

**DRAFT**

**MINUTES OF FRIENDS AGM 1<sup>st</sup> OCTOBER 2021**

**1. Apologies.** Received from:

- Roger and Jenny Carter
- Donia Ceato (Committee - Secretary)
- Geoff Witt (Committee - Luffenham)
- Penny and John Aeberhard – late of the Manor and now at their new home in Kent
- David Beniston
- Mr and Mrs Bodman (Keevil)
- Mr and Mrs Link (Keevil)

**Remembrance.** Before proceeding with the meeting, the Chair asked those present to bow heads for a moment and remember those Friends we had lost over the last 18 months. In particular we remembered:

- Margaret Beniston, member
- Declan Walters, who was Chair of the Friend's 1993 – 2003, died in April 2020
- And more recently our Treasurer, Frank Geraghty, who had been hoping to hand over the reins at this AGM but who sadly died two weeks ago.

**2. Minutes of previous AGM.**

The Chair stated that the last AGM was held on 3rd May 2019, with the 2020 AGM - scheduled for 24th April - cancelled in the early days of the Covid pandemic. The 2021 AGM was for obvious reasons being held later than would be ideal, but rather than roll over to 2022 it was thought important to gather together and take stock, and to restore some traction after the inevitable inertia created by Covid and the various lockdowns and restrictions.

As the 2019 meeting minutes were somewhat dated the Chair briefly summarised them as a reminder of what we were up to back then, oblivious of what was to arrive with us a few months later from China

**3. Chairman's report.**

The Chair started by thanking the Village Hall committee for enabling us to meet there this evening. We look forward to the planned upgrade, to include additional doorway between the skittle alley and main hall, and the installation a new screen and projector to assist with events such as this. Along with the already installed wi-fi these new facilities should allow future Friends Committee meetings to access the electronic Wiltshire Planning Portal and other up to date internet information.

Our activities had inevitably been curtailed over the last 18 months, but the Chair was pleased to report continuing efforts with **Luffenham Field**:

- The main achievement in 2020 was the successful restoration of the footpath bridge. It was our intention to celebrate the opening of the restored bridge with a picnic and ribbon cutting, but plans were thwarted by Covid. I hope many of you will have had the opportunity during your lockdown exercise regime to take a look at the bridge – the work was completed to a high standard, and more recent visitors will have noted the very smart commemorative plaque placed on the bridge through the very kind initiative of Helen Montague-Smith. Helen's late husband Mike was a past Chair of the Friends, and we are very grateful for her continuing support to the Friends. That support includes the ability of the Friends to communicate to the village through the excellent Newsletter which she so diligently edits. Thank you Helen.
- We are very grateful to all of you who so kindly donated to the bridge project, in particular to Jan Wicks who donated her takings of £170 for the sale of her fabric Covid face masks at the Village Shop.
- In relation to funding of the bridge project, the original agreement was for Wiltshire Council Rights of Way to pay half, and the Friends to pay the other half. In the final event, perhaps due to a surplus of 'end of financial year' funds, the Council to our pleasant surprise decided to fund the whole project. We need to do the right thing with the money you so kindly donated to the bridge project, and have therefore 'ring fenced' all the donations related to the bridge under 'Luffenham Field' with a view to funding continuing maintenance and further environmental improvement of the field. More on this when we look at the accounts later.
- Many of you will be aware that the Field was left to the village and is managed by a group of Trustees, one of which is our speaker this evening, Bryan Berrett. Since 2005 The Friends have undertaken the day to day maintenance of the field. The Friends have been keen to try and develop the field as both an environmental haven and a village facility, conscious of the increasing awareness of the need for biodiversity, sustainable wildlife habitats, and efforts to manage climate change. Any such developments have to take account of the Trustees' perspective, particularly in relation to stipulations concerning the planting of trees. Earlier this year, in order to get some expert advice on potential options for sustainable and practical development of Luffenham, the Trustees arranged a survey by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, and the Friends are in the process of drafting a phased plan for the future.
- We are currently considering how we might contribute to the Parish Council plans for tree planting, subject to the right kind of trees in a limited quantity. We have also received a very kind offer from Penny Aeberhard to fund some wildflower seeds for the field, and we are very keen to get your thoughts and suggestions for practical and sustainable improvements.
- Lastly, the Chair expressed sincere thanks to both Geoff Witts and Tony Evans

The Friends continued to contribute to the villages participation as a ‘destination ambassador’ in the **Great West Way** initiative. The 3 year special deal we negotiated runs up to and including 2022. Renewal thereafter will likely depend on participation by the currently dormant Longs Arms as well as the Village Shop.

During the Covid period there has been a lot of discussion and consultation concerning **Planning**, and in particular the development of **new housing**.

- The Friends constitution states the following Objectives:
  - To maintain the particular character and scenic qualities of Steeple Ashton
  - To work with the Parish Council, the District Council and the Local Planning Authority and any other interested bodies to preserve the beauty and architectural interest of Steeple Ashton and to ensure careful integration of new buildings, where necessary, into the existing picture.
  - The furtherance of knowledge on all matters relating to these objectives.
  
- With a view to furthering the knowledge and awareness of ongoing planning policy developments, the Chair had written a series of 6 articles in the village Newsletter. They covered the full spectrum from the Government’s controversial August 2020 Planning White Paper linked to the now removed Mr Jenrick, down to the responsibilities of individual householders. Of particular current interest is the development of the Wiltshire Council Local Development Plan, which seeks at local level to deliver the intent and targets of the policy generated by the White Paper. The Friends submitted detailed comment during the consultation phase which ended in March, and the consolidated consultation report has recently been published. It is encouraging that the lack of credibility in the methodology for calculating new housing targets in large villages such as Steeple Ashton had been acknowledged, but draft documents continued to show a target of 34 new houses to be built within the settlement boundary of the village.
  
- The Local Plan process is at pains to point out that community influence on planning need to be through the production and maintenance of Neighbourhood Plans.
  - 2000 Village Design Statement I basically redundant
  - Lot of work to develop a NP and goalposts keep changing
  - Takes approx. 2 – 3 years plus a referendum
  - Many parishes in Wiltshire have not yet developed a plan
  - West Ashton recent referendum May 21
  - What is way ahead for Steeple Ashton?
  - Undermanned PC. Consequences from inaction?
  
- The Chair remarked that our faith in the integrity of the planning and heritage process had taken a knock with what he referred to as the Sanctuary saga. We were all pleased to see the speedy stabilisation and improvement of the main building when it was purchased at auction in late 2019, but regrettably our fears concerning

speculative unapproved development for generation of profit regardless of heritage and environmental concerns had rather come to pass. The Friends have been to the fore in challenging the flawed process and the apparent lack of integrity concerning proper application of existing enforcement and planning regulations. We still await any decision on the way ahead, but it was understood the site remains on the market despite the lack of resolution.

### **The future.**

The Chair outlined that, like many organisations, the Friends were struggling to maintain membership and viability, and Covid had made matters worse. There were also a number of new village organisations drawing the interest of a wider demographic concerned with environmental matters – Natural History Club and SAVE spring to mind, as well as SAGE.

As The Friends approach our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary the Chair aired a few thoughts for comment:

- Should we celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> in 2022 per our headed paper date of 1972 and coincide with the PC Jubilee effort and Open Gardens eg share marquee funding etc, or delay to 2023 and be strictly correct per the excellent Berrett family research!
- Should we consider reviewing our Constitution to generate broader objectives and potential interest/membership?
- Consider updates of Village History and Guide, and Circular Walks?
- What issues and activities should we focus our future effort on?
- Should we potentially combine with any other organisations?

The Chair stated he was keen for the Friends to thrive up to and beyond our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday through renewed vibrancy and focus, and I would be grateful for your support wherever possible.

### **4. Treasurer's Report.**

At this stage we would normally present the final accounts for the previous FY, but the Chair expressed his regret that it was not currently possible until the documents of our late Treasurer have been consolidated and reviewed by the independent examiner.

The Chair stated that at present the Friends have a balance of £3,240.

Since the passing of Frank we have been doing what we can to confirm the status of subscriptions and membership.

The Chair expressed grateful thanks to Rosie B-G for her continuing work with the oil scheme, the subscriptions for which support the Friends.

I propose that reflecting previous donations and subject to findings of the independent examiner, the sum of £700 be ring-fenced for maintenance and development of Luffenham Field

Proposed: R Brett-Green

Seconded: H Montague – Smith

Unanimously approved

Election of Independent Examiner – Lyn Mccarron

Proposed: A Howard

Seconded: A Evans

Unanimously approved

**Afternote:** it was subsequently established that Lyn was not available to take on the role of examining the accounts.

#### 5. **Election of President.**

Sincere thanks to Lydia Peters, who has kindly agreed to stand again.

Proposed: A Hunt

Seconded: B Hodges

Unanimously approved

#### 6. **Election of Committee**

We currently have seconded to us:

- PPC – Rosie Brett-Green
- WI – Ann Hunt
- PC – formerly the excellent Jennie Wills, no new nomination at present

With very grateful thanks we said farewell to Donia Ceato (Secretary) and Malcolm Crucefix (Planning). Sadly we had no new firm nominations to fill the Committee ranks, but the following kindly agreed to continue and were proposed for re-election:

- Mike Beard
- Anne Howard
- Geoff Witts
- Tony Evans

Ann Strange has been approached as a prospective Treasurer, but her level of Committee involvement is subject to negotiation concerning her work commitments. It was proposed that in keen anticipation of her involvement that her name be added to the list for approval.

Proposed: R Brett-Green

Seconded: M Crucefix

Unanimously approved

#### 7. **Privacy Statement.**

We are keen to improve communication via email, and encourage you all to provide an email address with the assurance of the following privacy statement:

#### PRIVACY STATEMENT

Your personal information and email address will be used for membership administration and communication only, and will be protected in compliance with current UK Data Protection Regulations.

Proposed: A Evans

Seconded: M Crucefix

Unanimously approved.

#### 8. **AOB**

Polish memorial - Rosie Brett-Green proposed this be pursued and there was general agreement, however options for design and location needed to be considered.

In closing, the Chair expressed sincere thanks to all for their membership, subscriptions, and donations.

After a short break, we enjoyed Bryan Berretts's talk, 'The Final Straw'.