

Cosgrove Parish Council

MINUTES OF COSGROVE ANNUAL OPEN MEETING

Held on 27th April 2010 at the Village Hall, Bridge Road commencing at 7.00pm

Present: Cllrs AG Hickie (in the chair), Mr A Bracey, Mr R Gibbs, Mrs H Harbottle Mr J Roberts, Mr D Smith, Mr C Stokes & Mrs J Storey;
Also present were Cllr Mr I McCord (SNC), Mr A Walker (NCC) and 4 members of the public

1. Apologies

Cllr Mrs Harbottle (Family commitments). Northants Police had been invited but did not attend

2. Minutes of the 2009 Annual Open Meeting (previously displayed n/b)

Previously circulated and signed as a correct record at the May 2009 meeting

3. Matter Arising

No matters arising

4. Petitioners or Questions from Electors (required in writing by 12 noon 27th April

None

5. Adoption of Accounts

The clerk (RFO) outlined budget controls and Precept levels that were agreed

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|-----|--|------------------------------------|
| (a) | To receive Audited Accounts 2008 / 2009 | } No comments and formally adopted |
| (b) | Accounts for Audit 2009 / 2010 | } Approved |
| (c) | Budget Proposals 2010 / 2011 | } Approved with comment made |

6. Chairman's Report

The Chairman thanked the clerk and councillors for their support and work over the past year. It's been a challenging year with a new bus shelter from capital expenditure. We are now in a position to address the issue of fencing of the playing field and have budgeting for that and intend to apply for grant aid for more play equipment.

Planning applications have been largely day-to-day except Cosgrove House, The Old Post Office and land behind Bridge Road granted development on appeal.

We go into the new financial year with no debts.

* There were no questions from the public

7. Report by Northamptonshire Police

As Police were absent it was agreed that the clerk obtain crime figures from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010 and add to the minutes:

<i>Violence</i>	4 > 6	
<i>Burglary Dwelling</i>	1 > 2	
<i>Burglary Other</i>	2 > 4	(from garages and sheds)
<i>Theft from M/V</i>	3 > 1	
<i>Theft of M/V</i>	0 > 1	
<i>Veh Interference</i>	0 > 3	
<i>Criminal Damage</i>	5 > 3	
<i>Drugs</i>	0 > 1	
<i>Theft/Handling/Other</i>	3 > 4	

Total Crimes = 25 (an increase on last year's 18)

(PC Wallace : 03000 111 222 x 5602

E-mail: mick.wallace@northants.pnn.police.uk)

8. Report / Questions for District Councillor

Cllr McCord submitted the following report:

Before preparing this I read over the annual report I have given in past years. I notice a continuing theme – the state of SNC finance and the difficulties we face in balancing the books.

The past year on SNC has been no less easy. We had a budget overspend of approx £950k, but the end of year figures will be in the region of £600k overspent. This was due in part to an unexpected windfall from central government, refunding VAT and interest wrongly charged at the leisure centres in the early 1990's. This gave £277,000 to bolster the finances. There was some debate at the time with some feeling that we should spend this money in leisure as that is where it came from. While I have sympathy for the argument, I am more of a view that if your expenditure is almost a million more than your income, reducing that overspend is the higher priority. In addition to this SNC have been running a programme called Affordable Excellence. With this program we have taken cost out of the organisation. Today the cost of running SNC is almost £3m lower than 2008. This has been done by a few voluntary redundancies, freezing some vacant posts, holding (nearly) all posts open for 6 months before recruiting, reviewing travel expenses, e.g. cutting the mileage allowance from 60.1p per mile to 47.7p Still above HMRC 40p but a good start.

The waste collection rounds will be re-organised and streamlined, this has reduced the number of rounds from 7 to 6 and will save £117,000. Most of that saving is by not employing temporary labour.

Looking to next year, as we stand today there is a deficit of at least £1m, probably £1.5m and may be up to £1.8m. We don't know the real number as there are so many areas of uncertainty. Our best case assumes that the grant from central government will be frozen. Our worst case assumes it will be cut by up to 20%. National Insurance has been an election debating topic, but for SNC an extra 1% is a £60,000 cost to you the tax payer. If the income does not rise, that £60,000 means 1.2% rise in council tax. Public sector pensions need urgent reform, today your tax cash is contributing 25% of salary to the local government pension fund. That is unsustainable.

The government is also planning to move the running of Concessionary travel for the elderly from the district to the County Councils. They also plan to move the cash, but on the consultation papers they seemed to suggest that the amount cash they want to move will be more than what we think they give us currently. There is no way to get a detailed breakdown of how the grants given to SNC are broken down. I have written to Dept of Communities and Local Government but they tell me they don't know how much SNC get in grant for concessionary travel. So this may mean some very tough decisions to be taken in the near future. The reserves are being depleted quickly and if we have to re-structure it needs to be done while there is cash to pay for it.

Throughout this period we have been very lucky to have had Cllr Martin Wilson as the portfolio holder for finance. He has decided to step down from the SNC Cabinet this year, but his contribution to local government was recognised when he won a national award for his outstanding contribution to finance in local government.

In addition to this SNC continue to pay their creditors in 7 days and also were nationally recognised as one of the fastest payers.

In July we passed the Interim Rural Housing Policy which appears to be working. There have been a huge number of applications for small housing developments in the larger villages and the land bank calculation is rising rapidly. We are hopeful that by the end of the year SNC will have reached its 5 year land supply requirement and then the village confine lines will be strictly re-enforced. This policy has had a few tests at appeal and has been recognised by Appeal inspectors as being effective in delivering the housing required by government. Helpfully appeal inspectors also stated that SNC should soon be able to count a contribution from some of the larger developments discussed at Towcester and Brackley. Currently SNC are consulting on a supplementary planning policy on wind turbines in the open countryside. There have been 5 applications for test measurement masts in the district, none in this ward, but the one in Alderton can easily be seen from Grafton Regis. It is unlikely that these will not lead to wind farm applications. Central government planning guidance does not allow us to just say no, however SNC has produced its

draft and I would ask that you comment on it as I expect a lot of resistance and comment from the wind farm industry.

The waste performance continues to be amongst the best in the country, I wish to place my thanks to you who make it possible. The recycling is only possible by the actions of you the residents not us the councillors.

Another big decision taken by Council this year was to re-locate, in principle, from the existing offices to alternative accommodation at Moat Lane. Moat Lane is a development that has attracted millions of central government funding and SNC have been able to assemble a large land holding. Recently the ancient Burry Mount was opened to the public along with the water meadows bought from the Hesketh estate. There are a number of points to remember about Moat Lane, firstly the plans envisage an office block on the site along with other retail and commercial units, these will generate traffic and car parking demands irrespective if SNC occupy the office block or not. The finance of this project is in effect an asset swap. In return for a new office block and civic building SNC will swap its other land holdings for a developer to take forward. The new building will be less costly to run and will have other units providing income, in all this will be about £200,000 per year lower than the present offices. On the site will be a new Library and Registrars Office, we aim to get many public services operating in one location and drive footfall to the area to make it successful for all.

What do politicians get by way of allowances and expenses is always topical. In the past year I received my standard allowance of just over £4500. I did not take any RPI increase last year and will freeze it again for this year. My expenses on top came to precisely zero. Whether or not it will remain at this figure I can't promise, as if SNC asked me to go to London or something I would make a claim.

On a personal perspective I wish to record my thanks to you all for your help and support. Life is so much easier with functioning Parish Councils. I shall continue to raise matters on your behalf in the Council and to try to keep you all informed via email when I can.

The Conservative Group at SNC has just elected a new leader in Mary Clarke taking over from Sandra Barnes after 11 years in that position.

The budget locally and nationally, spending reductions, the initial draft of the Local Development Framework, wind turbine applications, High Speed Rail, Brackley Cottage Hospital and Moat Lane Procurement are the major issues that I can foresee. The next few weeks should see the existing uncertainty clarified or intensified, the year ahead looks no less challenging.

* Cllr McCord was thanked for his report. There were no Qs and he chose to remain

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9. Report by County Councillor

Cllr Walker submitted the following report:

Elections come and Elections go. In June 2009 I was re-elected for a third term of office as your Conservative County Councillor. I assume I must be doing something right because it was with an increased majority over the other two parties. If this is reflected locally then your new PPC for SNC will remain Conservative.

I have been given the task of Scrutiny Champion for NCC, ex officio Cabinet member. Too more readily hold the Administration and Cabinet to account on their forward plans. I was also elected as Chair to the Local Government East Midland Scrutiny Network, a most prestigious position which puts not only NCC on the map but this area also.

The biggest problem this year has been the Weather from December through to March and the roads chaos it caused. MGWSP our new Transport Contractor under instruction from NCC came up trumps, keeping the entire major "A" roads across the county open daily, even in blizzards. No help from this Government I am afraid to report, who instructed us to share our Salt & Sand stocks with surrounding Counties such as Bucks & MK. Just because we were prudent enough to maintain high stocks and they didn't. Yes the pothole problem has worsened but a new system of repair is under

way with another £2M being put into the budget to not just fill the holes but repair, whole tracks of road instead.

£500,000 was put into policing this year to decrease Crime and Disorder throughout the County by further increasing the PCSO strength. Continued reviews of our Service plans have made it smarter and more flexible for people to understand and work to. Our Care for the Elderly has begun, whereby we enable the Elderly and Infirm to have a better quality of life, by assisting them to help themselves and not be automatically shoved into a care home. We are now losing our CXO to Kent County Council, the biggest Council in England. I wish her well; she has been a boon to Northamptonshire. A more businesslike approach is now being adopted. With a complete restructure, this has not been easy on staff but they have carried on admirably.

We set a Council tax of 3.5% again the lowest Band D property tax in England and managed a balanced budget. Without cutting services! By just making services more efficient and achieved our goal of maintaining another neutral budget in this, at long last, General Election Year.

Waste Management and the Partnership with MK. Procuring a Waste solution for NCC and MKBC is well under way. We can no longer just fill holes in the ground with rubbish. For every tonne we put into a landfill site we are charged approx £80 - £90. Of your money.

I am still an appointed Director of East Midlands Fire Service Control Centre. Putting together a new regional control centre for the Fire Services of the shire counties of Lincoln, Leicester, Nottingham, Northants and Derby thereby ensuring a better call service and reaction time to Fire and Accidents at a total cost of some £7M. We are scheduled to come on line in 2011. Believe it or not, I was scrutinised by my own Fire Service Scrutiny Committee to ensure NCC was getting Value for Money from me...

Continued Scrutiny of the Empowering County Councillors Scheme continues, to ensure value for money and the correct procedures are being adopted by councillors. A further £10,000 was allocated last year and that I spent nearly all my allocation on local worthy causes. I am pleased to report a further £10,000 is available for 2010/11

“What you are still getting is a Smaller Council, Paying Less Taxes and Better Services”

I was unable to help Cosgrove last year from the Empowering Councillors Scheme (£9,750.00)

My activities locally as your County Councillor have involved:-

Planning Applications (speaking at SNC, DC Meetings on behalf of residents). Transport (Buses) (Home to School), Road resurfacing, Housing, Benefits,

I still Chair Kingsbrook Business & Enterprise School governing body. The New Head Teacher Pamela Hutchinson is in position and working well

My local work activity for parishioners is increasing yearly mainly due to the recession. I still maintain a turnaround response in 24hrs of 100% with actual achievement including planning of 98%

Again a big thank you to your Clerk and you Councillors for your professionalism and indulgence whilst I have been dealing with matters in your areas...

* Cllr Walker was thanked for his report. There were no Qs and he chose to remain

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10. Any Other Business

None

With no other business the meeting closed at 7.45pm