

Askerswell Parish Meeting

Thursday 16th May 2024 at 7.30p.m.

In attendance: Harry Coutts (Chair), David Atree (Vice Chair), Peter Ballard (Clerk), Tim and Dinks Boden, Liz and Nigel Guard, Lara Atree, Mike Green, Antony and Jessamy Wilsdon, Elaine Ballard, Richard Hobbs, Maggie and Geoff Barrett, Nick Evans, Graham and Gillian Fowler, Frank Hemmings, Godfrey Lancashire, Lauryn Mealing, Harriet Laurie and Morag Postles.

Item 1/24: Chairman's opening remarks. Harry opened by thanking everyone for their attendance, adding "For those of you who may be new to the Village or your first time attending a Parish Meeting, this is one of the most basic, ancient and effective forms of local government. We as a Parish are too small to sustain a full Parish Council (unless of course we become a ward of Lodders PC) but we, as a community together, retain our autonomy through approving how our local Parish precept money is spent (within proper guidelines), represent local interests in contentious matters like planning and are generally on hand to provide support and assistance where that is required."

Item 2/24: Apologies for absence were received from David and Rose Wintle, Graham and Mandy Hall, Laurie and Romaine Deards, Mike Sinclair, Gill Reypert, Alison Lancashire, Eileen Bryan, Ali Green, Rumbi Evans and Cllr. Neil Eysenck.

Item 3/24: Minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2023 were approved unanimously.

Proposed:	Richard Hobbs	In Favour:	20
Seconded:	Mike Green	Against:	0

Item 4/24: Matters arising not covered below – there were none.

Item 5/24: Correspondence – none had been received.

Item 6/24: Chair's update. Harry gave the following update: "The first thing to mention is to express our enormous thanks to Antony Wilsdon, who is stepping back from his role as village correspondent for the Eggardon and Colmers View after many years of hard work reporting on village life. The ECV is effectively the chronicle of village life across the Eggardon and Colmers Benefice and the contribution Antony has made, with the support of Jessamy, both of whom have served the village for many years in different roles, cannot be understated - we all owe Antony and Jessamy our huge thanks. I understand the search to find a new correspondent is still ongoing, so please reach out to Antony if that interests you.

We have been saddened by recent passing of long standing Askerswell residents Richard Brasier and of Marian MacLachlan who dedicated herself to good causes and the local community within the village and the Church over the 30 years of her life here.

We have had some fantastic events on in the village over the last few months – the spectacular village play, Gulliver, about a local smuggler from Askerswell holding an 'Apprentice' style series of challenges to find a successor to his business empire. I can only wish Antony the same success in the recruitment of his successor as Village correspondent.

We have also had the recent Beetle Drive as well as Village Coffee and Hot Cross Buns, training sessions for our new Defibrillator and, this coming Saturday, the Village Barbeque.

We have been pressing the Council on the potholes within the village, primarily along Parsons Lane but with potholes arising elsewhere as well as subsidence along the bottom of Litton Lane, that work will continue.

I have also been in contact with our MP Chris Loder about the fly-tipping on the site of the old Askers Roadhouse at the top of the hill by the A35 - which is within our Parish area. This is now being escalated with Dorset Council and we shall be continuing to press for this to be addressed and the site properly cleared and secured. If there are any instances of this activity impacting anyone here, for example any rubbish being blown from the site into the village, please do let us know.

We had a brief fleeting visit in late April from the Secretary of State for the Environment, Steve Barclay, who came to a farm in Askerswell to discuss flooding issues and environmental work within the River Brit catchment - which was reported by the Dorset Echo.

Last year there were some concerns raised about the provision of local community run bus services, particularly the Axe Valley and West Dorset Ring and Ride Service. I contacted both the Ring and Ride and Dorset Community Transport to ask about where things stand with this.

Firstly, while a stop-gap funding donation was secured for the ring and ride late last year, I understand this will last until July this year after which the service will be discontinued. However, I have also contacted Dorset Community Transport which is a privately run, small scale transport company. They operate a number of minibus routes, one of which serves Askerswell and I think is worth noting for the benefit of the Parish Meeting what this service provides...

“Bridport D” Service:

- This service runs to and from Bridport every Friday.
- Starting from Maiden Newton approx. 9.30am through Toller Porcorum, Powerstock, Askerswell, Uploders and Lodors.
- Morrisons served on request.
- Return journey departs 12.30pm.

They also support with handling baggage and can operate a door-to-door service upon request. Please get in touch if you need any more information. I hope that we will be in receipt of up-to-date literature from DCT about this which can be displayed or distributed for further information.

I should also pay tribute to our outgoing Dorset Council representative Tony Alford who has been our councillor since 2019 on Dorset Council but also represented Netherbury on West Dorset District Council for around 20 years, several of which he served as Leader of the Council. We wish Tony a long and happy retirement. Dorset now has a new Council, governed by a Liberal Democrat-Green coalition. This also applies to our own ward where we are now represented by Cllr Neil Eysenck from the Lib-Dems who was successful in winning this ward.

Neil was invited to this meeting and would like to have been here, but with the first full meeting of Dorset Council taking place this evening, that was not possible. Having got to know Neil, albeit from arm's length, he seems very decent, approachable councillor and I wish him well in his term of office.

Lastly from me, it has been a pleasure to serve as Chair for the last two years. We were in a rather precarious position two years ago with a whole new team who stepped up to ensure we could continue as our own independent Parish. Dave and Peter have been a huge support and I know we will be in safe hands moving forward and if there are any people who would like to take on a more active role within the PM, please do reach out even just for a chat to see if it might interest you.” And received a grateful round of applause.

Item 7/24: Finance Review (Clerk) Peter displayed the Accounts statement (attached) that was previously circulated and talked through the highlights. There were no questions. Harry called for the vote to approve the accounts, which were approved unanimously.

Proposed:	Godfrey	In Favour:	20
Seconded:	Harriett	Against:	0

He then made the statutory declaration that they would be submitted and published in the Notice Board and on the Website for 14 days and that anyone from the Parish may request to inspect the records within 30 days.

Item 8/24: Washingpool Fund update – Peter noted the transfer of excess donations to the Defibrillator fund (£930.06) and the generous donation of £150 from Village Coffee (for which he thanked Liz and the team, and there was a stirring round of applause) and confirmed that the balance currently stands at £1,708.00. Mike very kindly called for a vote of thanks to the Clerk for all the hard work in preparing the accounts – which he deftly turned into a vote of thanks to Nigel, both for acting as independent auditor and agreeing to stay on to do the audit next year.

Item 9/24: Summary of Planning Applications and Highways work – There were only two planning notices during the period, the Appeal to the decision not to allow the shepherd's hut at Medway Farm, which was refused and the original planning refusal upheld, and the non-material changes to the approved plans at Oaklea, which were also approved.

Item 10/24: Local Reports and Acknowledgements (verbal)

Village Hall – Geoff thanked everyone for attending all of the events, the VEGies for arranging them and all of the helpers. He noted that several of the current trustees are planning to stand down, and asked for volunteers to please step forward, noting that the task is not burdensome with only one meeting per quarter. The AGM will be on 19th June 2024 at 7.30PM in the Hall.

Good neighbours Scheme / 4WD Drivers - Godfrey thanked all involved and commented that, with no snow last year, there was nothing for the 4x4 drivers to do, but that the Good Neighbours continue to assist quietly in the background. He praised Liz and Kathy Hince, who, previously assisted by Gill Evans, do the majority of the “heavy lifting” and allocate tasks amongst the list of volunteers as requests come in. He asked if there was someone who would step up to assist Liz and Kathy to please contact him. He added that Kathy was unable to attend due to long standing commitments on a Thursday evening and requested that the PM be held on other days occasionally. This was briefly debated and it was agreed that the possibility of Wednesdays may be investigated.

Washingpool maintenance and nature report – Harry said “Thank you to all the volunteers who have signed up to the rota again this year and to those who have stepped back after many years. The very wet winter has left patches of the turf incredibly wet. Time will tell if this will dry off or whether remedial work will need to be carried out but we are watching closely. The mower is working in spite of mechanical issues last year, but we also have a spare lawnmower ready as a backup in case any issues do return. We are intending to replace the broken goal at the far end of the playing field as well as the rotten fence posts and clearing some of the encroaching scrub on the right-hand side of the green to enable an easier passage of the lawnmower and for the desired trees to thrive.

The River Asker forms a vital part of the wider River Brit Catchment - which has been the successful recipient of Government funding to deliver the Brit catchment recovery project. The importance of this was outlined by the recent visits of the Environment Secretary and Minister for Water Robbie Moore to the catchment earlier in the year.

The project looks to work with local landowners and community groups to improve flood resilience and enhance the natural ecosystems of the area. This will be measured by a number of key performance indicators. By 2050, the project aims to have accomplished...

- Increase diversity of species by 50% and 100% in abundance
 - 100% increases in soil carbon and above ground biomass and 200% increase in wetland creation within the catchment.
 - All catchment rivers to be high ecological standard. (the Asker already is!!)
 - All to mean 25% reduction in peak flow in Bridport and 10% elevation in base flows during drought. (i.e. reduce flooding but support migratory species in times of drought)
- If you need any more information about this project, please reach out to us and we will point you in the right direction." Tim Boden noted that according to Cllr. Atkinson, the Asker is the most Westerly chalk stream in the UK (and possibly the most Southerly as well).

Flower Tubs – Harry praised David and Rose for their hard work in the Square, and Lara for her efforts with the upkeep of the tubs at the Village Hall, we are very lucky to live in such a beautiful environment and to have it so well looked after.

Website – Harry thanked Nick for his considerable effort re-vamping the website and asked that if anyone has any comments or suggestions for the website, to please let us know.

Parish Lands charities update – Antony reminded us that the Parish lands comprise two fields (the Fuel allotment and the Gravel allotment) on the way to Medway Farm (currently rented by Medway) which were left in Trust to the village in the 19th century to support hardship or educational grants. They are overseen by the Trustees – Antony, Graham Hall and Richard Hobbs each serving four-year terms – and, as Antony's term is expiring in November, there will need to be a replacement found, and he asked for volunteers... There have been no grants made this year, so the balance of the Fuel allotment is £808.39 and the Gravel allotment is £808.38.

Rights of Way – Peter confessed to having done little on the footpaths recently and apologised, but noted that the potential for Dog Flaps had been raised and that he was hoping to be able to add some to the stiles in due course. If anyone spots any issues with the footpaths, please let him know immediately.

Village Clean-Up day – Harry noted that the Parish Meeting Officers and others continue to walk the streets (!) and pick up any litter that is spotted. We have had two recent action days at the Village Hall and the Church and he thanked all those who organised and helped out with these.

Marquee - the Marquee had been used to good effect last summer, was still at Medway farm, is 8m x 4m and in excellent condition, is free to use by any of the villagers, £50 for others (reduced to £25 for charity events)

Sandbags are held by a number of properties in the village and can easily be obtained if needed. We received 50 at the end of last year. Harry reminded everyone that these are stored for the benefit of the whole community so please be aware that we may ask for these to be used anywhere in the village if they are ever required.

Defibrillator – Harry commented that the Defibrillator is mapped out on Google maps, that the agreed "What 3 words" locator has been added and the signage has been enhanced to ensure it is easy to find. Training sessions have been organised and well attended, thanks to Antony and any further suggestions or feedback will always be appreciated.

Item 11/24: Election of Officers. Harry confirmed that he was definitely standing down as Chair (the entire Meeting gave a resounding round of applause and thanks for his excellent efforts over the last two years), advised that Peter was willing to stand as Chair, and that Lauryn had agreed to take the role of Clerk (with Dave agreeing to continue as Vice Chair). It was agreed that all of these could be confirmed by a single vote, so the

proposal that “Peter Ballard be elected Chair, David Altree be confirmed as Vice Chair and Lauryn Mealing be elected Clerk of Askerswell Parish meeting” was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Gillian
Seconded: Harriett

In Favour: 19
Against: 0

Item 12/24: Any Other Business. Antony commented that he would only be available for three more episodes as Village correspondent and asked for a volunteer to come forward.

Gillian proposed a vote of thanks to Harry and the Meeting Officers and there was a final round of applause.

Item 13/24: Date of next Parish Meeting was agreed as 16th October 2024 (Wednesday). Maggie subsequently confirmed the availability of the Village hall.

There being no further business, Harry closed the meeting at 20.08, a new Personal Best.

DRAFT