

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 24TH APRIL 2023

PRESENT: Chairman: J Thompson
Clerk: A Marabese
Others: 13 members of the public.

The Chairman declared the meeting open at 7:00pm.

1. WELCOME

The Chairman thanked all those present for attending the meeting and reminded attendees that this was not a Parish Council meeting but a meeting of registered electors (including councillors who are registered electors). The purpose of the meetings is to enable the registered electors to discuss parish affairs and to pass resolutions thereon. This meeting is also an opportunity for the Parish Council (and higher tiers of local government) and community group leaders to explain their activities over the last year. Anyone may attend but only registered electors in the parish may speak and vote. Any registered elector may ask questions of the Council. These will usually be answered by the Chairman or by the Parish Clerk or a designated Councillor. An elector may also make suggestions and comment on parish issues and propose resolutions. Resolutions relating to allotments are legally binding but all others are persuasive only, but will be considered by the Parish Council at their subsequent meetings.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Parish Councillors Addy and Seaman, Meppershall Pre-School Mr J Read - Editor of the Messenger, Mr G Jones, Mr G Cordes and Mr G Walker – Trustees of Meppershall Village Hall, and Rev. Roni Goodman.

3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS PARISH MEETING HELD ON 26TH APRIL 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th April 2022 were reviewed.

Proposed Mr. M Morgan / Seconded Cllr. P Chapman. Resolved to approved and adopt the minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on 25th April 2022. Carried.

The Chairman was asked to sign them as a true record of proceedings.

4. REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL – Cllr John Thompson

As my second year as Chairman of Meppershall Parish Council comes to an end, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my predecessor Cllr. Peter Chapman for his many years of service to Meppershall Parish Council. Peter has stood down from our Parish Council after 32 years of service. And during that time he served as our Chairman on a number of occasions. My thanks and those of the village to Peter for his service.

During the last 12 months the Parish Council has finally saw COVID-19 restrictions come to an end and Parish Council meetings have once again returned to face-to-face meetings here in Meppershall Village Hall each moth throughout the year (details on the Parish website). Council has continued to work for the Parishioners of Meppershall, as follows:

Planning – Planning continues to present issues for the Parish Council. This past year we have worked hard on responding to planning applications and dealing with current sites and development issues. At the same time, we have furthered our understanding of planning matters and endeavoured to build on our relationships with developers working in the

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village as well as officers at Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). Sadly well established Planning Officers at CBC have moved on and CBC are recruiting replacements in what is a very busy department for them at the moment.

With the delivery of the Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire Council, Meppershall Parish Council has greater knowledge of how best to appropriately respond to planning applications and ensure we better monitor current developers' compliance with those requirements contained in The Plan.

Our own Neighbourhood Plan progresses with our intention this year to hold the statutory referendum that will result in adoption of our Neighbourhood Plan. This will give us strong arguments to use against future planning applications, particularly those from speculative builders looking to bring large-scale developments to our village.

Members of the Council and local organisations are preparing for an appeal against CBC's refusal for Planning at 100 High Street. Whilst the number of houses proposed for this development has been greatly reduced (24), Council still believe that there are good grounds to object to further development in the village. We also wait to understand how the developer will progress their application for planning permission at 7 Shefford Road. The Development at 32 Shefford Road nears completion – this being the only development stipulated in CBC's Local Plan. The Development at 59 Shefford Road (Davidson's) progresses at pace and Council are delighted to welcome new parishioners to the village who have moved into the Davidson's development in the past 12 months.

The Parish Council has engaged with current developers working in Meppershall in order to facilitate positive outcomes for the village. Negotiations with Davidson Homes have progressed well and the Council hopes to sign an agreement later this year which will see the ownership of circa 5 acres of green space handed over to the Council to manage in perpetuity for the village, along with a fully specified children's play area in the North Eastern part of the open space.

Your Council was successful last year in objecting to a planning application at The Pigling (Off Shefford Road) which was called into Planning Committee. However, the developer has appealed against the decision and further work is being done to ensure the development receives the appropriate planning permission going forward.

Procedures, Consultations & Legal - During the year we had two councillor resignations and I would like to take the opportunity to thank Peter Crossley and Peter Chapman again for all their efforts whilst serving as Councillors. At the same time we have co-opted one new Councillor Tony Seaman and at present have two vacancies. My congratulations to all eight Councillors who have stood for our now uncontested local election and one less ballot paper for parishioners to fill out next Thursday on Election Day – 4th May 2023. A reminder that you must have approved photo identification to vote at this year's elections.

During the past twelve months your Clerk has worked tirelessly to ensure that current procedural and process documentation has been developed and reviewed by Council and with the help of Cllr Lucy Standbridge this has culminated in an updated Parish Council

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Website. I am grateful to the Clerk and Councillor Standbridge for their efforts with Social Media to promote responsible dog ownership and picking up dog excrement. You can see the many supportive posters on our Facebook page and on our website at - www.meppershall-pc.gov.uk.

Finance – The precept was increased for the financial year starting in April 2023 minimally by £1.88 which has resulted in a contribution of £64.43 per annum from a Band D property.

The Council supported the purchase and donation of a variety of items for the Village Hall and made grant donations to The Meppershall Messenger, The Meppershall Village Fair Committee.

Environment and Leisure – In March this year, the Parish Council were delighted to see the removal and the opening for use by parishioners of Centenary Field. A huge thank you to all who turned out to help remove the Heras fencing. The Sports Pitch will be subject to further remedial works this year, and so will remain closed until that work is completed later in the year.

Your Council were delighted to see the installation of Adult Gym equipment on Centenary Field at the top end of the field with a spectacular view over Bedfordshire for those using the equipment, or walking at that end of the field. In addition, a track has been completed around the Sports field to enable freer movement on the field, particularly in poor weather. Council plan to extend the children's play equipment provision at Old Road Meadow and create an improved football facility adjacent to it. Old Road Meadow Nature Reserve will be subject to improvements, including works to improve the Orchard and create wild flower areas. All this along with the planting of trees to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee year on both Centenary Field and Old Road Meadow.

I'm sure you will have noticed the positive impact Mrs. Viv Thorne, our Community and Environment Officer has already made around the village since joining Council last year. Viv is keen to hear from anyone who thinks they can help support her activities around the village and in particular in the street in which they live going forward. Thank you Viv.

Highways – We have seen the arrival of a new village gateways at the entrance to the village on Shillington Road and Shefford Road. But we all continue to suffer from the state of our highways, in particular Shefford Road is awful, but we have been assured by CBC that Shefford Road will receive the same treatment as Fildyke Road once major site developments on Shefford Road have been completed. We have also been blighted repeatedly by road closures, many due to works required for developments in the village.

The Parish Council was successful in obtaining a substantial grant from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and after months of discussion and delays initial works have taken place to spend this welcomed grant. CBC have still a way to go to complete the works which we hope will be done by the summer. We submitted two rural match funding applications to further enhance the works at the Shefford Road entrance to the village and

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Speed reduction works were completed at the end of last year and the remainder of works will be tied into the PCC Grant funding work already in progress by CBC.

Anti-social Behaviour – Your Council have been working with Bedfordshire Police and its neighbouring Councils to strengthen our voice in directing the focus of Police actions in our Parish. For the next three months we will see increased Police activities in support of our priority ASB with visible Police presence. We will look to further engage with our neighbouring Parish Councils to ensure the policing priorities remain relevant for Meppershall, as best we can.

Neighbourhood Plan – A great deal of work has gone into the Neighbourhood Plan by the Steering Group lead by The Clerk and Mr Andrew Pain. 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.

Environment and Leisure - I'm delighted to report that our allotments have seen an upsurge in requests for use of various sizes of plots. A backbone of regular plot holders have been joined by a number of new to Meppershall allotment plot holders. Works are scheduled to improve facilities at the allotment site this year.

On the boundary between the back of the new houses on Poppy Gardens and Centenary Field you may have noticed some remedial works have been carried out to clear the copse and increase the likelihood of the 5 Oak Trees currently established there from further developing along with a variety of other tree species.

Our Spring Litter campaign was heavily supported despite the inclement weather and we hope to encourage parishioners to "Adopt a Street" during this year to further improve the aesthetics of the village.

Dog fouling remains a high concern for parishioners. Our Dog Fouling campaign has been widely welcomed in the village and we will continue to promote positive dog owning and responsible dog handling with everyone picking up after their dogs, bagging it and putting it in the bins provided. There are more dog bins to come and be installed around the village. In addition to this during the summer period, we will be introducing a "Don't Bark" campaign to reduce the harm done to dogs being left in the open, unsupervised, who bark to get attention or indicate their fear of being left alone.

The Future – The Parish Council has an ambitious list of improvements planned to Parish Council owned green spaces over the coming 12 months in addition to the 'normal' work of the Council. If anyone would like to become more involved with some of the Councils work as a volunteer please do contact us as you will be warmly welcomed.

5. WARD COUNCILLORS' REPORTS

None

6. REPORTS FROM OTHER GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

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a. Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) – Mr John English

INTRODUCTION

Good evening and thank you for giving CPRE the opportunity to address you this evening. My name is John English, and I am a Trustee and a Planning Volunteer with the role of leading the Central Bedfordshire Planning Team.

CPRE Bedfordshire have a team of 10 planning volunteers covering the County of which six are deployed in Central Bedfordshire.

We are supported by two part-time staff located in our Bedford Office, Lois Director of CPRE Bedfordshire and Shelley our Digital Marketing Officer.

We are an independent charity but affiliated with the nation charity, CPRE. This combination of local knowledge and national influence makes us very effective.

Our mission is to enhance, promote and protect the Bedfordshire countryside, and the ability of local communities to enjoy and value the natural world. To achieve our mission, we work with a range of organisations and communities in Bedfordshire.

OUR ROLE

CPRE Bedfordshire aims to empower and work in partnership with communities to help shape their neighbourhoods wherever we can. We work with local parishes and community groups to offer advice and guidance on a wide range of planning issues. We are not a substitute for Local Action Groups, instead we support residents with setting up and running their own campaigns and groups in their own name for or against a planning applications. On occasions we embed ourselves within a LAG at the invitation of residents ie; Stondon, Shefford, Flitwick Campaigns to guide them through the process as well as providing them with material and templates to get them underway quickly.

We continue to respond to consultations on big infrastructure projects such as East West Rail and London Luton Airport expansion.

We provide clear, understandable information in our targeted briefing papers to parish and town councils on major projects and make the communities affected by these projects aware of the implications and how they can respond.

Our experienced team provide guidance on campaigning and engagement and help raise awareness of campaigns through a range of marketing channels.

Our planning team is made up of volunteers who have a broad knowledge of local issues and planning. In 2022 we dedicated over 3,000 hours to supporting local communities including Meppershall. In 2022/23 we worked on several planning applications in the parish and provided support when requested and we look forward to working alongside the PC at the forthcoming Appeal Hearing.

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We know that the countryside and urban greenspaces are important for people's well-being, especially in the current situation, and loss of these can have a detrimental impact on communities and individuals.

Windfall developments place pressure on local infrastructure and services and change the culture of rural communities. With our support, the local community can work to maintain these precious aspects of rural life that benefit all.

Your recent grant will support our team of planning volunteers to continue working with communities such as Meppershall to ensure that the community and parish council are aware of any planning issues and have good advice and guidance on how best to respond to these. With continued pressure on our countryside, we want to:

- Develop and support our Planning Team (all volunteers) so we can take on more work and broaden our skills base.
- Develop a panel of experts to advise on areas such as biodiversity, water, renewable energy, farming, and food security. For the latter we have now on boarded Carmel Edwards as a Trustee to support this subject matter.
- We are monitoring the Local Plan to ensure it is adhered to. We will also be making our voice heard during the Local Plan Review which is now in progress and will provide advice to parishes and the community on how to respond to the review at the planned milestones.
- continue to campaign against developments on the Green Belt and AONB such as Greenwoods which impacts Barton, Gravenhurst, and Shillington.
- continue to offer workshops on planning, and other topics such as developing and maintaining wildflower meadows. We had a great turnout at our last planning workshop, over 50 participants from PC's and Local Action Groups.

We do not make a charge for our planning advice and guidance but as a charity, we are dependent on individual support and other sources of income such as grants to fund our work.

As a campaigning group we do not always fit comfortably in the criteria set by some grant making organisations, so fundraising is a challenge. Like all charities our income has also been affected by the pandemic but at the same time our workload has increased as developers have taken advantage of the situation.

In addition, communities now appreciate the value of the countryside on their doorstep and want to protect it now, more than ever before.

We have worked in your community recently and will continue to offer our support when you need it.

Thank you one again for your financial support.

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b. Meppershall Village Hall – Mr D Birch – Trustee

The Village Hall continues to be well utilised for both regular hiring and one-off events and particular thanks are due to Marie Melton for her work as Bookings Manager and Graham Walker and John Thompson for the hours they've spent looking after the building.

It was disappointing that the Meppershall Tearoom decided to close at Christmas but unfortunately it simply didn't get the number of customers it needed to operate sustainably. As this has been a recurring problem the Trustees are not currently looking for another operator.

The Changing Rooms have been re-scoped in order to offer alternative uses for the facilities. The changes to the changing rooms do not affect their availability or use as sports changing rooms in the future.

Meppershall Village Hall is a non-profit organisation run by voluntary Trustees, with no reliance on any annual grants or Meppershall Parish Council Precept support. Energy price rises over the last 12 months have virtually tripled the utility costs and has unfortunately meant that hire charges have had to be increased. The Trustees have worked hard to minimise the increase and are grateful for the continued support of event hirers for birthdays, christenings, weddings and a wide variety of celebrations alongside regular hirers such as the Fitness & Drama Activities run by individuals and groups, Meppershall Social Club, Meppershall Pre-School and since September 2022 Regina Caeli Home Schooling which have helped to provide hiring income to cover the operating costs.

The Trustees are very mindful that the MVH is a Village Facility, enhanced now that the adjacent Playing Fields and Sports Pitches as well as Gym Equipment and Children's Play Areas are in full use. It has been a long and satisfying path to get to this point over nigh on ten years since the new facilities project started. Well worth it.

However, MVH needs to be more of a self-help organisation if the hiring costs are to be kept low but a high quality building and service provided. The Trustees are therefore asking for help from local residents who have skills that can be provided on either a free or low cost basis e.g. specifically building and grounds maintenance, plumbing and internal painting. There is also scope for appointment as a Trustee, contact info below.

The next AGM will be on Tuesday 13th June 2023 at 1900.

If you have any questions or concerns or would like any additional information about the running of Meppershall Village Hall, the trustees can be contacted on trustees@meppershallvillagehall.co.uk. We'd also welcome any constructive contributions and help to assist in the running of the hall.

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c. Meppershall Messenger – Mr J Thompson – Treasurer

Summary - Our village magazine continued to publish a monthly edition and in an online format throughout the previous 12 months. Volume 38 of the magazine spanned the period from April 2022 to March 2023 – 10 issues including a two- month edition in the summer and at Christmas. The magazine typically comprises 32 or 36 pages, plus advertising pages.

The Meppershall Messenger has linked with other organisations in the village and the wider district to connect readers to a range of interesting, informative, encouraging and enjoyable content from across the community. 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.

In July 2022, we saw the departure from the editorial duo of Mick Ridley after 4 + years alongside James Read. We wish Mick the very best in his new work role and our heartfelt thanks for all his support during the time he spent editing our magazine.

Contributions and Editorial Policy - The magazine welcomes contributions, ideas, information and letters – which can be submitted or discussed with the editor via email: 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 editor additionally adjust the content of the magazine for quality, accuracy and formatting requirements.

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, Andrew Pain, Paul Savuto – Personal Finance Pages, Wanderbus, Meppershall Craft Club, Macmillan Cancer Support – HATS Drama Group, Gardening by Donna Cameron, Central Bedfordshire Council Davidsons Homes, and many more.

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. Additionally, we have maintained production of an online PDF version of the magazine – providing the entire issue, with advertising, in an easy-to-access file available on the village website (<https://meppershall-pc.gov.uk/the-meppershall-messenger/>). The Magazine committee would again like to extend our sincere thanks to The Parish Clerk, Alex, who has kindly uploaded the online version of the magazine to the village website each month and who maintains a strong connection between Meppershall Parish Council business and correspondence and the village magazine.

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The social media link to the online PDF format of the magazine achieved an average of 164 downloads each month for Volume 38 (April 2022-March 2023). Additionally, the magazine is viewed directly from the Meppershall.org website. The team therefore believe that the online readership is significant and that this is a significant and growing channel for connecting the magazine to its audience. In time, it will be important to consider improvements to the PDF format.

Social Media - The Meppershall Messenger page on Facebook - www.facebook.com/themeppershallmessenger - currently has 228 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.

Advertisers being invoiced for their space in the magazine, but still at the 2019-2020 cost levels. We thank all the advertisers for their support and collaboration.

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.

Parish Council Minutes - The Editor is grateful to the Chair and Clerk of Meppershall Parish Council for the renewed quality and timeliness of MPC minutes for publication in the village magazine. They continue to come in a consistent format and are clear and comprehensive. Minutes from each Parish Council meeting are approved in the subsequent monthly meeting (one month later) and released for publication in the village magazine in the following month (two months after the original meeting). The minutes are available sooner via other channels.

The Team and Contact Information - The Meppershall Messenger can be reached via email: 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 –

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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.

The Editor James Read finalises each issue of the magazine and managing the ongoing stream of content. Contact him using the email address above. John Thompson is the Treasurer of the magazine. Andrew Pain is Advertising Manager and Distribution Manager. We thank Colette House for her long service as volunteer and for her ongoing proof-reading.

A wider team of volunteers ('The Committee'), their support and commitment continues to be crucial to the ongoing success of our much loved village magazine, as we deliver to an increasing number of residents across the village, and we thank them very much on behalf of the whole village. New street-level distributors, particularly for the newly constructed parts of the village, are increasingly important and we continue to appeal strongly for new volunteers to step up and help in the year to come.

The Meppershall Messenger A.G.M. will take place on Saturday 24th June 2023 at 10am in Meppershall Village Hall. All welcome.

d. Wanderbus – Report read by Mr J Thompson

Fancy a trip to Cambridge? Or how about St Albans on market day? Or a walk along the river in St Neots? All these destinations are available on your local Community Bus service – Wanderbus.

Did you know that Wanderbus is a regular bus service open to all – whatever your age, just like any other bus service. Yes, we accept Concessionary Travel Passes for those of a certain age, but we also can accept cash fares for the younger age group to travel with us. We operate fixed weekday services to various destinations and you will find our timetables in The Messenger each month or check out our website – www.wanderbus.org.uk.

During the months April through November, usually on the 4th Thursday of the month, we also offer day excursion trips to various Houses and Gardens or markets across Beds, Bucks, Herts and Cambs. These trips are also open to everyone. Again, check our website or The Meppershall Messenger.

Come try us out! You will be pleasantly surprised by the social and friendly atmosphere on the bus and we are sure you will make new friends with the regular passengers. You only have to wave to the driver and they will stop for you anywhere along Shefford Road / High Street / Rectory Road.

As a Community Bus, we are operated fully by volunteers and rely on passenger numbers to fund our operation from Council fare re-imbursement. Wanderbus has been running since 1989 and it was in 2015 that we bought a second bus as demand for our services was increasing and the Committee wanted to add new routes.

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A new timetable commenced on the 5th March 2023 with revised routes and times on some routes.

We will be replacing our older bus at the autumn of this year, so we really need the support of more of our village residents to use the bus and to ensure we can maintain our services.

We hope to see some new faces on board in the near future! Thanks for your support.

e. Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan – Mr A Pain – Chairman

f. Mr Blake Stevenson – Candidate in Ward Councillor elections in May 2023.

If elected he intends to be part of the community and involved with the Parish Council and residents' issues.

7. ISSUE AND QUESTIONS RAISED BY PARISHIONERS

a. Signage – Will village signs include instructions that dogs must not enter play areas and that they must be on a lead when on Parish lands? *The Clerk – Yes.*

b. Bus Routes – Is there any talk of a Wanderbus route from Meppershall to Arlesey station? *Mr Thompson, not at present but this could be brought to the attention of the Wanderbus leadership team.*

8. MEETING CLOSE

The Chairman thanked all those who had attended and closed the meeting at 20:15.

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