

HALE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Hale Annual Parish Assembly held at 7pm on Tuesday 18th April 2023

Present:

Councillors Gemmell (Chair), Gillmon, Lavis, Kyle and Vickery

In attendance

Councillor Heron

Amanda Johnson – Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer

25 members of the public

5 Speakers – see below

1 To receive apologies for absence - Sue Bowser

2 To consider and approve the Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 5th April 2022 - The minutes of the meeting were approved and signed by the Chair.

3 To receive the Chairman's Annual Report for 2022/23

Cllr Gemmell welcomed all present.

Since April 2022 there has been so much going on both at home in the UK and abroad. The invasion of Ukraine has continued to cast a shadow on us all and has been largely responsible for the global rise in oil and energy prices as well as wheat which has led to inflation, the rise in central bank interest rates and the unrest of ongoing public sector and train operator wage demands.

The biggest news for us as a nation was of course the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen which was celebrated in the village with an open picnic on Hatchet Green on Sunday 5th June. Sadly for those of us who attended, it started cool and overcast and soon turned into a blustery day with torrential rain. It was a washout but I'd like to thank the then events committee for putting it on (albeit with some seed funding from the Parish Council), those who participated and the valiant Parishioners who attended as well as the few who helped clear up.

Regrettably of course Her Majesty died in September. Obviously there is a train of events which are long established and which follow such an event, involving the Royal Family and Government. Those events trickle down to local government and your Parish Council was pleased to undertake the Proclamation of King Charles III's accession to the throne in front of the 40th jubilee Oak Tree to the west of the village hall here. Timings were tight and we weren't allowed to perform the centuries old ceremony before the District Council had performed it in Lyndhurst. Some 30 parishioners attended at somewhat short notice and I thank them for their support.

With regards work in the Parish paid for by the Parish Council, we undertook an arboreal survey of the small copse of trees adjacent to the village hall and it was confirmed many were in a dangerous situation with leaning trees, overhanging deadwood and disease. Your Council then spent £8000 in a major clear up of the copse to protect visitors and Parishioners, safeguard the many children who play in the copse and satisfy our commitment to our insurers.

Many of you will have seen the speed signs installed in recent weeks. There aren't many providers of speed signs and yet there are several types on the market. In addition, installation has to be registered with the Highways department. It has taken longer than anticipated to obtain the licence before ordering and then installing them. The total cost was in the region of £7000. Many of you will have seen them on Forest Road as you enter the village and also at the west end of Hatchet Green approaching from the pond. Obviously these have been major expenses for the Council, yet despite this, the precept has been sufficient and for the third year in a row, we have held the Parish Council precept at its pre-Covid level. Your Council tax statements will confirm a 0% rise in Parish Precept 3 years in a row and although the sums are small compared to the rest of the services which make up the Council Tax, we are proud of that.

During the year BT wrote to us asking if we wished to take ownership of the telephone box. Many villages have done this and we agreed. So far, the upkeep and repainting has proven to be more expensive than the box itself – but that's why BT will have approached us!

4. To receive a report from Councillor Edward Heron, Downlands and Forest Ward, NFDC and Executive Lead Member for Children's Services – Hampshire County Council.

Cllr Heron reported on HCC matters, he is stepping down as an NFDC councillor after 16 years and will not stand as a candidate in the NFDC elections to be held on May 4th.

HCC – There is a significant increase in Council Tax this year. HCC's annual budget of £1.8 billion is spent predominantly on schools (1 billion), adult social care (500 million), children's social care (300 million), refuse collection (60 million) and highways (40 million) This leaves highways severely underfunded as social care funding is always prioritised over highways. HCC has just received an extra £6 million to focus on mending potholes, however road building materials have increased by 28%. The HCC budget has decreased by 680 million over 14 years and without further intervention HCC will inevitably face bankruptcy.

Cllr Heron asked all to report potholes at -

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance>.

As an alternative, potholes can be reported using the 'FixMyStreet' mobile app (<https://www.fixmystreet.com/>) that is available for both iOS (Apple) and Android devices. Using the 'FixMyStreet' app doesn't enable the same level of feedback as you will not receive the HCC tracking reference number, but as it utilises the mobile device's GPS and camera, it does make on-site reporting simple and quick. It would be preferable for reports to be made using the Council's website, but better defects are reported than not and the simplicity and immediacy of the app may encourage more reports.

Question – Can potholes be reported at using what3words?

Answer - . HCC do not use what3words due to high licensing fees so one of the options mentioned would be preferable.

Question – Do HCC accept liability for damage to vehicles from potholes?

Answer. Yes they do, paying out approximately a quarter of a million a year.

To receive a report from Lee Knight, Local Ranger, Forestry England

Lee Knight has been a Forestry England keeper since 2016 and in August 2022 became the keeper for this area (Turf Hill to Linford) and will shortly be moving into Woodgreen. Lee outlined the role of a keeper and wider Forestry England projects.

Deer – The New forest is home to Muntjac, Sika, Fallow, Red and Roe deer and numbers are at an all time high. This has an effect on the ecology of the Forest, particularly in terms of overgrazing in the enclosures which decreases woodland regeneration. Therefore a record number have been culled in the last year. A deer census is currently being carried out in the Forest and the wider area using technology such as thermal drones. This aims to give a more accurate record of the current population.

Birds – The Forest is a crucial habitat for many ground nesting birds e.g. curlew, nightjars and lapwings, most of which are in decline.

Butterfly conservation - The New Forest is a very important habitat for butterflies with three quarters of all UK butterflies recorded in the Forest. Butterfly counting is an annual event in the Forest with the same route being followed every year. Work is carried out in the enclosures to help improve the habitat for wildlife.

Reptiles – the New Forest is home to adders, smooth snakes, grass snakes, slow worms, common lizards and sand lizards. All of which are facing pressures leading to decline.

Fungi –The New Forest is a special and nationally-important area for fungi. It is an ongoing problem to stop people picking the fungi and there are still commercial pickers who do so.

There is a huge amount of pressure on the Forest from visitors and dog walkers; the role on a keeper includes being on call 24/7 and being called out for animal deaths, fly-tipping, BBQ,s etc. All incidents can be reported to Forestry England at 0300 067 4600. Out of hours this number is managed by the Environment Agency. There will be a total of 10 keepers by summertime.

Cllr Gemmell asked that Lee talk about the recent works at Millersford Plantation – Over the winter the majority of Millersford Plantation has been felled as part of the Forest Design Plan to revert the area to heathland which is a rare habitat. This work must be carried out in winter to reduce the effects on wildlife however this does result in a horrifically messy landscape in the short term but is done for the long term gain.

Question – Are you able to go onto National Trust (Hale Purlieu) land to help an injured deer.

Answer – Written consent is required by the landowner to use a firearm. It is planned to increase the communication with the National Trust.

Question – Due to the high numbers of the deer, is there an impact on their health?

Answer – The deer that have been culled have been bigger than the average and in good health.

To receive a report from Steve May , PCSO, New Forest West Neighbourhood Policing Team.

Steve is part of the part of the Ringwood and Fordingbridge neighbourhood police team that consist of an Inspector, a Sgt, 5 Police Officers and 2 Police Community Support Officers. Steve covers the 3 Fordingbridge Wards of Downlands and Forest, Forest North West and Fordingbridge Town with PC Adrian Woodhead.

Two separate operations have centred on non-dwelling burglaries and the use of catapults and have both been successful in arrest and a decrease in offences. There is also an operation in progress to mark items to make them identifiable if stolen and this will be publicised at local shows e.g. New Forest, Ellingham. Much community work goes on with organisations and schools e.g. talking to school children about County lines.

In Hale from April 22- April 23 there were 26 recorded occurrences 12 of which were recordable as crimes. This is a significant decrease from the previous year, especially as other areas of the district have seen crimes increase.

Anti-Social Behaviour (1) Report from highways regarding a large number of animals congregating. .

Violence against the Person (0)

Dwelling Burglary (0)

Burglary Other Than Dwelling (3) Various outbuilding break ins with a number of high value tools taken.

Business Burglary (2) local water treatment plant entered with nothing taken and an outbuilding entered and a number of tools taken

Damage (1) garden entered and items damaged

Theft (2) outboard motor removed from a boat and a report of branches being cut and wire fencing being taken

Theft from motor vehicles (2) Vehicle entered and suitcases taken and 1 report of a catalytic converter being cut from under a car.

Theft of vehicle (1) 4x4 vehicle taken from a garage and later recovered. Small car taken from the roadside outside owners home.

Cllr Vickery asked SM to outline the importance of reporting.

SM reiterated the importance of reporting. 101 is not seen as a brilliant system by the public and is probably best used online. The user may receive a response stating that no further action will be taken however Steve will see all that is reported and all information may lead to a positive outcome.

Question – What is the current position regarding average speed cameras along Roger Penny Way.

Answer – It is believed that this is still in the process of a feasibility report; there is much to address particularly the lack of telecommunications across the Forest.

5 Representative reports from local organisations:

Jacqui Hartas – Hale Village Hall Committee

Achievements in 2022/23

- The café and library is thriving and is open every Tuesday.
- Improvements to the garden are ongoing and Jane Pearce and David Keniston are maintaining and developing it beautifully.
- We commissioned a professional tree survey and the recommended work has been carried out, including felling a dead ash and small oak tree.

- We have trialed and invested in Hallmaster an online booking and invoicing system.
- We are in the process of purchasing a new digital door locking system which will improve access to the hall and security for the hall and users.
- Bookings, both for the main hall and downstairs areas are increasing

Plans for Hale Village Hall in the future.

- We have submitted a grant application for a new boiler.
- We have submitted a grant application for bird boxes/feeders/insect hotels to attract wildlife to the garden.
- We are still planning to insulate the roof of the main hall and improve the acoustics and are obtaining quotes and funding information.
- We need to add a second toilet in the downstairs area.

Summary figures for 2022

- Total income - £25,338 ,Total expenditure - £17,953, Surplus - £7,385
- Total closing funds - £54,136, Reserves required - £65,000

A massive thank-you to all our supporters and trustees;

- **Our regular hirers:** - Brownies, Cricket Club, Hale School, Horticultural Society, Parish Council, Redlynch and Hale Transition Group, Tai Chi and Qi Gong, Veggie Club, Dance Classes, Diamond K9 Dog Training and Little Acorns Toddler Group
- **Other fundraising and Donations:** - County Councillor Grant, NFDC, 100 Club, Food Market, Supporters of Table Tennis and Film Club
- **Our external examiner:** - Julia Nobes has generously donated her time to sign off our accounts

Trustees Appointed by user bodies- Ian Gemmell (Hale Parish Council), Sue Adams (Brownies), Richard Barlow (Redlynch & Hale Cricket Club), David Mussell (Hale and Woodgreen Horticultural Society)

Village Elected Trustees – Jacqui Hartas (Chair), Gary Adams (Treasurer), Mark Nobes (Secretary), Marjanna Batterbury (Hall Manager), David Keniston, James Stewart, Sarah Pook. Co-opted Trustee – Debbie Vine.

Question – What is the reserve needed for?

Answer – The reserve is broken down and can be seen in the full accounts. It required to maintain the building into the future.

Hale and Woodgreen Community and Parish Magazine update.

Income – Advertising £2,375, Donations £2020.00 Gift Aid reclaimed £237.53 (Claimed against 2022 donations)

Expenditure – Printing and gift aid envelopes £4,069.31

- Printing costs have increased twice since launch in October 2021. We are breaking even.
- We need more donations to be sure we can continue and will launch another campaign in September encouraging annual donations

Question – Jacqui was thanked for the hard work in producing the magazine.

Julia Harding – Woodgreen Community Shop

The Woodgreen community Shop has had a challenging year. In Spring 2022 there were concerns after a few consecutive months of losses and a campaign on “Use us or Lose

us” was launched. This was a big success and resulted in an increase of use which coupled with many summer visitors saw turnover fluctuate over the year. Consequently 22/23 the shop broke even and maintained the cash reserves.

The increase in costs has, and continues to be a big challenge; costs change weekly and these costs are having to be passed onto the customer. The fixed price for the energy costs ended in March and although a reasonable new contract was secured this will still see energy costs increase from £8,000.00 to £16,000.00 per annum.

The minimum wage has also increased significantly which will lead to increased wage costs for the paid team. Management is always looking carefully at overheads to reduce costs and has recently sold the shop van as it had minimal use. New initiative include using more volunteers and a new marketing campaign which has increased footfall and sales over the last few months.

The Post Office is a service for the village, it is subsidised by the shop, costing about £6000.00 a year. Increases in wages for the PO staff will not be covered by the Post Office. The committee would encourage all to use the PO as much as possible, including other services offered now such as the Amazon Hub.

Woodgreen shop received a legacy from Peter Arnold who used the shop often and was a very dedicated supporter. This money has been used to create a new coffee bar for the many walkers and cyclists who use the shop with hot drinks and cakes available.

Julia would like to thank the fabulous team of paid staff, volunteers and committee who are all very dedicated and create the lovely ethos of the shop.

David Mussell – Hale and Woodgreen Horticultural Society

Hale and Woodgreen Horticultural Society is celebrating its 100th year. Talks already held this year have all been very successful with many attending. And more are planned throughout the year. On Saturday 22nd April there is a plant sale at Woodgreen Village Hall and three outings are planned this year. An Open gardens event will take place in 2023 and more gardens are required in Hale.

6 To take public comments and questions

Doug Gemmell expressed his thanks to Cllr Edward Heron for his many years of dedicated service as a New Forest District Council Councillor.

The Chairman thanked the speakers and everyone for attending and welcomed all to stay for refreshments.