

ALTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of meeting at the Coronation Hall, 7.30, July 19, 2012

Present: Steve Hepworth (Chair) Peter Emery, Kate Fielden, Charles Fletcher, Jenni Frost.

In attendance: Councillor Robert Hall

Apologies: Jayne Drew, Ben Owen, Polly Carson, Robert Carpenter Turner, PC Richard Barratt (In the absence of PC Barratt the police report, agenda item 4, was not taken)

- 055/12** **Great Stones Way:** At the request of Cllr Hall, who had another meeting to attend, this agenda item was taken first. Cllr Hall outlined his criticisms of the project, and of the consultants' report. Among the points made:
- the proposed long distance footpath route was contrived rather than natural
 - it had gained no support from parishes within the Pewsey Vale. At a recent public meeting attended by some 70 people a request for a show of support saw just one hand raised in favour. Yet the project organisers seemed to be relying on local support and help
 - the report did not address numbers, so the initial estimate of ¼ million users a year (which had "raised hackles and alarms") must stand
 - no car parks – the only existing, small car park already constantly full
 - no toilets – people will use the fields
 - hazardous crossings of major roads at the A4 and A342
 - B&Bs might benefit in theory; in practice local establishments already full (Jenni Frost confirmed; Steve Hepworth to double-check)
 - pubs like the Barge would gain but no accommodation except campsite and no nearby hotels
- Steve Hepworth raised the following points:
- Protected hill site of Adam's Grave is on the route but turf already worn. The report (6.1.2) suggests returfing, possibly by Natural England. But NE have already forbidden returfing of the adjoining White Horse, even using turf from within the reserve
 - The report acknowledges that the churches at Alton Barnes and Alton Priors will need protection – but does not suggest how this should be done, or who will bear the cost. The historic but fragile turnstiles on the cobbled paths across the fields between the churches were also at risk.
 - Charles Fletcher stressed concerns over dog control.
 - Cllr Hall said local people did not support the project and would not be helping, yet that help was what the organisers seemed to rely on. He would raise all these issues with relevant Wiltshire officers and councillors.
 - Kate Fielden said that the report assumed the long distance path will go ahead and merely looked at mitigating adverse effects. However, it had

not looked at user-numbers – on which the effectiveness of any mitigation measures would entirely depend. The report, therefore, had completely failed at the outset.

The feasibility study had estimated 250,000-400,000 users a year. Most will make day visits to so-called “honeypots.” Alton, as one of only two honeypots on this 17-mile section (the other being Avebury) could see a “horrendous” thousand visitors a day. There was also the unresolved issue of who would pay for maintenance; also how the churches could be protected and who would pay.

The hillsides around Adam’s Grave and the White Horse had all the designations and protections required, yet there had been a disgraceful lack of response from Natural England and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The project overall failed to fulfill the concept of a “strategic recreational route.”

KF pointed out that the group which will decide whether to recommend Leader Funding for the project will meet on August 1. Agreed that Steve Hepworth should write to the AONB officer setting out the pc’s concerns, copied to Cllr Hall.

SH said there was a feeling local communities were being bounced into a decision to meet funding deadlines. Other members voiced concerns and objections. Councillor Hall said he believed the project could be stopped by Wiltshire Council. Members thanked Cllr Hall for his attendance.

056/12 Minutes: The minutes of the previous two meetings were agreed (proposed Charles Fletcher, seconded Peter Emery) and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising:

056/12 RAF memorial: SH reported that he had approached English Heritage about listing or other protection for the RAF memorial and surviving structures associated with the World War II airfield at Alton Barnes. However the organisation had not been helpful.

057/12 Playing field Community Asset Transfer: Charles Reiss (clerk) reported that Wilts Council had secured a discount on the cost of the public advertisements required before the transfer could proceed, from £735.36 to £593.69. They would wish the reduced amount to be paid as a lump sum or over two or three years instead of the four years suggested originally. After brief discussion Steve Hepworth proposed, Peter Emery seconded, that the amount be paid over three years. Agreed. Jenni Frost requested the invoice be provided for all three years, if possible, for VAT purposes.

058/12 Canal issues - update: SH reported that British Waterways, now the Canal and River Trust, has given a job number for the Quiet Zone signs

at Honeystreet and for hardcore to improve the towpath as agreed. Although no date had been notified, this suggested work would soon get under way.

059/12 **Speedwatch:** Documents had been sent to Caroline Brailey of Pewsey Area Board for the siting of equipment in the villages. Response to come.

AOB:

060/12 **Street maintenance:** SH reported that as agreed at the AGM (item 039/12) he had contacted Wilts Highways about flooding at Alton Priors. Wilts had since visited the site, cleared all gullies and dug out the drainage ditch. It had been a good response.

061/12 **Pewsey Community Plan:** It had been suggested that surrounding villages be involved in this project, either as observers, receiving papers as published, or sending a representative to Pewsey pc meetings. SH said that while he did not have time to attend meetings, he would be prepared to receive documents. Agreed

062/12 **Robert Pile Charity:** SH reported that Jenni Frost had offered to resign as a trustee because she was unable to attend many meetings. SH said that he had no other candidate in mind and pc members said they were agreeable to her continued membership.

063/12 **Thanks to Chairman:** Peter Emery, as vice-chairman, pointed out that the customary thanks to the Chairman had been omitted from the Annual General Meeting. He would like now to register thanks to Steve Hepworth for all his hard work and congratulations on doing such a good job. PC members strongly agreed.

064/12 **Auditors:** JF reported that the Audit Commission had appointed Grant Thornton as new external auditors. This had been circulated to pc members by email, with no objections or comment. Auditors fees for the current financial year were down from £50 to zero.

065/12 **Payments & cheque signatories:** JF presented cheques for White Horse maintenance (£80) and refurbishment of playground bench (£150) both to Peter Emery. Signed by Charles Fletcher and Polly Carson. JF pointed out that the only other pc member currently authorized to sign cheques was Peter Emery. It would be useful to have another signatory. Kate Fielden proposed Steve Hepworth as additional signatory, seconded Charles Fletcher. Agreed

There being no other business the meeting ended at 8.25 pm.

* Subject to approval by next pc meeting