

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting of Blackthorn				
Held:	Blackthorn Village Hall		On:	Thursday 16 June 2022 at 7.30pm.
Present:	Parish Council Chairman Cllr. Mrs J. Lamont (JL), Vice-Chairman Mr R. Rue (RR) Cllr. Mr C. Hegarty-Swain (CHS), Cllr. R. Lamont (RL) and Cllr. Mrs A. Stevenson (AS).			
In Attendance:	District Cllr. A. Patrick and Clerk/RFO to PC: Mrs T Charlesworth			
Item No	Topic			Due Date
	Apologies: Accepted from:			
	District Cllr. G. Coton.			
22.81	To receive declarations of Personal or Personal and Prejudicial Interests':			
	Register of Members' Interest: None.			
22.82	Minutes:			
	RESOLVED: 5.1: Minutes of the Annual Parish Council meeting held on 19 May 2022 were approved and signed by the Chairman Cllr. J. Lamont. 5.2: Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Blackthorn held on 19 May 2022 at 8pm were carried forward to be next meeting.			
22.83	Vacancy/Co-option:			
	No applications.			
22.84	District/County Cllrs: District Cllr. A. Patrick.			
	- Reported that he had, had an interesting month and would give an update on things he had been monitoring: - Rail Freight Interchange proposals at J10 are currently under public consultation. - Islip Bridge: Work is to commence on 20 June 2022 to segregate walkers/traffic. - Funding is available for application through the:- - Community ownership fund for the purchase of assets; bidding begins this week (he would forward the link) and the Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Improvement Fund (funding over three years). - Volunteer Awards – nominations for a local resident. - Matters from the previous parish council meeting i.e. the Play Area Car park and the gap in the embankment to be followed up with Tony Brummell.			
22.85	Matters for Report:			
	6.1: None.			
22.86	COVID-19: No update on Guidance:			
	OALC template letter for sending to your MP re virtual meeting: C/fwd.			
22.87	Project Reports:			
	8.1: Drainage and Flooding: River Bank Repairs/Network Rail: To be followed up by District Cllr. A. Patrick. Blackthorn Brook: Follow up letter to be drafted and emailed to Cllr. J. Lamont and R. Rue.			
	8.2: Traffic Calming: Village Plan: Review of proposals:- 20mph Limit Application: Village consultation by means of a 'google' form; Cllr R. Lamont. - White Traffic Calming Gates: Mr & Mrs Cross to be approached to see if they could make gates from composite materials if available; otherwise bespoke gates would have to be considered.			
	8.3: Play Area: Car Park: District Cllr. A. Patrick to follow up. Repairs in-line with the RoSPA Report: No response from Trevor Stewart: District Cllr. A. Patrick to see if there is a list of recommended maintenance contractors.			
	BUSINESS:			
22.88	Finance:			
	9.1: To accept the list of accounts paid prior to the meeting and receipts received and to approve payment of invoices:			
	Invoices paid prior to the meeting: None.			
	Receipts: None.			
	Invoices for payment: It was RESOLVED that the list of invoices were approved for payment: - Clerks Pay/Exp May 2022 – £161.66 – Cheque No: 101428. - Working from Home Allowance - £6.00 per week: Clerk/RFO needs to look into this further to see if can be claimed: RESOLVED: - That the Parish Council approves the payment if it can be claimed. - M.R. & J.S. Cross – Inv. No's: 91 - £324.00 (Grass cutting play area 6.5.2022/20.5.2022) – 90 - £732.00 (Grass cutting verges 27.5.2022) – Total £1,056.00 – Cheque No: 101425. - SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks) – Membership Renewal £98.00 – Cheque No: 101426. - British Trees for the Queen's Jubilee: No invoice presented.			

vi. Zurich Municipal – Insurance Renewal – Inv. No: 515240345 - £772.11 – Cheque No: 101423. vii. Reimbursement – Dell Technologies - £1,020.26: RESOLVED: - That the cheque for reimbursement was approved for payment once the order has been completed and invoice presented. viii. Jane Old – Internal Audit 2021/22 - £190.00 – Inv. No: JO179 – Cheque No: 101427. ix. Swarco Traffic Ltd – MVAS Warranty Expires 31 May 2022 – options of Silver and Gold maintenance contracts – Swarco confirmed that there is no Bronze option. RESOLVED: - Not to renew the Warranty as the Silver and Gold options did not offer value for money.	RFO	
9.2: Bank Reconciliation to date: (attached): It was RESOLVED to accept and approve the bank reconciliation(s) as follows: 1.1.2022 Up to 31.3.2022 (Bank St. Issue Date: 18.3.2022): - Balance B/fwd £ 28,503.28 - Add Total Receipts £ 6,139.27 - Less Total Payments £ 3,225.36 - Balance C/fwd £ 31,417.19		
9.3: Budget Comparison: RESOLVED: - To accept and approve the budget comparison 1 April 2022 up to 16 June 2022. - Payments: In-line with budget. - Receipts: In-line with budget.		
9.4: V.A.T: a. Spreadsheet: Presented and accepted: i. HMRC Claim: Claim to be made at the end of June.	RFO	
9.5: Quotes: a. Allotment Post: As larger firms are not interested in the work; L. Butler has agreed to get the work done and will present the invoice for reimbursement. b. Laptop: Having confirmed that Dell Technologies will not approve payment by invoice: RESOLVED: - That the PC accepted the offer from Cllr. A. Stevenson to purchase using her card and; - To approve the reimbursement once payment is made; see 9.1-c-vii. c. Insurance – Review of policy and quote: See 9.1-c-vi.	AS/Clerk/ RFO	
9.6: Internal Audit 2020/21: Internal Controls recommended for action; reviewed again in 2021/22 Internal Audit 9.7-a. a. Payroll Controls - The Council, as an employer, is required to register with HMRC and to record all payments to its employees with HMRC regardless of whether any tax is due (HMRC advice note from 2011 supplied) – In process; laptop need to be separated from Merton PC. Document Storage: Recommendation that just the last five years of minutes are kept with the Clerk, with the rest being deposited with the County Archive for safety.	Clerk/RFO	
9.7: Internal Audit 2021/22: a. Internal Auditor Report: The report was considered and the following noted for action: C: Review of Internal Controls: Ensure that the Risk Assessment is reviewed annually – preferably at the beginning of the Financial Year in order that it can be used as a working document throughout the year. Attention should be given to the recommendation at 5.92 relating to the assessment matrix. D: Budgetary Controls/Precept Requirement: The budget amount (both expected expenditure and expected income) and the Precept amount should be agreed and minuted in order that the final outturn can be confirmed. G: Payroll Controls: The Council, as an employer, is required to register with HMRC and to record all payments to its employees with HMRC regardless of whether any tax is due (HMRC advice note from 2011 supplied). It is imperative that this is rectified as soon as possible. H: Asset Controls: Investigate and publish any Deeds and Titles: Clerk confirmed with Internal Auditor that this was already in place. J: Accounting Statements: While Income and Expenditure method is 'correct' it is unnecessary for a small Parish Council. Receipts and Payments would be far more appropriate: It was agreed that the process was up to the Clerk/RFO to decide.		

- **M: Exercise of Public Rights:** Ensure that the Electors' Rights dates are for 30 working days and cover the first ten working days of July. Note that the earliest date for 21/22 is 1 June due to the Jubilee bank holiday.
 - **Transparency Compliance:**
 - **Compliance with the Transparency Act:** The difference could be avoided if the change was made to Receipts and Payments method.
 - **Further Recommendations:**
 - Following the completion of the Internal Audit, the Council should undertake a review of effectiveness as per Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. A blank form can be supplied.
 - **Training**
 - The Clerk and the Councillors should be encouraged to take up the training offered by the local County Association and SLCC to increase their knowledge and expand the Clerk's professional development. I recommend including a regular agenda item and budget for training:
- RESOLVED:**
- That the Clerk/RFO can enrol in the SLCC – FILCA course - £120.00 plus VAT.
 - **Financial Responsibility**
 - While the Clerk / RFO is responsible for the day-to-day running of the Parish, the Council should be reminded that, as a corporate body, it is the Council which is responsible for financial governance and this responsibility should not be taken lightly. I recommend that a Councillor Responsible for Internal Financial Control is appointed. As recently recommended by OALC, the Councillor Responsible for Internal Financial Control should have a check sheet to help them make the appropriate checks on the accounts. For instance, with the payments, I recommend that the Councillor identifies a number of payments from the original bank statement and then follows them back through the Minutes checking the process of paying and agreeing to place the order / undertake the work. The Councillor should also check that any income is also recorded: See 9.8.
 - **Budget Setting**
 - I should like to see more significance made of the budget and precept setting. The overall budget (both income and expenditure) totals should be minuted and published for consideration. For clarity, once the budget has been considered, the total amount of Precept should also be minuted. It then helps to clarify the amount requested is the amount deposited by the District Council and also makes sure that the outturn at the end of the year is in line with expectations.
 - **Banking**
 - I recommend that the Council reviews the bank mandate annually as part of its review of finances in April.
 - **Debit / Payment Card**
 - The Council does not hold petty cash, however, the Council should consider the provision of a debit card or charge card on the bank account in the Clerk/ RFO's name in order that items such as Office 365 or anti-virus software can be bought in the Parish's name without the need to resort to the Clerk or another Councillor having to use their personal accounts. With the appropriate safeguards and procedures this would be acceptable.
 - **Reserves**
 - I recommend that the Parish considers earmarked reserves and agrees to adopt a full Reserves Policy which should be reviewed annually. Guidance can be found in the latest edition of JPAG.
 - **Provision of Equipment**
 - I noted that my recommendation about purchasing the appropriate IT equipment is yet to be implemented. This should be rectified as a matter of urgency. An IT budget and reserves should be considered for the future.
 - **Staff Appraisal**
 - The Clerk is employed by the Council and the Council, therefore, should be mindful that it is, as a corporate body, an employer. I recommend that the Council form a staffing committee, of at least three members, which is able to perform an annual review of the Clerk's employment. Employment training provided by the County Association should be undertaken.
 - **HMRC**
 - As mentioned in last year's report, the Council, as an employer, is required to register with HMRC and to record all payments to its employees with HMRC – regardless of whether the salary is below the tax threshold. This has not been implemented. The HMRC advice note from 2011 was supplied last year and is, again, attached to this report. It is imperative that this is implemented as a matter of urgency. I recommend that the Council engages a payroll company experienced at dealing with Parish

JL

	Councils to ensure that the correct procedures are followed. OALC will be able to give details of their employment adviser. ■ Working from Home Allowance ■ The Clerk is entitled to the Working from Home Allowance, particularly as the Council does not incur the costs of a Parish Office. I recommend that the Council budgets to pay the Clerk for the full – HMRC agreed – £6 per week: See 22.8-c-ii. ■ Document Management ■ In our discussions, I noted that the Clerk is in possession of many of the Parish Council Minute books. As these books are the only record of the meetings and should be kept in perpetuity, I strongly recommend that just the last five years or so are kept with the Clerk, with the rest being deposited with the County Archive for safety. A review of other documents, both paper and electronic, should also be undertaken following adoption of a Document Retention policy. ■ Councillor Email Accounts ■ As part of GDPR, it is recommended that all Councillors should use email addresses provided for them by the Council: Completed. <i>District Cllr. A. Patrick left the meeting at 8.58pm.</i> b. Certification of Exemption: . To consider/approve whether or not the Parish Council meets the qualifying criteria for exemption. RESOLVED: ■ During the financial year 2021/22 the higher of the authority's gross income of £13,175 for the year or gross annual expenditure of £14,933, for the year did not exceed £25,000. ■ The Parish Council was able to confirm the required statements and certified itself exempt. ■ Completion of Certificate of Exemption: Signed by the RFO and the Chairman; Clerk to send to the External Auditor (Page 3 only): The Chairman JL signed the Certificate of Exemption; Clerk previously signed on 16 June 2022 to enter the recorded minute reference and would submit to the external auditor. c. The Annual Governance Statement: Section 1 was read: RESOLVED: ■ To respond as follows: ■ 1. Yes. ■ 2. Yes. ■ 3. Yes. ■ 4. Yes. ■ 5. Yes. ■ 6. Yes. ■ 7. Yes. ■ 8. Yes. ■ 9. N/A. d. The Accounting Statements: Completion of Section 2: RESOLVED: ■ That Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2021/22 were accepted and approved; previously signed by the RFO; T. Charlesworth and dated 16 May 2022. ■ That Boxes 1 to 10 had been completed in-line with the End of Year Accounts as presented. ■ That Box 11: No; The Council as a body corporate does not act as sole trustee for and is not responsible for managing Trust funds or assets. e. Following approval: The Chairman and Clerk of the meeting sign the Annual Governance Statement and the Chairman signs the Accounting Statements: ■ Section 1 - The Annual Governance Statement 2021/22 – Section 1 was signed by the Chairman JL and the Clerk/RFO – Clerk to enter minute reference. ■ Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2021/22 was signed by the Chairman; previously signed by the Clerk/RFO on 16 May 2022 – Clerk to enter minute reference. f. Exercise of Public Rights: RFO sets the commencement date: The date for the commencement of the Exercise of Public Rights 1 July 2022 and will end on the 11 August 2022. ■ All required documents to be published on the website before the 1 July 2022. Draft Statement of Variances as required by Internal Auditor.	Clerk/RFO	
	9.8: Improving Internal Control Mechanisms: The Parish Council is aware of the 'Fraud in Parish Council's' document circulated by OALC. RESOLVED:		

	- That Cllr. R. Lamont acts as the Internal Controller; to participate in any relevant training. - Cllr. R. Lamont to review the proposed Internal Controls policy; to be considered for adoption at the next meeting.	RL/Clerk	
22.89	Planning Matters:		
	10.1: New Applications: a. Application No: 22/01487/ F Applicant's Name: c/o BW Architects Ltd Proposal: Erection of new 2 bed dwelling on land currently used as paddock - Location: Church House, Thame Road, Blackthorn, OX25 1TE - Parish(es): Blackthorn Comment by 21 June 2022. RESOLVED: The Parish Council had no comments or objections to the revised application.	Clerk/RFO	
	10.2: Decision Notices: None.		
	10.3: Appeal Notices: None.		
	10.4: Withdrawal Notices: None.		
	10.5: Planning Issues: a. Network Rail: No update. b. O.C.C. - Decisions Meeting (28/04/2022) - Cabinet Member for Highway Management: Read; no comments.		
22.90	Data Protection Regulations:		
	a. 11.1: Generic Email Addresses: Councillors able to set up emails using their passwords; Cllr. R. Rue to send an email to all requesting confirmation that emails are working.		
22.91	Correspondence: B.P.C.293 Circulated for comments prior to the meeting:		
	BPC293: Items for decision considered on the agenda; list of further correspondence not requiring a decision considered prior to the meeting. a. BPC293(04): Thames Valley Police - Queens Jubilee and Community BRG – David Scott and I am the new Bicester Rural Neighbourhood Officer: David Scott had not responded to an invite to the Jubilee Celebrations.	RB	
22.92	Website/Issues raised through 'Facebook': Items to be approved for publishing:		
	a. Issues raised through 'Facebook': The PC utilises Facebook for items of interest not for its business: b. Matters approved for publication: Parish Council Vacancy.	RL/Clerk	
22.93	Parish Council Liaison Person:		
	a. To review the liaison role. - Consider hosting an event to look at issues and matters strategically and that affect all: Cllr. A. Stevenson has attended a meeting at Ambrosden Parish Council: Residents in Blackthorn Meadows are in support of the proposed boundary change. The Parish Council currently has not events planned to invite residents too. - Cllr. A. Stevenson to liaise with Launton and Marsh Gibbon Parish Councils with regards to any traffic concerns on the A41.	AS	
22.94	Village Matters: Reported incidents: None.		
22.78	Matters for Further Information or Discussion at the Next Meeting:		
	a. Matters for Further Information: i. Clerk to contact Oliver Connell & Son Ltd., regarding the removal of 'Bike event' signs along the Oxfordshire to Cambridgeshire road. b. Matters for Discussion: None. i. Internal Financial Controls Policy.	Clerk	
22.79	Date of the Next Meeting: Coronavirus: Update advice to be considered.		
	a. Meetings for 2021-2022: i. Parish Council Meeting: 7 July 2022 at 7.30pm: RESOLVED: That the meeting scheduled for 7 July 2022 at 7.30pm be rescheduled for 14 July 2022 at 7.30pm.	Clerk	
There being no other business the Chairman closed the meeting at 9:38pm. Draft Minutes subject to Confirmation <i>Minutes Approved 14 July 2022 – Minute Ref: M6/2022 – 22.99 – 5.1</i>			