

East Hagbourne Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting duly convened and held on Thursday 27th April 2017 at East Hagbourne Pavilion

Present were Cllrs D Rickeard (Chairman), I Duff, C Gover and C Topping ; A Leigh (Clerk to the Council) ; County Councillor P Greene and seven members of the public.

Apologies were received from Cllrs S Beynon, D Button and J Elliott and from Mrs M Harrison.

1) Welcome and Introductions.

The Chairman introduced Allison Leigh who took over the role of Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer to the Council at the end of 2016.

County Councillor Patrick Greene spoke briefly about his time working with East Hagbourne Parish Council and indicated this would be his last meeting. He wishes the community well.

2) Parish Council Activities

Chairman's Report: David Rickeard, Chairman

Welcome to the 2017 Annual Parish Meeting. Although this meeting is convened by East Hagbourne Parish Council it is not a Parish Council meeting, but a meeting of East Hagbourne parish residents. This meeting is to inform you what your council has been doing over the past year, to highlight plans for the future and to listen to your comments.

We have held ten regular Parish Council meetings this year plus one extraordinary meeting to handle urgent business. I would like to welcome our new Parish Clerk, Allison Leigh, to her first APM. Allison joined us at the end of 2016 and is already making a big impact on organising the large amount of business that the Council handles. I am pleased also to introduce Sarah Beynon who volunteered her services and was co-opted during the year, so we now have seven Councillors, with one vacancy remaining. I thank all of them and Lucy Dalby our former Clerk for their support and involvement over the past year.

District Councillor Jane Murphy and County Councillor Patrick Greene have been loyal supporters as always, attending many Parish Council meetings and following up actions on our behalf in their own organisations. Election of new councillors to the County Council will take place on 4th May and Patrick Greene will be standing down - we offer our thanks to him for his 22 years of service to our community.

The most significant event over the past year has, of course, been the planning proposal to build on the Green Gap, its rejection by SODC's Planning Committee and the subsequent dismissal of the Appeal after a 6-day hearing in January. Whatever happens in the future, this was a major victory and a great achievement. The list of people to whom thanks are due is a very long one, including our MP Ed Vaizey, our District and County Councillors and SODC's Planning Committee and their Appeal Team. We received excellent and generous legal guidance and advocacy from our lawyer Stephen Ashworth, his assistant Ralph Kellas. And our barrister at the appeal hearing, Hashi Mohammed.

Most of all, though, the sustained response of East Hagbourne residents through their very large number of well reasoned written comments and sustained engagement through the long appeal process amply showed how much people care about their community.

But in the end, we could not have mounted this defence without the in-depth knowledge, determination, skill and enthusiasm of the Mind The Green Gap Team led by Andy Barmer

and Nick Wright. They deserve our thanks, admiration and respect. We have witnessed a phenomenon, with local people meeting a large developer and facing them on their own terms.

Future planning decisions will be come more influenced by the emerging SODC Local Plan and our own Neighbourhood Plan once it is completed. Crispin Topping, as well as playing a significant role in the Green Gap appeal is Chairman of our Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and will give an update later, so I will not say more here.

Other significant events during the year were the completion of the improved Pavilion car park surface - again, more in a separate report - and the success of Kingsholme Close residents in securing an 'Article 4 Direction', subject to SODC ratification in June, to help protect the character of that area. Our bus service has survived the loss of OCC subsidies, but we need to use it more if it is to have a long term future: and the weekly market bus to Wallingford has been continued on Fridays thanks to financial support from Parish Councils in East Hagbourne and other villages.

I mentioned last year the efforts of Cordelia Gover and our web master Chris Alberry to keep our web site up to date, and that for the future, we are looking at ways to translate the site to a more permanent home with the help of Andy Barmer. While we have been preoccupied with more immediate concerns over the past year, these plans are now starting to move forward.

Through all the high profile activities of the year, we should not forget the ongoing efforts of all the other activities in the Parish - the Village Hall, Shop, Allotments, Neighbourhood Watch, Hagbourne Environment Group and all the other activities where volunteers make our community so special - with apologies to any that I have not specifically mentioned.

I usually conclude my report with a reference to the annual litter blitz - or Great British Spring Clean as we are being encouraged to call it this year - which will be this coming Saturday 29th April. Di Duff and Yen Rickeard will welcome helpers of all ages so please come along to the Village Hall at 10am. The timing is particularly apt following last weekend's revels in the Millennium Wood, which left a vast amount of litter, mostly now cleared up thanks to Crispin Topping. So this is a good point to thank Crispin and all those people in the parish who do their bit to keep things tidy or keep grass mowed as well as Cordelia Gover who leads our activities to improve the network of dog bins and get them emptied regularly.

Don't forget the Fun Run and walk on Monday 1st May - participants and volunteers are welcome here too and proceeds go to good causes including the Village Fund.

Finally, I remind you that all Parish Council meetings are open to the public, and you are always welcome to attend and contribute - you can find the agendas on notice boards or the web site where you will also find minutes of previous meetings.

We do need more volunteers to take the Council and other activities like the Pavilion into the future. The Green Gap campaign has shown what energy and spirit there is within all age groups in the community, so we encourage particularly younger people to come forward and make their mark.

Financial Statement: Allison Leigh, Clerk/RFO

The Parish Council started the year last April with Reserves of £36,900. This was made up of £10,000 Pavilion Car Park, £10,000 New Road Development Fund, £3,000 Neighbourhood Plan and £13,900 in the General Reserve.

The Precept received was £29,720 and a PWLB Loan of £45,000 was received in respect of the Pavilion Car park works.

Grants totaling £14,000 were also received from SODC and Locality to support the Neighbourhood Plan preparation.

Expenditure during the year amounted to £85,800. It was carefully controlled and followed the Budgeted provisions closely.

The year-end saw the Reserves balance standing at some £37,900, which comprised £5,130 Pavilion Car Park, £3,589 New Road Development Fund, £3,076 Neighbourhood Plan and £26,105 in the General Reserve.

Looking ahead to 2017/8 the Precept was increased by approximately 4% but no extra funds were added to any of the Reserves as it was considered that the Funds remaining in those Reserves would adequately cover the anticipated costs arising in the current year

3) Neighbourhood Plan Update: Crispin Topping - Councillor

Crispin Topping first noted the success of the Mind the Green Gap appeal. He indicated it has brought the village together and that it very rare to get a victory of this kind.

He also discussed an update on the Neighbourhood Plan. He indicated that he is in discussion with SODC, who is assisting in making changes to help prepare it for consultation.

There is a public meeting on the 18th of May at which Crispin will summarise the plan and what it is hoped to achieve.

The plan should be ready by the end of May for consultation both with the public and statutory bodies.

Following that, within 6 weeks comments will come back, it will go to the inspector to comment and then goes to vote.

David Rickeard indicated that the character assessment would be finalized during May.

4) Pavilion Report

Our Treasurer, Derek Button, has prepared EHSRC accounts for the year to 31st March 2017. Revenues from the Community Room increased considerably from the previous year as a result of new regular activities and the one-off hiring for the Green Gap Appeal. Revenues from the pitch and changing room declined, because HUFC was able to field only one team in the North Berks League this year.

£750 had been received as a grant from the Parish Council, this being only half of the amount anticipated. The accounts therefore show an operating surplus for 2016-17, although support is still being received from the Parish Council including the regular grass cutting and the clearance of brambles.

We have experienced some problems: An under-floor leak has occurred in the central heating system to the changing rooms, but should not be too difficult to rectify. An allowance has been put against water charges to cover a separate large leak, which is still not fully understood. However, there does not seem to be any on-going leak. Grass cutting has been problematic since the football pitch needs to be cut short and often to make a good playing surface - we are working with the Parish Council to try and improve matters.

We are most appreciative for the generous support of the Village Fund for a grant of £350 to buy a new line marking machine and for a second grant (to be included in the coming year's accounts to purchase a new storage cupboard situated in the kitchen area.

The cupboard is needed to enable the Baby & Toddler Group to move their Friday morning sessions to the Pavilion starting next week. The Toddlers will join the Art Group, Community Choir, Pilates and Table Tennis as regular activities in the Community Room. Over the past year we have also hosted Baby Sensory classes as well as the Green Gap appeal and a number of meetings and private parties.

The new car park surface has now been completed and seeded, so should green-up over the coming months. This has already had an impact on the attractiveness of the facility, so we are confident that we can continue to grow activities in the coming year. The Fete will again be hosted on 10th June and on 5th July there will be a walking football competition organised by SODC. Hagbourne United are working on a series of friendly matches to take place over the summer.

Now that the car park is finished, it is perhaps timely to summarise the capital costs of the whole project. The overall build cost, including the car park was £475,799 of which £208,350 was provided by grant funding with the balance of £267,449 provided by the local community through the Parish Council, including two loans totaling £104,559.

We have a marvellous facility and can concentrate now on making the best use of it for the community benefit. Our cleaner Joanne keeps things tidy and there are some small maintenance and improvement items, which are being addressed, including a work party on Saturday 13th May to smarten up the children's playground.

We would welcome more assistance - the effort at present falls on just a few people. Help with bookings, promotion, or even just emptying the waste bins would be most appreciated.

5) Open Discussion – priorities for the coming year

A few items of interest arose here. One of which is lighting outside the Pavilion, particularly along Great Mead. It was thought that some innovative ideas may be needed here.

David Rickeard touched on the topic of grass cutting and keeping the village tidy.

A concern was raised that planning notices aren't being put up. David Rickeard indicated that the public is able and encouraged to weigh in on any planning application.

The meeting concluded at 8:35pm

Signed.....Dated.....