

AIRING OF TWYFORD'S PROBLEMS

MONDAY'S meeting of Twyford Parish Council lasted well over three hours. In that time there were two demands for public apologies, a chairman's report and a councillor's statement on last week's Advertiser report.

Virtually every topic that has concerned the parish council in the recent past was touched upon. The 13 members of the public heard explanations of council decisions, reasons for meetings at the chairman's house and the council's interpretation of the Local Government Act.

All went well until the newly-appointed clerk, Mr. Tom Wingfield, read the minutes recorded under "Any Other Business" at the last meeting on October 17, when the clerk, Mrs. Heather Gee, resigned.

According to the unverified minutes the clerk resigned as she had heard her association with other organisations in the village was disapproved of by the chairman. The chairman was pleased to accept her resignation, said the minutes.

"This is a deliberate lie," said the chairman, Cllr. Arthur Hodges, "that I objected to anything the clerk was connected with. Neither did I say I was pleased to accept her resignation. I never spoke a word."

"I want a public apology from the former clerk in the Press or I am going to take legal action."

He also called upon Cllr. Graham Gingell to prove that the council was not running its business properly, since it was also minuted that "if the council did not run their meetings in a proper manner, he (Cllr. Gingell) would be forced to resign."

Cllr. Gingell said this minute contained no allegation of misconduct.

Cllr. Meakins said that Cllr. Gingell's statement came after he (Cllr. Meakins) mentioned holding committee meetings of the parish council.

An extract from the 1933 Local Government Act was read. It said: "A meeting of the parish council was to be open to the public unless the council otherwise directed."

Cllr. Gingell said if he had been mistaken he apologised and wished to withdraw his statement but first he wished to check if he had been mistaken.

A vote was taken on the chairman's proposal to withdraw the offending minutes. It was passed with an abstention from Cllr. Gingell.

Speaking on an issue about publicising meetings, Cllr. Hodges said: "It is up to the Press to look out for notices put up in the village. There are only two places in Twyford where they can be put — on the church notice board and on the chapel notice board."

Then came his demand for a second public apology.

"In the Buckingham Advertiser two weeks ago we were accused of calling an improper meeting. Here again it was meant for me. I, in fact, put a notice advertising the meeting by the chapel and by the church."

"I think we should have an apology from the former clerk because the

correct calling of the meeting had applied."

Cllr. Hodges said that when a pile of letters were handed over to him from the previous clerk he found a cheque for £766.85 from the fund-raising committee and one for £461.14 from the parish council — both had "cancelled" written on them by Mrs. Gee.

He said it had been arranged that the fund-raising committee should hand over all its money to the parish council. The parish council would then make a loan of £461.14 on November 1 to the new committee as an independent body for twelve months.

At the October meeting of the council, councillors had been told the committee had £861.14 in its account, but Cllr. Hodges said this sum was not mentioned in a letter from the council to the committee.

In fact at the time of handing over all the committee's money there was only £766.85 in the account, Cllr. Hodges explained.

"Without consulting me the clerk said it was not correct, although it was clear from the letter that it was absolutely in order."

DISGUSTING

Cllr. Harry Meakins said: "It was discussed around the village but not around the council table. It is disgusting."

Cllrs. Wood and Gingell reminded Cllr. Hodges that the clerk, Mrs. Gee, had told him about the discrepancy.

Cllr. Hodges said she had told him but he had made no comment at the time as to what she should do.

Cllr. Gingell said: "Perhaps, and this is mere supposition, the clerk felt there was an obvious discrepancy, and since that would have to be ironed out at a subsequent meeting the sensible thing was to cancel the cheques."

Cllr. Hodges said: "Let me say one thing, it was on October 17 that the clerk resigned so she was not our clerk then to do this."

Cllr. Gingell proposed that the council should ask for the bank statements of the former fund-raising committee up until November 1, and also for the opening account of the new independent committee. This was agreed.

PLAYING FIELD

The next matter for the council to discuss was levelling the playing field.

"Here again we are in trouble," said Cllr. Hodges, "you will know that only part of the turf has been laid down. The contractor has done his work. Since then we have had a lot of rain and the place made up the most has sunk a little and must be made up more."

"The contractor came to see me and wanted his money so I contacted all the councillors. Four were in favour of paying and one against. The cheque was drawn out of meeting."

Cllr. Gingell recalled that Cllr. Meakins proposed at the last meeting of the council that the account should not be paid until the work was satisfactorily completed.

It was agreed to ratify the chairman's action of

paying the money to the contractor. Cllr. Gingell voted against this proposition.

In his chairman's report Cllr. Hodges said he found that the public audit stamp; the council's public liability insurance for the playing field, and the water rate had not been paid, when given papers by the previous clerk.

These had since been paid and he had also managed to collect allotment rents from all but one person. These had not been collected before for two years. Councillors approved his actions.

Cllr. Hodges continued: "To clear myself, on the instructions of the auditor there were a number of cheques signed after our clerk resigned which were signed by Cllrs. Wood and Gingell. All I need is for this to be recorded that I was not, as chairman, asked to sign those cheques."

Cllr. Meakins then made his statement. Referring to an article in the Advertiser he said: "The Press says we held secret meetings. I did not hold a secret meeting and I do not think the rest of the parish council did."

RIGHTFUL MEETINGS

"I should like to make it clear that we only carried our rightful meetings. The reasons these two committee meetings were called were because things had got to be done."

He then talked about the levelling work on the playing field and said that he was satisfied the contract had been completed, "although certain people are not".

"Last year we agreed to levy a rate of 6p, and as councillors we knew what the levy was for."

Cllr. Meakins talked about the council's decision to use voluntary help for re-turfing the field — "we bit off more than we could chew and we must admit it" — and the fact that voluntary help was not forthcoming.

He pointed to the fact that the article contained comments from Mr. Brian Connell, chairman of the Twyford Football Club, and said: "We went to a large expense for that football club to try and let them play this year".

Councillors had looked at the field he said, and it would be possible to get the pitch in its proposed new site.

NO WASTE

"I hope the village knows we have not wasted money. It is my dearest wish that it will be completed before the end of the summer."

"I had the newspaper this week. If it were not for fighting back I felt like slinging it in. But it was not the few who have moved to the village lately who voted for us, it was other people."

Cllr. Hodges said he was very "perturbed" when he found the Press on his doorstep. He said he had refused to let a reporter see the Minute Book, but added the Press had no right to the book anyway.

He repeated that the meetings held at his house were to "sort out the books" which had taken the councillor's three hours to do.