

WOOTTON PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING held on Monday 13 May 2024

In the Chair: Cllr John Harwood (Chair, Wootton Parish Council)

Electors present: 21

C/Cllrs Tim Sumner and Andy Graham and D/Cllr Genny Early

12/25 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

13/25 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2023 were received and approved.

14/25 Parish Council Report

The Chair of the Parish Council gave a report on behalf of the council Attached as Appendix 1

15/25 RFO Report

The RFO summarised her report attached as Appendix 2

16/25 Report from Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Cllr Bates explained the purpose of the Steering Group and that the aim is have the plan formed within a year. Appendix 3

17/25 County Councillor Report

Cllr Graham reported that it has been a busy year and highlighted:

- Appointed water champion for OCC, e.g. sewerage and pollution and bringing Thames Water to Account. Wettest winter in 150 years and lots of flooding. Remedial action is being taken. Requested that if there is a need for something to be done ALWAYS copy in Cllr Graham and he will ensure a response is received.
- 100 electric busses so air quality in city centre will be improved.
- Roads – potholes are an issues and the county council is re-surfacing roads and not just filling in potholes. £5m has been put into the budget and 100 roads across the county are being resurfaces. Requested photos are taken and potholes reported on Fix y Street.
- S7 bus is using the turning point again and not going into the centre of Woodstock.

A member of the public asked about the bus shelter opposite Judds Garage which had been requested many months ago and asked about progress. Cllr Graham requested that more photos are sent and he will investigate

18/25 District Councillors Report

D-Cllr T Sumner welcomed Genny Early(Green Party) who was recently elected. He highlighted the following points:

- WDC is committed to become carbon neutral by 2030.
- WODC is pushing on the installation of solar panels
- WODC is investigating green energy for leisure centres and pools.

- The number of EV charging points are being increased
- Thames Water
- The Oxfordshire plan is being rolled out .
- Updates are being provided on S106 funding for villages
- Aircraft noise from Oxford Airport is a concern and Cllr Sumner is now on the Consultation Committee

Cllr Sumner concluded by indicating his total support for Wootton and other parish councils.

Cllr Genny Early introduced herself in her first week in role as District councillor. She expressed her thanks for being elected. She previously lived in Woodstock and is now in Stonesfield and encouraged all to get in touch and looks forward to working with the PC.

19/25 Reports from village charities and organisations

- **Wootton Conservation Trust**
- Phil Parker presented his report (**Appendix 4**)
The Meadows were closed for 2 weeks due to the wet weather which has caused a lot of debate and letters had been received by PC asking for an investigation. Phil asked for anyone interested in volunteering to contact him. Questions - walking routes, dog fouling, Rights of Way,
- **Wootton Community and Sports Trust (WCAST) Appendix 5**
- **Wootton Relief in Need - Report and presentation of accounts Annex 6**
- **Wootton Stores – Appendix 7**
- **Wootton Village Hall**
Comedy nights continue to be held and as well as theatre events and there will be an open air performance of Comedy of Errors in July. A new kitchen is being fitted in the summer.
- **Village Hall talks**
Most events are a sell out - started in 2008 and this weeks talk by Peter Radford will be the 134th talk. Talks have raised over £60K over the years. £15K has been raised for Ukraine.

20/25 Any Other Business

A new rector will be starting in late summer. The first rector in 800 years history to be a woman. The new rector is an American lady with 2 children, husband in the navy, presently curate of St Mary Magdalene.

A resident asked about the future of the school building - NPSG are considering this and will report in due course.

A resident asked about the restoration of the well - people are needed to volunteer to tidy up the unkempt areas of the village, and a meeting will be arranged in due course.

The meeting closed at 8.23 pm

Appendix 1

Chair's report to Wootton Annual Parish Meeting – 13 May 2024

I am pleased to submit this report on the work of the Parish Council during the year 2023-24. The Council's associated financial statement is submitted by our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Cathy Fleet.

I can first report that over the year the membership of your parish council has remained stable, which is important for the continuity of our work on behalf of the village. I am grateful to all those who served as councillors during the year: Frances Bates, Marcus Brown, Fiona Mackinlay and John Salter, all of whom stood for re-election and will be with us for this coming year. And I must also say thank you to Mark Eccles-Williams and particularly our vice-chair, Andy Molyneux, both of whom decided not to stand at the recent elections. I am pleased to report that two new councillors have been elected in their place, Pauline Briggs from Lower Dornford and David Knight from Burditch Bank

As I reported last year we continue to face significant challenges. Fortunately we have improved our financial position significantly. We now have replenished our reserves sufficiently to be able to meet the minimum requirement which our auditors expect us to maintain. But we will need to continue to build them up in the next few years so the incoming council can have the confidence that resources will be available to help face the various demands and challenges ahead.

Before discussing these challenges I must record the good news that we now have a qualified parish clerk in post. Mrs Cathy Fleet joined us in the summer of 2023 and we have benefitted from her experience and careful management of our administrative and financial affairs since then. Her contact details are clerkwpc0@gmail.com.

We have seen the implementation of the 20 mph limit throughout the village including the B4027. The level of compliance on the Glympton road however remains dangerously low and given that pedestrians have to walk on the road, the situation at night in winter is particularly hazardous. We are also aware, as it is regularly brought to our attention by residents, that there are some drivers who still drive through other village roads at dangerous speeds. The Council has supported the setting up of the Community SpeedWatch group and will be looking to invest in further measures to encourage better compliance with the speed limit.

The strange saga of the diseased ash trees in between Burditch Bank and the Glympton road has fortunately now been resolved with the help of our local county councillor. The new Council will want to talk to the residents of Burditch Bank about how the uncontrolled growth of potentially dangerous trees can be prevented in future.

Sadly, during the year, we saw the closure of Wootton school after almost 200 years of serving our community. The Council had no powers to defer or prevent the closure which was a decision taken by the Diocesan Academy Trust and the Department for Education in the light of the low numbers of children attending the school and the changing demography of the parish, which means there is no 'pipeline' of children likely to join in the future. The closure was managed as far as possible in a way which protected the education of the children involved.

The Council continues to be involved with the Village Travel Network group and during the year we published some ideas about how local transport links could be improved and be made safer.

During the past year, the Council has considered all the planning applications affecting the village which have been brought to our attention, and where we have felt it important we have submitted our observations and recommendations to WODC. We also submitted a detailed response to the developers of the proposed Botley West Solar Farm during their pre-submission consultation phase. A copy of our submission is on our website.

Finally, during the year we resolved to develop a Local Neighbourhood Plan for the village. When adopted this will form part of the official planning guidance for West Oxfordshire and will need to be taken into account by any development proposals in the area. We have set up a Steering Group made up of representatives from all parts of the village, as well as parish councillors, and held an exhibition in the church on the history and evolution of the village. The next stage will be a survey where everyone in the parish will be able to give their views. The Group is continuing to work and welcomes comments, submissions or ideas from all parts of the parish.

John Harwood

Chair, Wootton Parish Council

Appendix 2

RFO Report for Annual Prish Meeting May 2024

I took over from Chris Hoad as Clerk and RFO for WPC in June last year. Cris had left the finances for the PC in good order, for which I thank her, but none the less it has been a learning curve for me. I have been Clerk/RFO for other parishes for many years, but every parish has its challenges!

WPC has 2 streams of income, the precept and the grass cutting grant. For 23/24 the precept was £16225 and the grass cutting grant was £542.

The budget for 24/25 was set in December 2023 and the precept demand increased by 2% to £16320 and the grasscutting grant remains the same.

The main payments for the year were Clerk's salary, PAYE, Insurance and grounds maintenance. Total expenditure for the year was £10,957, leaving a surplus of £5810 to add to reserves.

The audit for 23/24 is being carried out – thanks again to Phil Parker – and the accounts will be signed off at the June PC meeting after which they will be published on the website.

Cathy Fleet
Parish Clerk & RFO

Appendix 3

Report from the Neighbourhood Plan Steering group

The group held its first meeting on Jan 18th 2024. There are currently 10 members of the group in addition to those from the Parish Council. The make-up of the group will vary as different interests and expertise are needed. The first phase of the process of creating a neighbourhood plans to gather views of those living within the designated area – in our case the parish boundary, and those with commercial or other interests, such as community organisations.

The group are working on a survey which will be circulated in early September. In order to ensure the survey properly reflects the interests and concerns of residents and stakeholders, an exhibition about the 'Evolution of Wootton' was held in the church for 4 weeks. It proved popular and over 120 people visited and many left comments as requested.

The next meeting will be on May 14th and will include an introduction to social engagement and place-making from Clare Richards, of Footwork. Following this, work will start on the questions to be used in the survey.

The Steering Group will have a stall at the Flower Show with the surveys available and a display explaining what can be achieved with the Neighbourhood planning process.

Frances Bates and Fiona Mackinlay.

Appendix 4

WCT report to parish, May 2024

The water meadows are a wonderful resource. We are so lucky to have them. Thanks yet again to the founding trustees for finding the funding, acquiring the land and setting up the Trust to manage it in perpetuity. The Trust's charitable purposes are to preserve and protect wildlife and to advance education and understanding of nature, its value and the need for conservation. The Trustees are mindful of the importance of support from across the village, and that this support is contingent on people being able to use the land. The need to balance the needs of conservation with public access has of course been a source of some lively discussion in recent days. After prolonged wet weather, the Trustees were increasingly concerned about the state of the land, and decided we needed to close the meadows on the north side of the river for two weeks, to give the land a brief rest. We did not take the decision lightly, as we know how important the meadows are to everyone. The debate gave us a valuable opportunity to talk more about what we do and why – and we even gained a new volunteer as a result! We are pleased to report that the ecology of the meadows is thriving. We are very grateful to Sue Helm, an Oxford botanist with the Ashmolean Natural History Society and former County Recorder, who volunteered to survey the flora last summer. To our surprise she identified over 160 different species of plant. We are delighted to be doing more to introduce people – and particularly young people – to the joys of nature. We now run a stall each year at the flower show, combining fun with learning. We organized our first bat walk – and have another one planned for this summer. We are starting a kids club later this month, and are developing a new notice board for the main entrance. The majority of our funding comes from DEFRA or specific project grants for managing the land in environmentally sensitive ways. This pays for works like hedge cutting and topping. We have finally finished a five year programme of fence repairs. This year we were also awarded a grant for laying a living hedge along the Round Top / Dorn Warren Bank boundary. We are able to keep the costs of land management down because of the wonderful support of our village volunteer working parties, and also the Oxford Conservation Volunteers who run 3 or 4 days each year, when their groups come out from Oxford and do an unbelievable amount of hard labour – even when it is raining again! Our other essential workers - the sheep - will be returning in late summer, to help keep the grass down to the required length. In the coming year, we really need start the next cycle of willow pollarding, so are looking for grants for this. Huge thanks to fellow trustees and secretaries, other village volunteers, and all our supporters.

Appendix 5

WCAST report for Annual Parish Meeting

This was the second year of operation for Wootton Community and Sports Trust (WCAST). We are a charitable trust, responsible for the provision and maintenance of the Burditch Hall, the Play Corner and the Playing Field.

We were grateful to receive £900 of precept from the Parish Council this year towards mower fuel. We would be very grateful to receive a similar amount this year if the Parish Council were able to support us again.

WCAST Sports has had a successful 12 months to date, with Wootton Sports FC gaining promotion last year from the Witney & District football league division 3 to division 2. The team have exceeded expectations in the new division, and are pushing for promotion, currently at a very healthy 3rd place.

Volunteers at the bridge bar serve post-match drinks and hot food to both teams (and many of the local kids) after the games. Many visiting teams have expressed their gratitude for such welcoming hospitality.

The local Youth team Stonesfield Wootton Under 16s have also had a fantastic 12 months. Gaining promotion in their inaugural season within the competitive Oxfordshire Youth League, they worked hard and added more success with back to back promotions this year!

The Play Corner has required some repairs and actions following our ROSPA inspections. This year's ROSPA inspection will be in July with the report likely received in September.

At the hall, popular weekly coffee mornings are held on Thursday mornings and are free and open to all. A village book club and a knit and natter club have also formed and use the facilities free of charge. The hall is available for private hire at affordable rates, and bookings have increased this year.

The bridge bar opens to the public every Friday, and we are grateful to all our volunteers for giving up their time to provide this community space for the village.

We have completed the first phase of our planned toilet refurbishment, altering the entrance to the accessible toilet to improve privacy.

Our full kitchen refurbishment has made it easier for us to hold regular community events at the hall, which have been a great opportunity to get the community together, and for us to fundraise. Popular events include pizza and curry nights, games evenings and monthly bingo. Seasonal events such as a Christmas sing-along have also proved popular.

As the football season comes to an end, we will be marking out rounders, badminton and tennis pitches over the next couple of weeks and in June, we will be hosting our first family rounders match of the season. This summer, our free programme of sports activities for

children living in Wootton kicks off on 21st June. Details will be on Wootton on WhatsApp and on the Wootton website shortly.

WCAST started the year with bank and cash balances of £30,724. Income was £30,913. We were grateful to be awarded a £5000 grant from Blenheim Palace to help towards refurbishment and maintenance of the property. Expenditure on running the trust was £15,777 and the costs of equipment, stock and refurbishment of the hall in the year were £31,117. The Trust therefore finished the year with bank and cash balances of £14,743. This includes funds that will be spent in the coming year for the continued maintenance and refurbishment of the facilities.

We are grateful for the increased collaboration this year between all the village organisations, and we look forward to working together on some joint events over the next 12 months. We are extremely grateful for all the support we receive from everyone who attends and helps out at events, to all our amazing volunteers and supporters, and to the community for helping us to ensure that the Burditch Hall and Playing Field are there for people of all ages to enjoy.

Appendix 6

Wootton-Relief-in-Need (WRiN)

Annual Report: May 2023-24 (Simon Heighes, Chair).

Our headlines for the year are once again very positive. The committee has been refreshed with the appointment of two new trustees – one nominated by the PC and one unanimously co-opted. Sadly, though, we have to record the death of our longtime treasurer, Ann Day, and our *ex-officio* trustee, Rev. John Reader – who was with us for much too short a time.

One of our main objectives last year was to begin to modernise the operation of the Charity. After a difficult period with Barclays Bank – with no access to our accounts for nearly eight months – we now have on-line banking and have opened an account with the Unity Trust Bank, which offers the procedures we require to authorise transactions quickly and securely. Our efforts to regain access and control of our investment portfolio have unfortunately been hampered by the decision of the former Clerk not to return the Charity's entire archive of administrative and legal documents after leaving the committee in May 2023.

In last year's report I made the point that in committees with very long-serving members, it is all too easy for *past* practice to become routinely accepted as *best* practice. Our 50th anniversary in September provided the impetus to examine the procedures and workings of the Charity and, with input from four new trustees, we have begun to make changes which we believe will broaden the scope of our work, sharpen its effectiveness and improve the transparency of our operation – just being here tonight and submitting a report to the Parish Council are things which the Charity has been shy of doing for half a century.

We are acutely aware that without the eyes, ears and second sense of a resident vicar, it is more difficult than ever to identify anyone who may be in need and encourage them to make contact. So, more than ever we rely on everyone's help, and I'm pleased to say that recently this has worked very well. But, of course, we hope for continued vigilance and sensitivity, and have now set up a confidential email account – infowrin@gmail.com – which will be listed alongside the rest of the village's contact details, at the back of *Outreach*.

sjh (26.iv.24)

Appendix 7

Wootton Stores

The past year has seen a degree of change for Wootton Stores. After the departure of Rachel Jones as Shop Manager we were incredibly lucky to find a replacement in Michele Glanville. Michele has worked tirelessly to keep the shop running as efficiently as it always did, and to make her own mark as Shop Manager and take the shop forward.

It hasn't been an easy year financially - energy prices saw our electricity bills increase dramatically, and all our supplier costs went up. Despite this, with Michele's drive to keep our costs low while still stocking the same wide range of goods, and with committee members negotiating better deals with electricity providers, we have managed to weather the storm.

A further change was the purchase and installation of a new till and back office system. We needed to do this as the old system was no longer being supported by the software providers and was beginning to show cracks. Again, Michele and the committee worked hard to research and agree on the best new system, to install it and to manage the huge job of migrating everything over from the old system. The shop's volunteers have all been trained on the new till and without exception have accepted the change with good grace and humour. There are still a few teething problems that are being worked on but we are confident we have a much better system that will see us well into the future.

Wootton Stores remains a valuable asset to our village, and to the people who use it. It is a vital hub, not just as a shop but as a place to collect prescriptions, buy tickets for village events, display adverts and posters, collect the village hall key and meet friends in the courtyard.

Of course, the shop would not run without the team of volunteers that turn up every day of the week to keep it open. We are so grateful to them. But we always need more volunteers, and occasionally have had to close the shop when we just can't fill a shift. The benefits of volunteering in the shop go beyond just helping to keep the shop open. I can confirm, being a volunteer myself, that through the shop people make new friends and learn new skills, and I would urge anyone with a passing interest in volunteering to step through the shop door, put on an apron and join us!