called upon councillors with varied skills and talents who contributed to the task at hand.

My thanks to the Parish Clerk and the SWG for successfully managing the transition.

The Parish Council decided to accept an offer from the Borough Council to occupy a depot at Waterside, for a transition period until the end of March this year. This gave us time to procure a new depot and offices to meet the end of March deadline. Again, the SWG scoped the premises requirement and an external property advisor was employed to assist the process. I am pleased to say the deadline was achieved and new premises at Westmead are now being settled into. The search for, and legal acquisition of new premises has only formed part of the overall process which has required input on everything from fitting out, transfer of staff and equipment to setting up numerous new contracts with fit out contractors and suppliers.

All of this and operating within a budget which was settled before we even had any inkling of the Borough Council 's intention to discontinue its service.

Our new depot does provide meeting space but we are considering possible venues in readiness for public meeting venues in due course.

We are fortunate to live in a wonderful area with established woodland, parks and cycle routes. It is not an exaggeration to say that its upkeep is as much a consequence of the efforts of local volunteer groups as that of the Parish Council. To single out a few names, our thanks as ever to Lynne and Barry and Justin for their work at Shaw Ridge, Roger Ogle who leads the Peatmoor Woodland volunteer group, Trevor Carlton at Westlea Park, Geraldine Barnard of the Greendown volunteer group, and Moya Pinson of the Westlea volunteer litter pickers.

Our main grant award has been to West Swindon Library to support extra staffed hours. We have also provided grant assistance to new projects - Toothill Youth club and Toothill Family Project, Toothill Scouts for a new roof, Swindon Scrapstore to support their work in assisting vulnerable people during the pandemic, and Shaw Road residents association for Neighborhood Watch signs.

We are all increasingly talking about our environment, protecting and encouraging our green areas, wildlife and bee population. Ash dieback disease is regrettably active across the UK. Earlier in the year, Neil Pullen, the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Officer presented the Parish with an overview of the Swindon Forest Meadows project which includes the reshaping of copses behind Westmead and removal of diseased ash trees. This work is now well advanced.

We continue to establish a number of environmental policies. As you know we have established woodland meadows at Shaw Ridge and Toothill Park and support voluntary groups at Peatmoor Copse and Greendown Copse. We have declined an offer from the Borough Council this year to weed kill around pavements/gutters and street signage, as this would have involved the widespread use of glyphosate.

We are presently further developing policies to better encourage bees and other wildlife from the flowers we choose for our planters, to rewilding areas and the way we maintain and cut our grassed areas, hedge lines, and copses.

We have progressed our plans to develop a Pump track following interface with local user groups and presentations from specialist designers and developers. Councillor Suresh Gattapur spearheaded a fund- raising campaign, raising just over £3600 to support the project.

We are particularly conscious of the level of council tax on all residents in such challenging times. Whilst the precept for the current year reflected an increase of some 3.5% in a band D equivalent property, I would assure you that we have worked diligently to maintain and keep costs to a minimum.

#### **4. Updates from Volunteer Groups:**

##### Presentation – Edgehill Haven

Glynis Hales shared slides detailing the importance of soil. Soil carbon sequestration is the process of removing carbon dioxide from the air via plants and trees. Glynis shared pictures from Edgehill Haven. Glynis acknowledged that there had been a fine balance between residents perceptions of what should be happening in the local environment and making decisions for the long term sustainability of the environment.

##### Presentation – West Swindon FAB

The FAB group shared slides of their volunteering across the areas on Shaw Ridge. These included pictures of the meadow, copse management and planting. FAB reported that the volunteers had worked consistently to achieve the vision for a wildflower meadow. Many hours have been put in and it is showing results. FAB thanked the Parish Council for the involvement of the Lydiard Turkeys cut and bale work.

##### Presentation – Peatmoor Woodland Group

Roger Ogle shared slides highlighted the work of the Peatmoor Woodland Group. There is a core group of around 8 volunteers with up to 16 getting involved in at other times. Roger reported the area to be a rare example of wet woodland, the whole area is an important and unusual ecological site. This is to the credit and foresight of staff in Swindon Council's planning and landscape department back in the 1970s who recognised what a valuable environmental resource the site is. Nowadays it would be described as an Eco-Systems Service which describes the planet as an integrated environment. The woodland is an example of carbon sequestration where hundreds of years, perhaps thousands of years, of carbon is locked up in the peat, plants and trees, a process that continues every day.

##### Presentation – Greendown Copse

The Greendown group shared a short video taking a walk through Greendown Copse detailing the native plants and birds. The video shares the work of the volunteers collecting litter and flytipping alongside improving pathways and native planting. The group highlighted the presence of the invasive variegated archangel. The video can be found on Youtube: [Greendown 2020 - YouTube](#)

## **5. Questions:**

Cllr Courtliff reported that the group reviewing verge management at Swindon Borough Council had been delayed in reporting but it had completed its review and the report should be in the public domain in the near future.

Cllr Courtliff asked if the Parish Council had made provision for children with disabilities in its delivery of play equipment across the Parish. Cllr Philpot advised that each refurbishment scheme set out to include accessible elements within the overall design.

A resident asked if there was anyone who could update on the Toothill Big Local scheme. Cllr Sydney Smith advised that this was not a Parish Council initiative however it was known that following architectural designs and drawings, a tender had been released to secure a building contractor for future works.

## **6. Requests/Ideas for Future Priorities**

The following were submitted for future consideration:

- A Vision for the Management of the Environment
- Engaging with Schools on environmental issues
- Dog Training Park
- Wider provision for allotments
- Links with Plastic Free Swindon
- Promote the adoption of public spaces by local residents
- Clean Street Signs

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions.

Meeting closed 8.32 pm.