

# MEPPERSHALL PARISH

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM ON MONDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2021

**PRESENT:**     **Chairman:**     Peter Chapman  
                  **Clerk:**         A Marabese  
                  **Others:**       5 members of the public.

The Chairman declared the meeting open at 7:30pm.

**1. WELCOME**

The Chairman thanked all those present for attending the meeting.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Ward Cllr Liddiard, Ward Cllr Brown, Parish Cllr Parsons and the Rev. V Goodman.

**3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS PARISH MEETING HELD ON 29<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2019**

No meeting was held in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic lockdown however minutes of the meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019 were reviewed and adopted. The Chairman was asked to sign them as a true record of proceedings.

**4. REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL**

The past year has been a strange year for all. The COVID pandemic and lockdown has caused the Parish Council to meet virtually but this hasn't stopped them working.

Planning – Planning continues to be the biggest issue for the Parish Council. This past year we have worked hard on responding to planning applications and dealing with site and development issues. At the same time we have acquired more knowledge of planning matters and endeavoured to build on our relationships with developers working in the village as well as officers at Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). Members of the council and local organisations participated in the Planning Inspectorate hearing for 40 Shefford Road where the developer has appealed CBC's decision not to grant planning for 103 homes. We await to hear the outcome.

Environment and Leisure – We hope to have taken control of Centenary Field by April 2021 however this has not yet happened due to Croudace Homes dragging their feet and altering parameters of a settlement. We are hopeful that this issue will be resolved soon so that we can make planned improvements and allow our resident to use the facility.

Highways – On a positive note Fildyke Road was resurfaced from the Sugar Loaf ph up to number 84. On the flip side the state of some of our roads and in particular Shefford Road is awful. We have also been blighted repeated by road closures, many due to works required for developments in the village.

Finance – The precept was increased this year minimally by £1.20 per annum for a Band D property.

Nuisance Youths – We had hoped that the issue with nuisance youths and the anti-social behaviour caused by them had gone away however in the last few week issues have resurfaced with damage caused to council property near the village hall. The problem lies

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not just with Meppershall youths but also those from neighbouring villages. We can only hope that parents are aware of their children's behaviour and help to ensure we maintain a village where the property of others is respected.

Neighbourhood Plan – A great deal of work has gone into the Neighbourhood Plan by the Steering Group lead by Cllr M Thomason. This team should be thanked for all their hard work as they have put together a vision for how the village should look in the future.

New Councillors – Mr K Karlake recently resigned from the council and another member would like to stand down. The council is eager to co-opt new councillors especially those with any planning experience.

### 5. **WARD COUNCILLORS REPORTS**

None

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

#### **a. St Marys Church – Report read out by the Clerk**

Thank you for this opportunity to represent St Mary's Church at this meeting for registered electors. This has been a very challenging year for the Church, for me personally, the Churchwardens and the PCC (Parochial Church Council)... because of Covid we have had to learn about being versatile and adaptable!

17th March 2020 - with the first Lockdown fast approaching, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York closed Churches for public worship. On 23rd March the Prime Minister announced that Churches were to close completely with immediate effect.

So on Saturday 21st March we began our "Lockdown" pattern of Online Services.

9am and 9pm Morning Prayer using 24-7's Lectio 365 App

9pm Night Prayer / Compline from Daily Prayer App, the Church of England

And 10.30 am Online Morning Worship on a Sunday - (Service Sheets for this service are delivered to those in the parish without computer access) - Listen in Worship: The Sermon and The Hymn of the Day - was made available on a local phone number - and this podcast is uploaded on 9 platforms including Spotify and Apple.

A weekly Hymn of the Day - Audio has been sung /and video prepared for us by James and Miriam Read - (with the occasional help of others).

When allowed, the Church began opening for Private Prayer one day per week on Wednesday 17th June. On 2nd August 2020 St Mary's opened again additionally on alternate Sundays for 9am Holy Communion - in an interim service pattern.

A Zoom Cafe has been held weekly in Meppershall after the online Sunday Service.

Rectory Teas has continued to make fortnightly contact with its regulars plus a few others - and through the kind and thoughtful ministry of Ruth and Keith Callard has delivered

# MEPPERSHALL PARISH

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gifts ranging from puzzle books and newsletters to Chicken Stew and Apple Crumble! Rectory Teas held some Walnut Cafe meetings in the Autumn when that was allowed.

Prayer Ministry has remained available in the church via a confidential Prayer Chain.

We have continued to hold funerals at the graveside, at the crematorium and in church when allowed, and managed to fit one wedding into last summer!

We have also continued to provide Morning Worship/assemblies in our school using Loom and Google Teams.

Sadly we were unable to hold our Sparks Holiday Club last year. However the Living Advent Calendar still lit up our windows at Christmas, Santa still travelled around the Village, and Carols by Candle light in Church was replaced by "Meppershall Sings Carols" on Facebook and YouTube - my thanks to all those brave villagers who led our singing!

Additionally our church bells tolled for the funeral of Captain Tom and also more recently, at the announcement of the death, and for the funeral, of HRH Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh.

We currently continue to hold services in Church and on line - and to try to respond quickly and imaginatively to the ever changing demands of this time.

My thanks to all who have continued to support the Church, and have offered their many and various gifts and talents to continue to keep Church alive and well - especially to the cleaners without whom we could not have managed. I am conscious too, that there are many who have not been able to fulfil their usual roles in these extraordinary times.

We have also successfully undertaken emergency repairs to the Church building and the Church wall. However, a current priority is the huge challenge of remaining building repairs to the sum of around £450,000

Our overall aim continues to be - that we should 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".

My thanks to all who share this vision and work hard to make it a reality.  
Revd Veronica (Roni) Goodman - Rector of Meppershall and Shefford.

### **b. Meppershall Messenger – Report presented by Mr J Thompson – Treasurer**

#### **Summary**

Our village magazine has continued to publish a monthly edition throughout lockdown – 10 issues per year with a two-month edition in the summer and at Christmas. Linking with other organisations in the village and the wider district, The Meppershall Messenger has connected its readers to a range of information relevant to the lockdown as well as interesting, informative, encouraging and enjoyable content from across the community.

# MEPPERSHALL PARISH

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM ON MONDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2021

Since May 2020 until April 2021, The Meppershall Messenger has produced 10 Issue of the magazine averaging 30 pages of content across Volume 36. Meppershall can be proud of the contribution made by the whole team at the Meppershall Messenger and by its contributors, advertisers and supporters – ensuring the continuity of this important piece of village life through a period of unique challenges.

### Contributions and Editorial Policy

The magazine welcomes contributions, ideas, information and letters – which can be submitted or discussed with the editors via email: [mepp.messenger@gmail.com](mailto:mepp.messenger@gmail.com). It is founded on relevant, interesting content from the community and the editors have published every contribution submitted in the past year. Achieving a strong stream of articles, comments and opinion from people right across village life is the essence of the magazine and the editors remain committed to publish the full diversity of material submitted to them. Anyone can contribute. The editors additionally adjust the content of the magazine for quality, accuracy and formatting requirements.

Regular contributors this year have included Meppershall Parish Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Meppershall Good Neighbours (GNOMES), The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Meppershall Social Club, Meppershall Players, Paul Savuto – Personal Finance Pages, Wanderbus, Meppershall Book Club, Meppershall Craft Club, Enid Pamment – Shefford Leisure Group, Zoe Cox – Allotments, Macmillan Cancer Support – Meppershall Village Support Group, Campton Gardening Club and many more. Individual articles on the local environment (thanks especially to Andrew Foster and Polehanger Farm), as well as village history information and creative pieces from several other writers, have been greatly appreciated.

### Distribution and Reach of the Magazine

Each Meppershall Messenger edition is posted through every letterbox in the village in normal circumstances. This has been the case since the launch of the magazine in 1985. During lockdown and the requirement for social distancing, the safety of the volunteers supporting the magazine has been protected by suspending the usual physical collation and binding of the printed issues and suspending house-to-house deliveries. Instead, a limited number of copies have been made available in the village shop thanks to a shorter production run printed and collated by Treasurer, John Thompson, single-handedly. Additionally, more time and effort has been spend on creating an online PDF version of the magazine – providing the entire issue, with advertising, in an easy-to-access file available on the village website, [Meppershall.org](http://Meppershall.org). The Magazine committee would like to extend our grateful thanks to The Parish Clerk, Alex, who has kindly uploaded the online version of the magazine to the village website each month. During lockdown, the custom print run provides a reach to around 50 households. The social media link to the online PDF format of the magazine achieves an average of 203 downloads each month, peaking at 403 in the autumn of 2020. Additionally, the magazine is viewed directly from the [Meppershall.org](http://Meppershall.org) website. The team therefore believe that, although lockdown has compromised the reach of the magazine to some degree, a robust ongoing circulation – digitally and in printed form – has been maintained. We will continue to learn about, and optimise, the digital distribution

# MEPPERSHALL PARISH

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM ON MONDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2021

channels for the magazine while returning to a printed circulation to every household in the village in due course.

### Social Media

The Meppershall Messenger page on Facebook -

[www.facebook.com/themeppershallmessenger](https://www.facebook.com/themeppershallmessenger) - currently has 172 followers. This page is used primarily to share the link to the current issue of the magazine. In addition, it shares other posts and information on an occasional basis to maintain and build its followership. It is able to share its posts to the 'Meppershall Noticeboard' on Facebook which has a greater and wider reach to the village as a whole. There is significant potential to strengthen the content and reach of the Meppershall Messenger Facebook page in the future and to consider the use of other social media channels – this will require a commitment of additional time from a volunteer to build the right content strategies and create and share the right posts on a regular basis (new team members will be very welcome). The magazine does not use any 'paid' (sponsored) distribution on Facebook – its reach is entirely 'organic'.

### Finances and Advertising

The Meppershall Messenger is a not-for-profit publication. Its income covers its production costs – with the main costs relating to paper and printing. Those working on the magazine in any capacity are entirely volunteers. Income is derived from advertising, considering its strong value in reaching every household in the village with relevant and engaging local news, opinions and information. Additional income has been received from Meppershall Parish Council in the form of grants and a grant was also recently received from Central Bedfordshire Council.

In the past year, printing and paper costs were greatly reduced and the team recognised the need to maintain a strong partnership with advertisers through the 'uncharted waters' of lockdown – which has been a period of great challenge to local businesses as well as to the village magazine itself. In recognition of some very long term partnerships and loyal support from the local businesses featured in the magazine, the team decided to maintain advertising on a free-of-charge basis for the current year. The magazine has sufficient funds to support this until April 2022. We thank all the advertisers for their support and collaboration and we look forward to a return to normal arrangements for everyone by this time next year.

Of course the base of advertisers changes over time. The team are looking for new advertisers for the coming year and are open to proposals and ideas for advertising and sponsorship opportunities.

### The Team and Contact Information

The Meppershall Messenger can be reached via email: [mepp.messenger@gmail.com](mailto:mepp.messenger@gmail.com) – we welcome any ideas, comments, articles, information and we love to hear from anyone wishing to be involved in any way – whether it's a one-off letter to the magazine or an offer to join the team and volunteer to bring new skills and ideas.

# MEPPERSHALL PARISH

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM ON MONDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2021

Co-Editors James Read and Mick Ridley share the role of editing and finalising each issue of the magazine and managing the ongoing stream of content. Contact them using the email address above. John Thompson is the Treasurer of the magazine. Andrew Paine is Advertising Manager. Colette House is Distribution Manager and also serves as proof-reader, while Enid Pamment is Production Coordinator. We say a big thank you to this core team who have adapted and committed to maintain a regular issue as normal despite lockdown challenges.

A wider team of volunteers ('The Committee') have been less active in the work of the magazine in the past year than would normally be the case, owing to the suspension of the printed edition. However their support and commitment is greatly appreciated and is fundamental to the ongoing success of our much loved village magazine.

### **7. ISSUE AND QUESTIONS RAISED BY PARISHIONERS**

- a. Dog Fouling** – Meeting participants discussed the issue of dog fouling in the village and potential ways to encourage dog owners to 'poop and scoop'

### **8. MEETING CLOSE**

The Chairman thanked all those who had attended and closed the meeting at 20:05.

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

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