

BURGHCLERE PARISH COUNCIL

Notes of the Annual Parish Assembly

Held virtually via Zoom on Tuesday 4th May 2021 at 7pm

Present:

Parish Councillors: Richard Carrow (Chair), Andrew Crowley (Vice-Chair), Sandra Whiting, Geoff Morton, Ian Collins, Julian Parkes, Amanda Wason

2 members of the public

1. Apologies

Cllr Briony Canning, Borough Cllr John Izett and County Cllr Tom Thacker.

2. Welcome - Introduction of Speakers and Councillors

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that it was being held virtually to comply with current restrictions, however it was intended to act as a signal for the launch of a more open discussion on future initiatives with invited speakers and increased attendance.

3. To receive and note any Matters Arising from the minutes of the previous Annual Assembly held on 20th May 2019

These had been circulated prior to the meeting, there were no comments raised and were accepted as a true record.

4. Parish Council Report – Cllr Richard Carrow, Chair of Burghclere Parish Council

Cllr Carrow read the following report:

It would be difficult to deliver a report covering the previous 12 months without acknowledging the impact Covid-19 has had on all our lives. The community response to the challenges it presented has been exemplary, with many in the parish selflessly providing help to those who have needed it. I'd like to thank all residents who have contributed in so many different ways to helping others during this time.

The Parish Council set up a point of contact for assistance with Basingstoke Voluntary Association and instigated the Information Exchange Hub, ensuring guidance and details of local resources were shared widely. We've decided to keep the Information Exchange Hub going as a conduit for messages in future.

In April last year, the Parish Council swiftly switched to meeting remotely in line with government legislation that allowed for flexibility in the frequency of meetings and how they were held. Councillors found the change easy to manage and business has continued throughout without interruption. All meetings continue to be publicised in advance on the parish noticeboards and website, with parishioners able to attend virtually if they wish to.

The legislation also removed the requirement to hold an Annual Parish Assembly last year and while we're pleased to be able to hold a virtual assembly now, we hope that the gradual lifting of restrictions will soon permit the arrangement of a public event at a later date. This would enable a wider discussion to take place on proposed community initiatives such as: to improve play area facilities, adjust its layout and that of the area behind the Portal Hall Clubroom, start a climate change and sustainability project and other ideas besides.

The temporary government legislation expires on 7th May, therefore we anticipate that face to face Parish Council meetings will resume in June.

We have been pleased to co-opt two new Councillors – Amanda Wason and Julian Parkes, who have taken over from Roger Butler and Jacob Richardson who have stood down, and for whose support we were very grateful. We now have a full complement of 8 Councillors, with me as Chairman and Andrew Crowley as Vice-Chairman. County Cllr Thacker and Borough Cllr Izett frequently attend meetings to deliver reports on Borough and County activities. I'd like to thank my fellow Councillors for the enormous contribution they have made to the smooth running of parish matters and their enthusiasm for new initiatives, some - like the new website and the Parish Online mapping system - already implemented, with others under consideration.

Turning to the new Parish Website, it now complies with accessibility requirements and we are able to present information on Parish Council and Portal Hall matters in a clearer and easier to read format. It also displays a lot more information of wider interest and incorporates much of Bob Hill's village website. Furthermore Councillors can be contacted directly through dedicated email addresses.

Each year, the Parish Council sets a budget for discretionary grants. During the past 12 months grants have been given to Victim Support, Homestart and The Church of Ascension. We continue to encourage local groups, community organisations and charities to apply if they have an objective that will benefit the Parish.

We have continued to meet our financial responsibilities which includes setting the annual Precept and ensuring that audit requirements are met.

Discussions and decisions during the year have covered a variety of topics including: new and updated policies, road maintenance, climate change, the Newbury tip, parking, transport, defibrillators, fords, footpaths, trees, signage, litter, and of course, planning. The past 2 years have seen a large number of applications for extensions and some new builds, most of which have been approved. While I will talk about neighbourhood planning separately, mention must be made of Falcon Developments' attempt to build 35 houses on Harts Lane to which many residents objected. Following Basingstoke and Deane's decision to turn down this application it went to appeal and a Hearing was held before Christmas last year. Happily the

Inspector dismissed the appeal principally due to the threat to the success of the neighbourhood plan at referendum and to the local landscape. Nevertheless the lack of B&DBC's 5 year land supply means the threat of speculative development proposals is never far away.

Burghclere Parish Council also acts as Sole Trustee to Pinder Recreation Trust with Cllr Andrew Crowley as Chairman.

5. Pinder Recreational Report – Cllr Andrew Crowley, Chair of Pinder Recreation Trust

Cllr Crowley spoke to a report as outlined below:

Thank you to all the volunteers on parish and in the village who have supported, cleaned, maintained the Portal Hall and surrounding buildings during the last year. Without their support and dedication we would not be in the positive position coming out of lockdown.

Portal Hall

a. Business

i. Bookings – Pre-School, Events

- 1. We hope our regular activities including short mat bowls, aerobics can restart after May 17th*

ii. Cottage

- 1. Old tenant of 3 years moved out*
- 2. New tenants moved in after 10 days handover*
- 3. 25 applicants to rent cottage.*

iii. New Website integrated with Parish Website

- 1. Promoting the hire of hall and Club Room*
- 2. New App to be developed*

b. Finances

- i. Basingstoke & Deane business Interruption money*
- ii. £18,612 paid as Small Business Grant during COVID*
- iii. For 2020 Surplus was £7,248*

c. Maintenance

- i. Gutters, cleaning, roof repairs*
- ii. Hall Floor resurfacing*
- iii. Cleaning of eaves, beams while checking smoke alarms*
- iv. Plans and budgets are being put in place and being reviewed for the replacement of the 7 main Portal hall windows as per approved planning application*
- v. In addition to the replacement of the window the list of projects such as guttering and internal and external painting all remain in planning subject to funding which we continue to seek through our own business income and through grants where available such as the Greenham Trust.*
- vi.*

6. Burghclere Sports Club Report – Andy Trimbell

Cllr Morton read out the attached report on behalf of Andy Trimbell:

2020 Overview

The Sport Club was only open for 6 months of the year due to Covid restrictions and the Miniature Railway was unable to open at all – this was especially disappointing as the Railway is now pretty much complete and we were looking forward to it starting to pay for itself and raise much needed funds to allow for urgent work to be completed on the Sports Club facilities.

2021

Things are looking much more positive now the Sports Club is allowed to open (outside only currently), Football has resumed and the Miniature Railway will be opening to the public (subject to for limited/controlled numbers and social distancing) in the next few weeks.

We are hoping to hold a Family Fun day type event over the summer, the End of Season Steam Up in October, with a number of running days between now and then – all details will be published on our Facebook page and in the Village magazine.

Our primary aim for 2021 is to raise enough funds to be able to replace the roof of the Sports Club building (which leaks) and improve overall heating efficiency.

7. Earlstone Common Report – Denis Matthews

The report was provided by Denis Matthews and read by Cllr Carrow, as follows:

For those who are not aware, Earlstone Common is an area of about 23 acres that straddles the Burghclere road from an initial position adjacent to the boundary of The Clere School, ending where the extended Oxdrove Track meets the Burghclere or Aldern Bridge Road. It was gifted to the inhabitants of Burghclere in 1904 by the then owner Walter George Arkwright. This land was to be overseen a Trust. There were seven conditions imposed upon the Trustees in the original 1904 indenture.

Since 1904, the management/oversight of the Common has undergone various incarnations, ending up in the current position of a formally registered Trust which uses the original indenture as a basis and now supplemented by a formal “Governing Document”. This governing document sets out in more detail how the Trust is managed and the powers of the Trustees.

During a meeting of the Trustees in June 2019, one of the Trustees raised a concern that had been communicated to him by some of the adjacent Landowners of the Common.

This concern was about the extent to which the Common should be returned to its original heathland condition, thus requiring considerable felling of the tall self-seeding pine trees that have clearly populated a considerable section of the northern end of the Common. A public consultation was held on the 20th October 2019, in the Portal Hall, to allow all those concerned and interested parties to voice their opinion. Sadly, even following good advertising of the event, attendance was low and those adjacent landowners who had voiced concern failed to attend. However, the Trustees still remain aware of the unease about extensive felling and would only proceed following more consultation with all concerned.

Due to the Covid restrictions, no meeting of the Trustees have taken place since December 2019, but with the easing of restrictions, we will be looking to have a meeting in the next few months.

The death of Cliff James was a very sad event for us all and we would like to thank him for his valuable work in supporting the Trust. Fortunately, Amanda Wason has kindly agreed to join the Trustees as the third member representing the Parish Council and we look forward to welcoming her in person at the next Trustees meeting.

Clearly, woodland and heathland needs regular maintenance. We have been fortunate in the past to be able to rely upon Green Gym, the students of Sparsholt College and the indefatigable Simon Melville to undertake this work. However, these sources cannot be expected to take on this task on the regular basis that the Common needs. Therefore the Trustees have been looking at ways to generate an income so that the cost of maintaining the Common can be covered. This would have to be done without fundamentally changing the current nature of the Common and the Trustees remain in discussion on how this can be achieved.

In this age of litigation, the Trustees were made aware of the personal liabilities of being a Trustee. Therefore it was decided that the best course of action would be to take out Public Liability Insurance, which has now been done, with cover of £5M.

We look forward to sending another report in a years' time.

8. Herbert Plantation Report – Neill Bruce

Neill Bruce's report was read out by Cllr Carrow as follows:

There has been one change to the Management Committee, where Chris Elston moved out of the area, so I had the pleasure of inviting Ian Findlay back on. Work has been extremely sporadic this last winter, due mainly to the Covid restrictions. This last winter the volunteers split into two groups, with Harry Dove doing the main thinning in Cpt 2A on the first Sunday morning of the month, with the HCC ranger and three helpers, while Simon Melville and Neill Bruce were doing lighter thinning work opening glades, when weather and Covid allowed. If anyone would like to join us on weekdays I'd like to hear from them.

Normally our HCC rangers would have been in to mow the paths' edges etc., but they were stopped from doing anything but 'making safe' any dangerous trees, so no regular work has been carried out. This may well mean that path 11, through Cpt 3A will become very overgrown in the summer, with its share of ticks on the overhanging undergrowth, so do be careful through there, and maybe use other more open paths, if we haven't been able to open it up.

Following a survey of trees near Well St and The Oxdrove, in 2018/19, 20 more trees were felled for safety reasons by contractors and HCC staff. These are trees that would fall on either the road or even on houses.

This year we are again allowed to spray bracken, so I have drawn up a map of the areas that need treatment. The 2019 work was well worth it. We are also looking for someone to spray all the rhody re-growth at the North end of the wood. As there are a large number of ash trees in the wood, we are monitoring those that die and could fall across a path, with a view to getting contractors in to fell them. We are not planning to go in and blitz every ash tree, as there could be a handful with a generic make up that could allow them to survive the Chalara die-back.

Hopefully we can achieve more progress next September onwards.

9. Neighbourhood Plan – Cllr Carrow

At the last Annual Parish Assembly in 2019, I reported that we were about half way through developing a neighbourhood plan. Since then we have completed all the required stages: Regulation 14 and 16 consultations during 2019, review by the Independent Examiner in Feb 20, Decision Statement by B&DBC allowing the plan to proceed to Referendum in May 20, incorporation of all the changes recommended by the Independent Examiner throughout 2020 & 2021 and now, in 2 days time, the referendum itself will be held. I'd like to pay tribute to the hard work undertaken by the Steering Group and the support of the Parish Council as Qualifying Body. It is a remarkable achievement to have completed a neighbourhood plan in effectively only 2.5 years, with a one year government enforced delay due to Covid on top.

But it is not a done deal until residents have voted. We hope this will be positive (I am unable to say more than that!) and if passed at referendum the policies will allow for a small development to meet the housing target set in the Local Plan and other benefits too. Beyond the referendum, if successful, there will be more work to look at how best to implement these policies in the wake of Covid-19. Moreover, as B&DBC's Local Plan Update matures about 2 years hence, we will also want to keep closely aligned with their work and influence it when and where we feel it's needed. I fully expect to have to review our plan in light of any new housing targets and if required work out how to meet them.

Finally we need to track the government's White Paper ambitions. Some of these, like simplifying aspects of planning such as greater use of digitisation, are sensible. But we do need to keep a close track of any attempts to water down localism, that is to say, the way communities can (and must) have a voice in local planning matters through measures such as neighbourhood planning.

In sum, this is potentially the end of the beginning. Planning changes, but never ceases.

10. Footpaths – Cllr Carrow

This report covers 2 years:

- Footpaths remain in a generally satisfactory condition. A footpath bridge survey was undertaken last autumn to update the current register. Some culverts have collapsed while a couple no longer exist on the ground. This hasn't affected the footpath network although does mean that a couple of paths are less used. I am aware of the state of some wooden bridges which are useable but deteriorating gently.*
- Hampshire Countryside Services have been very proactive and supportive. They provided a York Gate at Hockley's Hole which was installed by a group of volunteers last month. Being a large gate it is being trialled to see whether it meets both farming and pedestrian needs.*
- While there is still work to do on certain stiles and footbridges, we were delighted to be the beneficiary of Mrs Ethna Hammond's metal kissing gate, which has been installed between West St and Whitway, and thank her for this donation to the network.*
- A stile survey will be undertaken shortly with a view to replace these with kissing gates over time.*
- I am also grateful to the volunteer party who cleared a lot of overgrown blackthorn at the southern end of the railway line. The path there is much improved.*
- Path clearing took a hit last year as Covid prevented the usual annual cut back by Countryside Services contractors. Once again I am grateful to individuals and local landowners and farmers who have kept paths and tracks in good condition. Recently qualified as a brush cutter and first aider I am now able to lead volunteer groups to undertake works around the parish or even further afield.*
- I'd like to remind residents that a new version of the Countryside Code has been published and would ask that due respect is paid to landowners while out walking, particularly over control of dogs when passing livestock.*

11. Q&A

Cllr Whiting noted that 2020 was the first year during which Pinder Recreation Trust had arranged for a Parish Christmas tree and asked that thanks be recorded to all who were involved in making it happen, including Peter Baikie and Cllr Collins.

Cllr Morton responded to two questions raised regarding Earlstone Common:

- He confirmed that Trustees had resolved to proceed with the felling as described.
- The Public Liability Insurance that had been put in place was set at a level that was felt to be adequate and at a cost that could be met by their limited funds. It would continue to be reviewed.

The meeting closed at 7.33pm.