

STEEPLE ASHTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 27th April 2022 at 7pm

Present: Cllr Rob Leonard (Chair), Cllr Leah Dampier, Cllr Malcolm Jones, Cllr Francis Ash, Cllr Jon Tapper, Cllr Jeremy Cottle and Cllr Adrian Dallison.

In attendance: Nicola Duke (Parish Clerk) and 26 members of the public,

1. Welcome from Chair – Cllr Rob Leonard welcomed everyone to the meeting; highlighting that the meeting was not a parish council meeting but a meeting of the parish and was an opportunity to get together and provide updates on work and activities of the PC and local groups.
2. Apologies for Absence – Mrs Francesca Buffery-King. Cllr Jonathon Seed
3. Matters Arising – None.
4. Chairman's Annual Report for 2021/2022
Cllr Rob Leonard provided a report on the PC's activities for the municipal year, a copy of which is available on request and is summarised below:
 - A new Council term had commenced in 2021 and the Council currently had 2 vacancies.
 - The Clerk was identified as the main point of contact for parish council matters.
 - The duties and powers of the Council were explained and identified.
 - 27 planning applications and 12 tree work applications had been considered during the year; with matters relating to The Sanctuary, Dark Lane North being a particular issue.
 - Wiltshire Council's Local Plan had identified 34 houses as being required in the parish and this was one of the reasons why Neighbourhood Planning was being considered.
 - Highways issues had been worked on and the installation of the Speed Indicator Device had been a successfully delivered project. Meetings had been held with Wiltshire Council to look at highways issues and a Community Speed Watch team had been established.
 - Environmental issues were also being looked at and the Climate Group was working on these. 420 trees had been obtained free of charge from the Woodland Trust for the parish. A seminar on renewable heating had been held in 2021. The Council had carried out a stock survey on its trees to develop an appropriate management plan.
 - General issues looked at had included; football at St Mary's with one team being given notice, the launch of a new website, the publication of the results of the 2019 village survey and the closure of the parish office, which would help reduce the Council's operating costs.
 - The Council's sub-groups were identified; recreation, climate, highways, Acreshort Park and the planning for the Platinum Jubilee celebration events.
 - The Financial Position of the Parish Council was presented, a copy of which is appended to the report. It was highlighted that capital projects such as the SID and tree improvements had resulted in a higher than usual expenditure. The precept for the new financial year had increased slightly to cover increasing operating costs and a grant towards the village hall heating improvements has been agreed.
5. Wiltshire Council Update - Cllr Jonathon Seed had sent apologies.
6. Village Groups
 - 6.1. Community Policing Team (Janet Gould) – not in attendance. It had been reported that there had been no crime reported in the recent months.

- 6.2. SID/Speed Watch - Cllr Malcolm Jones provided a report, a copy of which is appended to the minutes. In addition, the following comments were made:
- The Speed Limit Reminder device was introduced and explained. It was highlighted that the device was relocated on a regular basis in accordance with the deployment rules. The data collection of the device recorded the speed detected in and out of the area, the average speed between the two and the maximum speed done in that area. 900 vehicles per day travel in each direction; 450 coming in southbound. An idea of the numbers of vehicles adhering to the speed limit, the speed of vehicles and the impact of the SLR was being given.
 - The red gateway markings were being looked at and the intention was to apply to Wiltshire Council for new markings in Ashton Common and to refresh those markings to the 30mph signs south of the village as the existing markings were worn.
 - A discussion was held on speed bumps and Cllr Jones reported that there were noise issues with these particular measures. It was agreed that it was difficult to identify the most appropriate traffic calming measures and it was confirmed that the Highways Engineer had agreed to carry out a further assessment with a view to making recommendations for the PC to consider. The work of the Community Area Transport Group (Wiltshire Council) and the funding available through that group was reported. Mr Pybus reported on the installation of speed bumps at West Ashton.
 - Cllr Jones confirmed that a further visit from Wiltshire Council engineers was being planned.
 - Cllr Tapper reported on the re-invigoration of the Community Speed Watch; volunteers had come forward and Wiltshire Council were in the process of arranging for the required traffic surveys to approve appropriate locations. Once approved, volunteers would be trained and anyone interested in joining the team was asked to contact the PC. The data from the SLR device would assist the team in focusing on the best times of day to deploy the speed watch. Police support would be sought.
- 6.3. The Friends of Steeple Ashton - Mike Beard reported the following:
- The AGM would be held on Friday 27th May 2022; followed by a talk by Richard Osgood.
 - The Friends would be celebrating 50 years in 2023, events were being planned and they were keen to seek new members and committee members.
 - The Friends remained a very relevant organisation with its aim to preserve the beauty and architectural interest of the village.
 - The Friends worked with the parish council on planning applications; with focus being given to the environment as well as architecture and heritage issues.
 - An upcoming big issue was the evolution of the Wiltshire Council Local Plan; the opportunity to input into this would be later this year. A particular issue would be the target of 34 new dwellings in Steeple Ashton's designated settlement area and the potential implications of this. The Friends would wish to influence this and would be scrutinising the methodology of this allocation. Reference was made to the Neighbourhood Plan process, which would be discussed later in the evening – this was now the only way in which future planning could be influenced and speculative development avoided.
 - The Friends would take a balanced view of these things and remain aware of the broader issues striking a balance between these and the special nature of the village.
- 6.4. St Mary's School Building Management Committee - Malcolm Bond had provided a report which was presented and a copy of which is appended to the minutes. The report

covered the who's who of the Committee, its finances and key activities for 2021/22. It was queried as to whether the loss of the PC as a tenant would impact the finances and it was clarified that the effect was minimal.

- 6.5. Wiltshire Guild of Spinners, Weavers & Dyers - Beryl Francis had provided a report which was read out, a copy of which is appended to the minutes.
- 6.6. West Wiltshire Model Railway Circle - Ron Pybus had provided a report which was presented and a copy of which is appended to the minutes. Attention was drawn to the Trowbridge exhibition on 7th May 2022 at the Guildhall, at which the group would be in attendance. It was confirmed that the group would open during the Jubilee weekend, the details of which would be publicised by the PC.
- 6.7. STASH (Steeple Ashton Village Shop) – Maureen Hodge had provided a report, which was presented and a copy of which is appended to the minutes. Apologies were given on behalf of the Chair, Guy Bagnall. In response to a question, it was reported that the finances were in a satisfactory position. The value of the shop as an asset to the village was noted.
- 6.8. Steeple Ashton Guides - Diane Bouault reported the following:
 - The group had 50 girls enrolled who met every Tuesday, with an age range 5-16 years old. The members were supported by a young leader, 9 adults and 2 DoE volunteers.
 - The group had continued to meet virtually through lockdown.
 - A camping holiday had been arranged in the summer of 2021, which had been especially joyous given the recent years of lockdown restrictions. Further holidays and camps were being planned for 2022 and older girls had the once in a lifetime opportunity to row on the river Thames in the last Jubilee barge.
 - Full use was made of the facilities at Acreshort Park.
 - Being part of the SA community was important to the group; which had supported the church, hall and wider community through its 2021 Christmas tea party.
 - A litter pick was being planned, which would take place on a Tuesday night.
 - A performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream with afternoon tea was planned for the afternoon of Saturday 4th July as part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations; this would be performed again in the evening in the Village Hall with cheese and wine.
 - The PC was thanked for the annual grant, which was hugely helpful to the group. The group felt that it was able to provide a valuable service to the community, particularly in recent years in helping to address mental health problems generated by the covid-19 lockdowns.
- 6.9. Village Hall Management Committee - Clive Little provided a report, which is appended to the minutes.
- 6.10. Natural History Group - Roger Ferguson reported the following:
 - The group had been established for 18 years and was a small group interested in the nature of the village.
 - The group met four times a year in the Methodist Church Hall.
 - Organised trips were arranged; both locally and further afield. Bat and bird surveys had been carried out resulting in a comprehensive list of some 200 species.
 - The group was free to join, had 24/25 members and kept in touch between meetings via email and WhatsApp.

- There had been a crossover with the Climate Group regarding tree planting in the village and it was confirmed that the group were happy to carry out a tree survey on public areas in the summer of 2022.
- It was reported that house martins and swallows had been seen recently, young peregrines had been seen on the church and nesting boxes for swifts were being considered. Hedgehogs had been seen visiting a number of properties and had also been seen at Acreshort Park.
- It was confirmed that the group focussed on plants and animals, although palaeontology had been looked at some years ago.
- The group would be arranging dawn walks and bat watches.

6.11. SAGE (Steeple Ashton Gardening Endeavours) – Mel Burge had provided a report, which was presented and is appended to the minutes.

6.12. Acreshort Park Group - Mel Burge presented a report on behalf of Francesca Buffery-King, a copy of which is appended to the minutes. Mr Ron Pybus confirmed, in response to a point raised in the report, that the roof of the Acreshort Hut was in good order and would not require attention for several years.

6.13. Steeple Ashton Recreation and Community Development Group - Cllr Leah Dampier reported the following:

- The group had been revitalised and now had 9 members meeting in the Hall on the second Monday of each month, with a focus on the recreation areas at St Mary's and Newleaze.
- The next meeting would be a workshop to gain feedback on ideas and thoughts for projects for those areas.
- New members were welcome and anyone interested was asked to contact the Parish Clerk.

6.14. SA Women's Institute - Marian Little provided a report, which is appended to the minutes.

7. Neighbourhood Planning for Steeple Ashton

Cllr Dallison introduced the item, outlining that the concept of Neighbourhood Planning had been discussed over recent years but progression was now being seriously considered as a result of the 34 houses allocated to the parish in the WC Local Plan. More information on the planning for a Plan, its costs and impact was required and assistance had been sought from West Ashton Parish Council, which had a made Neighbourhood Plan for its parish area.

Mr Ron Pybus spoke to his experience of Neighbourhood Planning as it related to the parish of West Aston, making the following points:

- In July 2015 West Ashton Parish Council had resolved to prepare a Plan and a public meeting had been arranged to seek interested residents to join a Steering Group.
- The difficulty in getting membership for the Steering Group was highlighted. The number of volunteers declined after quite a short period of time.
- A Parish survey had been done and some advice given by Wiltshire Council covering such things as vision and objective statements, development plans for housing and how to monitor and review the process. Mr Pybus reported that the development of a Neighbourhood Plan had been a daunting prospect.
- The main driver for Steeple Ashton had been the Community Governance Review which saw some areas of the parish eventually being transferred to Trowbridge Town Council.
- The Plan area had been identified and approved prior to the transfer of land to Trowbridge Town Council.

- A RHNS had been undertaken by Wiltshire Council, which was then incorrect following the transfer of land to Trowbridge Town Council, but not amended.
- The trigger for the Plan had been the desire to protect the village of West Ashton and its vision towards Trowbridge – to preserve community as it was.
- The group had accepted that some housing would need to be developed.
- The consultancy costs involved in the preparation of the Plan had been significant.
- The Plan had identified some small areas of land which could be small infills – these had been rejected by WC due to local bat flight paths. More members of the group had left at this point, leaving only a very small group to take the Plan forward.
- During the process a lot of information about the village and a lot of proposals had been identified. Although the Plan had been ‘made’ and could perhaps control speculative development Mr Pybus reported that he had not seen it have much local impact.
- The total cost of the Plan had been 11k plus – most of this had been grant funded. The direct cost to the PC had been very small.
- Mr Pybus reported that he had spent 30 years working in local government and this had been the most protracted, awkward process he had ever been involved in. The work had been difficult and liaison with Wiltshire Council had been hard.
- The parish had not seen a dramatic change since the Plan had been ‘made’ but nothing major had come up as yet to challenge it.
- It was reported that the Plans need to be kept up to date and reviewed every 2 years.
- Once the Plan was prepared it would need to go to a local referendum and has to be voted on by the parish. The whole process of Neighbourhood Planning had been felt to be convoluted.
- In response to a query from Cllr Leonard the majority of those present at the meeting expressed in principle support for preparing a Neighbourhood Plan; although it was noted more information was required.
- It was reported that the Friends of SA would review the next Local Plan consultation and a village wide discussion would be appropriate at this stage.
- It was agreed that evidence as to whether a NP affected WC’s decision in terms of housing was required; together with what the NP might actually achieve for the parish.
- It was reported that developers would be looking at the wider plan for the area and that the best hope for the parish was to be able to influence where housing ends up. It was felt that a NP could be a double edged sword in that it could attract developer’s attention.
- It was noted that Wiltshire Council planned to expand the settlement boundary by 100m buffer.
- Cllr Leonard suggested that the best way forward would be to have a specific community meeting to try and make a village decision as to whether to proceed with neighbourhood planning. This would be arranged as soon as the Local Plan was issued by Wiltshire Council.

8. Any Other Business – General questions and comments were invited:

- Jubilee weekend – Cllr Leonard drew attention to the planned beacon lighting on the Thursday night and sought helpers for set up and marshalling. Anyone interested was asked to contact the Parish Clerk or Cllr Ash.
- Thanks – Cllr Leonard thanked the speakers and contributors.

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 9.32 pm.