

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

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

The Chairman declared the meeting open at 7:08pm.

1. WELCOME

The Chairman apologised for the slight delay in start time and welcomed all for their attendance at the meeting. He explained that the parish meeting is not a parish council meeting but a meeting of parish electors. We have various representatives of organisations connected to the village present including Mr John English of CPRE who this year assisted Meppershall with hedgerow planting and hedge laying. Representatives also from organisations who the parish council has supported financially.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr James Read of The Messenger, Graham Marshall and Clive Lester of Wanderbus and Councillor Romeo Zavacky.

3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS PARISH MEETING HELD ON 29th April 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th April 2024 were reviewed.

Proposed A Pain / Seconded Mr J Thompson. Resolved to approve and adopt the minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on 29th April 2024. 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 Parsons

During the last year it has again been my honour to serve as Chairman of Meppershall Parish Council. I would like to begin my report to you by thanking my fellow Councillors, some of whom are long standing and some very welcome new faces, who have continued their efforts for the benefit of the village and its inhabitants.

The Council held 10 meetings during the year, here at the Village Hall. As always, the information relating to those meetings is available on the Parish Council website. The Council have been pleased to have regular attendees from the public and will always welcome anyone with the interests of the village at heart to our meetings.

The Council have continued to work on your behalf, as follows

Planning - This continues to be a significant task. As you are aware, the Parish Council is not the Planning Authority but is a Statutory Consultee and as such we continue to try to provide local views and advice to Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). Sadly, our advice is not always heeded and the pressure for new sites from developers is relentless. The Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire Council is in place and is proving useful in formulating our responses to planning applications, although changes to Government policy regarding planning and building and the issue of a new National Planning Policy Framework has the potential to impact significantly on our area. As you may well know, CBC Officers have been working on the next version of the Local Plan for the last year and will be required to give due regard to

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

the new realities. We would like to encourage everybody to join us in responding to consultations whenever they occur.

Our own Neighbourhood Plan needed additional input in response to changes in National Guidance and unfortunately due to the time that has elapsed since the initial Village Survey provided the basis for the original Plan, it was deemed necessary to update the information. If nothing else, we have a lot of new parishioners whose views would not have been included. To this end, an enormous amount of work has been done to prepare a new Village Questionnaire. Special thanks are due to Mr Andrew Pain and the Clerk to the Council. The questionnaire consultation period is open until May 18th and the Council would like to encourage as many responses as possible. In due course we shall seek approval of the Neighbourhood Plan by referendum of parish electors.

Following on from planning matters reported last year, the development at 59 Shefford Road, Stocking Drive, has been completed, at least as far as the building process is concerned. There are however outstanding issues connected to landscaping and the open space which the Council are still hoping to adopt for the benefit of all residents. The Council would like to take this opportunity to welcome all our new residents, wherever they have chosen to make their new home. With the completion of these developments, we are looking forward to CBC undertaking their promised repairs to Shefford Road. Keeping up the pressure has taken up an inordinate amount of time by the Clerk but at least we now have a proposal to repair the road from the roundabout up the hill and to the entrance to Stocking Drive.

Almost unbelievably, the application relating to 7 Shefford Road has not yet been determined. Through the year we have been consulted on several individual applications, but we have had a temporary respite from large scale proposals. We do not expect that to continue in view of the changes of policy at a national level and the new Local Plan. At this point may I remind parishioners that they can object (or support) applications in their own right and that by doing so they can add real weight to the responses of the Council.

Procedures, Consultations and Legal - I am pleased to report that the Council continues to have a full complement of Councillors after successfully recruiting among residents. The Council is a mix of long standing and newer parishioners, which is as it should be. In the way of things, we shall undoubtedly need new faces in the future, so if anyone has an interest in helping to run our village, please watch out for requests for assistance.

Our Clerk has continued to work tirelessly on behalf of the village, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank her on your behalf. Our councillors have also worked hard, some efforts have been successful, and others are sadly best described as work in progress.

Finance - When considering the costs of providing services to the village, it was felt necessary to request an increase in the Precept for the year 2025-26. For the usual exemplar Band D property, the increase will be from £73.00 for the past year to £83.00 for the next financial year.

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

As in the past the Council has continued to provide support to organisations such as the Wanderbus and the Meppershall Messenger and are delighted with the success of one of last year's beneficiaries, Munchkins. We are always pleased to consider requests for financial support from groups or organisations, working to provide for the village.

Environment and Leisure - We have been gratified to see the facilities on Centenary Field in full use. We have been pleased to note actions by our Clerk and councillors, with the support of responsible dog owners, has resulted in continued improvement regarding dog fouling. Again, our Litter Picks have been well supported by residents and are making a positive difference. As I said last year it would save everybody a lot of work if everybody took their waste home!

We were pleased to be able to appoint a new Community and Environment Officer, Mr Roger Hirst, who has already become a significant and valued addition to the Council team. Mrs. Thorne has been able to continue to support us with her work with the allotments and Old Road Meadow. I would like to mention the work undertaken by volunteers, under the auspices of CPRE, to teach and carry out hedgelaying in Old Road Meadow. A large amount of new hedging has also been planted by village and visiting volunteers, for which we thank them all. The Council continues to contract out some of the environmental work including significant works to improve the drainage of both Centenary Field and Old Road Meadow. A lot of this work was in connection with one of our major projects completed this year. A consideration of the needs of the village, and particularly our younger residents, led the Council towards the provision of additional play equipment both on Centenary Field and the extension of the play area in Old Road Meadow. Most of the funding for this work was secured from developers, by way of the levies demanded of them by CBC but we also secured a grant of £25,000 from CBC.

Highways - It is probably fair to say that a large proportion of the problems with the quality of the village roads have been down to building works. Hopefully some of the worst can be addressed before long. I have heard it suggested that the parlous state of Shefford Road at least cuts down on speeding! A more sustainable answer would be for an improvement in the current lack of care and consideration when driving, especially on the approaches to the village. The speed limits are there for a reason. Let's hope.

Anti-Social Behaviour - I would have liked to finish this report by noting that this problem has gone away, but it has not. The Clerk and the local policing team have spent much time, especially earlier in the year, in trying to counter anti-social behaviour and activities associated with the dealing and use of illegal substances at locations around the village. It would help if all parishioners, if they see activity of this kind, could report it to the Police, anonymously if necessary and assist us in efforts to counter the problem. It is a regrettable fact of life that if things are not reported, they may officially be deemed to be not actionable.

In conclusion may I thank the Clerk and Councillors for their support during this last year. The Council will continue to act for the benefit of the village and its residents and as I've said before, please get involved, it's your village too!

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

5. WARD COUNCILLORS' REPORTS – Cllr Blake Stephenson

The Chairman advised those present at the meeting that our Ward Councillor, Blake Stephenson had previously advised that he is often unable to attend Monday evening meetings due to attendance in Parliament. He is however working with the Clerk to the Council to ensure he provides updates to Council at monthly meetings and is aware of any issues in the village.

6. REPORTS FROM OTHER GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

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

INTRODUCTION

Good evening and thank you for giving CPRE Bedfordshire the opportunity to address you this evening. For those who have not met me before I am John English, a Trustee, and a Planning Volunteer with the role of leading the Central Bedfordshire Planning Team. CPRE Bedfordshire's team have 11 planning volunteers of which 7 are assigned to Central Bedfordshire.

During the year we were supported by part-time staff located in our Bedford Office, Lois Director of CPRE Bedfordshire is retiring at the end of the month and will be replaced by Jane Lee who currently is shadowing Lois.

We have now completed the process of transferring to a Charity Incorporated Organisation which is a more sustainable legal structure, remaining an independent charity but affiliated with the national 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 application. On occasions we embed ourselves within a LAG at the invitation of residents i.e., Stondon's Save Our Village and Flitwick's Save Steppingley Field Groups. We also respond to consultations on big infrastructure projects such as the East West Rail, London Luton Airport expansion and Universal Studios Theme Park.

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 skilled 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

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

have a broad knowledge of local issues and planning. In 2024 we dedicated over 3,000 hours to supporting local communities including Meppershall.

We know that the countryside and urban greenspaces are important for people's wellbeing, especially in the current situation, and loss of these can have a detrimental impact on communities and individuals. Large developments can put 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 2024 grant supported 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.

In 2024 we launched the Hedgerow Campaign of which Meppershall became one of our partners. 1,500 metres of hedgerow restored or planted covering ten sites in six locations of which four were in Central Bedfordshire. Meppershall contributed with 200 metres of hedge laying at Old Meadows, 70 metres at the allotments and finally 120 metres at Centenary Fields. Great result by the volunteers.



In 2024 we ran a planning workshop which was well attended. It is our intention to continue with these and briefings throughout 2025 shadowing Central Bedfordshire's New Local Plan Process. CPRE Bedfordshire are concerned that since CBC held their "call

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

for sites “for the new plan, developers and land promoters have launched an avalanche of planning applications for significant sized developments in central and northern Wards. Eight sites will collectively provide 1,700 new homes, all of which are windfall developments.

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 can be a challenge. Like all charities our income has also been affected by inflation and the cost of living but at the same time our workload has not decreased 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 whether it will be hedgerow regenerating, planting trees or planning matters.

Thank you for your continuing financial support.

b. Wanderbus – Mr Clive Lester - Trustee

Firstly, Wanderbus would like to thank the Council for their grant. The monies help towards our daily running costs, regular safety and servicing and recently to repairs – due to potholes - you may not be surprised to learn.

We are looking to replace our older bus next year and Parish Council funding is always a great help towards this goal as we are now expecting a new bus to be in the £125k region which will take a considerable amount of fundraising from many diverse areas.

We are well supported in the main by Meppershall residents. We have some very loyal and frequent residents utilising our services but would always like to see more.

Under the current Government Scheme cash fares are only £3.00 per journey so a round-trip to Cambridge, Welwyn Garden City or Stevenage for example will only cost £6.00 return (cash only) – far cheaper than driving or catching a train.

We hope that residents, especially the newer members of our village, understand that we operate in the same basis as a regular contracted bus service and are open to be used by all the residents, not just the ‘more senior’ members of Meppershall.

We are not able to accept wheelchairs but can take walking aids, strollers and prams. We are always looking for volunteer drivers as none of our current loyal drivers are getting any younger!!

With thanks again to the support from the Parish Council and to the residents of Meppershall for their usage of our services.

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

c. Meppershall Messenger – Mr Andrew Pain – Advertising & distribution Manager

Summary

Volume 40 of the magazine spanned the period from April 2024 to March 2025, and in April 2025 we were delighted to celebrate 40 years of the magazine with a special anniversary issue, the first in volume 41.

The majority of the ten issues of Volume 40 ran to 36 pages, with an additional 4 issues of 32 pages. This demonstrates that, for another year, local interest from contributors to the magazine remained high and village life provided plenty of content to amply fill our pages.

We want to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to every contributor, and to the whole team at the Meppershall Messenger, for the part they play in the continuity of this important piece of village life. Support for the magazine from organisations in the village and the wider region, and from individuals, has continued to build a good range of interesting, informative, encouraging and enjoyable content.

The magazine has continued to cover its costs based on grant income and advertising – with advertising prices maintained without increases for several years. We continue to provide a copy of the magazine to every property in the village at no charge, as well as providing an online version.

The process of compiling the 40th anniversary issue reminded us that the magazine owes everything to the vision of its founders in 1985, and in particular the late Dorothy Morris whose commitment created the foundations of the magazine we see today. She was supported and succeeded by a long line of excellent volunteers in the village and the coming years will be a critical period for maintaining and growing the volunteer team behind The Meppershall Messenger, to ensure its continued success.

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. It is founded on relevant, interesting content from the community and the editor has 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. The editors additionally adjust the content of the magazine for quality, accuracy and formatting requirements.

The breadth of content has included the gardening section that we continue to cultivate thanks to Donna Cameron and Campton Gardening Club; the personal finance info that we treasure from Paul Savuto; information driven by Clive Lester on behalf of the Meppershall Wanderbus team; there has been much praise of the updates we receive from Rector Roni Goodman and the team at St Mary's Meppershall; Meppershall Social club has served up monthly updates for us (Sharon, Gordon and now Gemma); The Players At STMA (Karen) have played out their monthly news in our pages; we have had

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

a healthy supply of articles from Shefford Osteopathic Clinic, the local GP practices, Kerrie Hipgrave, Mid Beds Cancer Support Group; and more. Thank you also to the Meppershall Munchkins (Melanie Choonos), Craft Club (Kim Tyler), Meppershall Good Neighbours (Kim again!), Meppershall Pre-School, Meppershall Academy, and others.

We have appreciated the series of film reviews (Cineaste's Corner) that David Peters wrote before moving away from the village recently.

We have also welcomed updates to the village from our MP, Alistair Strathern.

At times in the history of the magazine, minutes from Meppershall Parish Council (MPC) meetings have been a regular feature. The magazine team is committed to including these whenever they are received from MPC, but in the last year they were provided only occasionally owing to the difficult timings of the acceptance of the official minutes compared with the editorial deadline of the magazine. Clearly any updates from MPC would be valuable to our readers, and we would encourage MPC to consider whether some 'headlines' from MPC meetings could be shared for publication, pending final approved minutes.

Cover images

Our new cover format has continued throughout Volume 40, and this allowed us to reflect a wide variety of village events and projects as 'cover stories'.

Letters

We have typically featured at least one letter from readers each month, but we want more! The magazine is an excellent platform for voicing local opinion, and we can withhold the names of contributors if letter writers are concerned about repercussions. The editor reserves the right to know, at least in strict confidence, who letters are actually from, for editorial integrity. Letters must not be offensive, must not have potential to cause individual distress and must not repeat misinformation / disinformation.

Advertising

We continue to offer excellent value for money to our advertisers, and we are maintaining revenue at more or less last year's level. 5 advertisers didn't renew, but the three new ones we secured more than offset this in terms of revenue and space.

Currently we have 53 advertisers, only 2 of whom have not yet paid. Which is heartening. Many have been with us for a very long time, and we're glad they decided to stick with us.

We have paid ads for 16.5 colour pages and 5.625 (5/8ths in old money) Black and White, so every month we either move some into the editorial pages, or more frequently print 24 pages using the excess for public interest, charity events etc. As always, if you need a tradesperson, look in the Messenger first!

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

And if you use one who doesn't advertise with us, ask them to contact me about how we could help. The cost of the ad could well be less than your bill.

Finances

During 2024 – 2025, the Meppershall Messenger purchased a new printer, with improved printing speeds for both black & white and colour printing and copying, from our long-term supplier Mirus Managed Print Limited. Our thanks to Richard Flint, the Print Director for Mirus, for his generous contract terms for the next three years and the highly competitive (discounted) price of our new printer. In addition, this year, after some months of mechanical problems, The Meppershall Messenger purchased a new paper folding machine from our long-term supplier of non-printer equipment - Chilvers Reprographics Ltd. Capable of folding up to 600 pages per minute, this is an essential piece of the production equipment and is now working well. Thank you to Meppershall Parish Council for their continued support, with a donation toward the purchase of printing paper supplies, which is an ever-increasing cost for the Meppershall Messenger. Pressure on costs is coming from paper (the price has rocketed in the last few years).

We have covered our outgoings and maintained advertising costs at 2019 rates for another year, despite having to replace the Printer and folding machines this year.

Distribution / Delivery

This continues to be we achieved every month in a very short window of time. We have 36 "rounds", ranging from 9 to 88 doors. The copies arrive at the Village Hall about 2pm, (half already stapled by John), along with a small team of volunteers, which has sadly reduced by three recently due to people moving away. So volunteers needed! They are stapled, bundled into 10s for ease of counting, and bundled into the correct number for the round. Most of the time anyway...

They're out of the door and loaded by 3.30, and dropped off to the deliverers generally before 6, doorstep catch-ups notwithstanding. In the main, they are delivered before the weekend, rain, shine or snow not seemingly a problem for our trusty team.

And without that team this simply would not happen.

The fact that so many people give their time freely for the Messenger means that we can offer blanket coverage of our village at a very low cost. And we are truly grateful for this

Online Reach of the Magazine

The social media link to the online PDF format of the magazine achieved a widely varying number of downloads for each month for Volume 40 (April 2024 - March 2025), with a low of 50 and a high of 107. Additionally, the online magazine is viewed directly from the Meppershall.org website (web traffic unknown). Although this online readership is significant, it remains modest and is not showing significant growth. If we wanted to consider measures to improve our online/digital readership, we may want to consider improvements to the PDF format and more strategic digital marketing (social media promotion etc). This would likely require additional skills and new volunteers.

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

Social Media

The Meppershall Messenger has a page on Facebook - www.facebook.com/themeppershallmessenger. The following for this page increased by almost 10% in the past year, to 296 people. 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 continues to prove itself as the most effective way to reach the village digitally. Facebook statistics indicate that our social media audience is around three-quarters female, with the majority between 35 and 64 years of age.

A humorous social media post for April fool's day achieved a social media 'reach' of more than 4,000 (that is the number of people for whom it appeared in their feed). Typically, our social media posts achieve only a fraction of this reach, however it does show the potential of the channel. One particular obstacle to strong social media reach is that Facebook algorithms disfavour posts containing links that take users away from the Facebook platform. We will be much more successful with our social media if we can devise a way to publish the magazine onto Facebook directly.

The Team and Contact Information

The Meppershall Messenger can be reached via email: mepp.messenger@gmail.com. We love to hear from anyone wishing to be involved in any way – especially people wanting to volunteer to bring new skills and ideas. James Read continues as sole editor. Each month, the editor manages email correspondence, creates a Microsoft Word template, inserts/formats the content submitted by contributors, manages page layouts, images, pagination etc, writes the editorial page, applies corrections (after proofing) and passes a MS Word version to the printing team for production. The editor also creates a PDF version with the cover and adverts added, for posting to the Meppershall.org website. These processes typically take the equivalent of two working days and can be completed from a remote location away from the village.

John Thompson is the Treasurer of the magazine. Andrew Pain is Advertising Manager. We thank Colette House for her continued support as proofreader. Andrew Pain has kindly continued in the role of Distribution Manager (thank you Andrew!).

A wider team of volunteers (including 'The Committee') are crucial to the ongoing success of our much-loved village magazine. Thank you to the printing, collation and distribution/delivery volunteers. 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.

d. Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group – Mr Andrew Pain – Chair

This has been a slower process than I anticipated when I first got involved, and that has not been helped by some disinvolvement by previous members. For almost a year the Steering Group has consisted of just Alessandra Marabese (the Parish Clerk) and me, with

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

input from John Thompson and John Parsons on occasion, and Lucy Standbridge for tech help plus feedback from some external bodies or contractors. But mainly me and Alex...

Our Draft Plan was completed almost a year ago, based on the older Village Plan, and several Plans from similar villages, but the process of fine-tuning, examination and review by the various Statutory Consultees etc. took a long time, and the outcome was not entirely positive, since CBC felt the Draft Plan was based very much on out-of-date data, as the most recent Village Survey was well over 10 years old and Meppershall has undergone substantial change (they mean growth) since then.

So, a new questionnaire was recommended, as a way of determining what today's residents actually want. This delivered by the Messenger Distribution Team, with an online version created by Lucy Standbridge. It went live April 1st and is running until May 18th. On completion of this, the resulting data will be analysed, collated, and incorporated as much as possible into an updated plan, which will then be resubmitted for review by CBC before being passed to an external Inspector. Once their approval has been obtained, it will be voted on by residents in a referendum. And I desperately want it to be completed this year.

It's important that the Plan is in place and adopted as soon as possible, since the policies we had drafted were based on the results of that earlier survey, and the views of our predecessors, and were designed, in the words of our Draft Vision Statement, "to enhance the rural character of the village whilst maintaining the hilltop aspect and linear nature of the village." That's it, in a nutshell. Preserve and maintain our village. That's what I want, certainly.

We also mention in the Questionnaire small-scale developments, since we all recognise that there must be some additional housing, of various types, to accommodate existing residents and new ones. What we wanted to do is prevent any future negative impact of large-scale, inappropriate housing developments being shoe-horned into spaces in the existing village or bolted onto the side so that it becomes an urban sprawl.

And we are not alone in those views. Without going into detail here, since the Village Questionnaire is still running and I don't want to prejudice responses, the overwhelming majority of respondents (200+ to date) value the rural nature of Meppershall. They value the countryside and the network of footpaths and permissive walkways (in as much as many of them admit to not knowing where they all are). They appreciate the surrounding fields, and the abundance of wildlife. It matters to them.

And for many, it was a major factor in deciding to move here or remain here.

It's certain that major housing estates will damage this. The governments stated policy of 1,500,000 new homes in 5 years means they've got to go somewhere, and developers will be scouring existing settlements for potential new sites. CBC have recently made a call for sites, inviting landowners to submit sites for prior consideration and assessment

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

for housing, and doubtless some will be submitted from here, given previous unsuccessful applications.

If the Neighbourhood Plan is in place when those applications are lodged, then CBC's planning officers must consider how future applications will accord and comply with it, and if they do not, then they are more likely to be refused.

So, it's vital that we have a fully adopted Neighbourhood Plan in place quickly, one that aims to preserve the character of the Meppershall we have - or we will be facing years more upheaval, disturbance, and doubtless irreparable damage to the fabric and character of Meppershall as it is today. If we want sympathetic design, sustainable building, space to breathe – we must create policies withing our plan to ensure that developers deliver these things. And getting it right has taken time. But it needs to be done properly...

That's the view of the Steering Group, such as it is. I appreciate there may well be other views and opinions, and they may differ from ours. That's what the questionnaire is for – to uncover people's views on future Meppershall. ***So, fill it in! Please...***

But this is the update on progress so far, and I apologise that the process is taking so long, but it seems that this is how it is if you are to formulate a wide-ranging and long-term local government policy.

Updates will continue to be given to the Parish Council at their monthly meetings, and probably in the Messenger as well so as to reach as many residents as possible. Because they for sure don't come to Parish Council meetings!

Thank you for your help so far, particularly to Alessandra Marabese, John Parsons, John Thompson and Lucy Standbridge. And thank you for your time tonight.

Mr John English of CPRE added that a Neighbourhood Plan does hold weight with Inspectors at appeal, so it is really important that the village gets this through.

e. Village Hall – Mr Kevin Larsen – Chair of Trustees

The mission from the village hall committee of 12 members is to make sure that the village hall is sustainable with the ethos that we look after village functions, usage and need. We must make some tough decisions on usage as we need income to support the running of the village hall.

f. Meppershall Munchkins – Mrs Melanie Choonos – Chair

Munchkins was started in September 2023 to fill a need for the village. Our numbers have grown. We thank the parish council for the grant they have provided that has been used to buy toys and equipment for the group. Have a bank of volunteers that help the group. They get good feedback.

g. MAPTA –

MEPPERSHALL PARISH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 28TH APRIL 2025

Thanks to the Parish Council for letting us use Centenary Field for the Easter Egg hunt that was popular. Also, MPC contributed to the parking buddies that are now used outside the school. The new MAPTA committee is still finding its feet but have an open dialogue with the council which is very positive.

7. ISSUE AND QUESTIONS RAISED BY PARISHIONERS

- a. **Does CBC have a 5-year land supply at the moment?** *Of the 3 recent appeals it has been proven that CBC does not have a 5year land supply (found to be between 4.8 and 4.93years). CBC are not working well on big sites. Appeals dismissed were dismissed on reasons other than for the 5-year land supply.*
- b. **Antisocial Behaviour – We have had a lot of vandalism and damage in the village recently, but we do not see police in the village, would it not help if a police team patrolled the village occasionally as a deterrent?** *PCSO Tasha Healey – Once scheduled visit to village a month and other visits are with the patrol car. Will pop into Budgens after issues. Possible could do more foot patrols. We are aware of youths responsible for ASB last year and those causing issues at the moment seem to be a different group. We have worked with families, housing associations and the clerk on previous issues. We have been made aware of the damage caused at the allotments this evening and we will review the photos and reports submitted to the Police to see if we can identify them.*
- c. **Village Hall - Many people in the survey have requested a café, are the committee still pushing for this?** *Mr Kevin Larsen - Real issue is that the kitchen is used predominantly for the hall and sharing the kitchen is the biggest challenge. We would be more than happy for someone to come forward to run a café.*
- d. **As a parent I want to say thank you very much for the new play equipment installed at Centenary Field and Old Road Meadow which is brilliant. However, there is a bin missing at the top end of the play area that could be added to avoid litter.** *Clerk to add to next MPC meeting.*
- e. **Can we have more picnic benches at Old Road Meadow for parents to sit on and watch children play?** *Clerk to add to next MPC meeting.*
- f. **Some wheelchairs users are using the road instead of the footpaths on Shefford Road due to the poor state of the footpaths. What can be done about this?** *Clerk to add to next MPC meeting.*

8. MEETING CLOSE

The Chairman thanked all those who had attended and closed the meeting at 8:25pm.

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