

Hethe Parish Council

Minutes of The AGM Of The Parish

Held on Tuesday 26th April 2022, at 8.00pm In Hethe Village Hall

Councillors Present: S Wallace (Chairman)

Mrs. J Elkington

Mrs. J Ramsey

Mrs. S Hartwell

In Attendance Mr D Jakeman (Clerk)

Cllr Wood District Councillor

Mike Green

1. Apologies Cllr. Overton, Cllr Corkin County Councillor

2. Declaration of Interest

3. Chairman Report As acting chair, it's a pleasure to use this address to thank the outgoing Chair for his years of service to the Hethe Parish Council and the village overall. Under his leadership and with the expert support of the Clerk, the council has restructured and added additional valuable governance to the way we operate, our transparency, and how we share information with the villagers and other key stakeholders. If the pub were open, we'd raise a glass in thanks, but that's another matter.

April, 2022, we are somewhat in emergence from the pandemic, and it feels like the village has escaped somewhat unscathed. The nature of us being a rural community has afforded us the advantages of both community support for one another, and avoidance of most of the risk of transmission given the luxuries we enjoy with space, light, and fresh air. I know first-hand as I'm sure you all do others across the country have not been as fortunate. I'm sure my fellow council members will share my thoughts and sympathies to those within our community who have been impacted within their families and wider circles.

The village is entering a period of change, whether we like it or not, local infrastructure projects like HS2 and EWR, the rail distribution centre, and Bicester's ongoing expansion, and we continue to ensure where we live helps drive the continuation of the character of Hethe, community, positivity, pragmatism. The village hall regeneration work continues, we await with bated breath the Duck reopening, and people moving into the village are welcomed with open arms. It's wonderful to see such positive progress despite the hardships of the last couple of years.

I know as a group we will keep the interests of our community at the centre of what we do, and I'd like to thank you all for your hard work this last year. I know Chris would have said the same.

4. County Councillors Report 2021/22 has been another very busy year. Local government has been on an almost constant emergency footing for some time now; Brexit planning morphed into the largest civil emergency in 80 years as Covid impacted all aspects of our life. In common with all my parishes, Hethe residents responded magnificently, and the work of local government was made immeasurably easier because of community volunteers, who did everything from providing friendship, groceries, medicines and of course, manned the vaccination centre and allowed the NHS to roll out the programme that has ultimately given the vast majority of us our freedoms back.

Now, we are actively engaged in responding to the crisis in Ukraine, and once again community volunteers are leading the way. The arrival of guests from Ukraine represents the third refugee crisis

in as many years, the other two being refugees crossing the channel and those evacuated from Afghanistan. In all cases, our area has willingly played its part, ensuring all of the necessary wrap around services are available to help ensure the best possible outcome. I am also very happy to help refugees with council related matters as they settle into the community.

Locally, the area remains under immense development pressure. I recently circulated a list to the PC of all of the major projects I am engaged in, and I hope my track record of standing up for our rural villages is well known. Protecting those things we value most will remain a key priority. I have also continued to work on a range of other issues, including flooding, highways, maintaining bus provision, EW rail, the A41 corridor review and development pressures, as well as confidential casework on behalf of individual residents. I have also been able to help a range of community groups with small grants from my councillor priority fund. I am committed to helping communities recover from Covid and I still have funds available to help with local schemes that bring people together.

I am also following up the highway's issues by the church, which I thought had been dealt with 3 years ago. I will keep you posted.

As for the wider County picture, the landscape has been changed by the election results last May. The county council is now controlled by an unstable Liberal, Labour, Green alliance, which is allowing the wilder margins of that group to set much of the agenda and in the last 12 months we have seen this translate into some very odd decisions:

- Their first decision was to introduce gender neutral titles
- Then they raised councillor allowances, particularly for cabinet members
- They have incensed local farmers and food producers by introducing a Vegan only catering policy, claiming lower food miles, then delighting in pineapples, mangos, and kiwi fruit flown in from around the globe
- But at least that's consistent with a cabinet member flying to a climate conference in France that could have easily been reached by train or indeed virtually
- They've committed to gender neutral toilets in all county council buildings, without any idea how much it will cost
- Promised to restrict housing developments and then voted for 380,000 new homes per year at their national conference
- They routinely ignore public consultations and petitions
- Have plans to ban buses from some park & ride bus lanes, allowing only bikes to use them and forcing busses to join the queueing traffic
- Under resourced the village 20mph initiative, so there are now huge backlogs and delays
- Increased car parking charges 3-fold in some locations
- Borrowed £88million this year alone, at a cost of over £5million per year in interest to council taxpayers
- Maxed out the 22/23 council tax, making it one of the highest increases in the UK at 5%
- And will introduce a workplace parking levy and expand the road charging zone in Oxford

I mention these things because it is impacting on the decisions OCC make and the levels of service that residents can expect. Tax, borrow and spend, underwritten by the hard-pressed council tax payer, is in my opinion, no way to run a county council, whose substantive responsibilities remain Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Public Health and Highways.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the PC and all of the volunteers who do so much good in our community.

5. District Councillor Report In order to reach financial stability we have had to increase the Council tax by £5.00 a year. We have delivered nine years without the need to raise the District Council proportion of the Council tax. This should enable us to manage the strategy going forward with Central

Government plan to amend the way the Business Rates are distributed. The District also receive a favourable grant for the number of homes built across the district and this may change also. The District is working on the Local Plan leading up to 2030, Villages will be protected and will just see some minor infill as we see now. The major build will be in the towns.

6. Hethe Play & Stay Hethe Play & Stay has restarted following an understandably hard couple of years. We're tremendously grateful to the village hall and the VH committee to for their continued support and usage of the hall. The group is currently running as a breakeven operation, we've seen reduced numbers because of natural smoothing of local demographics but also where some people are hesitant to attend groups due to Covid. While we recognise that this isn't ideal for adding cashflow to the VH, the feedback we receive from attendees is that this is a fantastic and valued weekly event. We're looking over the summer to undertake an audit of the current play equipment to remove old/no longer suitable equipment, perform our bi-annual deep clean, and make space for more suitable new donations. Our numbers of parents and children attending are growing week by week and we see this as a very positive trend in the right direction. Thanks to all for you supporting us, Jessica & Rachel

7. Hethe Village Hall Since the end of covid restrictions bookings are up - we are now the go-to establishment for dog training (Lyn Bowers – Best Paw Forwards and Heather Donnelly's Dogs) - numerous classes held on a regular basis at the weekend. We have also attracted Karate classes run by Bronwen Morgan's partner - these are in addition to her normal Yoga sessions and of course John Horwood's Line Dancing remains a popular feature twice a week

The Village Hall makeover pot continues to grow and the HS2 grant is progressing

The tree which came down in storm Eunice back in February was cut up, thanks to Perry and John – the remaining 'stump' will be shaped (via chainsaw) into a bench to replace the one that was broken up some years ago – the tree that came down last November from 'that' piece of wasteland will be dealt with early summer

The grass within and surrounding the Playpark has been cut and the rubbish bins emptied and disposed of – it is disgusting what people throw away in a public bin; I would expect nappy bags to be taken home.

8. Parochial Church Council Summary 2021 Report and Accounts for the Parochial Church Council of St Edmund and St George, Hethe This is a summary of the annual report and accounts. The full, approved, document is available on the village web site at <https://www.hethe.org/st-edmunds-st-georges-church>

Worship and Prayer Due to COVID-19 restrictions, only eleven regular Sunday services were held in our church in 2021 - all between April and December. The average attendance was twelve. Other services held were on Easter Sunday (eleven adults), Harvest Festival (eighteen adults and four children), Remembrance Day (twenty-eight), a Carol Service (seventeen adults and two children), Christmas Day (eight adults). At present there are sixteen parishioners on the Church Electoral Roll. There were three funerals for local people at the crematorium and two weddings in the church (one with an attendance of 100). As soon as the COVID-19 restrictions allowed, the church was left open for private prayer and reflection. The Church Building Summary We were unable to complete repairs and redecoration in 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions, the lack of contractor resources and a heavy workload experienced by the Diocesan Advisory Committee (who approve works to the church). Eco Church. The church is registered under the A Rocha UK Eco Church scheme. The electricity supply is 100% generated from renewable sources through the Parish Buying Energy Basket. Fairtrade supplies are used wherever possible. Two areas of the churchyard are being allowed to grow into natural, flowery spaces, to encourage wildlife and make them more attractive and interesting for visitors. An outside compost toilet is being considered. Bird boxes had been placed in the trees and an insect hotel added. Financial Review Summary

The net result for the year was an excess of receipts over payments of £1,608 on unrestricted funds and £2,423 on restricted funds. Adding bank and cash balances brought forward at the beginning of the year, the balances to be carried forward on 31st December 2021 on unrestricted funds totalled £12,225 and on restricted funds £4,129, a total of £16,354. Vers 1.0 Page 2 of 2 The PCC are grateful to members of the parish who continue to contribute through regular giving and the 100 Club and all of those within and outside the parish who donated towards the cost of repairs. Administrative Information PCC members who have served at any time from 1st January 2021 until 31st December 2021 are: Ex Officio members: Revd Alice Goodall (Chair) Mrs Flora Skinner (Vice Chair, Churchwarden & Safeguarding Officer) Mrs Helen Pritchard (Deanery Synod Representative) Elected members: Mr Michael Green (Secretary, Treasurer & Electoral Roll Officer) Mrs Pauline O’Gorman Mrs Helen Wood Mrs June Nisbet (wef May 2021) Thanks We would like to thank all the volunteers who work so hard to make our church a special place in the community. They undertake varied roles from helping to maintain the churchyard, to church cleaning, to providing flowers, to raising funds, to being members of the PCC – all are to be thanked for their work. In particular we wish to mention our churchwarden, Mrs Flora Skinner, who has worked so tirelessly on our behalf

9. Open Forum – For Residents The Parish Council were asked what plans they have to efficiently monitor The conservation Area since the report was published in February 2022. The clerk replied and said it would be on the Agenda for the May meeting at the start of the new term of office. The Council was also asked what we were doing for the Jubilee Celebrations? Councillors realised that this was fast approaching and that it would be a good idea for the community to come together after so much lock down and fears of going out. Flora had already made a start on this. Councillors agreed to apply for the grant from the District Council and to help with leaflets etc. Cllr. Mrs Ramsey said she would discuss celebrations with Flora. The Council were also asked if they could update the village on what has happened at the meetings a bit quicker. Also would the PC look at climate change and green issues going forward.

10. Chairman’s Closing Remarks Cllr. Wallace thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting and wished everyone well for the start of the Council Year.

11. Date of Next Meeting