

Salford Priors Parish Council

Minutes of an Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held in The Memorial Hall, Salford Priors, on Wednesday 27th. October at 7.30pm.

Present: Councillors, AW Wolfe (Chairman), M Myers (Vice-Chairman), JR Stedman, DC Penn, RA Francis, and L Wright.

Also in attendance: MJ.Philpott, Clerk, County Cllr. P Barnes, District Cllrs. D Pemberton and BW Slaughter, 53 members of the public, 10 under 18s, and Sarah Hickinbotham from The Evesham Journal.

1. Apologies for absence

Council considered and agreed apologies for absence from Cllr. A Quiney due to illness. When asked, the Clerk confirmed that it was flu.

The Chairman thanked the Vice Chairman, Cllr. Stedman, all other Councillors, and the Clerk for the work done at the previous meeting regarding the footway lighting during his absence.

2. Declarations of Office and Disclosure of Interests

2.1 Register of Interests: Members were reminded of the need to keep their register of interests up to date.

2.2 Declaration of Interests: Members were reminded that they were required to declare and disclose any personal or prejudicial interests in items on the agenda. Councillors with a prejudicial interest were required to leave the room for the relevant agenda item.

Cllr. JR Stedman declared prejudicial interests in Items 7.3, Mowing Contract, and in Item 20.2, payment transactions 8624, 8625, and 8626, to Limebridge Rural Services and a personal interest in payment 8633 to the Memorial Hall.

3. Open Forum

At approximately 7.40pm. the Chairman moved that the meeting be adjourned for Open Forum and this was agreed. With the agreement of the meeting he invited the County and District Councillors to speak first.

3.3 Ward Members' Reports Cllr. Barnes reported that the weight pad and camera system for Bidford Bridge had been type approved and was now available. He said that new planning reform procedures would allow ward members to vote on applications in their area if they had not made representations. In respect of the fire service Cllr. Barnes reported that stations at Warwick, Brinklow, and Studley would be closed shortly. On a more positive note he was able to report that the second boat to be based at Stratford had been agreed. In respect of the cuts he announced that WCC would be cutting costs by 25 per cent over 4 years. In response to questions he said that the Evesham Road speed visor would be fitted before April and that bus services were under review. He felt it was important that as many people as possible used the service to establish its need.

Cllr. Pemberton reported that in the District savings of £3.6m had to be made from just £6m of expenditure as all the rest of the budget was committed in contracts for services such as refuse collection. He said that the second tier of staff had left and many others would follow. Cllr. Pemberton referred to planning applications for a Waitrose store and Park and Ride at Seven Meadows Road and also for Alcester Hospital. He said he had had some success with information regarding poly tunnels and would communicate with the Clerk. Cllr. Slaughter said that no services could be considered sacred and that pressure would also be on parish councils to reduce spending.

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Before moving to the next items the Chairman said he wanted a civilised debate and requested that residents should not repeat matters raised at the previous meeting as these had been taken account of in the Council's report.

3.1 Have your say (under 18s.): Otis Belgrave said that he found it intimidating to walk through the village without lights and he felt it was particularly dangerous for young girls.

Lily Stedman said she worked at the Bell Inn and had to walk home at the end of her shift. She took a torch but still felt frightened walking in the dark streets.

3.2 Public Participation: Mr Simon said that he was used to reading documents but this was "lies...damned lies". He questioned the accuracy of the report accusing the Council of dishonesty and lack of integrity. He was looking for the Council to provide some direction over the issue of the lights and to present some alternative options; not to merely justify their decision. He said that references to other examples were meaningless.

A resident from Perkins Close asked what the wires connected to the posts were for and was advised by Cllr. Stedman that they were the power supply.

Mrs Dare was concerned that there had not been time for residents to fully consider the report and she had only received it the previous day. The Vice-Chairman said that, of necessity, it had taken a considerable time to put together but this was not the last opportunity for residents to comment and it was an ongoing debate.

Mr Stevens asked why a letter could not have been sent to all residents to keep them informed. A member of the public criticised the Council for only issuing the lighting report and other information by e-mail and made the point that not everyone in the parish had the benefit of internet access. The Chairman said that this would be rectified with the issue of a factual statement by the PC which would be distributed as soon as possible to all households in the parish following the meeting. Mr Stevens said that residents should be able to walk around the village as they had for forty years.

A young resident said that she felt frightened driving in her car when the lights were out, also when walking along the road.

Mr Dare said he thought the attitude of the Council was disgusting and insisted that people did walk around the village at night. He suggested a vote of no confidence in the Council.

In response to a resident's comment about their children having to walk in the dark, Mr Fenlon said that parents should accept responsibility and collect their children if they had concerns. He was shouted down with some unpleasant comments being levied at him.

Mrs Jackie Stedman responded by asking if she was considered to be an irresponsible parent.

Ms Spoelstra said she walked with sticks and found it very difficult to get around with her dog and carrying a torch.

Mr Ballantyne said there were some factual mistakes in the report and asked if he could write about the report. He was assured that he could do so. When asked by Cllr. Stedman to give an example he

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referred to the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting and said there was no reference to the lights possibly being switched off. The Vice Chairman corrected him on this particular issue as the comment was most definitely minuted. (there is a reference on pages 7109 and 7110) He also felt that the number of protestors in the previous minutes had not been accurate as some people were there as a protest but whom, on the Chairman's request, had not duplicated the concerns which had already been stated.

Mr Haines said he agreed with Mr Dare and asked what power the Council had to turn off the lights. He believed it was dangerous and he would never agree to it.

Mr Cane said that residents were informed in April that the increase in the precept had been provided to pay for repairs to the lights.

The Chairman referred to the petition and emphasised how important it was for the wording not to prejudice the outcome. He confirmed that the lights were switched off as a trial and that if all the 31 lights had to be replaced the cost would be £31,000.

A resident said that alternative savings should be made and proposed the planters should go as they were pretty but not necessary for safety.

Mrs Dare said if the lights were removed the cost, at £650 per pole and light, would also be considerable. She suggested that the repairs could be done over a number of years with a small increase only in funding and the lights could be kept on.

Cllr. Stedman said that the Council had become aware that the poles were 47 years old and were slowly deteriorating. Last year a survey of the lights had been carried out by the Council's lighting engineer and the cost of correcting all the deficiencies found was £12,600.

Mr Dare asked why maintenance had not been carried out over past years but the current Councillors were unable to answer that question immediately.

David Mills referred to the lights outside the School and said it would be dangerous when children were coming out, especially when leaving after school activities. He said that prior notice should have been given as was done by the electricity company.

Karen Littleford said that the lights should not be switched off and that if it required extra money to be raised in order to keep them on then that should be discussed.

Yvonne Hartiss asked who was responsible for the poles and Cllr. Stedman said it was the Parish Council.

Leslie Simon said it had been very good to hear the children speak and they had put their views over very well. He still wanted to see some alternatives put forward by the Council.

A resident asked if, in the event of an accident, the Council would pay compensation. The Chairman responded that there was no duty on the Council to provide footway lights. After stating her case, the last speaker from the floor insisted that she would complete what she wanted to say, no matter how long it took and resorted to personal criticism of a Councillor. She suggested that the Council

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was not properly considering the situation. It was not possible to prevent her from talking even further and the meeting was clearly out of order.

The meeting throughout had been subject to disruptive behaviour, continual interruptions, people shouting across each other and loud applause, also personal comments being made against Councillors from members of the public. At 8.22pm the Chairman suspended the meeting and the Councillors left the room.

The Clerk informed the residents that the meeting was abandoned and the date of the next meeting would be published on the notice boards in accordance with normal practice.

Following the meeting abandonment the Clerk considered it was necessary for the listed payment cheques to be signed and this was done by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman in accordance with Standing Order 13c of the Council's adopted Standing Orders.

Signed.....

Date.....