

## Minutes of The Elmore Annual Parish Meeting held at Elmore Village Hall on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2015 at 7.45 pm

Present	Parish Councillors: Mr J Field (JF) Chair, Mr A Nash (AN) Vice Chair, Mr T Jones (TJ), Mrs J Hobbs (JH), Mr N Meek (NM), Clerk Mrs D Jones (DJ)	
In Attendance	Colin Ellis, Graham Littleton, David Mossman, Christine Lingard	
1 Apologies	Cllr A Blackburn	
2 Police Report	Not in attendance and no report received.	
3 Christine Lingard	Talk: GRCC Village Agents in the Community – Christine Lingard Agents are managed by the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council and funded by Glos County Council and the NHS. Christine explained her role as Village Agent for 11 local villages including Elmore. She offers high quality information, promotes access to a wide range of services and will identify unmet needs in the community. The aim is to help older people maintain a secure, good quality of life. She will visit at home and help is free. We were encouraged to phone her on 07810 630179 if we would like a visit or know of someone who does. TJ agreed to include this information in the next issue of The Bridge.	TJ
<h4>4 Chairman's Annual Statement</h4> <p>This 'Statement' or Report by the Chair of the Parish Council is a legal requirement and has to be delivered at the Annual Meeting.</p> <p>"I will touch on quite a few subjects, some of which will be covered in more detail during the remainder of the meeting.</p> <p><b>Finance:</b> Our finances have remained in a healthy state throughout the year, our accounts have been successfully audited and there were no adverse observations. There is move afoot that will probably mean that we, as a small parish with an even smaller budget, will be exempt an external audit in future years – the final decision is awaited.</p> <p><b>Budget:</b> We had one major purchase during the last FY and that was the first of our planned two Defibrillators and this is now installed at Elmore Back. We will cover the purchase of the second equipment later in this meeting but suffice to say that we will be carrying out fund-raising in order to purchase this second life-saving device for our village.</p> <p><b>Precept:</b> In line with our healthy financial state we decided at our Parish Council meeting in March not to increase the Parish Precept for the 5<sup>th</sup> year in a row. The Precept remains at £2,400 per annum which is divided on a pro-rata basis amongst all parishioners based on their respective Property Valuation Band. The personal contribution is shown on your Council Tax Bill against 'Elmore Parish'. There may be small fluctuations from year to year which are accounted for by other residents in the village being awarded a reduction in their bill because they have applied for Housing Allowance (previously called Housing Benefit).</p>		

**Composition of Your Parish Council:** Your Parish Council welcomed Nick Meek as a new member at the beginning of the Year, following the elections last May when Clare Stewart stepped down as a Councillor; otherwise it has remained the same.

The status of each Councillor is identical with all having an equal voice and vote on all matters under discussion.

For some reason, that will always remain a mystery, they have asked me to Chair the meetings. I would emphasize that all the Councillors give of their time voluntarily and none of them receives any sort of payment or allowance for their services and deserve your support.

We always welcome constructive comments and suggestions but it is disappointing when unwarranted criticism is directed at either individual councillors or the Parish Council as a whole.

We are totally apolitical and remain impartial in our approach to all matters and have been at pains to make sure that any decisions we have taken have reflected the majority view of the parishioners, formulated at the public meetings or in direct communication.

This is done by making sure that our meetings are publicised in advance and open to the public to express their views. Indeed, we have adopted a policy of permitting comment and discussion during our meetings from those who make the effort to attend – I have to stress that this is not the norm in other Parish Council meetings or at either the District or County Council meetings.

The dates of our regular Parish Council meetings are publicised well in advance and repeated in each issue of The Bridge and while we make every attempt to publicise extraordinary meetings by posting notices at least 7 working days in advance and sending notification to all those on the database, we appreciate that there are some members of the community who may not be aware of such meetings either because they don't read the notices, don't read our newsletters or have chosen not to be part of the electronic messaging via the e-mail database.

**Nature of our Business:** Over the last 5 years we have seen an exponential rise in the volume of business directed at the Parish Council Clerk, Dorie Jones, who I might add has done an outstanding job since taking up the post and without whom my job would be so much harder. This increase is mainly attributed to the fact that most of our communications now arrive electronically and because it is so easy to distribute documents 'en masse' we tend to get just as much correspondence as far bigger towns like Stroud.

Not only does Stroud District Council send us information but Gloucestershire County Council do too and indeed we get a fair amount of correspondence from Central Government in London as well as assorted charities and other agencies.

Sadly, because most of the e-mails arrive without any guidance by the author who fails to draw attention to any specific aspect, it is necessary to wade through each letter to ensure that there is not something in them that concerns us.

The nature of our business has also changed.

Everything has now to be done formally and requests for highway services like pothole repairs, for example, become a time consuming and frustrating exercise. Few if any agencies are available at the end of a telephone these days and we get automated responses from our e-mail requests.

This is because many local government departments have suffered severe cuts during the recession which has meant that we no longer have dedicated local reps we can contact for services and have to join a queue.

The much hailed Localism Act – designed to give local councils more power - has meant that they also have more devolved responsibility and increased our workload.

One of the main effects has been the very short lead time for comments on Planning Applications – SDC are under remit to respond within set timeframes so our deadline for comments is normally 3 weeks. This makes it very difficult to carry out any sort of meaningful

consultation so we would only hold a public meeting for contentious issues.

**Parish Communications:**

**Electronic Database:** Over the last 8 years we have built up an electronic database of addresses but this only includes those parishioners who wish to receive notices and updates via e-mail. Every issue of The Bridge draws attention to this facility as did the annual newsletters before that.

Currently we have some 54% of households included in this database but for a more effective system, not only for everyday messages but also for emergencies; we would like to see a broader base to our information network, especially as the access to electronic media is increasing.

It is fully understood that some people either do not have internet access or prefer not to get e-mails from other sources.

However, there is a major benefit for being on the database and that is if a short notice emergency occurs or it is necessary to issue flood warnings.

**The Website:** The website has now been functioning for over a year and contains not only the agendas of forthcoming meetings and the Minutes of previous meetings but also provides a reference for EPC Standing Orders and the Emergency Plan. [www.elmoreparish.org](http://www.elmoreparish.org)

**The Bridge:** We've had the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of our quarterly Parish Newsletter and it seems to have been a great success with many positive comments received. We are always looking for contributions, no matter how small which our Editor, Trevor Jones, compiles, edits and produces. The printing is done commercially.

It is distributed by hand around the village with the aid of several volunteers.

**Notice Boards:** We have one main notice board in the Village, outside the Village Hall. However, during 2014 we replaced the 3 ad hoc notice boards elsewhere in the village – one each at Elmore Back, Farley's end and the Barn at the junction of Stonebench Road.

**Elections & Boundary Changes and the Effect on Elmore:** The Electoral Commission have been conducting a review of the electoral boundaries within Stroud District Council and the result is that many of the Wards will now have 3 District Councillors. To alleviate a situation whereby parish and district elections get out-of-sync with national elections, Stroud District Council is proposing that we, and many other parishes, have an election in 2016, out of normal 4-year cycle, and then 4-years later in 2020. This will ensure that we remain dovetailed with either local or national elections at least until then, thus reducing costs to all concerned.

**Flooding and the EA:** We have come a long way since the scare in January 2011 when the EA announced that the whole of Elmore Back was to be flooded to convert it into a wildlife sanctuary.

Since then, your Parish Council has worked tirelessly on this matter in conjunction with The Severn Voice Task Group.

We got the original report withdrawn and a second consultation was completed – this time with full involvement of the local stakeholders.

We have written to several Ministers of the Environment ('several' because they kept changing!) and after the Somerset Floods last year we wrote to the PM personally expressing our concern about the way the Government was handling the issue of flood protection.

Throughout this time we have also fully engaged with our local MP and the upshot of all of that is that the EA will no longer plan to intentionally flood Elmore Back and extra funding has

<p>been secured to carry out repairs and maintenance along our flood defences. Over the last 12 months we have also engaged with the EA at a local level and this has produced added benefits for us all.</p> <p>The latest highlight was the Community Day held at Elmore Back on 29<sup>th</sup> April in conjunction with the EA to repair a section of the riverbank. This was a ground-breaking event as it was the first of its kind and may provide a catalyst for the future.</p> <p>The cost of this event to the EA, in terms of materials, fuel and manpower, was some £4,000 but they were delighted with the result as we managed to carry our 2-weeks work in one day. We intend to build on the success of this event with a further event in the autumn to collect and make faggots, followed by a further maintenance day in the Spring 2016 to utilise the faggots and repair other sections of our riverbank.</p>		
5 Open Question Time	<p>Village Agents: Christine will contact Parish Councillors to identify vulnerable people. JF replied that this fits in with the Elmore Emergency Plan.</p> <p>Flood Defence: is there a time limit on Environment Agency funding for flood defence: JF replied that funds appeared after the Somerset flooding and that no time limit for funds has been set. However, in the future there could be plans for landowners, river bank land, to contribute or cover costs if EA funds are not available or in an emergency.</p> <p>It was pointed out that rubbish deposited on the river bank by high tides is not collected before it is covered by new plant growth, making the task a more difficult and expensive one.</p> <p>It was agreed that work was being done on the river bank and that a much better relationship now exists between the community and the Environment Agency.</p>	
6 Declaration of Members' Interest in Agenda Items	Nothing was declared by the Councillors	
7 Minutes of previous Annual Parish Meeting	The Minutes of the Previous Annual Parish Meeting held on 5 <sup>th</sup> June 2014 were proposed as a true record by AN and seconded by TJ.	
8 Matters arising from the Minutes of 5th June 2014	It was recorded that all Matters Arising from this meeting have been covered in the Parish Council Meetings held on 3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2014, 11 <sup>th</sup> December 2014 and 2 <sup>nd</sup> March 2015.	
9 Finance:	<p><u>The Parish Precept for 2015/16</u></p> <p>In line with our healthy financial state we decided not to increase the Parish Precept for the 5<sup>th</sup> year in a row. The Precept remains at £2,400 per annum which is divided on a pro-rata basis amongst all parishioners based on their respective Property Valuation Band.</p> <p><u>Account and Audit</u></p> <p>Parish Council finances remained healthy throughout the year. The bank balance at the end of the FY was £5,855.62. When allocated spending and the ring-fenced contingency fund and the pond maintenance fund are taken off there will be £2,369.01 funds available at the end of May</p>	

	<p>2015. The financial records were agreed by Councillors at the meeting held 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2015 and the Annual Return for external audit has been signed by JF.</p> <p><u>Forecast Expenditure for 2015/16</u> Over and above our regular expenditure for insurance, The Bridge, Clerk’s Salary, Village Hall donations our forecast shows a healthy forecast bank balance with a contingency fund of £1500 and pond maintenance fund of £600.</p>	
10 County Councillor’s Report	<p>Cllr A Blackburn sent his apologies as he could not attend this meeting. He reported that he had no new items to pass on to EPC other than developments with the Canal and River Trust (CRT). CRT plan to change the way in which our canal bridges currently operate.</p>	
11 District Councillor’s Report	<p>Cllr D Mossman reported on the SDC plan for Housing. Strategic sites for development have been identified but these do not affect Elmore as none of these sites are on the west side of the Canal. Supermarket site planning is under discussion in Stroud. It was reported that the organisation of the SDC planning is changing and that this might affect our communication with SDC planning. In discussion it was recorded that Parish Council elections will take place in 2016 and then 2020 in line with other local elections.</p>	
12 Highways	<p>Improvements to Lake Street and Potholes NM reported having site meetings with the Highways Dept. It was agreed that the poor pothole state of Lake Street has had temporary repairs and that more major ‘overlay’ work is still planned for this financial year. This is most likely to be in October 2015 and will cover 930 m of road.</p>	
13 Elmore Emergency Plan update	<p>JF reported that some 24 months ago we embarked on a major project to ensure the safety of all parishioners. This has involved the writing of a draft Community Emergency Plan which encompasses an outline plan of what we, as a community, would do in a given emergency - in conjunction with the statutory Emergency Services. Not every possible emergency has been covered in our plan but we have considered the likely risks and threats that we might face and top of the list is of course – flooding. The very nature of such a document means that it is quite bulky and earlier this year we circulated a paper copy of this document around the village to a selected group of individuals for their personal comment while also posted a copy on the Parish Website. Disappointingly, the document itself seems to have vanished after only one or two people had seen it and its current whereabouts is still a mystery ☹ Nevertheless, we will continue to seek input to the draft to ensure that we have not missed anything and that the plan is actually workable. Part of the plan covers health emergencies and we have already started to implement this aspect with the purchase of two Defibrillators – the first of these is already installed. Trevor Jones has led the acquisition of the Defibrillator. TJ reported that the first defib had been paid for by EPC and sited at Elmore Back Farm. James Tooth had been employed to do the electrical work &amp; TJ</p>	

	<p>has now fixed up the signage.          Nick Meek masterminded the recent training session for the Defibrillator located at Elmore Back Farm and reported that the session had been a great success and that about 12 people, all but one from Elmore Back, had been trained. Thanks due to Sophie Round who hosted the session. TJ asked NM to find out if the trained people would mind their contact details being made public in The Bridge.          Barry Overton had volunteered to do the regular checks on the machine at Elmore Back. He had also pointed out at the training session that if CPR was being carried out, a third person is needed to fetch the defibrillator.          There was some suggestion that CHT could set up an automatic dialing system which would carry on through up to 10 names until a trained person responded. TJ agreed to investigate this.          There was some discussion about how to raise the money for the second defib. Finally it was decided that EPC would fund up to 50%, the other 50 + % to be raised by public subscription. JF set an acquisition date of October 2015 for the second defib and stated that fund raising should start as soon as the Church 700 Celebrations were over and certainly by September 2015. It was decided to contact everyone in the village by letter and ask for a donation. Donation envelopes would be attached to the letter and a date for collection of these would be published. TJ agreed to contact the Land Charity to ask for the £300 they have granted the project. DJ will be able to claim back the VAT on the first defib and other items from June 2015.</p>	<p>NM</p> <p>TJ</p> <p>TJ</p> <p>DJ</p>
<p>14          Broadband          and          Telephone          update</p>	<p>JF reported that we have kept up the pressure on BT and Openreach to finish the planned upgrade of the telephone and Broadband links to both Elmore and Longney. There are no longer any shared lines but there are 2 issues to solve. The new Fibre Optic distribution box has been installed this side of the Pilot Pub but it has not yet been connected to the Hardwicke exchange as a new box is to be located on the other side of the canal. The new build of 187 houses at Sellars Farm has also complicated matters. The extra long poles to carry the transmitters and receivers of the Back Haul system were installed in January but the actual equipment has not yet been fitted to the poles nor has a power supply been fitted. Fastershire have a target date for this work for September 2015.</p>	
<p>15 Parish          Communicati          ons</p>	<p><u>Website</u>          The website was set up as a trial in early 2014. It continues to be developed. Thanks to JH for running it and DJ for updating information. A ‘hit counter’ is being used to see how often the website is being visited.  <u>The Bridge</u>          It was agreed: that the next issue would be published in July/August and include the Chairman’s Annual statement: to emphasise some notices with borders, including our fund raising for the second defibrillator.  <u>E-mail to Elmore Residents</u>          JF emphasised the value of having as many people as possible on our email contact list. This means that we can pass important messages and keep everyone informed of events. This is also a vital component of the</p>	<p>JH/DJ</p> <p>TJ</p>

	Emergency Plan as the passage of vital information will be a key to not only prompt action but also possibly the saving of lives. JF discussed a personal mail-shot to all those not on the list to encourage participation.	JF
16 Any Other Business	<p>Canal and River Trust</p> <p>JF reported that The CRT is the body that took over responsibility from British Waterways for our national rivers and canals. It is proposing to automate all the bridges along the Gloucester to Sharpness Canal. The aim is to save money on manpower, some £500,00, but there are some serious implications for all those living on the west of the Canal.</p> <p>All be bridges would be converted to allow them to be opened remotely rather than the hand cranked system currently in use. This process would cost £2 million.</p> <p>The idea would be that each boat owner would be given an App for a smartphone which would allow them to open the bridges as they progress along the Canal.</p> <p>CCTV cameras would be installed on every bridge to monitor the safety of bridge users.</p> <p>There would not be any regulation as to how many times the bridge would be allowed to open in any given period, so in effect it could open every time a boat user wants it open, i.e. with priority over road users.</p> <p>The CCTV cameras would not be used to monitor the build-up of traffic queuing to cross, so in effect the bridge could be opened several times while the traffic waits for boats to pass.</p> <p>We have been assured that if an ambulance wished to cross the canal they would be directed to the best bridge by the CRT control centre.</p> <p>However, there are one or two positive aspects to this plan, the first being security. The CCTV on every bridge would monitor traffic across the canal and could be used by the police to detect criminals, fly-tippers and anti-social behaviour.</p>	
17 Date of Next Meeting	The date for the next Annual Parish Meeting is to be announced for some time in May 2016	
	The Chairman thanked all present for attending and declared the meeting closed at 9.40pm	
	Signed..... Date .....	