

Steeple Aston Parish Council
Annual Parish Meeting held on 20th May 2024 in the Sport & Rec building

Minutes

1. To receive apologies for absence : Charlotte Clarke, Cllr Andrew McHugh
2. Present: Martin Lipson, Peter Dammerman, Angharad Lloyd Jones, Richard Preston, Matt Watson
- 3 To receive the minutes of the last meeting held on 22nd May 2023
The minutes of the meeting held on 16th May 2022 were checked for accuracy and content and agreed as a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.
- 4 Chairman's Report
It is time for a round-up of the activities of the Parish Council over the past year; and for the first time this falls to me, as Chair. As always the year has been a mixture of the routine and the more unusual.

I'll start with the customary thank yous to all those people who help the Parish Council keep the village running smoothly. Many thanks go to all the following: to Nigel Prickett and Will Pryse for grass cutting and weed-killing respectively - they keep the village looking tidy through the warmer months; to Helen White for her attentive internal audit of the PC books, to Jenny Bell for her excellent work keeping the village informed through the website, Facebook and now Instagram; to Torquil McLusky and Barbara Brewer for their efforts looking after the Sports and Recreation Centre and the Village Hall respectively, and to the many other volunteers who help in looking after these assets that are so central to our village life; to Amanda Rodgers and the Allotments Association for keeping the allotments in such good shape and to Kay Francis and committee for being the guardians of our Community Orchard; to JC Penney's for all their care keeping our toilet and bins in order; to Graham Porcas who with his trusty gang has-been filling potholes on our roads and keeping our suspension undamaged; and to those occasional volunteers who have helped out with maintenance in the playground, with tidying up land behind the war memorial, and with other acts of generosity and kindness; and to Steeplejack who on more than one occasion has been quoted as the minute taker for the council which only goes to prove they attract more readers than the official Council minutes.

My personal thanks, to Cathy Fleet, the Parish Clerk, who runs the administration of the Parish Council, dealing with finance, correspondence, meetings, agendas, minutes, and all the personalities of her councillors. A big thank you to all my fellow councillors. The Parish Council is very much a collective endeavour. All councillors give up their time, and contribute in many and varied ways, with practical help, suggestions, ideas, and support. Their contribution is immeasurable.

It would be remiss at this point to not pause to mention the incredibly sad and recent passing of Stuart Ferguson. Stuart gave over 25 years serving the community through

this council. I for one will miss his fierce logic, eye for detail and encyclopedic knowledge for parish council decisions of the past.

On a happier note we welcomed Mat Watson to the council

And finally, I should mention our two local councillors Arash Fatemian, of Oxfordshire County Council, and Eddie Reeves, of Cherwell District Council. My thanks to Arash, who supports us through his attendance at our monthly meetings, continues to keep us abreast of developments at OCC and champions projects such as our forthcoming Blandford fly survey. Sad to say despite promises to the contrary and having been in post well over a year, none of us have yet to meet Mr Reeves. Let's see what the next 12 months bring.

On to our activities over the past twelve months. It feels as though there has been much focus on the issue of land this year. The sale of the parcel of land behind the war memorial was completed this year and the new owners have already set about improving what was pretty much waste ground. It was felt that the sale of any council land should be directly attributable back to the community, consequently proceeds from the sale have been designated towards improving the Pocket Park area. 2023 saw the creation of the Steeple Aston Community Orchard Committee with responsibility for looking after the land gifted by Sarah Lucas in late 2022. Thanks to this committee and their volunteers, this space is now firmly established as a quiet communal area for villagers and wildlife with the creation of a pond, establishing of a hive and erection of several bird boxes. Early this year a quince tree was planted in memory of Sarah Lucas who passed away in October.

The Environment and Sustainability Committee (the ESC), has continued to advise the village on issues to do with the environment and sustainability. Under the chairmanship of Carl Tomlinson, their promotion of the 20mph speed limit will come to fruition this year and they continue to champion village infrastructure from car charge points to improved policy making around solar panels and improved water capture and storage. Our thanks to them for all their work.

Planning is always a hot topic in the village but was of particular note this year with the updating of the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan. As agreed at a village meeting in February 2023, the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan Forum were invited to help decide which areas in the village might be suitable for development. A Steeple Aston Site Selection Committee took on this time consuming and challenging task. Across a series of meetings with strong and passionate public attendance, it was agreed to target up to 30 new dwellings in the plan timeframe of 2024-2040, allocated across two preferred sites and one reserve site. Thank you to Martin Lipson and the site selection committee for all the time and energy put into this mammoth task.

The development at Townend welcomed its first residents this year with all but one house now occupied. We hope the new members of our community are enjoying the village. With the arrival of our new residents, much needed S106 funds were released. These funds are already being put to good use with the installation of new lighting in the Village Hall, purchase of an extra tall ladder and commissioning of much needed treatment for the football pitch and purchase of blinds for the Sports & Rec building.

Alongside these meatier issues, there will always be the day to day business of simply keeping the village running. Perhaps these actions feel less newsworthy; however they are central to parish council life.

As ever, there was ongoing maintenance at the playground: repairs to the basket swing, renewal of bark and the inevitable toilet maintenance featured heavily this year. The path beside the village hall was upgraded to make it more suitable for wheelchair users and disabled, repairs undertaken to the raised walls outside the committee room and the wooden bin shelter. The extension of 'white lines' on South Side were agreed to improve safety and protect the village bus service and a mirror tested to improve visibility in and out of the village car park. (Sadly, the council still searches for a solution to this problem.)

And then there is the future for which we must plan. There will continue to be major planning issues in which we must voice the village needs, of current note might be plans to expand London Oxford Airport facilities. As we speak a Community Land Trust is being established in response to villager feedback. It is a long road yet, but this endeavors to provide a vehicle through which the village can develop housing solutions to reflect its needs. Thanks to contributions from The Councillor Priority Fund, our village will lead on a survey into the Blandford Fly population with a view to minimizing its 'painful' impact in future years. And finally, we hope that S106 funds will provide the basis for improvements to our play spaces in the village. Whilst we anticipate the need for additional fundraising, I hope this can secure the future of this asset for future generations.

I will look forward to reporting on these initiatives and more next year and that concludes my report.

5 RFO Report

The accounts for 2023/24 have been audited by Helen White – thank you Helen - and will be approved by the Parish Council at the next meeting, after which they will be submitted to the external auditor and once their audit is complete will be available on the website.

The End of Year position shows a closing balance of £87589, of which £68876 is held in reserve. Reserves are required as the parish council has responsibilities for maintenance of the Village Hall, Sport & Rec building, Bus Shelters, Benches, various walls around the village and the play area, all of which can be quite expensive when things go wrong. The parish council is required to maintain reserves of up to 12 months expenditure. The reserves are held in an account which provides interest of 5.22%, so the funds are not just sitting there doing nothing, we are making it work !

The precept from CDC for 2023/24 was £33,934.

Expenditure this year included spending on grasscutting and weed spraying throughout the village, Clerks salary, insurance, daily toilet cleaning and maintenance of the defibrillators.

As well as the usual expenditure, this year the parish council is pleased to have provided grant funding to various organisations in the village amounting to just over £5000.

6 Public Participation

There were no members of the public present

Signed Chair

Dated