

HALE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Hale Annual Parish Assembly held at 7pm on Tuesday 29th April 2025

Present:

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

In attendance

Councillor Edward Heron (HCC), Councillor Janet Richards (NFDC)

Amanda Johnson– Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer, Approx 30 members of the public.
Representatives from local organisations

1 To receive apologies for absence -Cllr Kyle, PCSO Steve May.

2 To consider and approve the Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 30th April 2024 - The minutes of the meeting were signed by the Chair at the end of the meeting.

Matters arising – Full fibre broadband – No current update on the situation. It is hoped that it will be available in the village by Dec 2026.

3. To receive reports from local village groups.

Faith Seaward, Business Manager – Hale Primary School

Faith is the Business Manager for the Forest Edge Learning Federation which includes Hyde, Breamore and Hale Schools. Hyde has 45 pupils, Hale 72 and Breamore 80. The small numbers of pupils brings challenge as funding received is per pupil and currently there are a smaller no of children joining than leaving. It is estimated that in 3 years Hale will have 58 pupils. The school carries out much promotion work at which it is very successful. Hale School can be heard on Radio Solent over the next week. All parishioners are welcome to visit the school and all volunteers are welcome; volunteering opportunities include reading to the children, helping with times tables, site maintenance and gardening.

A toddler group is held once a month. Forest Edge has a “50 things” policy which promises that between joining in Yr R and Leaving in Yr 6 children will do 50 amazing things which could include going to a musical, riding on a bus or making a bug hotel.

Jacqui Hartas – Chair Hale Village Hall Management Committee

The café/library is thriving and continues to open every Tuesday. Jane and David are maintaining the garden beautifully with help from volunteer Brian who clears the leaves. We have had maintenance work to two oak trees. We’ve added a rain canopy and lighting in the garden and bought furniture. Pop-up garden events are a huge success in the warmer months. The main hall ceiling has been thermally and acoustically insulated and two fire exit doors have been replaced. A new toilet cubicle has been added downstairs and the changing / shower room has been refurbished. The talk “Scene On the Green”, Barn Dancing, Wreath-making and Abba/Queen events have all been successful and well attended.

Future improvements include - Replacing all lights with LED in August 2025 and putting movement sensors where possible. We are fitting 27 x solar pv panels to the roof plus 2 x 13.5 kw storage batteries in August. We have planning permission for a new accessible toilet extension and have several funding bids in progress. Longer term we hope to replace the gas heating system with air source and infra-red panels. Hale Film Club will be replaced by pop-up events during the winter months.

Many thanks to the following for grant awards, National Grid for the new toilet cubicle and new radiators downstairs. The National Lottery for the refurbishment of the shower room. HPC, NFDC, ACRE, DEFRA, Hale and Redlynch Transition Group and Bernard Sunley Foundation for the ceiling insulation. Veolia Environmental, NFDC CIL funding and West Solent Solar for the solar panels, batteries and LED lighting.

And, as always, a massive thank-you to all our supporters and trustees; Our regular hirers: - Brownies, Cricket Club, Hale School, Horticultural Society, Hale Parish Council, Redlynch and Hale Transition Group, Tai Chi, Veggie Club, Dance Classes, Diamond K9 Dog Training Other fundraising and Donations: - 100 Club, Food Market, Supporters of Table Tennis and Film Club.

And: - all our private hirers and all of you for attending events and supporting us !!

The Hale and Woodgreen Magazine is run by a sub-committee of the Hall, this is still very successful and breaking even financially.

Julia Harding – Woodgreen Community Shop

Woodgreen Community Shop had a turnover last year of £600,000 creating a profit of £12,000 which was a significant improvement to the £2,500 loss made the previous year. This has been achieved by reduced energy costs, better use of volunteer staff and changes in purchasing costs. The Post Office is still a financial challenge which has created an increased loss of £10,000 this year. This is mainly caused by increases in wages. The shop essentially supports the Post Office for the good of the community and would encourage all to use it as much as they can.

A questionnaire was available to all customers and local people and the results have led to changes such as smartening up the outside, more community engagement and improved quality of fruit and veg.

The shop had received £25,000 of grants for which is very grateful. These are from NDFC (CIL application), Cllr Edward Heron and the National Lottery. This will fund a new array of solar panels and associated batteries will reduce costs in the future.

Julia thanked everyone for using the shop.

Cllr Josh Lavis - Update on St Marys Church roof repairs.

Major repairs have taken place to mend the roof of St Mary's Church, Hale which as in significant disrepair. 70% of the roof has now been replaced, the chimney repaired and the remaining part of the roof will be replaced in the near future. It was a huge effort to raise in excess of £50,000; many thanks to all who contributed and helped raise funds and acquire grants, particularly Jacqui Hartas. Fund raising continues for the final repairs. Bill Templeton thanked Josh for his efforts in managing the works.

4. To receive reports from local councillors.

Report from Janet Richards, NFDC Councillor.

The General Election in July brought a change of government, and with it some new challenges for the District Council.

Both the District Council and the National Park have started work on new Local Plans for development in our area, but the government's latest housing target for the New Forest would mean building new houses at three times the rate achieved in recent years. Whilst there is a definite need for more affordable housing, we currently have a declining population here, and very limited land to build on, given that so much is protected within the National Park and the

National Landscape. The housing target seems unrealistic and so the District Council is working with the National Park to propose a more reasonable number in the Local Plans put forward for approval.

The government is pressing ahead with devolution across the country, including a new Hampshire & Isle of Wight strategic authority and an election for a Hampshire mayor in May 2026. Devolution does not directly affect the District Council, but the government also decided to reorganise local government at the same time. This will see the end of the District and County Councils, to be replaced by 3 or 4 Unitary Authorities across Hampshire. The various councils are currently discussing how best to divide up the area and so far there is no agreement on the best way forward. The New Forest's preferred plan would be to join with Test Valley and Winchester to form a single Unitary Authority, as these are similar rural councils. Plans must be submitted to the Government by the end of September.

In October we will be moving to the new waste collections, aiming to improve the District's recycling rates. The New Forest is currently one of the worst areas of the country for recycling – until recently only a third of our rubbish was recycled, compared to twice that in the best Councils. From October, food waste will be collected separately every week for composting. There will be fortnightly collections for the rest of the rubbish and recycling using wheelie bins, and glass will continue to be collected separately once a month. The new arrangements will help us to meet the national target of recycling 55% of rubbish by the end of this year.

This year, the Council is once again distributing a million pounds of CIL money, which is money collected from developers when they build new houses. In our group of 8 parishes, we have been awarded £214K for projects including improving footpaths, reducing traffic speeds, and renewable energy – all things which should be of great benefit to our parishes. It is down to the hard work of Parish Councils and community groups who submitted bids for the money, that we have been awarded such a large chunk of the million pounds.

Report from Councillor Edward Heron – Hampshire County Council.

HCC's annual budget of £2.9 billion is spent predominantly on schools (1.4 billion), adult social care (800 million), children's social care (400 million), refuse collection (80 million) and highways (70 million). This leaves highways, of which there 6,000 miles, severely underfunded as social care funding is always prioritised over highways.

Cllr Heron outlined the plans for government devolution which will see the end of HCC which will be replaced by a strategic authority headed by an elected Major. Hampshire will then be divided into 3 or 4 unitary authorities each with a population of approx 500,000 residents. NFDC would ideally like to merge with Test Valley and Winchester, however having such a rural authority will have challenges. NFDC do not want to merge with Southampton although this is a possibility. The government has said that existing councils cannot be broken up. If no agreements can be made by September then the government will make the decision.

5 To receive the Chairman's Annual Report for 2024/25

Cllr Gemmell outlined the groups on which Hale Parish Council are represented, these include the North West Quadrant which meet quarterly, the New Forest Association, Downton Crime and Policing Group, New Forest Association of Local Councils and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan consultative group.

Cllr Donnell has headed a local group to produce the Hale Community Emergency Plan which can be seen on the website.

HPC continues liaising with The National Trust regarding verge parking along Hale Purlieu; this is a long standing issue which has no obvious solution. The NT has very few rangers and are not able to police parking however they do plan to put more signage at Hale Purlieu and have cleared in front of the car park to make it more visible.

Ryan Scott outlined some of the works recently undertaken –

The works we've undertaken since the start of December are part of our general site management with a focus on heathland restoration. These habitats are in a consent state of succession and require regular maintenance to protect the heathland communities associated with them. At Hale these communities include, humid heath, valley and seepage mires, and some areas of acid grassland.

Our recent focus has been on rotational gorse management and removal of seedling birch.

Historically, much of the gorse across the Forest would have been periodically managed with a standing burn. Due to mitigating site factors such as species protection, visitor safety and weather conditions, we have chosen to cut the gorse and burn at selected sites in a more controlled way.

Cutting the gorse close to ground level allows it to regrow, hopefully with a tight habit, providing a habitat and food source for many associated species. The areas recently worked were selected due to the age of the gorse stands and proximity to busy visitor routes. Large areas of mature gorse can create pinch points between people and livestock so we prioritise keeping these open. Silver birch is an ongoing problem at the site, with seedling trees now posing a significant threat to the condition and quality of the open heath. We have removed a large volume of seedlings and will return to these areas over the next few years to continue tackling the young trees. Hopefully, through a combination of cutting and grazing we can keep on top of this. These are routine heathland restoration works which we will continue to rotate across the site in the coming years.

HPC continues to liaise with Highways regarding the state of Hale Lane, some repairs have taken place but no long term solution is forthcoming.

SLR's – Solar panels will be added to the speed devices along Forest Road which appear to be successful. Sleeves for temporary posts and SLRs will be installed in tethering Drove and Hale Purlieu in the near future.

Many thanks to the cemetery volunteers Georgina Babey and Sally Raworth for working in the cemetery and improving it for wildlife.

6 To take public comments and questions

Question regarding Harry's Meadow and the conditions of the planning decision.

HPC have just received a response to their letter to Steve Avery which questioned some of the conditions in the planning notice. This will be shared with parishioners if requested. It does not clarify the exact size of a pitch.

Question regarding car parking charges.

Forestry England are introducing car parking charges into New Forest car parks by autumn 2026. The exact details of how this will be undertaken are still unknown.

The Chairman thanked the speakers and everyone for attending .

