

SPECIAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of a **Special Parish Meeting** held on **Wednesday 20th February, 2008** in the **Assembly Room, Town Hall, Marlborough at 6.00 pm**

PRESENT Councillor Mrs P. Dow	Town Mayor
Mrs P. Dobson	Town Clerk
Mrs S. Fry	Office Manager
Mr. N. Kerton	Wiltshire Gazette and Herald

34 Members of the public including Town Councillors

NOTICE OF MEETING – Public Notice of the Meeting has been given in accordance with Schedule 12, paragraph 10 (2) of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. NOTICE OF MEETING

The Mayor reported that notices advertising this meeting had been displayed at –

Town Council offices notice board
Town Hall notice boards
Manton notice board
The Library notice board
Local Information Point
Portfield Stores

2. MINUTES

That the Minutes of the Parish Meeting held on the 14th January, 2008 were confirmed as a true record and signed by The Mayor Councillor Mrs P. Dow.

3. REQUEST TO HEAR AND DISCUSS THE RECORDED CONTENTS OF THE FOLLOWING MEETINGS –

Extraordinary Full Town Council Meeting of the 14th January, 2008.
Planning Committee Meeting of the 21st January, 2008.
Finance and Policy Committee Meeting of the 24th January, 2008.

The Mayor, Councillor Mrs P. Dow – we are here this evening because a request was made for a Parish Meeting to be called by 11 electors in order that those members of the public who wish to, may have the opportunity to hear and discuss the recorded contents of the above meetings.

The Town Clerk reported that no recording existed for the Planning Meeting held on the 21st January, 2008 due to a technical problem.

The Mayor then handed over to the Town Clerk.

Town Clerk, Mrs Pam Dobson – the Town Council, on request, will make available to any person the Minutes for the specified meetings, if they do not already possess them. The Minutes are the legal record of meetings and cannot be changed once adopted through the democratic process of the Town Council. The Minutes are always made available to members of the public on request and are included in the Town Council's Freedom of Information Publication scheme as a core item.

The Town Council's protocol on Recording of Meetings is clear that the recordings are strictly for the use of officers of the Council to prepare Minutes and for the Town Clerk or other designated officer to have a means to reasonably resolve a dispute by evidence of the recording, prior to adoption by the Full Council. Once the Officer is satisfied the recording has served its purposes and that there is no further need, it will be deleted. As described in the protocol there may be wider implications that the Town Council would need to consider in respect of data protection and human rights legislation, should they retain the recordings longer than necessary or make audio copies available.

The Mayor, Councillor Mrs P. Dow – in the absence of a decision by the Corporate Body of the Town Council, the Mayor and Town Clerk do not have the authority to act contrary to this protocol.

The Mayor then asked for any comments.

Mr. R. Allen – if a meeting is recorded the recording should be made available.

Town Clerk – this is not in accordance with the policy agreed by the Town Council and as an Officer the Clerk does not have the authority to act to the contrary.

Mr. R. Allen – asked the Town Clerk if she was refusing to supply a copy of the recordings.

Town Clerk – it was the policy of the Council that the adopted Minutes are made available as the legal record of the meeting and as such they would be supplied on request.

Mr. R. Allen - stated that there will always be a lack of accuracy with written minutes and that given that a recording exists this should be made available.

Town Clerk –reiterated that this was not the policy on recordings and she could not act contrary to this.

Councillor A. Kirk Wilson – stated that he would like to put a question to those who had called this meeting.

Specifically I should like to ask Councillor Dobson, who has served for many years on Marlborough Town Council and acquired a legendary reputation for prudence in spending Council money, what he hopes to achieve by this meeting?

Indeed when recording meetings was first mooted in January he welcomed it not as a way of resolving problems with the minutes, but as a way of saving overtime payments for a minute taker.

This meeting, and the communications he and his solicitors have had with the Town Council staff, have consumed a great deal of emotional energy and not a little money, all at the expenses of more important work. This situation has held ever since his planning application for a new big house within the designated Marlborough Area of Special Quality became widely known in the town, and attracted a huge amount of adverse comment.

With no explanation of what purpose would be served by listening to audio recording, and where there is no dispute that the minutes accurately record what was decided, one can only speculate what he is looking for. Is it to comb the transcript for any actionable statements? Or to see if anyone said anything uncharitable about him?

Please what is the purpose of all this waste of energy?

Councillor S. Dobson – stated that he felt that planning issues had no bearing on this meeting. He felt that meetings should be open and transparent and that he did support the use of recording equipment being used in meetings if it would reduce administration costs.

Councillor Dobson - stated that he had heard Councillor Mrs Fogg ask the Town Clerk if recordings of a meeting took place would they be made available under The Freedom of Information Act, to which the Town Clerk answered yes.

Town Clerk – responded that what she had actually said was that they would be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

Councillor N. Fogg – asked how many people were at the meeting who had signed the request for a Parish Meeting to be held, he had counted only 7.

Mr. N. Waite – stated that his wife had been unable to attend due to ill health.

Mrs T. Cavill – requested that only 1 person at a time speak as it was impossible to hear what was being said.

Councillor R. Notton – stated that he had been against the recording of meetings when it was discussed by Council. He felt that a decision had been hurriedly made without proper thought being given to this item. As there was no facility at this meeting to give apologies he had been unable to give his sons.

Mr. R. Allen – asked how many people had been consulted on the time that this meeting was to be held as previous meetings had not started until 7.00 pm, however there were more people here this evening that was normal for a Council meeting. He felt that the openness and transparency that this Council seek to show was being walked away from. Having read a copy of the Minutes of the Full Town Council meeting held on the 4th February, 2008 and a memo circulated by the Town Clerk to Councillors in which it states that draft minutes are not circulated and comments as to there accuracy asked for so that individual Councillors can

ensure that their remarks are recorded to the detriment of others. This clearly is not the case having read some of the comments contained in Council minutes.

Councillor G. Loosmore – asked how Mr. Allen had obtained a copy of these draft Minutes and the memo that had been sent from the Town Clerk to Councillors.

Mr. R. Allen – replied that these minutes are not embargoed.

Councillor N. Fogg – stated that there were 75% of Councillors present at this meeting but only 70% of people who had called for the meeting to be held.

Councillor S. Dobson – stated that not that many months ago this Council had taken great pride in being awarded Quality Council Status what would those who make such decisions on these awards think now?

The Town Clerk – asked Councillor Dobson to specify exactly what he felt had been compromised regarding our Quality Council Status.

The Mayor, Councillor Mrs P. Dow – informed those present at the meeting that transcripts of recordings could be provided but at full cost to those who request them.

Mr. N. Kerton – asked if the way forward was to suggest that the Town Council discontinue the recording of their meetings?

Mr. D. Hunter – stated that this meeting casts a very sad reflection and that there were important general issues that need to be ironed out. Should the Town Council not of had a policy in place for recording at meetings before any decision was made?

Mr. N. Kerton – made the following proposal –

This meeting directs the Town Council to cease the recording of meetings.

**Voting as follows 13 votes for
 16 against**

The Mayor, Councillor Mrs P. Dow – read the following extract from The Town Councils Protocol on the recording of meetings.

After taking advice, the council recognises that, to adhere to the ‘Disclosure of Recording and Legal Implications’ paragraph, considerable care would be needed to prepare publicly available audio copies of a recording. The necessary scrutiny and editing would often require the preparation of a transcript for legal verification, and so the cost of providing an audio copy would exceed that of a transcript. Therefore, it is the Council’s policy that providing audio copies is not cost-effective, and, in cases where the minutes do not suffice, the council will only provide written transcripts.

The meeting closed at 6.35 pm