

**Steeple Aston Parish Council**  
**Annual Parish Meeting held on 22nd May 2023 in the Sport & Rec building**

**Minutes**

1. To receive apologies for absence
2. Present: Richard McAndrew, Martin Lipson, Peter Dammerman, Stuart Ferguson, Angharad Lloyd Jones, Julia Whybrew, Richard Preston, Matt Watson
- 3 To receive the minutes of the last meeting held on 16th May 2022  
The minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022 were checked for accuracy and content and agreed as a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.
- 4 Chairman's Report

Once again it is time for a round-up of the activities of the Parish Council over the past year; and this will be the last time that it falls to me, as Chair, to do it. As always the year has been a mixture of the routine, the humdrum and the occasional unexpected, but interesting, challenge.

I will start with the customary thank yous to all those people who help the Parish Council keep the village running smoothly. Many thanks go to all the following: to Nigel Prickett and Will Pryse for grass cutting and weed-killing respectively - they keep the village looking tidy through the summer months; to Helen White for her attentive internal audit of the PC books – and her timely and thoughtful intervention on the cost of keeping the public toilet open and cleaned; to Jenny Bell for her excellent work keeping the village informed through the website and Facebook; to Torquil McLusky and Barbara Brewer for their efforts looking after the Sports and Recreation Centre and the Village Hall respectively, and to the many other volunteers who help in looking after both these great assets to our village life; to Rose McCready, Nigel Grugeon and the Allotments Association for keeping the allotments in such good shape – we wish Nigel and Rose well as they prepare to leave the village; to Shawn Hamilton, who has taken on the responsibility of playground steward; to Graham Porcas who with his trusty gang has been filling potholes on our roads and keeping our suspension undamaged; and to those occasional volunteers who have helped out with maintenance in the playground, with tidying up land behind the war memorial, and with other acts of generosity and kindness; and to Steeplejack who I am sure attracts more readers than the official Council minutes, and thus helps to keep the village informed of what we, the Parish Council, do.

My personal thanks, as always, to Cathy Fleet, the Parish Clerk, who runs the administration of the Parish Council, dealing with finance, correspondence, meetings, agendas, minutes, and the idiosyncrasies of the Chair. Also, in this my last meeting, a

big thank you to all my fellow councillors, past and present. The Parish Council is very much a collective endeavour. All councillors give up their time, and contribute in many and varied ways, with practical help, suggestions, ideas, and support. Their contribution to the work of the Parish Council is vital and immeasurable. And my special thanks go to Martin Lipson, the Vice Chair, who has been a huge support and a purveyor of sound advice throughout my time in office.

And finally, I should mention our two local councillors Arash Fatemian, of Oxfordshire County Council, and Eddie Reeves, of Cherwell District Council. My thanks to Arash, who has been helpful in many ways during my term of office: among other things providing a grant towards our first speed device, making important interventions during the first Hatch End planning application, and keeping us up-to-date with developments at OCC. Eddie Reeves, at the time of writing, has yet to put in an appearance at a Parish Council meeting – a stark contrast with his predecessor, Mike Kerford-Byrnes. It seems that we are not the only parish council to have dropped off Mr Reeves' radar. However, he assures us he intends to rectify this failure over the coming year.

On to our activities over the past twelve months. Perhaps the most important developments have been the establishment of the Environment and Sustainability Committee (the ESC), and the donation to the village of the Community Orchard. The ESC was set up in March and tasked with advising the village on issues to do with the environment and sustainability. Under the chairmanship of Carl Tomlinson, they have been extremely active, among other things promoting the 20 m.p.h speed limit through the village, acquiring a heat camera for residents to use to identify areas of heat loss from their houses, researching local food suppliers, and keeping the village informed of developments with articles in Steeple Aston Life. Our thanks to them for all their work.

In October 2021 The Parish Council was offered a piece of land on Water Lane by Sarah Lucas, one time resident of Steeple Aston, and niece of George Boscawen Randolph, who lived at Randolph's on the corner of Water Lane and Northside from 1902 to 1951. The Parish Council gratefully accepted her offer and has designated this land as a Community Orchard for the use of village residents. The land transfer was completed in the middle of last year, and a small ceremony was held in April, attended by Sarah, to mark the official 'opening' of the orchard. Under the leadership of Annie Bailey, the Orchard Committee are drawing up interesting plans for the development of the area. Our thanks to them for all the work they are doing there.

Other pieces of land which have concerned the council have been the area behind the war memorial and Pocket Park. The land behind the war memorial has been left as waste ground since the development of the small estate at Lawrence Fields. After much deliberation, the Council has decided to offer the land for sale. Plans to effect this are ongoing. The land at Pocket Park, originally leased to the Parish Council by Cherwell, was thought to have reverted to the District Council. However, we are deemed to have retained the lease, and have decided to continue to administer it. How the area is developed will be something for the Council to decide in consultation with local

residents over the coming months. It is intended that funds from the sale of the land behind the war memorial will be channelled into the development of Pocket Park.

Planning is always a hot topic in the village. The development at Townend is nearing completion; the necessary traffic mitigation has been put in place; and many of the houses have already been sold. Received opinion about the appearance of the new houses and the new traffic and pedestrian system has generally been very positive. And residents have commented that the new road layout is much safer. Our thanks to Rectory Homes for their generous contributions to the village of a new noticeboard to replace the one blown down in a storm earlier this year, and for their donation towards our Coronation celebrations.

The draft Local Plan from Cherwell District Council, later withdrawn, specified 47 new houses to be built in Steeple Aston. We are waiting to see what the revised plan will say. However, at a meeting of 68 village residents in February, it was agreed that, rather than leave matters in the hands of the District Council, the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan Forum should be invited to help decide which areas in the village might be suitable for development. That process is ongoing.

Looking back at the various royal events over the year we celebrated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June. Our thanks to everyone involved in those celebrations. We mourned the death of the Queen in September. And we celebrated the coronation of King Charles earlier this month. Again many thanks to everyone involved in organising events on all these occasions: Coronation Day, despite the weather, was a memorable occasion. Special mention too to the bellringers, who always put on a stirring performance on these occasions.

Alongside all these more newsworthy issues, there are of course more mundane, but nonetheless essential, concerns involved in keeping the village running. There has been ongoing maintenance at the playground: repairs to the trampoline, the zip wire and the gates to the toddler area. In an effort to prevent dog fouling, we have installed a bag dispenser on Northside for dog walkers who forget to take bags with them. We held a well-attended, and extremely useful, defibrillator awareness session to instruct people how to use the defibrillators in the village. We hope to have an external cabinet installed at the Red Lion very soon so that both our defibrillators will be available 24/7.

And, as always, there are things for the future. Two new speed indicating devices have been requested. The subleases for the Village Hall and the Sports and Recreation Trust are nearing completion. We are still trying to come up with a way of soliciting donations for the upkeep of the playground from users who live outside the village. We have plans to upgrade the path beside the village hall to make it more suitable for wheelchair users and the disabled. And there are major planning issues around Junction 10 of the M40 which will undoubtedly affect all the surrounding villages, and which will require consideration and action by concerned parties.

And that concludes my final report. It only remains to say that when I came to Steeple Aston 12 years ago, I had no intention at all of joining the Parish Council, and even less of becoming Chair. However, having done it for nearly five years, I can say it has been a fascinating experience: both challenging and rewarding. There have been high points. And there have been low points – as there are in any job. Overall though I hope that the activities of the Parish Council and the developments we have enacted over the last four to five years have had a positive effect on village life. From a personal point of view, it has been a hugely enriching experience, and my successor, whoever he or she may be, will take over with my support and best wishes

4. Public Participation

Richard Preston commented that the signage for Townend are not satisfactory and suggested that they should be changed. He also commented on the chicane as the visibility is poor, but it has the effect of slowing down traffic.

Signed ..... Chair

Dated .....