

THE FRIENDS OF STEEPLE ASHTON
2022 AGM
7pm 20th May 2022 in the Village Hall

DRAFT MINUTES

1. Opening/Apologies. The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming all those present. He had received apologies from committee members Anne Howard, Rob Leonard and Geoff Witts.

2. 2021 AGM Minutes. The draft minutes of the AGM of 1st October 2021 had been distributed electronically to members and also posted on the village website. The Chair stated that items of interest would be updated during this AGM and that he did not therefore propose to go through the minutes. He asked for their acceptance as a true record.

Proposed: Helen Montague-Smith

Seconded: Ann Hunt

3. Chair's Report. The Chair delivered his 2022 report along with projected slides:

- Our 50th Anniversary is in 2023.
 - We will reach that milestone and celebrate it in style – potentially a marquee lunch open to all members, with perhaps a bench or other item commemorating the anniversary to be presented to the village.
 - I would, however, be remiss if I did not raise with you my concern regarding The Friends continued existence beyond our 50th birthday – which largely centres on the committees continuing challenge to recruit members and deliver our objectives.
 - The PC and other organisations face similar challenges, and I hope that as we emerge from the confines of Covid that more folk might be inclined to get involved – the tasks of the committee are not particularly onerous if we are able to share the workload, and as well as numbers we would also benefit from some fresher perspective to reinforce those with more experience of the village.
 - We are now in Year 3 of 3 in respect of the Great West Way initiative, which you may recall the Friends led on co-ordinating back in 2019. It is a shame that Covid has negatively impacted on things. Our bargain deal Ambassadorship will cease at the end of this year and we do not plan to continue with it, but having got Steeple Ashton on the GWW map I am hoping that the revived Longs Arms – as the main tourism beneficiary - may take an interest in taking over from the Friends, Shop, PC and Coachmans' Cottage quartet.
 - The Friends village guide is still very much available for purchase in the shop, as are the 7 circular walk guides we started work on back in 2003. The Chair

hoped to walk the 7 routes over the next few months to check the continuing accuracy of the guides, conscious that some footpaths are prone to deterioration – or even closure in the case of some of those in our neighbouring parish of Great Hinton.

- Concerning Keevil airfield, usage by the RAF was much reduced and that continued occupancy by the MOD for helicopter and drone training should be actively encouraged; disposal of the airfield by the MOD had the potential to generate development that could be damaging to the character of the village and surrounding area.
 - The Friends' oil scheme continues, contributing to the reduced oil tanker mileage around the village as well as to the Friends as Rosie and Colin very kindly donate the membership admin fee to the Friends. Many thanks to Rosie and Colin Brett-Green.
 - The Chair commented that he had recently been doing some archiving of Friends documents going back as far as 1973, and it was wonderful to see how the organisation got underway and how it has flourished and evolved. Inevitably some of the issues come around again from time to time, which perhaps serves as a reminder that we can't take anything for granted in terms of preserving what is special about the village and its surroundings.
- Our main objectives continue to be, as stated in the constitution, to 'preserve the beauty and architectural interest of the village', encouraging appreciation of what we are lucky to have as well as enabling awareness of any emerging concerns.
 - If we are to sustain beyond our 50th it might be a wise option to revisit the priorities and wording of our constitution to better reflect an intent to protect and conserve what is truly valuable to the village and the parish in both built and rural terms, while being prepared to sensibly adapt to the demands and challenges of the modern environment.
 - The Friends continue to rent Luffenham Field from the Trustees of the Charity of Crooke and Others, and we aim to maintain and develop it as a publicly accessible environmental haven. Geoff Witts is the committee lead on the field, the Chair read the report he had kindly submitted.
- The committee continues to meet monthly on order to keep in 'synchronisation' with the submission of planning applications and consultation deadlines, working alongside the PC.
 - The Friends main focus is on heritage issues, and for over 2 years now we have been concerned with the development of the oldest dwelling in the village, The Grade 2* listed Sanctuary. The very good news is that the stabilised and refurbished main building has recently been purchased and occupied by a young family new to the village.
 - The not so good news is the ongoing ambiguity concerning the unauthorised development within the curtilage and associated enforcement action in the wake of the departed developer.
 - Regrettably, the Sanctuary saga has done little for our faith in the efficiency and integrity of the Local Planning Authority, who throughout the Sanctuary saga displayed no willingness for any transparent engagement with us let

alone reply to emails – very different from years gone by as evidenced in our archive documents.

- With that in mind, the upcoming ‘big issue’ in terms of planning policy that will directly impact on the village is the ongoing development of the Wiltshire Local Plan, which in simple terms will dictate how the Local Planning Authority will conduct future planning control while delivering mandated new housing targets. As reported at the last AGM, the Friends submitted detailed concerns during the 2021 consultation process concerning the methodology and outcomes published in January 2021 which included:
 - A target of 34 new dwellings in the Steeple Ashton settlement area by 2036.
 - The creation of a 100 metre buffer around the existing settlement area to aid development.
 - The need for parishes to develop and maintain up to date Neighbourhood Plans to influence planning and protect against ‘speculative development’.

The next stage of the process is publication of plan for pre-submission consultation and preparation for submission following consultation: Qtr 4 2022 - Qtr 2 2023

- The 2000 VDS which The Friends assisted the PC to produce very usefully mapped the village conservation and settlement areas, and articulated much of what is valuable and deserving of protection in the village. It is now dated, and largely defunct in terms of influencing planning. Given continuing adjustments by Mr Gove and the Government concerning housing development and targets, there is an understandable reluctance on the part of the PC to embark on the considerable effort and expense involved with developing a comprehensive Neighbourhood Plan, which will need to pass LPA scrutiny and include plans for delivering any mandated housing targets before being formally voted for by the community in a referendum. Given the time it will take, and the risk of not articulating what is valuable to us, your committee is of the view that development of a plan should if at all possible get underway sooner rather than later.

4. Review of accounts.

The Chair stated that because of a changeover of Treasurer in 2018, Covid, and then the death of our Treasurer in 2021 and loss of our independent assessor, we have had a somewhat delayed review of recent accounts.

He was grateful to Ann Strange, who was unable to take on the full role of Treasurer as we had anticipated at the last AGM, but instead very kindly undertook in her professional capacity to complete the independent assessment of the 3 years accounts from 2017-21. These had previously been electronically posted for review and were projected on screen; given the straightforward content and positive balance he did not intend to go in to detail unless anyone had any queries to raise? (None were raised).

The FY 22-23 accounts will reflect a modest honorarium paid to Ann in recognition of her professional assistance.

Ann has since prepared and completed the latest FY 21-22 accounts, which have kindly been independently assessed by Diane Hunter.

You will note that the overall state of the account remains sound, with an end of year bank balance of £3.2K and an overall capital balance of £3.9K. Of this, just over .5K remains ring-fenced for Luffenham.

Acceptance of presented accounts:

Proposer: Alison Evans

Seconder: Helen Montague-Smith

Election of independent assessor. Pending appointment of a committed committee Treasurer it is the committee's intent for the Chair assisted by Anne Howard to operate the accounts. Ann Strange is stepping away from the committee due to other commitments, but has kindly agreed to be nominated as our new examiner.

Proposer: Julian Peters

Seconder: Rosie Brett-Green

Vote: Unanimously carried

5. Election of President. The Chair was very grateful to Lydia Peters for outstanding support as President. She has now been involved with the Committee for 25 years. He was delighted that she is prepared to continue.

Proposer: Roger Carter

Seconder: Jean Clarke

Elected: Unanimously carried.

6. Committee.

As previously mentioned, we did not benefit from a new Treasurer, but since the last AGM Shaun Baxter kindly stepped up to join us to assist with Electronic communications and secretarial duties – well done Shaun!

The Chair bid a fond and very grateful farewell to two committee members this evening:

- Tony Evans – on committee since 2012, leading on Luffenham.
- Rosie Brett-Green – PCC Rep since 1999? No new PCC rep currently nominated.

Coming on to the committee the Chair warmly welcomed a new PC rep, their Chair, Rob Leonard. Ann Hunt continues as the WI rep.

The following committee members have agreed to stand again:

Mike Beard
Anne Howard
Geoff Witt
Shaun Baxter

(plus Lydia, PC and WI)

Proposer: Gerry Oughton

Seconder: David Beniston

Elected: Unanimously carried

7. AOB, closing remarks. No AOB points were raised. The Chair thanked all those attending, closed the meeting at 7.45pm, and looked forward to the following talk by Richard Osgood MBE, Senior MOD Archaeologist.

Mike Beard
Chair
27/02/23