

Avebury Parish Council

Minutes of an ordinary meeting of Avebury Parish Council held on Tuesday 4 October 2022 at the Social Centre, Avebury SN8 1RF.

In these minutes APC stands for Avebury Parish Council, AONB for Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, ASSC for Avebury Sports and Social Club, ASSF for Avebury Sacred Sites Forum, AWHS for Avebury World Heritage Site, CES for Community Exhibition Space, FB for Facebook, MAB for Marlborough Area Boards, NT for the National Trust, PC for Parish Council, PCSO for Police Community Support Officer, RoW for Rights of Way, SID for Speed Indicator Device, SWAST for South Western Ambulance Service Foundation Trust, UKN for Upper Kennet News, WALC for Wiltshire Association of Local Councils, WC for Wiltshire Council, WHS for World Heritage Site.

Present: Mr Stephen Stacey (Chair), Dr Mike Bedford (Vice Chair), Mrs Maggie Lewis (Vice Chair), Mr Ben Butler, Mrs Lynzey Paradise and Ms Zandria Service.

In attendance: Miss Liz Moore (Clerk).

Time started: 19:33

- 1. Public question time:** there were 12 members of the public present for all or part of the meeting including Eva Stützenberger (Visitor Operations & Experience Manager, National Trust Wiltshire Landscape), Caterina Di Garbo (Landscape Architect, Portus & Whitton) and Peter Oliver (Countryside Manager, National Trust Wiltshire Landscape). A question was asked about who owns the footpath on the western edge of the churchyard at St James Church, Avebury. The lady asking the question said that her husband, who lives with her in one of the cottages, had fallen on two occasions due, she said, to the poor condition of the path. Members of the PC expressed their sympathy. It was thought that this might be an issue for the Parochial Church Council and Cllr Lewis offered to write to the Secretary. The Chairman said that he would look at the footpath the next day and take photographs. The member of the public thanked the PC for listening.
- 2. Apologies:** Councillors Donna Byatt, Mike Daniel and Robert Parker. Apologies also received from Jane Davies (Wiltshire Councillor).
- 3. Declarations of interest:** there were none.
- 4. Minutes of meeting held on 6 September 2022: it was resolved** to accept the minutes as a proper record of the meeting. Proposed by Cllr Lewis, seconded by Cllr Butler and agreed unanimously.
- 5. Matters arising from the minutes:** there were none. A member of the public thanked the Chairman and Cllr Lewis (Vice Chair) for actioning his requests from the last meeting.

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6. **National Trust update:** it was noted that the NT update had been previously circulated to members by email (see appendix 1). Eva Stützenberger provided an overview of the NT's work that month. She explained that there would be shorter winter opening hours from Sunday 30 October and the High Street toilets would be closed until Saturday 25 March 2023, and she spoke about the various seasonal events that were planned for the coming months. It was noted that the next ASSF meeting to review observance management would take place at 2pm on 10 November chaired by Hazel Barry-Scott (the Trust's Experience & Visitor Programming Manager). Eva reported that the NT had received funding for access improvements (see item 7) and would be assessing the suitability of its car parks for electrical vehicle charging points. She said that the NT was also in the process of carrying out qualitative surveys to establish visitor demographics post-Covid and to find out what visitors expected from a site like Avebury. They would very much like local feedback and she asked anyone in the community wishing to take part to contact Abby George: abby.george@nationaltrust.org.uk. Eva stressed that the NT still had significant road safety concerns about increased footfall on the A4361. She said that they regularly received visitor concerns and complaints about people walking in the road or on the grass verges from ASSC to the village. In response, Cllr Lewis said that the PC had written to ASSC about the issue and that signage was in place to direct people across the safer Sports Field route. The Chairman invited Kate Fry (Treasurer, ASSC) to speak. Kate explained that signage had been put up to try to discourage people from taking their lives in their hands and that ASSC had not received any direct complaints. The Chairman suggested that more fact finding should be done and the **issue passed to the Transport Group meeting on 25 October for urgent review**. He said that, whilst it was down to all stakeholders to consider countermeasures, in his opinion Wiltshire Highways had to be the responsible authority since the concern related to pedestrians on the public highway and therefore they should be brought into the discussion. Members agreed and felt that it would be a good idea to involve the local PCSO as well.
7. **National Trust:** Caterina Di Garbo introduced herself as a Landscape Architect working for Portus & Whitton. She explained that it was her remit to ensure that all users had inclusive access to the NT landscape. She gave a detailed presentation on the proposed resurfacing of the farmyard and main and staff car parks. The following points emerged:
- a) On the main NT car park, the loose gravel would be replaced with, probably, a self-binding aggregate. The problem with the current gravel surface was that it became muddy in wet weather and dusty in dry weather.
 - b) The farmyard also had a loose gravel surface and options for replacement surfacing would need to be considered there, too.

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- c) The main NT drive and staff car park had a gravel surface and suffered from pot holes. A self-binding aggregate surface could be a solution. to achieve accessibility, durability, and safe routes.
- d) The company would be working with civil engineers to inform the necessary drainage work.
- e) A trial would be carried out, for example to check the soil structure.
- f) Work would be carefully planned to avoid any negative impact on traffic flow in and around the village.

The Chairman thanked Caterina for her presentation and for early sight of the current proposal. He requested that the NT provide a draft of the final proposal to see what options it has chosen before an application was submitted to Wiltshire Council. The following questions arose:

- Was the NT considering improvement work to the path from the main car park onto the High Street? **Yes, the path from the main car park was in the plan.**
- Concern was expressed about whether the NT was planning to remove any cobbles in front of the farmyard. **No, the NT was not proposing to remove any cobbles.**
- As it was understood that the NT had funding for the project across the whole site, were there any other areas being considered to specifically help people access the Circle or Avenue? **The NT has a separate project using the same funding pot to provide, for example, hire vehicles, braille guides, benches and a whole range of other projects.**
- Was the NT going to take into consideration the flooding risk? **Yes, the NT has to explain the drainage plan as part of the application for planning permission.**

The Chairman thanked Caterina for her detailed presentation.

The Chairman proposed changing the order of business and to move directly to item 9. Planning since this was the item that had brought so many members of the public to the meeting. All agreed.-----

8. **Proposal for a regular meeting for commercial operators:** it was agreed that the PC could facilitate a first meeting to see whether there was interest but, that it would be up to participants to organise any subsequent meetings they elected to hold.

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9. **Planning applications:** Notification of proposed works to trees in a **Conservation Area**. Proposal: Main Visitor Car Park - Fell one Mature Ash (Ash Dieback) N. Trust Overflow Car Park - Fell 5 Semi Mature Ash South east Henge Sector - Fell 2 Mature Ash Avebury Recreation Ground - Fell 3 Mature Ash Carpenters Cottage - fell 1 Leylandii , 1 Elder , Reduce 3 Leylandii West Kennett Farm - Reduce 11 Leylandii by 50% West Kennett Layby - Fell 3 Sycamore, 1 Elder, Reduce 1 Sycamore, Coppice 1 Goat Willow, The Lodge - Remove Mature Ash , Remove Small Yew , Reduce Holly & Sycamore by 30%, Reduce twin Stemmed Sycamore by 30% & Crown Lift, Reduce Western Stem on Triple Stemmed Sycamore **at the National Trust car park**, Avebury. Ref: PL/2022/07599.

The Chairman explained that the notification of proposed works to trees by the NT was a very significant application that included work on 39 trees and the felling of 19 of them with no proposal to replant. Given the level of public interest, he said that it would have been helpful for the NT to have informed the PC of its intentions at an earlier stage. He invited Peter Oliver to speak. Peter explained that the NT carried out an annual tree safety assessment and that the bulk of the trees identified for felling were suffering from Ash dieback. A question was asked about the NT's criteria for selecting trees. It was noted that the NT had a zoning policy, which meant that the SE quadrant was classed as being in a high risk zone as there was a reasonable risk of people gathering under trees and of diseased Ash trees there potentially shedding limbs. The Sports Field was in a medium risk zone due to diseased Ash trees being in the vicinity of the cricket nets. A member of the public was invited to speak. Kate Fry said that she wished to express her thanks and acknowledge the courtesy of the surveyor for contacting ASSC about the proposed tree work. However she added that members of the public had been shocked by what appeared to be an overzealous tree felling operation that would have a detrimental effect on Avebury's wildlife and landscape. Peter Oliver explained that the trees for felling had been selected if 50% of the crown had dieback. He walked the site regularly and was uncomfortable leaving diseased Ash trees in situ. Thinning of the crown indicated that a tree was declining and could drop a limb at some point. During discussion the following points and questions arose:

- Was there photographic evidence over time of the trees decline? **Yes.**
- The risk was a lot less by the cricket nets and orchard as people did not congregate there so might those trees be cordoned off? **Possible.**
- What about bats roosting in the trees? **Whilst a full assessment would be done, it would be permitted to fell trees on safety grounds.**
- Was there a proposal to replant any trees as per the recommendations in the PC's Tree Policy? **No, because the WHS Management Plan was against replanting trees. However he could probably replant three trees in the Southern section.**
- There seemed to be an issue with balance and timing and that a key factor for the NT was legal liability. Was it possible to take a more measured approach? For example, there were 4 Ash trees in the Drove that, although diseased, were exhibiting no dieback on new growth and had therefore had appeared to have developed

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resilience. **Peter Oliver said that he had watched the Ash trees over a number of years and believed them to be declining.**

- Was Peter aware that at least 100 different species depended on Ash trees and that the Tree Council advised leaving them so they could set seed? Woodpeckers had been seen on the Ash trees. *[Ash trees support a large number of other species. A list of 955 species that use ash trees has been collated, of which 45 are obligate on ash, i.e. are only known to occur on ash trees and 62 are highly associated with ash (rarely found on trees other than ash) – source: The Tree Council. Woodpeckers are attracted to dead wood in a tree i.e. soft wood.*
- Can the trees be re-assessed? **The NT trees are re-assessed in June/July.**
- The last mass culling had resulted in the NT's contractor cutting a tree at Bridge House in error. Can they guarantee that it won't happen again, please? **Yes.**
- Cllr Butler stated that he had not felled a single Ash tree on his farm in Avebury Trusloe and none had dropped any limbs. He had also planted over 100 trees on the farm and felt that the NT should consider re-planting in lower risk areas.
- There was general consensus by the public that Avebury would start to look very different should so many trees be felled on the NT estate.

The Chairman repeated that he regretted that the NT's intentions had not been presented to the PC before the application had been submitted to WC. The village tended to find work on trees controversial. He asked that ASSC and the Trust come up with a mitigation proposal for the trees on the sports field. The PC could then reach a decision at a separate Planning Committee meeting. **It was resolved** to convene a Planning Committee meeting on the Sports Field at 4:30pm on Tuesday 18 October 2022. [Cllrs Bedford and Lewis gave their apologies]. Thanks were expressed to Peter Oliver for answering questions on the NT's application so fully.

10. Project Updates:

- a) **Speed Indicator Device:** Cllr Paradise reported that the SID had been defective due to a problem with the cable between the solar panel and the battery. It was acknowledged that there might have been an issue with the batteries, too, which was why two new batteries were in operation. In the meantime, the battery for the SID had been disconnected from the solar panel and was currently in working order. Data collection had ceased whilst the issues had been resolved. The last recorded 85th percentile was 37.9, which was a median speed along the A4361 near Rawlins Park. There had been 98,017 vehicles travelling southbound during the month of September and the highest speed recorded was 70mph at 5am.
- b) **Chapel Project / exhibition space:** written updates previously circulated to members including photographs of the exhibits that were currently in place. The Chairman explained that as part of the NT's internal approval process their solicitors had requested some final changes to the lease: clause 6.1 had been extended but without additional adverse effect for the PC. A final draft copy would be presented for approval at the November meeting. The Chairman went on to summarize the project progress and said that the first event was planned for 14 October with David Dawson giving a presentation. All members were welcome to

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attend. It was noted that volunteers were needed to extend the opening hours and also regular cleaning was required. In discussion it was agreed to pay £12 / hour for two hours cleaning per week for a trial period of three months. Cllr Lewis said that she would provide the cleaning materials. It was also agreed to purchase a key safe for easy access to the Chapel.

- c) **Play Area:** Cllr Paradise reported that she was having difficulty getting quotations for single items of equipment as suppliers were trying to quote for the whole job. She would carry on contacting different play equipment companies and report back at the next meeting.
- d) **To set a date for a Transport Group meeting: it was resolved** to convene a Transport Group meeting at 7pm on Tuesday 25 October 2022 at the Social Centre, Avebury.

11. Local Issues:

- a) **High Street Planters:** Cllr Paradise reported that there were no further issues with the planters and all were being looked after by a resident or family in the village.
- b) **Notice boards:** the Clerk reported that pricing for non-wooden notice boards of a similar size to the existing ones at Beckhampton and Avebury Trusloe was about £500 per notice board. Cllr Lewis offered to pass on the details of the ones her husband had recommended to the NT in his capacity as secretary of the Ramblers Association. Further pricing would be obtained to inform the budget for 2023.

12. **SWAST Defibrillator Scheme:** the Vice-Chair reported that the PC had received a further donation of £510 from the Postmen's charity cake sale for a defibrillator at Rawlins Park. It was agreed that the PC write to formally thank the Postmen, Andy and Mick, and Andy's godchildren, and also to thank Mr and Mrs Ullens, who own the Henge shop. Cllr Lewis said that she was delighted to report that the Community Shop had pledged £250 towards a defibrillator at Beckhampton. The PC needs to research the power and siting options for a cabinet. Cllr Bedford offered to meet with Cllr Lewis to look at options as guidance had changed and defibrillators could now be 400 metres away from the target location.

13. **Parish Steward Priority Sheet:** Members requested that for his next visit on 20 October that he (i) check the culvert at the end of the High Street near Bridge House (ii) carry out more pot hole filling on the byway to Windmill Hill (iii) cut back the overhanging hedge south of the A4 at the east exit from Beckhampton (iv) check drainage at the east end of Beckhampton near Galteemore Farm as the ground was prone to water springs. The Clerk reported that checking of all gullies and grips was already on the list as per the requests from the last meeting minutes. Members were still concerned about the vegetation encroaching footpath 22 and particularly the risk of flooding as the ditch running next to Trusloe Manor was not being maintained by anyone. Martin Cook at WC had emailed to advise that it was down to the PC to check ownership of the ditch via Parish records / the archiving office. Cllr Butler said that he would ask Diana Wethered about the ownership of the ditch next to footpath 22 as she may know more information.

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14. **Communications and Correspondence:** the Clerk reported:

- a) Headlines submitted to UKN.
- b) North Wessex Downs Annual Forum: Friday 25 November 2022, Marlborough Golf Club.
- c) WALC AGM: Monday 10 October 2022, 6:30pm onwards at ASSC.

15. **Finance and admin including:**

- a) **Banking arrangements:** item deferred to next meeting agenda.
- b) **Training:** not covered.
- c) **Review of Emergency Plan:** in progress. Item deferred to next meeting agenda.
- d) **Review of Asset Register:** (document previously circulated to members and see appendix 3). **It was resolved** to receive and adopt the updated Asset Register. Proposed by Cllr Paradise, seconded by Cllr Service and carried unanimously.
- e) **Review of Financial Risks:** (document previously circulated to members and see appendix 4). **It was resolved** to receive and adopt the updated Financial Risk Assessment. Proposed by Cllr Paradise, seconded by Cllr Lewis and carried unanimously.
- f) **Cheques for ratification: it was resolved** to ratify the following cheque payments. Proposed by Cllr Ben Butler, seconded by Cllr Bedford and carried unanimously.
 - (i) Westcotec Ltd. Two new batteries for the SID (including VAT) £210.60
 - (ii) Miss E. Moore: Clerk's overtime + expenses (22 Aug – 21 Sept 2022)
£130.23

16. **Date of next meeting:** 7:30pm on Tuesday 1 November 2022 at the Social Centre.

The meeting closed at 21:54

Appendices:

1. National Trust Update – October 2022
2. Chapel Exhibition Update by Cllr Stacey
3. Asset Register dated 4 October 2022
4. Financial Risk Assessment dated 4 October 2022