

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 29TH APRIL 2019

PRESENT: **Chairman:** Peter Chapman
 Clerk: A Marabese
 Others: Ward Councillor Brown. 7 members of the public.

The Chairman declared the meeting open at 7:45pm.

1. WELCOME

The Chairman thanked all those present for attending the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Mark Liddiard

3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS PARISH MEETING HELD ON 23rd APRIL 2018

As there were only 2 attendees at the previous parish meeting held on 23rd April 2018, of which the Chairman was one, no minutes were taken.

4. REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

Planning – The last year has been a bad year for planning in the village. The Stocken House application was given permission by ‘outside the area bureaucrats’ and it will be interesting to see the detail of the full application when it is submitted, whilst the Orchard Close development is having also been granted permission. The Parish Council has used the issue of ‘sustainability’ several times to no avail. Some developments in the village have seem slow sales of larger homes however, Croudace Homes have sold their houses quickly.

Village hall - The village now has a new village hall and all those involved in its creation should be thanked and it is hoped that it will be well used.

Environment and Leisure – Play equipment will be installed on centenary Field in the coming months, hopefully for the summer holidays and it is hoped that the new football pitch will be ready for the new season.

Highways – The usual problems of speeding and parking (especially around the village shop) continue. The Parish Council via Central Beds Council is in the process of getting CCTV installed to better understand the issues. Maintenance of the vehicle activated signs will become the responsibility of the Parish Council in the near future. These cannot be moved however they can be replaced with newer models.

Finance – The precept was increased this year for the first time in several years. The increase attributed to the parish council was minimal compared to that of the Police, CBC and the Fire Services.

Elections – There will be no election for Parish Councillors in May as less than 10 people have come forward as candidates. We will not have 10 councillors in May therefore we will be looking to co-opt.

Nuisance Youths – Issues of anti-social behaviour continue in the village and the Police are now carrying out door to door enquiries in Brookmead and Brookside as the issues seem to

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have migrated to this area. The Police are actively trying to resolve the situation and are taking it seriously.

5. **WARD COUNCILLORS REPORTS**

Local Plan – The first hearing of the Local Plan is scheduled for 21st May 2019 starting at 10am in the Council chambers at Priory house, Chicksands. Two further weeks in June and one in July have been reserved for further hearing dates.

Highways – The CBC highways team have secured the use of a new machine which repairs defects using the recycled road surface. It is estimated that this process reduces repair time by 60% and saves money. It heats the road surface to 200 degrees to a depth of 30mm. It is then rolled to level it and a thin hot layer is added to complete the process.

Recycling – The Thorn Turn recycling centre has now been in operation for a year. It has achieved a 66% recycling rate and managed to divert 6,330 tonnes (81.6%) of waste from landfill. This site accepts public and trade waste. The new reuse shop on site has registered item to the weight of 75 tonnes that have been reused.

6. **REPORTS FROM OTHER GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS**

a. Wanderbus (report provided to the Clerk)

2018/2019 has been an important year for Wanderbus. The Committee decided in early 2018 to replace our 8 year old bus to avoid future unexpected costs / service interruptions that could occur with older vehicles. Whilst annually we continually try to build reserves for such high capital expenditure, we had to go out to various Bedfordshire and national charities in search of grants to assist with the cost of a replacement bus. We were quoted a figure of £78k for a flat-floor 16 seater bus in the same style as our older bus that was brought into service in 2015.

With grants from local Town & Parish Councils, various charities and trusts supporting Bedfordshire projects, the Bedfordshire Masonic Lodge and an award from the National Lottery Fund, we achieved our target and, most satisfyingly, managed a surplus towards normal operating costs that will support us during 2019 and into 2020, barring any serious unpredicted costs.

We now have 16 volunteer drivers, sufficient to operate our two buses and to cover excursions and private hires that contribute to our revenues.

6th May 2019 will see a new timetable and includes a new Friday afternoon route (W5) starting from outside the new Meppershall Village Hall and going to Biggleswade and the A1 Retail Park and we hope this will be well supported – perhaps after lunch at The Walnut Tree Café.

Having had to move our parking from Meppershall Care Home, we would like to thank the Fosters for providing us with safe and ideal parking at Polehanger Farm.

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Finally, we would thank Meppershall PC who have always been most supportive of Wanderbus.

b. Gnomes (report provided to the Clerk)

The Meppershall Good Neighbour Group was officially formed on 2 December 2013 when we had public liability cover for our volunteers. We are identified locally by the acronym GNOMES (Good Neighbours Offering Meppershall Excellent Services) and currently have 33 volunteers offering various skills and services on request. All our volunteers are DBS cleared and the majority are Dementia Friends. Our telephone is manned Monday to Friday all year by volunteers on a rota basis. We are self-funding, receiving donations from clients, volunteers themselves and village organisations. We do not charge for any services we undertake but do ask clients to assist our car owners with expenses currently at the HM Revenue and Customs authorised level of 45p per mile. We would also ask clients to compensate our volunteers for any unavoidable out of pocket expenses incurred whilst carrying out a task for them. At present we have no plans to approach any organisation for financial support. Our telephone costs are met by a local business which is a very generous gesture, displays community spirit and enables us to keep our costs down. All our committee members subscribe, not only their time, but the costs of phone calls, stationery and the like. Our predominant expenses are public liability insurance and room hire for the compulsory annual general meeting.

In the first year we had 48 calls for assistance from 22 people our initial job being to check a household fire alarm, in the second year we more than doubled our requests to 100 and had a slight increase to 107 calls in 2016. This, however, was not sustained and the calls dropped to 85 in 2017. 2018 has shown an increase to 140 calls. The first quarter of 2019 has seen a job tally of 58. Not all calls require physical action some are to advise, give information or assist other village groups or attend training sessions. Some are even for social events like transport to coffee mornings, village fetes and charity events.

A fair proportion of our work is either visiting people in their homes (288) or driving to appointments (122). In total we have helped some 81 individuals from the village in one form or another and on more than one occasion.

Predominantly, our driving tasks are to the surgeries in Shefford and Stotfold and to the Bedford and Lister hospitals. These are essential services as there is no convenient public transport solution for any of these venues. Other driving tasks has been to:

- A crematorium
- Library to collect books
- Shops to do the weekly household shopping
- Shopping for a specific cat food
- Collecting batteries for hearing aids
- Council offices to collect a Blue Badge
- Transfer a patient from Shefford Health Centre to A&E
- A memory clinic in Biggleswade.
- Taking Evergreens out for afternoon tea

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DIY Tasks have included:

- Setting up the village hall for a wake.
- Fixing leaking hose pipe,
- installing doorbell,
- changing batteries in fire alarms,
- hanging net curtains,
- assisting with wallpaper hanging,
- putting up shelves,
- construction from a flat pack,
- grass cutting and path weeding to name a few.

We do not profess to be able to do everything, sometimes we cannot help because of lack of expertise or training or because we believe they are not a service to assist those in need. An example of the latter is we would not take people to a departure point for their holiday.

Needless to say, we are always on the lookout for volunteers.

c. St Marys Church

Meppershall Church is open every day for visitors, worshippers, and all those who want a quiet moment.

Many people regularly visit the church and the churchyard and ST Mary's is very grateful to the Parish Council for their generous help with on-going care of the churchyard – it is enormously appreciated.

We are always ready to welcome new members or visitors into our congregation on a Sunday (main service at 11am) and of course we offer weddings, baptisms and funerals – and support through these happy and sad life occasions.

We have been welcoming the new residents of Meppershall as they move in with a welcome bag of goodies and an invitation to afternoon tea in the Church. We also take the opportunity when ever offered to have a church presence and provide a stall / tea at village events.

Roni, Keith and his wife Ruth have been leading Morning Worship in our Meppershall school. Each child who starts the school is given a Jesus Bible Story Book by St Mary's which remains theirs and follows them through Key Stage 1 after which it is theirs to keep.

Little ones who are baptised receive Toddler Bibles. We also send cards to our baptism children up until the 5th anniversary of their baptism when we hope they might enjoy going to Junior Church.

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We have services each Sunday at 11am (and at other times as specified). We also have traditional communion service on Wednesday morning, Celtic Morning Prayer with breakfast, Friday Silent together and Tuesday afternoon Rectory Teas – all welcome!

We try to visit anyone who would like a visit from us and there are regular services in our care home and home communions.

The Scarecrow festivals have been very successful and have created loads of buss with people out around the village. The feed into our church Gift day where we have offered community groups the opportunity to have a stall and fundraise for their groups too.

Each Christmas Santa and his team of elves visit each house in Meppershall and deliver a handwritten card. There is also a storytelling performance of A Christmas Carol which has become a Meppershall first Sunday in Advent tradition. Bedtime story with cushions and blankets, mulled wine, hot chocolate and mince pies! Look out for Wind in the Willows this summer! We started a (no charge) living advent calendar with a difference window being lit up each night through Advent.

We have a Junior Church and Easter and Mother's Day crafts though we are finding a dip in numbers. WE have a hugely successful high energy "Sparks" holiday club which runs for a week in the summer holidays and attracts 80-100 children. This requires a huge amount of support form al corners. This year we will be running from the 12th to the 15th August.

We have a very active Facebook page and have a lovely programme of alternative events and services: a regular 2nd Sunday stroll, a Pet Blessing service, churchyard working parties, Christingle and Come and Join in Nativity are all very popular.

Leading on from our holiday club we have started a monthly service for families on a Sunday afternoon which hopes to carry forward some of the holiday club energy and become a regular "Sparky" occasion.

One current priority is the huge challenge of building repairs. Unfortunately, we have been unsuccessful so far in gaining a grain to enable all the work to be done; in the meantime, we will be undertaking emergency repairs.

Responding to the repeated and truthful refrain that the church was very cold we have installed a new boiler and changed the way that the church temperature is monitored and boosted. We do have a large stack of blankets, but these are mostly unused now!

Our overall aim however is to be people growing deeper into God together, known as followers of Jesus, spreading the Good News. "with a heart for the community, at the heart of the community, making a difference in the community".

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7. ISSUE AND QUESTIONS RAISED BY PARISHIONERS

- a. **Stocken House / Inland Homes** – A parishioner stated he felt let down by CBC Councillors as they did not recognise the granting of approval by the Planning Inspector of the Stocken House planning application of 145 homes when considering the Inland Homes / Shefford Road application for 60 homes. The parishioner went on to say that he does not feel as if CBC is spending any money on Meppershall and that CBC Councillors did not back residents. He also asked the Parish Council to plan for the arrival of the FULL / reserves matters planning application for Stocken House.
Cllr Brown responded by saying that the decision on Stocken House was a difficult decision for CBC to deal with as a government inspector has approved the application despite CBC not wanting it. The main issue with Stocken House and Inland Homes is due to timing.
- b. **CBC Planning Dept** – A parishioner asked Cllr Brown if there would be any additional funding allocated for more planning officers. Cllr Brown advised that the team were currently 4 planning officers short as they keep losing them to areas offering better employment packages
- c. **Village Hall** – A parishioner noted that when looking to book the Walnut Tree Café for a village organisations AGM he was surprised to find that a damages deposit of £60 was required and he felt that this seemed excessive. A member of the Meppershall Village Hall Trustees responded by saying that the damages deposit was there to cover potential damage and any additional cleaning required after functions.
- d. **Hoo Road** – A parishioner asked the Parish Council chair to investigate the positioning of the 'SLOW – Children playing' sign on Hoo Road as it seemed to be badly located. He also requested that additional speed restriction measures be considered by the Parish Council on Hoo Road at the point where the newly laid tarmac starts e.g.: bollards and road humps.

8. MEETING CLOSE

The Chairman thanked all those who had attended and closed the meeting at 20:50.

Where no signature exists in this electronic version, a hard copy version is available for inspection from the Parish Clerk.
