

ALCONBURY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting held on Monday 12th June 2006 in the Methodist Chapel

Present:

Mr Brown (Chairman), Mr Senior, Mrs Adams, Mrs Aylott, Mrs Elphick, Mrs Hathaway, Mr Watson, Mrs Watkin and Mrs Williams. District Councillor Mr Keith Baker. Mrs. Lancey (Clerk), 12 members of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Mrs Dyer and County Councillors Sir Peter Brown and Elaine Kadic.

2. Councillors' Interests

Mrs Watkin declared a personal interest as her sons were of an age to use the bus shelter as a meeting place.

3. Planning and Surveillance

Mr Brown explained that the meeting had been called to discuss the reply received from Huntingdonshire District Council to the Parish Council's recent letter regarding the installation of the CCTV camera in the village.

He strongly emphasised that the Parish Council was not opposed to the use of CCTV cameras in principle, but that the concern was over the fact that this camera had been installed by the District Council without any consultation whatsoever with the Parish Council and that the letter from the District Council had given no explanation for this. The meeting had not been called to discuss any personal issues over the camera.

The reply from the District Council was considered point by point. The District Council had stated that the camera was only operational at specific times which appeared to the Parish Council to be a very subjective way of controlling its use. It was commented that as young people watched the camera being installed it had been no surprise to them that it was in place, which seemed to contradict the information given to the Clerk that the installation had been carried out without the Parish Council's knowledge in order that it might be done as quietly as possible.

The letter stated that the images recorded would be seen by HDC Community Safety personnel and CCTV staff, and should it prove necessary for prosecution purposes, the police. The Parish Council therefore wished to know for what purpose the landowner should require access to images from the camera and what procedures had been followed to ensure that an ordinary member of the public was suitable to view these images. It was noted that according to the District Council's Code Of Practice, images from CCTV cameras were only available to professional employees of the Council in the Control Room. The Parish Council could see no valid reason why the landowner, in this instance, should require access to any images.

Likely costs associated with the camera were also discussed. The response to the Parish Council stated that the only running cost of the camera was the electricity which the landowner was supplying free of charge. Whilst it was noted that it was very generous of the landowner to do this, it was suggested that there were additional costs associated with the camera, these being the man-hours required for installation, monitoring and

un-installation and these were unlikely to be cheap. The Parish Council was concerned that whilst the District Council was prepared to spend money on both installation and maintenance costs of the camera, it had not been prepared to contribute towards the cost of lighting in the bus shelter, which was considered might have gone some way to helping with anti social behaviour and the feeling of insecurity in this location. The letter also stated that numerous complaints had been received from residents in the area, but no such specific incidents had been brought before the Parish Council. It was hoped that when the District Council had been able to assess the activity recorded by the camera the Parish Council might be made aware of the extent of the perceived problems in the village.

It was pointed out that although the letter had stated that planning permission was not required unless the camera was in a conservation area, the bus shelter was indeed in the centre of Alconbury's conservation area. The camera had only been installed as a temporary measure, and had already been dismantled, but the Parish Council wished to know if it would be erected again at a later date.

The Parish Council stressed that one of the main reasons for not progressing with the demolition of the bus shelter as requested by HDC was because the shelter was in the centre of a flood plain, which was subject to a pending Flood Alleviation Scheme. Planning applications were expected within the next few months. Depending upon the outcome of the Scheme, it was likely that the shelter would be demolished in any case, and the Council did not feel it appropriate to spend approx. £8K - £10K of council tax payer's money for this purpose if it turned out that the Environment Agency would be remodelling the area in the near future. It was also pointed out that both Stuart Bell (HDC) and the previous County Councillor Peter Downes had stated at previous Parish Council meetings that there were no guarantees that demolition would solve any anti social behaviour problems. It had been considered more beneficial to instigate the development of a Youth Group within the village, which was becoming very successful. It was noted that the group of young people who frequented the bus shelter was now attending the Youth Group. This was obviously a longer term solution and approached the problems of anti social behaviour from a different angle. In view of this, the Parish Council did not feel it had been negligent in it's duties towards it's parishioners, and wished to convey this to the District Council.

The Parish Council discussed that originally they had been told they were not informed about the installation of the CCTV camera in an effort to keep it's presence covert and that it was to be used to observe and assess the instances of anti-social behaviour surrounding the bus shelter. However, the reply from Huntingdonshire District Council suggested that the purpose of the CCTV camera was "to assist in resolving the identified issue" and the Parish Council wished to know, therefore, why signs had not been displayed informing the general public of the presence of a camera in accordance with the District Council's own CCTV camera Code of Practice.

The Parish Council then discussed how to move forward from this point and how to try to gain something positive out of the situation it had found itself in over the past few weeks. It was suggested that a public meeting might be held when members of the District Council and perhaps members of the police would be invited to come along in order that the whole subject might be fully debated. It was agreed that the Clerk should write once again to the District Council conveying these points of view and inviting them to attend a meeting some time in the near future.