



LITTLE BERKHAMSTED PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the **ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** held on 19th April 2023 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall, Little Berkhamsted.

Present: Cllr Stokes (Chair), Cllr Hunter (Vice-Chair), Cllr Standbrook, Cllr Morris, Cllr Fellowes

Not Present: Cllr Noble, Cllr Eaglestone

In Attendance: Clerk – Laura Brooks-Payne, 12 members of the public.

AGENDA – Annual Parish Meeting

1. Opening of the meeting:

Cllr Stokes welcomed residents to the meeting and explained that the meeting was not an official Parish Council meeting, but instead, is a village meeting to advise residents of the work that the Parish Council had carried out in the previous year, and what is hoped to be achieved for the forthcoming year.

2. Apologies for absence: none

3. To approve minutes of Annual Parish Meeting 2022: Unanimously approved

4. To discuss matters arising from the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 2022:

Cllr Stokes advised that several items were still being worked on by the PC and were ongoing.

5. Parish Council review of the year:

see addendum for report.

In addition, Cllr Stokes advised that the report had been available on the Website for residents to read for several days prior to the meeting. Cllr Stokes briefly read through the report for those that had not read the report.

It was noted that the focus for the year just gone, had been increasing revenue coming in to the PC owned buildings – the Village Hall and the Community Pavilion, not least because general bills have increased as well as Business rates. The bookings have substantially increased. It has therefore come to light that the existing booking system is out of date. A new booking system will be available on the new website, which is currently being designed.

The Village Hall is in desperate need of roof insulation, secondary glazing and replacement of bulbs to reduce electricity costs and for the PC to be more environmentally friendly.

Cllr Stokes also advised that the PC had recently paid for traffic surveys to be undertaken to gain actual data of the speed and vehicle use of roads through the centre of the village and this is currently taking place.

Cllr Stokes gave thanks to the many volunteers who help within the Parish.

6. Update on the year gone by and Local Plan:

Linda Haysey, Leader of East Herts District Council advised that she would be retiring after the imminent Council Elections.

'Highlights' of the year – coming out of Covid the Council now work very differently, with officers not always in the office and working from home more. This works well in some ways but when new staff are employed it makes sense that staff are in the office to work together to understand the culture etc, and therefore staff have to work from the office 50% of the time.

Ukrainian Crisis – families have now been in the Country for over 6 months and unfortunately there is now a real problem with homelessness because UK families only signed up to the scheme for 6 months and some cannot host the Ukrainian families for any longer. Linda noted there are now 10-15 Syrian families living in East Herts too.

Community Projects – the big project for the last few years has been the renovation of Hertford Theatre which is nearing completion and will have its official opening in October or November this year. Hartham Leisure Centre is also currently being upgraded.

Money – Linda reported that there 'is not a lot of it around' for any areas of need. Central government make it more difficult by only having a one year settlement plan which makes it difficult for Local Councils to plan ahead.

Standards of Behaviour – Linda reported that members of the public can be very rude and indeed can be 'vicious' in emails sent to the Council. Officers are also regularly abused over the phone. The Council will not tolerate such behaviour, allowing officers to end the call should they need to or feel threatened. The Council have recently joined a Countrywide Scheme whereby the policy is 'debate not hate', to try to alleviate the problems.

Planning – this department is still under significant pressure and still have a backlog from the Covid years, in part because members of the public had more time on their hands and were walking more and finding possible planning breaches, therefore marking a large increase in current enforcement cases. The workload is being addressed but this will take time.

Linda noted that large, planned developments are much better for future development because they can be planned over a number of years to ensure the plans are sustainable going forward. There is a notable sized development of 10,000 houses currently being built on the outskirts of Harlow – The Gilston Development.

District Plan – the latest development of the plan is having the 'objectively assessed needs' removed. Planning officers are awaiting the next stages.

7. Questions from the public:

A former member of the (now closed) Recreation Committee asked if the funds transferred to the PC bank account for community events could be advertised on the website so that residents are aware that there are funds for events to take place should they wish to organise one.

8. Close of meeting:

Clr Stokes closed the meeting and invited everyone to stay for drinks and nibbles. Linda Haysey was first presented with a gift from the Parish for her work for the Parish over the last 8 years.

ADDENDUM

Annual Parish Meeting 2023 Parish Council Chairman's Report

Hard to believe, but another year has flown by and time for me to provide you all with a report of the Parish Council's work over the past 12 months. It has been an extremely busy time and if you would like more detail than I provide here or would like to ask Councillors questions please join us at the Annual Parish Meeting on **Wednesday 19th April at 7.30pm in the village hall.** This is not a formal PC meeting but your chance to get involved and have a say - whether you have ever been to a meeting before or not. After the meeting you are invited to join us for informal conversation, drinks and nibbles.

Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee weekend

The year started with the village's celebrations for the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Without a Recreation Committee organising village events anymore the Parish Council (PC) felt it was important to take a lead in celebrating this historic occasion. A bespoke brazier beacon was commissioned from Mill Green Forge in Essendon and lit simultaneously with all the others around the country at a BBQ party at the cricket pavilion. The same weekend a street party on the field, with entertainment from a world champion Irish dancer, was enjoyed by over 100 residents and their friends. The Parish Council also supported the Queen's Green Canopy Project and two new oak trees have been planted on the field with benches nearby to enjoy the shade they offer.

Welcome Back Fund Grant

This European Commission backed fund was made available to encourage people back into their high streets and villages after Covid. The PC worked hard to secure a generous grant and are pleased to report that good use has been made of the benches, four new picnic tables, a cycle rack, gazebos and an outdoor table tennis table by both villagers and visitors alike.

Cricket and Community Pavilion

The Community Café held in the pavilion on a Friday morning has become a regular date for many residents. It offers an opportunity to meet up with friends and neighbours over a very cheap, but delicious coffee or tea and to indulge in delicious, homemade cakes and biscuits. If you haven't been along yet, please do, you will be made extremely welcome. As well as providing a venue for the café, the pavilion is let to The Little Berkhamsted Sahib's Cricket Club between April and September. The club play nearly every Saturday and have some friendly matches midweek and on Sundays. They welcome spectators and visitors to the club bar. Apple Day Care nursery also make use of the pavilion for a few hours each week, providing the toddlers in their care with a safe place to play and learn. A great deal of money has been spent on the refurbishment of the pavilion in recent years and the Parish Council have been working hard to ensure good use is made of the building. As well as

our regular tenants the building has been let for private events and parties and this summer will be hosting another village wedding reception.

Village Hall

The Parish Council is now turning its attention to the village hall because this old building needs insulation and other energy saving improvements to make it fit for purpose in the 21st century. The rise in the cost of electricity this year has made this a priority. This is an expensive project, and we are investigating any grants available and hoping residents will support our fund-raising efforts. The hall is a great space for both village events and private hirers and we hope that improving the energy efficiency will increase its use.

Village Website

The increase in use of both the hall and the pavilion has required an upgrade of the village website to make the booking process easier for both bookers and the Clerk. We are hoping that the new website will go 'live' in the next month. Although the PC sponsor the website, we are keen for it to be a useful resource for the whole village so please let us know if you wish to use it to link to your business or to advertise local events, courses etc.

On the current website there is a 'History' page with some interesting information about the history of the village contributed by resident, David Cooper of Stratton's Tower. David has recently given the Parish Council a large amount of village archive material which will be digitised so that some of it can be on the website, and it is all preserved. We hope that it could then be put together for a display in the village hall – there are some fascinating photographs.

Highways

Although our highways are the responsibility of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) the PC receive many emails about both the state of the roads in the parish and the speed and volume of the traffic using them. Working with 20s Plenty for Herts we continue to campaign for a default speed limit of 20mph on roads where people and vehicles mix but despite many other counties and parts of the UK adopting this, HCC are yet to be persuaded to change their policy. HCC Highways department have no traffic data from the village, so the PC have commissioned a traffic survey to be conducted on Church Road and Robins Nest Hill in the next couple of months. This will give us the information we need to progress discussions with Highways about ways to at least achieve compliance with the current 30mph limit.

The drainage works on Robins Nest Hill have been completed and CCTV footage taken of the drain so that repair works can be undertaken. The cause of the large puddle that formed by the war memorial every time it rains has been identified but regular maintenance of the ditches will be required to completely solve the problem.

Planning

The PC are a consultee on every planning application received by East Herts Council (EHC). In order to make informed decisions about them we contact the applicant and arrange a site visit to discuss their plans. Although there have not been as many as immediately after Covid we have made around nine such visits this year.

Volunteers

Our thanks to all those in the village who give their time to help keep the parish looking clean and tidy, including regular surveying of the footpaths and bridleways, planting up the containers, cleaning the bus shelter, cutting the grass around the war memorial, and collecting litter.

A very successful litter pick was organised in October, with over 25 people clearing the roadside verges for a couple of hours followed by a sandwich lunch kindly provided by the Five Horseshoes Pub.

A free first aid course has just been held, open to all residents and providing up to date training in emergency life support including use of the Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) that is installed at the village hall.

We have arranged for a group of volunteers to organise a village celebration for the Coronation of King Charles III on Saturday 6th May. This will be held on the field, with the cricket club bar open, a BBQ, live music and an Auction of Promises. The money raised by the Auction and a share of the BBQ profits will go towards the Village Hall Insulation project.

The PC work within a highly regulated framework, supported by Laura Brooks-Payne, the Parish Clerk and our Ward Councillor, Linda Haysey and County Councillor, Ken Crofton. We are very grateful to them for all that they do. As a local government organisation, the PC work hard to minimise any waste of resources, ensure that we get value for money, take advantage of grant funding, are transparent in our dealings and try to foster relationships with residents and local organisations. However, we need your support. It is not the role of the PC to organise social events so a new recreation committee or similar is needed to develop community spirit and raise funds for the benefit of all. Please let us know what you can do to help.

The members of the PC are all volunteers. They give an enormous amount of their time outside of the bi-monthly PC meetings, working hard on behalf of residents across all the areas mentioned above. None of the above would have happened without their enthusiasm, commitment and good humour and whilst I would like to thank them on your behalf here, it would be lovely if you can come along to the village meeting on 19th April and thank them in person.