

CHARVIL PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 19th May 2021 in the Village Hall

Present: Cllr. Jim Gillett (Chairman), Cllr. Claire Andersen, Cllr. Pat Sutlieff, Cllr. Hilary Jones, Cllr. Mike Heath, Cllr. Narinder Ryatt, Cllr. Jane Hartley, Cllr. Neil Jackson and 26 residents, Borough Councillor Sam Akhtar and one member of the press.

Apologies:

1. Minutes from 2019 were circulated and approved

2. Chairman's opening remarks

The Chairman, on behalf of his fellow Councillors, welcomed residents to the meeting and thanked them for coming.

3. Chairman's report

The Chairman ran through the purposes and format of the meeting. First and foremost it is a legal requirement, but it also an opportunity for the Council to inform residents of activities over the past year and to present proposals for plans for the forthcoming year. In addition, it is an opportunity to invite residents to attend the monthly meetings, and he re-iterated that residents can only speak in the Open Forum, although they are welcome to listen to the whole meeting apart from confidential items that are discussed from time to time. In normal circumstances, it is a time when councillors and residents can socialise and get to know each other – unfortunately, due to the Covid restrictions, this will not be possible this year. He invited the Councillors to introduce themselves. He then moved on to the Council's main remits which are to manage the Village Hall (a popular well-kept facility) and other local amenities, and to be consulted by Wokingham on issues such as Highways, Planning, and schools. There was then a brief explanation of what the main responsibilities of the Council are – essentially to make Charvil a better place to live, by providing and improving amenities, representing the villages' interests externally and to obtain residents' views on key issues.

The Chair also explained that Charvil supported three local charitable trusts: The Sonning Education and Welfare Trust with Cllr. Jeffery being the Council's representative, The Almshouses Trust, now represented by Claire Andersen, and the Poor's Land Charity, with Lauren McCann representing the village. He thanked all our trustees for their work.

Lauren McCann reported as follows:

The Alms Houses in Woodley are continuing to be invaluable to the people of Woodley. The alms-house units are only available for Woodley Sandford and Charvil not adjacent parishes The present occupants thoroughly enjoy their living accommodation and the facilities provided by the Charity. During COVID the 11 Trustees have abided by all the rules.. their monthly meetings have been carried out on zoom. Our Clerk has continuously been a huge asset to us all. We are planning a party for the residents in the summer - once restrictions are lifted. Relief in Need is available for residents who require help from Woodley Sandford and Charvil and adjacent. All applicants are discussed fairly each month. The Clerk then notifies the successful applicants.

Claire Andersen reported that she had taken over part way through the year, so is new to the post, and that Jackie Jeffery may return as trustee in due course. They too are planning a celebration for residents, once restrictions are lifted.

4. Reports

Following the Chair's report, each Councillor introduced themselves and then each in turn gave their reports on the year's activity in the area in which they take a lead role: -

Claire Andersen, Staffing Committee

Councillor Andersen thanked all the current staff, and two who had retired last year, Mike Weldon and Roger Burns.

She explained that the past year had been a challenging one for staff with the Covid restrictions leading to much uncertainty, moving targets etc., but they responded in an excellent fashion.

To support the staff, the Council have introduced twice yearly wellbeing meetings, and there is a plan to review the current Council structure to adjust to increasing demands.

Amenities and Recreation

Because the Chair of Amenities had not stood for re-election, Councillor Sutlieff reported on the last year. The Covid Pandemic has hit the revenues from the Parish Facilities extremely hard, with a 90% reduction in Hall income and a 37.5% reduction in Sports income.

Fortunately, the new tennis passes have proved extremely popular, so keeping East Park Farm revenues afloat. However, the Pavilion itself is in a poor state of repair, not helped by the lack of use over the past year, and the Parish Council is debating its options.

Fortunately, expenditure has also been much lower, but there has been two significant insurance claims due to a water tank failure and theft of lead flashing from the hall roof. Other significant expenditure has been repairs to the MUGA and the St Patrick's Playground. Also, due to anti-social behaviour at both the hall and East Park Farm, the Council has invested in gates at East Park Farm and a chain at the Village Hall, to be able to close both car parks if necessary. The East Park Farm gates are closed each evening by volunteers.

There has been a new defibrillator installed in the phone box on Park View Drive South, bringing the number of open access machines to three.

Dog fouling has become more of a problem, and the resulting request to keep dogs on leads on the Sports Pitches has proved to be controversial.

The Parish Council is in receipt of £209k of Community Infrastructure Levy to spend on facilities in the village, and more will come with new development. But what do residents want?

The current pavilion is in poor condition and there is the opportunity to rebuild it, but should it be like for like, or should the opportunity be taken to provide more facilities such as space for a pre-school, café etc. Where should it be built – where it is, or on the current tennis courts? The Parish Council needs to hear what residents think.

Jane Hartley, Chair of Planning, Environment and Highways

Cllr. Hartley ran through the aims of the committee – to support and maintain the environment, to increase resident engagement, to work with local interest groups, and to consider the needs of all residents.

On Planning, the Local Plan is the main issue, and as it looks likely that Charvil will be chosen to take some development, a Neighbourhood Plan is being developed. Due to the chosen large site of Grazeley becoming unavailable, the Borough is having to look again at other sites.

Councillor Hartley then ran through the normal areas of Planning that the Parish can comment on and welcomed any residents who would like the support of the Council if they were concerned about a specific application.

On Highways, the Council continues to monitor speeding in the local roads with the Speed Indicator Device – it will revert to moving around the village to monitor more than one spot.

Other activities include the reporting of overgrown vegetation, supporting the proposed foot/cycle bridge between Wargrave and Shiplake, and an annual walk of footpaths. On Environment, the Council has conducted energy survey of its buildings and is working with WBC to improve energy efficiency. Thanks go to the local Adopt-a-street volunteers, Charvil Maters and the three Duke of Edinburgh volunteers who have been supporting our litter picking team to keep the local streets tidy. The Committee is currently working on developing a community orchard in The Hawthorns Park, is working with the Borough to increase biodiversity in the area and to reduce the carbon footprint at the hall.

Jim Gillett, Social Media, and Charvil Village News

Cllr. Gillett explained that this was now managed by the assistant clerk, and that she would welcome new contributions. Special thanks go to Shirley Newman for organising the deliveries and distributing the magazines, and to the volunteers who put in the legwork. The magazine is popular, but it is recognised that social media is becoming increasingly important.

Neil Jackson Chairman, Finance

Councillor Jackson gave a brief overview of where Parish funds come from, and what the main areas of expenditure are. This particular year has been like no other, with lettings being non-existent for long periods of the year. Fortunately, expenditure was lower as well, and the Council received nearly £20k in Covid grants that have made the situation this year more manageable.

However, because of increased staff cost, and the need for investment in parish facilities, it was agreed to increase the precept by 32.5%, or around £1 per household per week.

Claire Andersen, Neighbourhood plan

Councillor Andersen explained that a Neighbourhood plan is a way of allowing communities to have a greater say in the type of development that happens in their localities, and they also provide a financial incentive, as Parishes receive 25% of developer contributions if they have one in place, rather than 15%. The aim is to maximise community engagement, so that residents feel empowered rather than downtrodden by the process. The work on the plan began last year, and the hope is that it will go to a referendum by 2023. The website is about to go live, and people were asked to look out for the survey. Councillor Andersen appealed for any help that could be offered as this is supposed to be community driven.

Open Forum

Because of the Pandemic, some residents had asked questions ahead of time – one was the increase in Precept – this had already been answered in the Finance presentation; another was about the choice of any new parish building – this would be at East Park Farm, rather than a hall extension, but the exact location is yet to be decided upon; and a third was about professional dog walkers in the Country Park, but this is WBC's responsibility.

There followed a long discussion about dogs, signage on the sports fields, signage, and whether more dog poo bins can be installed. Two are due to be installed in the country park, locations to be decided.

There was a question about the Community Orchard – this is progressing, as WBC are happy for it to go ahead. The idea is to plant the first trees this autumn. A resident asked about whether this could be part of the Queen's platinum tree canopy, and it was agreed to investigate this.

There was a discussion about the planning application to build in the rear garden of 6. Old Bath Road, and various residents expressed their concerns. It was agreed this would be discussed fully at the next Council meeting.

There followed a long discussion on the issue of the Local Plan, whether WBC had been accurate in their assessments, what the Parish Council's and each Councillor's stance on the subject is, the perceived unfairness of including so many potential homes in Charvil, the fact that both Hicks and the University are influential landowners, and that the majority of comments to WBC on the Draft Local Plan were from Charvil residents.

The other big issue of the evening was the possible redevelopment of the Pavilion. Some residents, and the new Borough Councillor, supported the idea of a new pre-school as part of the

redevelopment, others were concerned that any redevelopment would lead to more disruption for local residents. Questions were asked about who would own the building, and if it is part of a lease agreement, then could all the money spent by Charvil PC on behalf of residents, end up benefitting the Borough, rather than the parish. There was also some discussion about the location, but this was inconclusive. It was explained that this would have to be widely consulted upon, and the first opportunity may be the Fete on 4th July.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 10 p.m.

*Signed*Chairman of the Council

Date.