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Salford Priors Parish Council

Minutes of the One Hundredth and Seventeenth Annual Parish Meeting held in the Memorial Hall, Salford Priors, on Wednesday 7th. April 2011 at 7.30pm.

Present: Parish Councillors J R Stedman (Chairman), L Wright, A.W.Wolfe, D.C.Penn, R.J.A.Francis, L Maude, and A Quiney, the Clerk, Mr M.J. Philpott, and thirty-two parishioners.

Apologies for absence were received from District Councillor B Slaughter, M Myers and J Seville.

Minutes of last meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 15th. April 2010 had been circulated and were taken as read. There were no corrections and J Fenlon proposed, E Mitchell seconded, and it was agreed, they be accepted as a true record. The Minutes were signed by the Chairman.

CPRE Dark Skies Campaign

The Chairman introduced Myles Thornton of the Warwickshire branch of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England. Mr Thornton explained that CPRE Warwickshire is a charity funded through membership. Their aim is to strive to protect the Warwickshire countryside from inappropriate development. He quoted Vincent Van Gogh “Can we see the whole of life or only know a hemisphere of it before death. I’ve no idea myself, but the sight of stars always sets me dreaming”. He said that it is a sad fact that darkness which is one of the things that defines the countryside and makes it different from towns and cities is fast disappearing and with it our view of the stars and planets. This is because we continue to carelessly and needlessly beam outdoor light upwards into the sky. The worst offenders are road lighting that is badly designed and spills light up into the sky; security lights that light up buildings and their surroundings; flood lights that are used to illuminate games pitches, places of entertainment, supermarkets and other buildings. And things are progressively getting worse. Mr Thornton produced maps that showed that Warwickshire has no dark skies at all: that the one remaining area in the south east of the county has disappeared.

He urged residents to ensure we don’t waste light outside our homes. He described steps being taken by CPRE to change policies of DIY stores by asking them to stock only security lighting that does not pollute and for highways authorities to set a date for replacing existing road lighting with low light pollution, full cut off lighting, which cuts out all light going upwards. Local Authorities should do the same with the lighting they are responsible for; and they should insist on a light pollution assessment of planning applications, with badly designed ones being sent back for modification. He said that the costs of not acting were clear; unnecessarily high energy bills, more carbon emissions, disrupted sleep patterns, disturbance to wildlife, and a night sky bereft of its majestic stars and the Milky Way

Mr Thornton concluded by saying that many Councils were thinking of cutting back on street lighting. CPRE believed that this will be welcomed by many and though motivated by finances, it is certainly the right choice if we are to reduce light pollution and energy consumption. But it should be done in consultation with local residents and the police should consider and ensure the proposals are practical. Ultimately smarter lighting will save Councils money, cut unnecessary light pollution and reduce their carbon footprint.

In questions to the speaker, Mr Simon referred to the switching off of footway lights in Salford Priors and said the main issues had been the lack of consultation and the need to

establish a balance within the community. Mrs Littleford asked if the latest survey had produced any new facts and Mr Thornton said that the number of areas where light pollution was increasing was growing. A resident asked if light pollution had a negative impact on the numbers of bats and owls and Mr Thornton replied this was the case. Cllr. Quiney enquired as to whether or not the effect of light pollution was considered in new residential developments and Mr Thornton said this was not generally done although new types of light fitting did reduce upward spread of light. There being no other questions, the Chairman thanked Mr Thornton for his presentation.

Annual Report

The Chairman invited the Clerk to read out the Annual Report for the year 2010 – 2011. A copy of the Annual report is attached to these Minutes.

Statement regarding the footway lights by the Chairman

At the conclusion of the report the Chairman made an additional statement referring to the issues regarding the footway lights. He said that everyone in the parish had received the Council's newsletter and attached information sheet regarding the lighting switch off. He emphasised that the written statement from the Council's insurer's stating that the existing poles will no longer be insured was extremely serious. If an accident were to happen and it was proved that a pole was the cause, the Parish Council would be obliged to meet any claim arising. In turn this would, of course, mean every resident would have to meet the cost and each could potentially see a hundred-fold increase in their already large council tax bill. If, for example, a claim reached £4.7M which is not unusual in serious circumstances; each household could be taxed with a £8,500 bill. The Chairman said he considered that the council has no option but to resolve this situation with urgency and he believed the only clear option was to remove the existing poles. The parish-wide lighting would then need to be discussed as a completely new issue. This matter will have to be concluded at the Parish Council meeting in April as the insurance runs out on June 1st this year. The Chairman continued by saying that the very old overhead wires supplying many of the lights do not have fuses or switches and therefore would remain live wires in the event of a pole or conductor failure. The wires are connected directly to the main network supply with no safety devices fitted, which could have lethal consequences.

Open Forum Part 1- (non-footway lighting issues)

Karen Littleford complained that there were no female members of the Council and it was not representative. The Chairman responded that all residents had the opportunity to call for an election when Cllr. Myers resigned but no such call had been received. In any case the criteria for selection were not based on gender but on ability to do the job.

Mrs Seville asked if there was any further news regarding the closure of the Orchard Farm packing station and the Chairman said that the understanding was that the station would be closed on completion of the onion packing season towards the end of April. The Council was working with the District Council planners to see that any potential tenants complied with the conditions relating to the site.

Karen Littleford said she believed the proposed bus shelter by Hedges Close was being built on private land. The Chairman said that the Clerk had received plans from the Land Registry confirming that the land is in fact public highway and the site had been selected on advice from both WCC and the Bus Company. Mr Mitchell said the stop used to be located closed

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to the Ban Brook Road junction but the Chairman said this had been moved because it was too close to the junction.

Jean Knight said that the verge by Hedges Close used to be mown and the Chairman said this was now included in the new contract.

Mrs Baker expressed concern over the location of the proposed affordable housing at the top of Tothall Lane. Mr Baker pointed out that the proposed layout showed a possible extension into the adjacent land and asked that a cul-de-sac would be preferable. He also asked regarding the need. Mr Dare said the site was not the first choice of residents. The Chairman responded by saying that information had been received confirming the need and that other potential sites had to be ruled out because of prohibitive land costs. The site at Tothall Lane was an “exception site” and this made the project affordable.

Open Forum Part 2 – (footway lighting issues)

The Chairman said that there needed to be very strong reasons for replacing the lights and mentioned the quotation received for disposing of the poles from EON which treated them as hazardous waste because of the creosote content and a consequent cost of £800 per pole.

Eric Mitchell said that he applauded the idea of a trial but thought that some of the numbers mentioned were scare-mongering. He asked whether a decision had yet been made. The Chairman said that no decision had been made but time was pressing and all points raised would be considered.

Philip Dare said he believed that the papers showed that the Council had made its decision and that if each pole was suspect then they just needed to be inspected. The Chairman said that there were problems with EON with different engineers giving different answers. Also, although a testing company had possibly been identified it was not known how long any certificate might be valid for or whether the insurers would accept it.

Mrs Dare said that no one knew who owned the poles and offered to visit the Records Office to inspect the old minutes.

Mr Bright said he supported turning off all the lights. He urged the Council to get on and get rid of them.

Mr Simon expressed his concern about the public liability issues. He asked the Council to thoroughly explore the problems with the poles and the insurers. He said that in reality the lighting budget was quite small compared to other items of council expenditure. He regretted the lack of consultation and urged the Council to adopt a phased approach and to identify those areas where new lights really were necessary. Mr Simon said that scare-mongering did not help. He asked if it would be possible for EON to provide finance for new lights.

The Chairman asked the audience what was the problem for a rural village without lights? Philip Dare said that people were frightened of walking in the dark and it was easy to trip.

Kelly Brunt said that the Council were there because they had been voted in and had to make the best of the resources at their disposal. She said it was easy to just use a torch and residents in many parts of the parish had to do this anyway. Mrs Hartiss said she found using a torch very worrying and described an incident with a man and a dog that she had

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experienced. She said she had helped get the lights in the village and she was most upset to see them go. She asked if the money included in the precept last year had been spent and the Chairman replied that it was still there. He then said he walked around the village a lot and noted the amount of background lighting and he saw no real problems.

Mrs Hunt said she had been told that the pole in her garden was safe and the Clerk said this was based on PD Long's inspection that no rot had been noted. Mrs Corbett asked why PD Long had not tested all the poles and was told that the tests were for electrical integrity but he also noted where the tops were rotted.

Mr Fenlon said a meeting should be arranged with the EON engineers and that any testing should provide categorical advice that the poles were safe. All poles would have to be tested and this would stop further arguments.

Eric Mitchell asked which lights would be left on and whether the Council had a plan for lighting the parish in the future. He urged the Council to prepare a plan.

Reg Stokes referred back to the ownership issue. The Chairman said he believed the Council installed the lights originally. Mr Stokes referred to the questionnaire regarding the Ban Brook Lights and the concrete cancer that was cracking some of the columns.

Karen Littleford complained that no councillors had put an opposite view forward. Cllr. Quiney responded by saying that originally he had opposed the switch off but had now changed his mind because many more facts had emerged that changed the whole situation.

Mr Simons enquired regarding the sub-station by the Church and asked if lights could be run from this point. Cllr. Wolfe said the Council might speak to Central Networks about this.

Cllr. Wright said that the Council were trying to manage the parish's resources but the liability issue was critical.

Mr Simon, Mr Mitchell, and Mr Fenlon all urged the Council to move forward with a plan for the future lighting of the parish with proper public involvement.

Cllr. Wolfe said that his biggest regret from his time as Chairman was that the Council had not told the public in advance of the switch off and he deeply regretted this. He apologised unreservedly for this omission.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and there being no other business closed the meeting at 9.45 pm.

Signed.....

Date.....