

Minutes of the Worton Annual Parish Meeting held in Worton and Marston Village Hall on Monday 26 April 2021 at 6.30pm via Zoom.

Welcome and apologies: Councillor Barry Devine, Chairman of Worton Parish Council welcomed Councillors and members of the village to their Annual Parish Meeting.

Apologies had been received from: Councillor Robert Goss and Alun Newman, Worton and Marston Link.

There were 7 Parish Councillors, and 7 parishioners attending. Also in attendance Councillor Richard Gamble, Wiltshire Council (retiring) and Liz Starling, Clerk to the Parish Council.

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 1 April 2019 (*No meeting held in 2020 due to pandemic*): DJ proposed, and DP seconded that the minutes were signed as an accurate record. Agreed.

Matters arising: It was noted that the Community Speed Watch team only have 12 volunteers currently as opposed to the 18 in 2019.

Report of the Chairman of the Parish Council - given by Councillor Barry Devine:

It's been an interesting year hasn't it?

It's like our village has gone through a kind of reverse Brigadoon - except without Gene Kelly or much singing and dancing - except in Gaisford Chase of course - remember that? How naive we all were.

Still a bit like the imaginary Scottish village we may -fingers crossed - be about to properly emerge from hibernation.

Perhaps the most important thing to report on is the Village Good Neighbours group which we set up in response to the early incarnation of the COVID crisis. At that time it seemed that anyone who cared - which to be honest was all of us, was desperately wanting to do "something" whatever that was. Speaking for myself and my family, the overall emotion was one of surreal but controlled terror where the only safe place to be was tucked up in bed! However, being a part of Good neighbours gave impetus for the need to make a difference and, after a few understandable hiccups we managed to morph the scheme into a practical network of genuine good neighbours who helped each other in a number of practical and emotional ways.

What at first seemed daunting proved quite simple and effective - getting us through the difficult early panic period so that we could let the friendships established or renewed run themselves, with the existing Link scheme run by Alan, the much-missed Hazel, and the rest of their volunteers continuing to support residents as they always have done.

It was also great to see the establishment of the Worton and Marston community group on Facebook (thanks Carla) which has become an established part of the way we keep in touch as a community.

I reckon we had around 60 residents involved in the scheme in one way or another, and I was flattered and honoured to speak about our scheme on local radio a couple of times. I did my best to let the world (mainly Wiltshire!) know just what a great place Worton - ok and Marston - is and continues to be.

When we first realised that we had a crisis to deal with my aim was to try to keep everyone safe, well and as happy as possible, paying particular attention to those who could feel lonely and isolated. I think we achieved this and, as far as I know, the impact of COVID has been far less than has been the case in other communities. That is not to say that we are unscathed. Our village has lost some loved and respected residents recently and, whilst this is part of the natural wheel of life, it does seem particularly hard to understand and deal with in circumstances that are so unnatural and make normal grieving processes impossible. We need to continue to look after each other and learn from our experience as hopefully we can get back to some sort of normal.

Which brings me to our Parish Council meetings that have certainly given us all a steep learning curve to climb. We have managed it, but to be honest, much of what we have done has been maintenance and “must dos”, as the national emergency and its frequently fluctuating rules and regs made realistic planning and actions difficult -except where absolutely necessary.

So, we have had some issues that necessitated action beyond COVID.

Planning - particularly in respect of housing provision, inevitably became a topic requiring discussion and action on our part. The online public meeting which we hosted in relation to the planning application for a number of new houses on the Sandlease farm site was well attended and, although opinions on this - and indeed any other -housing application were inevitably divided, the community dealt with the issue in a constructive fashion where the range of views was able to be considered fully and fairly.

The future of housing in the village will certainly be one of the major themes which will recur in the ongoing work of the Parish Council. It must be remembered that views expressed by the Parish Council will always be just one of the factors influencing any decisions. I am determined that we should, as a community, have as much control and influence as possible in order to make sure that future construction - both of housing and associated amenities, is in harmony with our village and its residents whilst also having an eye on the future. New housing at the right scale and location has played a vital role in making Worton the village it is now, and we need to keep this in mind when we deal with ongoing plans and schemes. With this in mind, we intend to reactivate a Worton Neighbourhood plan, using the work of the previous incarnation of the group as a basis but learning from the experience in order to produce plans that genuinely represent a beneficial outcome for Worton. Of course, I would be naive to believe that there would ever be total agreement on the issue, but hopefully a newly constituted group can work together to agree suitable compromises which will give us a sensible position in relation to larger national and local plans - currently suggesting a “large” village such as ours should have a considerable increase in housing stock.

Another area that we continue to be interested in is the perennial problem of traffic and its speed through the village. Whilst the data from the recent metro count were in some ways heartening, in that it suggested that the recently established 40 mph limit on the western approach to the village had had some impact on vehicle speed, there remains the common sense feeling that much of the traffic passing through continues to be too fast. The ongoing work of the Speed Watch team is to be commended on this and we are determined to show our support for their work in a tangible way. Things seem to move slowly (unlike the traffic!) in this respect, partly due to the significant investment needed and the importance of getting it right. We intend to purchase speed indicator devices, Known as SIDS (presumably run on gas??) and have begun the process of getting quotes. Getting these up and running is one of our aims for the year.

On a related issue, things seem to be finally happening with regard to the infamous Black Dog crossroads. The concern has been upscaled from a local to a regional concern, thanks partly to pressure from local residents and groups, where we have played a part, but also due to particular effort by Councillor Gamble, whose work and support over the years is greatly appreciated. Money has been set aside and we continue to be consulted.

During lockdowns of various durations and detail, our footpaths and other routes have become vital. We have tried to respond to requests and issues raised by residents as best we can and have been able to engage successfully with Wiltshire council and landowners with some success, particularly along Back lane. We are currently trying to facilitate improvements to WORT 10/11 - the path that connects Worton and Marston, but it has proved difficult to move as quickly as we would like. We are grateful for the support of a number of villagers in this respect.

We intend to improve the signage along the footpaths to indicate points of local interest, hopefully in combination with a new map and leaflet which would be available to residents and visitors to celebrate our history and enhance our appreciation of our village. I am grateful to Roger Wilshire for inspiration on this and hope to be able to include a range of knowledge and anecdotes as we go forward and rules allow. We will be seeking support!

I should also mention the request for replacement play equipment on the Whatleys Leaze site. This initiative, which owes much to the work of local residents has somewhat stalled due to the ongoing COVID crisis, but it remains very much on our “to do” list and we intend to fully involve the local residents to make sure that we get it right.

You are probably aware that we are seeking two new councillors - I can promise you a satisfying and fulfilling experience and there's no need to worry about undergoing the stress of an election. Please speak to any of the existing councillors or contact Liz Starling. To coin a phrase “Your village needs you”.

Which brings me finally to mention the somewhat unusual way we celebrated VE day (thanks to David and Chris) and say how much we are looking forward to a much better time to come as we get properly together and simply enjoy village life again.

Reports on the finances of the Parish Council - given by Liz Starling, Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer for the Parish Council

The Clerk reported that a total of just under £14,000 has been received by the Parish Council in the year ending 31 March 2021. Just under 75% of this came from the Precept (raised from the council tax) with a further 21% coming from the Good Energy solar fund. The income from the solar fund is however earmarked and can only be used for Community Fund Grants. Other income was a refund of VAT paid in the previous year; rental income on the Heath Hollow allotments and the keep at Sandlease; contribution towards the Society of Local Council Clerks subscription from Potterne Parish Council as the Clerk was also clerking for Potterne until July 2020. A very negligible amount of bank interest was also received.

Expenditure was just over £9,000 and was down on previous years, in part due to the pandemic. The main expenditure (43%) was on salary (Clerk's wages and payments to HM Revenue and Customs) followed by Ground Maintenance (21%) which was mainly grass cutting, work to the oak tree at Whatleys and some hedge cutting. Some grounds maintenance had been done by a volunteer task force (a big thank you to those concerned) and the Parish Council will continue to use volunteers (if appropriate) to try and keep costs down where possible.

Worton Community Fund - given by the Clerk to the Parish Council:

The Clerk gave a presentation on the Community Fund.

Projects must benefit the community within Worton. The following not-for-profit organisations will be considered: Registered charities; voluntary groups; community groups; clubs; school / pre-school parent associations. Generally, individuals are unable to apply unless they are organising a specific project with a community focus).

Not every project is eligible for funding, for example projects of a political or exclusively religious nature. The full criteria is available in the Community Fund grants policy.

There is an application form to be completed and provided this is received at least a week before the date of the next Parish Council meeting, the grant application will be considered at that meeting. Details of the application will also be published in The Bridge and on the Parish Council website.

The Parish Council encouraged all community groups and organisations in the village to consider if they have a need for grant funding. Application forms and grant criteria on the website <http://worton.org.uk/community-fund/> or by emailing the Clerk: clerk@worton.org.uk

Report from retiring Wiltshire Councillor Richard Gamble:

Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words at this Annual Parish Meeting.

I don't need to tell you that the past year has been far from normal but I hope you share my view that, in challenging times, we have been lucky to be here.

At county level I believe we have coped as well as any local authority in the country.

- We have maintained all basic services such as waste collections and recycling,
- we have done a significant amount of road works (including a little around here)
- and we have broadly speaking maintained our children's services and adult services.

- Miraculously, having at one point being £50 million in deficit, we have managed to finish the financial year with a balanced budget and enough reserves to see us through pressures that we see ahead.
 - We have agreed boundary changes for Wiltshire Council Divisions with the unanimous support of all parties. The new divisions will reconnect Worton and Marston with Potterne, which is historically correct, and will also connect with Poulshot.
 - We have started building our own council houses for rent
 - We have reduced our carbon footprint by 80% since 2018 and were voted the most climate-friendly local authority in the country by Friends of the Earth in 2019.
- In Devizes, I have been actively involved on plans for the museum and the Assize Courts, on plans for the wharf area and on plans for a railway station to be called Devizes Gateway at Lydney.

Locally, we have had some interesting planning applications and I am pleased to see the progress at the housing improvements and developments at the west end of the village. I am sorry to see the loss of the cedar tree in Cedar Close and I remain concerned about Back Lane, although it has been a quite issue recently.

As you know, we are now setting out on our new Local Plan for the county and I would urge you to stay engaged with that to ensure planning policies meet the needs of communities like this.

I remain concerned about the local road system but I am encouraged that there are now some options for Black Dog crossroads which I think we will be able to discuss in more detail after the election.

I will no longer be your councillor after 6th May but it has been an enormous pleasure and a privilege to have represented this wonderful community for 12 years in total. In one or two matters, like the station, I hope to continue to have a small role.

The chairman expressed huge thanks to Councillor Gamble and returned his comments to him saying that he had been outstanding as well and we will miss him a great deal. Councillor Slack thanked Councillor Gamble for his report, and for all of his great support to the Council; he wished him the very best in his post-councillor position. He also asked if there was an update on the proposed closure of Furlong Close.

Councillor Gamble said that the evidence is much blander than the media suggests. He is very concerned that this whole issue has arisen during a lockdown when we are talking about the future of very vulnerable people with special needs, many of whom have been living there for decades. The proposal has come along to close the facility, when those residents are unable to meet with family, friends and neighbours or professional advisors. It is a disgraceful situation to be in. The closure is not led by Wiltshire Council but they are constrained by the fact that the property belongs to another organisation; it is that organisation who are making the decision and not Wiltshire Council.

Report from Worton United Charities:

No representative in attendance and no report received.

Reports from Local Groups and Organisations:

➤ Christ Church - given by Heather Walker, Church Warden:

Christ Church has only been open for short periods between lockdowns over the past year, but Revd Ali and Stu, and the Ministry team have worked incredibly hard to maintain as many services as possible from all the churches in the Benefice, some live and many on zoom. It has all been a big learning curve but with the benefit of those taking part on zoom from around the Benefice getting to know each other. We have been very aware that some people do not have access to zoom, but we have managed to keep in touch with phone calls and by printing the weekly Newsletter for them.

We have very much missed having social and fundraising activities, including just having coffee and chat after church, which we know our congregation enjoyed, but hope we will be able to start doing these again soon.

Several outdoor services have taken place, a very wet and windy Harvest service at Five lanes Farm, a service on Poulshot Green, Palm Sunday, Mothering Sunday and a Sunrise service at Easter. And of course, the Carol float which travelled around the villages during the week before Christmas. Many thanks to Ali, Stu and Adrian for all their hard work on this at a busy time.

Whilst the church was closed during first lockdown last year the opportunity was taken to have the inside redecorated. It is now open every Sunday for private prayer, and some live services will be taking place through the Summer, intending to form a new pattern of services from September as restrictions are eased.

"Little Springers" is getting under way in Christ Church on some Saturday afternoons, being a time especially for families with young children, to enjoy activities together.

Two very valued Members are sadly leaving the Ministry team over the next few months, Revd Joshva, who will be leaving and relocating due to his increased work commitments and those of his wife, Rachel. Also Revd Renée, who will be moving closer to her family.

They leave with our very best wishes.

Revd Adrian Burholt joined the Benefice last June, as a curate for three years. He has taken on a great workload, including heading up the Vision and Plan for the future of our churches. Five groups have been meeting via zoom, for several months to discuss different aspects of church life and ideas for the way forward. You will be aware of the questionnaire which is included in the May edition of the Bridge which gives the opportunity for the community to also pass on their views.

If you see Revd Adrian, sometimes with Revd Ali, around the villages, along with their dogs, stop and have a chat.

So the past year has meant lots of changes but has given the opportunity to look forward to fresh ideas and ways of doing things.

We continue to pray for Revd Ali and Stu and family as Ali continues her treatment through the Summer.

➤ **Five Lanes Women's Institute (WI) - given by Sarah Devine:**

Sadly we lost our friend Joy, she will be missed.

On a brighter note, one of our members has celebrated her 90th birthday and 60 years of being a WI member. Our meeting schedule has been curtailed due to COVID, however we have kept in touch with members through phone calls, cards, meetings in a bag and zoom meetings. In the summer when restrictions allowed we held two garden meetings. We plan to restart our programme in June again with a garden meeting when we look forward to welcoming old and new members.

The Bridge Magazine - given by Giles Collins, Editor of the Bridge:

Giles reported that there has not been too much change over the last year. The magazine has been mainly online during the pandemic but is back in a printed version now. Both versions will continue from now on. Subscription is £3 a year and advert costs are the same. Subs are being collected this month.

People are becoming wordier with their submissions and editions are now 50-60 pages long although this is not a problem. Kim Cannon is in charge of the distribution.

It was suggested that the Community Fund might be able to support the Bridge if only has a one off. The Clerk will contact Giles regarding this.

The chairman thanked Giles for the wonderful job of producing an admirable read.

VE/VJ Day - given by Christine Johnson:

Last year's event was cancelled due to the pandemic. It has been reorganised for August 21st and 22nd in the village hall and renamed "VE and VJ 75 +1 not forgotten". The working group is under the auspices of the Parish Council. Donations will be made to Scotties Little Heroes and SSAFA. There will be WWII vehicles and tents from local enthusiast groups. Still looking for exhibits and history information.

Worton and Marston Family of Churches:

This small committee comprises members of Christ Church, Marston Chapel and of the Catholic community.

Through the year (in normal times) it is responsible for:-

Newcomers' Welcome Party at the end of January.

Good Friday Walk of witness with the cross followed by soup lunch.

Open-air service on Marston Green in July.

Beer and carols in the Pub in early December.

Carols by candlelight in Marston Chapel in mid-December.

Occasional healing services alternating between the two churches.

Through the last year Newcomers' booklets were still delivered to those we knew had moved into the villages during 2020 along with a welcome card explaining the principle of the Welcome Party and that even though we couldn't hold one, they were very welcome anyway.

We are hoping to keep a good record of newcomers arriving through 2021, and would be grateful for people all around the villages to keep us informed.

We then intend to hold a joint Newcomers' Party in January 2022 for those who arrived in 2020 and 2021.

Village Hall:

The Hall has been shut for most of the year due to COVID restrictions, however the trustees have been working to obtain grants including the Lottery Recovery fund. A dishwasher and new matching crockery have been purchased and installed. The business plan items of installing a sound system and hearing loop have also been completed. Additionally a ramp to be used at the fire exit has been finished. New chairs from a grant from the parish council have been bought including some with arms. The trustees are looking at a possible kitchen extension as well as some redecoration. We are looking forward to sharing all the improvements once it is safe to do so.

Community Speed Watch:

We have not been able to operate as normal during the past year and have had to stop altogether a couple of times.

We started again at the end of March but are only doing one session per day for the moment, as the camera has to be cleaned between sessions due to Covid regulations.

We hope to be able to increase our number of sessions when the Covid restrictions are lifted.

We have resumed monitoring at the Village Hall, although it has been found that the 30 mph signs having been relocated makes it more difficult to monitor vehicles coming into the Village from the Seend direction.

We always welcome new volunteers. A brief online training course needs to be undertaken which is run by CSW Admin.

If you would like further information, please contact Suzanne 724098.

Worton and Marston Ladies Group:

We are saddened by the loss of our members recently.

No activity over the past year due to Covid. We hope to resume our monthly meetings when the Village Hall is able to accommodate us once again.

Gardening Club:

We are saddened by the loss of our members recently.
No activity over the past year due to Covid. We hope to resume our monthly meetings when the Village Hall is able to accommodate us once again.

Worton and Marston Toddlers: *(received after the meeting)*

It has been a sad year for the Toddler Group. There was no Christmas party and no visit to the church to make Christmas decorations, no Mothers' Day cards or Easter decorations, or any crafts at all.

We were greatly saddened to learn of the death of Primrose Wright who was Santa's Elf at our Christmas parties. Our condolences to Keith.

The restrictions and requirements of the hall mean that it may still be some time before we can meet again as a group, but we are very much looking forward to meeting our lovely families again. We will be looking for some committed members of the group who are willing to help with the running of the group with a view to taking over at the end of the summer term 2022.

The chairman thanked everyone for their reports and invited anyone who had any questions to raise them during the final agenda item.

Public Forum:

There were no questions raised and the chairman closed the meeting at 7.30pm.