

Annual Parish Meeting of Blackthorn M1/19

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Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Blackthorn				
Held In:	The Village Hall		On:	Thursday 7 May 2019 at 7.30p.m.
Present:	Parish Council Chairman Cllr. Mrs J. Lamont (JL), Cllrs. Mr. R. Burden (RB), Mr R. Rue (RR) and A. Stevenson (AS).			
In Attendance:	Six parishioners, District Cllr. D. Hughes and County Cllr. I. Corkin and T. Charlesworth Clerk/RFO to the PC.			
Item No	Topic			Due Date
19.01	Apologies:			
	Cllr. R. Lamont (RL).			
19.02	Minutes:			
	Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Blackthorn held on 17 May 2018 at 7.30pm were confirmed as a correct record of the meeting, previously signed by the Chairman on 7 June 2018 minute reference M5/18 – 18/73.			
19.03	Chairman's Report:			
	Chairman's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting on 7 May 2019:- Accepted as minutes: <i>Chairperson's Statement</i> <i>"Welcome to Parish Council AGM for the year 2018/19</i> <i>I would like to welcome – all the guest to the village hall tonight for the Parish AGM</i> <i>I would especially like to thank Tracey our Clerk it is very good to see you</i> <i>Tracey continues to work 14 hours per month on Council business and we still share her time with Merton PC</i> <i>I would also like to thank Mr Morrissey who again this year has continued to keep our bus shelter clean and tidy.</i> <i>The work that the Council completes could not be achieved without the dedication of the volunteer councillors who give up their time not only to attend meetings but also to undertake the project work that is completed. The Councillors have again this year declined to be paid for working for the Council and remain committed to keeping our contribution to village life voluntary.</i> <i>I would like to take the opportunity to thank Cllr Rue for his contribution to the Council not only as my Vice Chair but also for his persistence in getting and keeping the road traffic calming system up and running. Randal has also taken a lead role on the pond project, and is normally the first point of contact within the village that people go to (penalty of retirement perhaps) Thank you Randal – no doubt you will hear more on all this in his report. Of special note this year was Randall standing in for me at the Oxfordshire Cambridge Expressway and then using his previous expertise and engineering background to provide a best estimate of possible routes this before the official maps were published – and when they were – they were pretty spot on.</i> <i>Cllr Stevenson is our longest serving Council member, I would like to take a moment to thank her for her ongoing commitment to the village and in particular, for her tireless pursuit to ensure that our grass verges are cut and look as attractive as possible. I would also like to thank Sandie and Randal for attending the Piddington Parish meetings to show solidarity and support on their planning issue with the proposed traveller's encampment. Sandie and Randall also attended the meetings with the Highways to look at accident rates on the A41 and what could be done about it.</i> <i>Cllr Burden has taken our planning brief and he ensures that the Council is kept informed on all planning applications relevant to the village and local area. Richard will provide an update on the major plans later. He also support the Clerk with the contracting out of our allotments. Richard's brief is growing with all the major developments that are in process – and he undertakes to provide us with a brief background of what is being proposed and what the possible objections are; should we wish to object. The Policy of the Council is only to object on permitted terms or past history – for example the Chicken Farm planning permission was objected to on the basis of the experiences of the smell of Blackthorn Farm as the highest level of complaints were registered when they were dealing with chicken waste.</i> <i>Cllr Lamont – continues to provide the Council with expertise in the use of Facebook and other communication tools. Cllr Lamont also provides updates for the Parish Magazine. Throughout 2018, Rachel has worked to get volunteers together for a revised Neighborhood Watch. Under our new GDPR requirements we are also required to have a UK domained website and organizational emails and Rachel is working with a supplier to deliver this. We are grateful to the Launton PC who provided guidance on how this could be achieved.</i> <i>Blackthorn is fortunate to have a dedicated team of volunteer councilors who give their time and energy to work for the parish –</i>			

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	▪ Following the 2016, AGM the Council committed to develop new communication channels and throughout 2018 Lee Butler has continued to provide support for the publication of minutes and other items of interest on the Council website. We aim in 2019 to move this to our new website once it is fully developed and operational – and move this to Rachel once it is completed. ▪ Another action from the AGM was to look at the car-parking situation at the Park – and throughout 2018, the Council has continued to build funds for any possible solution . ▪ The Park this winter suffered less flooding – I think this is down to the superb job that the Cross family did in clearing Blackthorn Brook this year. Following the annual inspection of the play equipment the council re-barked the play area and willow structure. It was immediately used by the children to dam the ditch. We have also had to replace the NO DOGS sign – this time with security screws as the previous 2 signs disappeared. We are fortunate to have the Park and it attracts families who then attend other events. Some equipment has been damaged through wear and tear and we have requested Trevor Stewart to come and re-inspect and replace elements as required. Continued bug bears are rubbish in the Park – and we are looking at how we can improve this – but I would like to thank the many volunteers that pick up litter from the park. ▪ Apart from our Councillors, the village has an army of volunteers and hopefully we will hear from some of them later – but I want to recognise their contributions in my report. ▪ The Village Hall Committee continues to provide social activities for the Village working tirelessly to provide entertainment in the hall for the village ensuring that the community has the opportunity to come together at least monthly through the Pub nights. The Hall is being regularly used by several groups – We have a singing group on a Monday, Pilates Tue/Wed Evening, Yoga on a Thursday – the u3A on a Wed and once a month a Craft group – proving that our facilities are attractive to a wide audience. This year they have also begun a coffee morning each Thursday – 1st Thursday of the month ▪ 2018 saw the Blackthorn Volunteers again organise and run with their many volunteers the Blackthorn Car Show, another fantastic day was had and local Charities were the beneficiaries of this success. ▪ Finally, I would like to pass on the Councils thanks to all the volunteers who continue to contribute their time and energy that makes Blackthorn a great place to live. Volunteers continue to give their time to this village and the Parish Council is here to make sure the environment we live in is the best it can be – so while we always welcome volunteers we also welcome ideas on what you would like to see. ▪ Some we can do others not – but if you don't share – we won't know. ▪ Thank you"		
19.04	Financial Report:		
	▪ 4.1: Financial Report 2018/19: Presented by RFO ▪ There was an increase to the precept from 2017/18 to 2018/19 by 0% giving a precept requirement of £11,548.00. ▪ Balance B/fwd £27,875.93 ▪ Add Total Receipts £14,492.82 ▪ Less Total Payments £11,955.16 ▪ Balance C/fwd £30,413.59 ▪ Main expenditure/income and funds reported.	RFO/ Clerk	
19.05	District Cllr Report: Chairman brought forward.		
	7.1: Received from Cllr. Hughes: ▪ Finance: Reported as being fine. ▪ Election: The District Council gained one seat and lost two giving little change. ▪ Working with O.C.C: This is reported as being successful; planning ties with Southnorthants are to be severed; noted that B. Duxbury, Planning Officer is to retire in July. ▪ Policies: There is a watching brief on the 'Environment'.		
19.06	Update on Parish Council Projects: <i>Chairman requested reports as follows:-</i>		
	5.1: Grass Cutting/Drainage and Blackthorn Brook: Cllr A. Stevenson reported as follows and accepted as part of the minutes:- ▪ AGM Blackthorn Parish Council ▪ 9th May 2019 Sandie Stevenson ▪ Grass cutting around our village the contractor is the Cross family. They have invested over the years in some very neat equipment to make them even more efficient. We have just signed them up for next two years. The council cannot thank them enough for their hard work and attention to detail, for last year 2017 and this year 2018. I think you will agree they do a very thorough job	AS	

- *DITCHES: Some of you may know the Environment Agency no longer are able to clean out Blackthorn Brook. We instructed Tracey our parish Clerk to write to E A to remind them of their obligation to keep the ditches clear and clean the Ditches. They still declined to we had no choice but to get it done. We then went out for quotes on getting it done locally. We gave the job to Michael Cross who has done a sterling job much better than anything the environment agency has ever done in the past. The council continue to keep an eye on Blackthorn Brook and all other ditches in the village.*
- *The Village Pond has you may have noticed had a bit of a haircut. The Parish Council have it on our list of things to budget for, it is a work in progress at the moment needs to be discussed with the land owner what we can do with regards to the reeds etc. but while the birds are nesting it is out of the question to do any pruning or cleaning. We did ask a contractor for a quote to clean it out but the cost was in the many thousands. Watch this space.*
- *The Play Area We have been very disappointed in the drainage last year. It has frankly water Logged this spring the worst I have ever seen it. Some of this was due to a blocked culvert which we could not deal with until the water went down a wee bit. It was not accessible during the very wet weather. We now have had a contractor look at the culvert they have managed to unblock it. We will keep a keen eye on this and see what we can do in the way of preventive maintenance.*
- *This year thankfully has been much more normal weather. We have just topped up all the chippings*
- *In all the play area. The Living Willow maze has had a wonderful maintenance job done by Gina Martin to bring it back to it formal glory. This has also been topped up with chippings. It is looking great in the Spring sunshine.*
- *We have had the equipment inspected by Trevor Stewart to ascertain if any lasting damage has been caused due to be submersed in water for a number of months. He appears to think it is best left where it is.*

6.3: Planning/Allotments: Presented by Cllr. RB:

RB

- **Planning:** Other than minor applications, there have been two major applications presented to the Parish Council; Blackthorn Meadows and Symmetry Park, the latter of which has ambitions to extend beyond its designated area towards Blackthorn Hill. Currently there is an application for the Erection of a free range egg production unit, gatehouse and agricultural workers dwelling including all associated works at Lower Arncott.
- **Allotments:** All currently let; reminder to keep up with rental payments.
- **HS2:** Works are scheduled to start at the end of June 2019.
- **Oxford-Cambridge Expressway:** Due to start August 2019 between here and Milton-Keynes.

6.3: Blackthorn Parish Council. AGM 9 May 2019: Presented by the Vice Chairman and accepted as part of the minutes:

RR

- *"Further to the statement from Cllr Jenny Lamont, here are more details.*
- *I am grateful to Cllr Sandie Stevenson for help on some of these projects.*
- **Road Safety Improvements:** *We are all worried about the accidents on the A41, particularly at the Launton and Marsh Gibbon junctions. Sadly there was another death last year. I am grateful to Cllr Corkin for organising a site meeting on 14 June 2018 with two experts from the Oxon CC Highway authority, and councillors from Blackthorn and Launton. A speed survey has been done with a view to dropping the limit from 50 to 40mph on this stretch.
At the Launton junction I have relocated one traffic sign and removed four illegal signs to improve visibility. The Launton junction has been redesigned to prevent overtaking, probably with a traffic island and double white lines to discourage overtaking. A new digital speed camera is proposed for enforcement. The overheight sign should be repaired to prevent faulty readings, and modified on the east side to prevent HGV's attempting to turn in the entrance to Blackstone Farm. However no funds are available for these improvements. I sent a detailed email requesting funding on 20 Jan 2019 but no reply yet. Oxon CC has improved visibility at the B4011 turn by hedge trimming behind the speed camera, and we need the cooperation of the landowner to cut back the bushes behind the Armco. We also need the cooperation of the landowner to cut back the hedging on the blind bend by the Lower Road postbox. Several near misses have been reported.*
- **Railway Embankment:** *Network Rail will reinforce the embankment between the low bridge and Piddington. They have used compulsory purchase and created an access track on the southwest side. We protested against some aspects of their plan, and I sent a detailed email to Oxon CC and Cherwell DC on 27 July 2018. We are dismayed that they have created a new vehicular access onto the A41 at the low bridge. Their agent Mr Richard Spendlove from Bruton Knowles assures me that the majority of the construction traffic will come from Piddington via a new bridge over the*

River Ray. At present floodwater from the low bridge is pumped down Station Road towards Blackthorn village. Last year this saturated our sewage pumping system. Mr Spendlove assures me that the floodwater will be diverted away from the village to the ditch alongside their new track. Reverse flow from the River Ray will be prevented by one way valves.

- **Pond and Blackthorn Brook:** You may know that there are three springs under the pond, and the only way that water can flow out of the village is along Blackthorn Brook to the River Ray. The Brook is the ditch on the east side of Lower Road, and is considered by the Environment Agency as a strategic waterway. As such they would sometimes clear it. At last year's meeting the spokesman for the Agency made it clear that no funds are available, and the onus is on the landowners. We are all grateful to Michael Cross for clearing the Brook last autumn, and also for his work on the ditch in Station Road. It is quite normal for the silt to be left to drain, before spreading on the verge and reseeded. The silt under the pond is nearly a metre deep, and we were quoted £50,000 for its removal. So we need to take it in stages. Maybe starting by clearing the silt under the springs and a clear channel to the outlet. Last December I wondered why the water in the Brook was not draining away, although it had been cleared and the River was low. I carried out a detailed survey with measurements from the pond to the B4011, and down to the River with kind permission of the owners of Pound Farm. I found several restrictions and obstructions. I found one 24" pipe half saturated, and one 12" pipe, clearly too small. There was a sluggish flow nearly to the River. However the last 15 metres of the Brook are completely blocked by an alluvial dam. I therefore suggest that we should remove this blockage this summer. This will require heavy machinery and cooperation of landowners. I also think we should replace the railway sleepers at the pond outlet by a sluice gate (penstock and headwall). This would normally be open. It could be closed at peak times to prevent local flooding. It could also be closed to build up a head of water for surge cleaning of the Brook. It could also be closed to act as a dam when we pump the pond out for silt removal. On the western side of Lower Road the ditch has been well cleared from Weir Farm Close past Weir Thatch. Unfortunately the water has nowhere to go, because the ditch from the postbox onwards is blocked. We need the cooperation of the landowner to clear this ditch. Also the pipe under the road connecting it to Blackthorn Brook needs to be cleared.
- **Blackthorn Meadows:** I would like to welcome any parishioners who may be here tonight from the new houses. During construction I liaised with the Site Engineer of Bellway Homes, and I am happy to report only one significant problem. The groundwater at the outfall from their site is 60cm above the data from the Environment Agency. This is consistent with the rising level of water on Otmoor and the lack of dredging the River Ray. I believe this precludes construction of an expressway at the bottom of their site, and I have personally reported this to the Engineer responsible at Highways England. We need to remember that Blackthorn in general is only one metre above Otmoor. I was excited to learn that Blackthorn Meadows will have mains natural gas. However the cost of extending this to the rest of the village is prohibitive.
- **Oxbridge Expressway:**
Last summer I made a detailed map of possible routes based on government information and topography. Cllr David Hughes was the first to see it. I displayed it at a Pub night in the village hall. Most people were interested, but somebody authoritatively told me I was completely wrong. For fear of being misleading I did not show it again. However the information available since November 2018 on the website <https://highwaysengland.co.uk/projects/oxford-to-cambridge-expressway> proves that my map is 100% accurate. So here it is again tonight.
 - My yellow line is the abandoned B2 Otmoor corridor.
 - My green line is the B1 corridor west of Oxford.
 - My orange line is the B3 corridor east of Oxford.
 If the project goes ahead, the B3 corridor seems the most likely.
 It is possible that some final route options may go through our Parish.
 We are looking for a volunteer councillor to be our champion on this and other issues.
 We hope we may have found someone.
 30mph Vehicle Activated Signs
 The unit in Lower Road was defective, and I had to take it to Milton Keynes for repair. Both are now flashing correctly and collecting data.
 I need to make stronger brackets for the unit in Station Road, and maybe replace its bluetooth module. Last year data analysis was entrusted to someone who has since left the village. He did good work on his android, but it seems it's not that easy. So we have bought a laptop dedicated to this purpose. I have successfully downloaded data, but everyone is mystified by the analysis software. Maybe there is a genius here that can show me tonight. Otherwise I will go to Milton Keynes for a tutorial when I replace the bluetooth.
Travellers Site: We have shown solidarity with Piddington Parish and our District Councillors in opposing a speculative development in Widnell Lane. I gather the

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	appeal for their second application has been delayed thanks to the MOD citing special circumstances”. ▪ Communication: As written by Cllr. RL and presented by the Chairman in her absence and accepted as part of the minutes: ▪ <i>“My apologies I could not be at this year’s AGM due to work commitments, the Chair has briefly summarized the projects I have been responsible for over 2018/19 in her statement and I provide more detail on each of those below.</i> ▪ Facebook and Parish Magazine– The council has added a running agenda item to its meetings to review any issues raised by parishioners on the Facebook group. We have also utilized the village group to post highlights from our meetings as per the request from last year’s AGM, as well as answering queries posted that warrant council involvement. We will continue to utilize this mode of communication with the village. ▪ We have also added a running agenda item to review any updates for the Parish Matters magazine that come from the monthly meetings. ▪ New Parish Council website – I have been working with a local UK based vendor Navitas to design and implement a new Parish Council website and email addresses to ensure that the council is compliant with the new GDPR regulations. Navitas have worked on many similar local council/parish sites. The site will house all council documentation, contacts, processes, meeting agendas and minutes etc. and provide a platform for regular news updates. ▪ The website is currently under construction and we will continue to utilise the old site until the new site is complete. We will advertise the new site in both Parish Matters and Facebook. ▪ Neighborhood Watch – A huge thank you to all our Neighbourhood Watch volunteers (Randal, Bill, Emma and Simon) We now have coverage across the village and have been able to extend the existing Lower Road scheme to cover all areas of the village. Simon Roe is leading the efforts for this and the council has closed out this project”. ▪ 6.5: GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations): No update.	RL	
19.07	COUNTY COUNCILLORS’ REPORT(S):		
	7.2: OCC Cllr Ian Corkin gave the following local updates: ▪ County Hall: Going through transformation; O.C.C. lost a third of its budget and people which has affected rural areas in terms of bus subsidies: He agreed to revisit the concerns regarding a local bus service and a possible bus link with Blackthorn Village and Blackthorn Meadows (part of Blackthorn Parish). ▪ Partnerships with C.D.C: ▪ Efficiency Stream: Opportunity to bring together Social Care and Housing. ▪ Infrastructure: ▪ HS2 spending review (delivery on time and on budget). ▪ East-West Rail: More support ▪ Education: A hundred percent of people got their choice of Primary school. ▪ Bicester Heritage: Have ambitious plans that could have implications on housing and traffic; currently have permission for a hotel. ▪ A41: Amendments and signage being reviewed. ▪ Bicester Roundabout: Traffic light system needs reviewing by Highways. ▪ Postcode Lottery: Funding opportunity. ▪ Oxford-Cambridge Expressway: Consider what offers the best development route and what can the expressway do to relieve traffic on the A34.		
19.08	Reports: Were received from:		
	▪ Village Hall/Social Committee: The Committee has had a busy year; welcoming an extra person, giving seven members. It uses Facebook and Email to publicise its events i.e., Pub nights, quiz nights and coffee mornings; holding its first Sunday Brunch morning last weekend, with more to follow, further events planned include the summer BBQ in June; October festival; Quiz nights; film nights; Halloween, Christmas and the regular pub nights. ▪ Expenses: Approximately £2,000.00 covering Insurance; electric; heating etc. ▪ Income from hire; private donations and gift aid. ▪ Plans Completed 2018/19: To refurbish the kitchen. ▪ Plans for 2019/20: To refresh the furniture; currently looking at options; Long term to do the extension. ▪ Car Show: Another successful event with the support of many volunteers.	GL	
19.09	Open Forum:		

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	▪ Support for the parking at the play area; look at C.D.C. Community grant and SPARK funding.		
	<i>The Chairman Cllr. JL thanked everyone present for attending the meeting.</i>		
There being no other business the Chairman closed the meeting at 9:25pm <i>Approved 6 June 2019</i>			