

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE OF LONGPARISH PARISH COUNCIL HELD AT GIDLEIGH COTTAGE LONGPARISH ON THURSDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2010 AT 7.45PM

PRESENT:

Christopher Duxbury (Chair), Mary Jo Darrah, David Gould, Natasha Rouse, David Hopwood

APOLOGIES:

Jonathan Frere

10/13 CHAIRMAN

Christopher Duxbury agreed to take the Chair and produce the minutes.

10/14 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

The approved 3 Feb 10 minutes were reviewed. There were no matters arising.

10/15 VILLAGE CORRESPONDENT

The Chairman welcomed David Hopwood to the meeting and thanked him for volunteering to be the village correspondent for the Andover Advertiser. It was agreed to recommend his appointment at the next Parish Council meeting on 11 Oct 10, which David would attend. The Clerk would then write and notify the Andover Advertiser of the appointment. CD would also notify the PCC, the school, the LCA, the fete committee and major landowners.

Action: CD/TH

It was also agreed that:

- The Hill and Valley advertisement [Sep 10 edition] would serve as David Hopwood's terms of reference. For the time being, David would clear any articles referring to the Parish Council with the Chairman; it was agreed that the Hill and Valley reports would be his main resource.
- David's first assignment would be to cover the Village Hall Centenary event, but apart from that would take up the reins fully from November. **Action: CD to notify John Scott and Gina Snowden**
- David would work closely with Mary Jo as roving interviewer for Hill and Valley and with David Gould as a detached reviewer of the village website. He will also arrange to meet Xandi Denny.

10/16 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference for the committee were reviewed and it was agreed that no changes were needed, other than to add guideline dates as to when meetings are needed. The Chairman explained that Tony Humphrey was drawing up a committee meeting matrix. **Action: CD**

10/17 PUBLICATIONS POLICY

It was agreed that The Parish Council's Publications policy was not in need of detailed review this year.

10/18 WEBSITE MATTERS

It was agreed that David Gould would set up TH's computer password to enable him to make entries on the website; and establish a website link to TVBC's conservation area appraisal and map.

David Gould briefed the committee on a suggestion for introducing a new website [and archiving the present]. A discussion paper is at Annex A and will be table for discussion at the November PC meeting.

10/19 PUBLICATIONS

Directory: The 2009 has not been updated this year. It was agreed that there is a continuing need for the Directory; and the committee accepted David Hopwood's offer to update a 2011 version, in conjunction with Mary Jo before end March, so that it can be paid for from the 2010/11 budget. Natasha's suggestion of including a list of village advertisers in the Directory will also be examined. **Action: DH/MJD**

Handbook:

- The revision of the Village Handbook is well in hand and needs to be completed and paid for during the financial year from the 2010/11 budget. Despite the view of the last meeting the Committee agreed with Mary Jo that publication as A5 would be more manageable. **Action: MJD**
- CD will send Mary Jo final report on the Conservation Area review. **Action: CD**

10/20 HILL AND VALLEY

It was confirmed that Natasha is the Parish Council representative on the Hill and Valley Management Committee; and Mary Jo is a member of the Editorial Committee.

10/21 BUDGET

2010/11: As of 13 Sep 10, only £93.75 is recorded as being spent out of the £1940 Budget, the majority [£850] of which is earmarked for the handbook. CD will carry out an 'out of committee' review and Natasha agreed to check on the position re Hill & Valley. CD will check situation regarding video interviews with Jeremy Barber and Cathy Yelf. **Action: CD/NR**

2011/12: An estimate for 2011/12 will be prepared 'out of committee' on the assumption that the 2011 Directory and the Handout will be paid for this financial year.

Item	Initial Estimate	Input by
Hill and Valley	400?	Natasha
Website	300?	David G
Reception for new villagers	150?	CD
Directory for 2012 edition	150?	DH/MJ
Video interviews	?	CD

10/21 AOB

- **New Villagers Event 2011:** CD will liaise with Martin Coppen and Gina Snowden. It was agreed that May is a good time to hold this successful event. Linda Blundell will need to be contacted re-catering and the venue booked. The Community Hall is the preferred venue, if it can be on a no charge basis, with a fall back on the village hall. **Action CD**

- **Next Meeting:** It was agreed that the next meeting should be held in early Feb 11 to further action on the website. **Action: All to note. CD to arrange.**

CJD

The Longparish Website

A Suggestion

History

The Longparish website, www.longparish.org.uk, was created in 2001 for the Parish Council. It used Mary Jo's Handbook for the structure and content, and was initially created as an experiment and hosted under David's then business website, www.levelcast.co.uk. In 2001 it moved to its own hosting and became www.longparish.org.uk. The site was relaunched with a completely different aesthetic sometime in 2001 or early 2002 (the backups from then have unfortunately evaporated) and again a few years later. The second relaunch updated the navigation without much changing the 'look and feel' of the site. It was done mostly for technical reasons.

Early Challenges

Back in 2001, there was no broadband and connections were typically very slow. It was therefore important to keep file sizes down. For example, Parish Council minutes were copied into plain web pages rather than uploaded as PDFs. This made them smaller, but involved considerable reformatting and general processing to achieve.

Other technical restrictions included the prevalence of PCs that could not display a large number of colours (256 was typical) so the site's colour scheme had to take that into account.

The web was a much less sophisticated place back then, too. In particular, there was almost no support infrastructure for web designers – you “simply” typed in the code for the page and put it on the web server. There was no way of knowing whether someone else was also editing a file, so that made collaboration awkward. We started using a (Windows) product called Dreamweaver which addressed some of these issues – it allowed several people to update the website without interfering with each other's work and provided rudimentary WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editing of pages. The downside was that every potential contributor had to have a copy of the software on their PC. The Parish Council funded a number of these, but the software had a habit of becoming unusable if the PC had a newer Windows version installed. The upgrade costs of the Dreamweaver software were rising quickly at each new version.

Current State

The site has grown to several thousand pages – David's (probably incomplete) copy has over 14,000 (sic) pages. This means that any site-wide change that affects every page will take months to complete, during which time the site will be at best inconsistent, at worst, broken. One reason for this is that the speed of upload (sending things *to* the web) is much, much slower than the speed of download.

The navigation structure has remained largely unchanged over the years and some parts of the web are not available through the menus, but must be chased down by clicking in-page links.

There are a number of idiosyncratic file and directory structures in various places. This is attributable to a number of things, not least the default behaviour of the Dreamweaver software.

There is much that is historically interesting that it would be a shame to lose. The Parish Plan is of course available, but so is the consultation process and the data from it. There are some interesting parts of the website that cannot be reached through the menus at all – the abortive Community Project is at

www.longparish.org.uk/cproject for example. While much of this fitted into the structure when it was first published, some of it has become ‘orphaned’ or simply doesn’t seem to belong where it finds itself. Tony’s job as Parish Council Clerk is made harder because he has to go through the process of manually uploading files (typically the PC minutes). He is therefore dependent on David not changing passwords or moving things around.

Current Opportunities

One great change in the web today is that there are very good infrastructure systems available to help you make web sites if you aren’t a computer programmer or graphics designer. The playgroup website, currently hosted at www.longparish.org.uk/playgroup, uses an Open Source (free) product called Joomla! that allows anyone with a password to create and edit pages and change the menus and generally administer the site. All this is done through their browser and page editing is (more or less) WYSIWYG. Joomla! supports 3rd party add-ins that let you easily add features to your site without writing them all from scratch yourself. For example, the playgroup are using a ‘file manager’ that makes it easy to put documents on the site for download. It is also easy to backup the site and to restore it (possibly somewhere different, if we ever wanted to change our provider). There are add-ins to manage events calendars and many, many more.

Another opportunity for us is that our web host provider (NamesCo) increased from 1GB to 10GB the amount of space we have access to.

NamesCo also recently introduced the idea of ‘subdomains’ where the leading www is something different. For example, the plan is to move the playgroup site to playgroup.longparish.org.uk.

The Way Forward

That *something* needs doing is not in doubt. The question is: what? Goals should be:

- 1 the navigation through the site should be improved and the aesthetics could be brought into the 21st century
- 2 we should make it easy for villagers to contribute to the site – for example, the Church might want control over their own pages to a larger extent than now
- 3 it shouldn’t take another 5 years to roll out, or we’ll be right back here again
- 4 we should avoid unnecessary loss of all the existing stuff

A Suggestion

I would suggest we roll out a new site from scratch in two phases:

- 1 testing – develop the new site at new.longparish.org.uk with Joomla!
- 2 implementation – move the old site to old.longparish.org.uk and switch the new site to www

The advantages of this approach are that we are instantly ‘live’ with something and we can solicit comments by linking to it from the current site. We don’t lose anything from the old site at all – we can simply link to it from the new site. Items that need copying across (Parish Council minutes, for example) can be copied piecemeal over a period.

Joomla! lets us have multiple contributors from the outset. It also has a large number of attractive templates so that the site will at least not look like the dog’s dinner and we can develop our own site template at leisure. At least one of the templates has been designed for accessibility (I’m not sure whether it has been formally ratified) so we can meet our statutory obligations by allowing anyone using the site to use that instead of our preferred template.

To meet the goal of improved navigation, we have Natasha looking at the site with a pair of fresh eyes. If we get it wrong in our first stab, at least Joomla! makes it easy to shuffle things around without having to reload the entire site.

A Plan to Get Started

The Players

Webmaster and technical lead – David G, who will pick David H's brains

Site navigation and contents – Natasha

Contributors – the Communications Committee members and probably also Jonathan Evans (for the monthly Church events updates), Tony (uploading Parish Council minutes, etc), Jeremy (who does lots of updates at the moment) and others if persuadable.

The Testing Phase

Here's a stab at an outline plan for testing:

1. David sets up new.longparish.org.uk with Joomla! including modules for backing up, managing calendars, etc. and finds an attractive default template. The structure is basically the Handbook sections (OK, we've been here before, see below...)

David gives all contributors their passwords and makes sure there's instructions on the web.

This version is essentially a 'sandbox' where everyone is getting the hang of the tools. If it all goes horribly wrong, it doesn't matter (that's what backups are for)

2. In parallel.... Natasha is coming up with sensible navigation, stuff we want to have included, etc.
3. In parallel.... all contributors go in and have a go at updating some content in the sandbox.

I think it will take to the end of October to get the initial structure in place and probably the end of the year before everyone has had a chance to get to grips with the tools.

At this point, we should have a better idea of what needs to be done and how we are all getting along with the editing tools.

This is the point we agree the final structure and who is going to be responsible for what. Then we should have an idea how long it will take to come out of testing.