

## **BURGHFIELD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MINUTES THURSDAY 12<sup>th</sup> MAY 2022**

**Councillors:** Cllr I MacFarlane, Cllr P Lawrence, Cllr M Cresser, Cllr A Gallagher, Cllr D Godding, Cllr R Longton, Cllr D Godwin, Cllr C Jackson-Doerge, Cllr N Morse, Cllr L Sharp, Cllr I Morrin, Cllr J Ansell  
**Apologies:** Cllr T Ansell, Cllr B Neilson, Cllr C Greaves  
**Officers:** Clerk to the Parish Council  
**Public:** 13 members of the public, 3 Neighbourhood Police Officers, District Cllr G Bridgeman

### **1. Introduction and Welcome by the Chairman of the Parish Council**

The Chairman welcomed those present and opened the meeting.

### **2. Apologies**

Apologies were received and accepted for Cllr T Ansell, Cllr C Greaves, and Cllr B Neilson.

### **3. Approval of the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 2021**

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting from 2021 were acknowledged by those present, having been approved as an accurate record of events.

### **4. Annual Report from the Chairman of the parish Council**

The presiding Chair read the Chairmans report in the absence of Cllr T Ansell, providing a brief summary of the highlights and achievements of the Parish Council during the previous year.

N.B: The report provided factual information specifically relating to the parish of Burghfield only.

### **5. Reports from the Chairman of the Committees upon the Council**

Reports were presented by the Chairman of the Communications Committee, the Community Committee, the Infrastructure Committee, the Asset Management Committee, and the Governance & Finance Committee outlining the achievements and highlights of the previous year. The presiding Chairman thanked members for their hard work throughout the year.

### **6. Questions ahead of the meeting from Parishioners/Electorate**

In order to assist the efficient administration of the meeting, members of the public were asked to email their questions in order to provide opportunity for a fuller answer to be provided. The Chairman advised the following questions had been received:

- 1) A post on the Parish Council Facebook page on 23rd December states that 73% of the responders to a survey about the Village Hall refurbishment were in favour of an increase in the precept to pay for the refurbishment. Could the Parish Council state firstly how many responses were received and secondly what was the percentage of those in favour against the total population of Burghfield Common of around 6,000?***

A total of 113 responses were received: 100 via the online platform Survey Monkey, 3 via direct email and 10 in paper copy.

The consultation was circulated to all 2,500 households within the parish via the parish newsletter. The total number of respondents as a % of households (who pay the precept as an overall) was 4.5%. The total number of respondents as a % of the total electorate equates as 1.88%.

(West Berkshire Council, with a population of 168,000, might receive about 1,000 responses to major consultations, equating to 0.59% of the overall population).

**2) *The village hall refurbishment cost a great deal, and, in any project, it is customary to have a post completion review. Can the Parish Council provide detail of the following:***

- 1. *The total cost of the project.***
- 2. *The original budget.***
- 3. *The amount of the overspend.***
- 4. *Details of what the overspend was spent on.***
- 5. *An understanding of why a fixed price contract was not obtained.***

The Chairman advised that a detailed final report had been prepared regarding the refurbishment of the village hall which addressed all of the above points. The report is available for viewing and download via the parish council website.

**7. Questions at the meeting from Parishioners/Electorate**

The following question was raised by a parishioner:

Q. – Can you please confirm the quoted figure of 4.5% of population being happy with an increase in precept to fund the village hall refurbishment.

A. – An increase has not been necessary and therefore not applied due to prudent financial planning by the parish council coupled with an increase in revenue from the village hall.

The Chairman invited the Neighbourhood Policing Team to speak:

The Neighbourhood Policing Team gave a brief report regarding the proposed provision of CCTV within the parish following the generous gifting of a mobile camera from a local resident. The camera is for use within the vicinity of the Recreation Ground in Burghfield in a bid to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Parishioners raised a number of questions regarding the use, location and utilisation of the CCTV footage obtained. Reassurance was provided with a video of the camera in action being shown to illustrate to capability of the camera being used.

Thanks were expressed to the local resident and the police for answering the questions and concerns of residents present.

**8. Chairman's closure of meeting**

The Chairman thanked parishioners for their attendance and declared the meeting closed at 20.15pm.

## **Appendix A: Chairman's report for Annual Parish meeting**

I am sorry that I cannot be at the Annual Parish meeting this year.

Once again this has been an interesting year for the parish council. We started the year with a change of legislation preventing online meetings but still having to hold meeting to meet our legal obligations. This led to a new first with the parish council having an outdoor meeting in the Recreation Ground in order that we followed both the Covid legislation and met held the meeting within the legal timescales. Fortunately, the weather was pleasant, and lack of wind met that we could social distance and still hear each other talk.

The most exciting project this year was completing the refurbishment of the village hall. Much of this work was required to upgrade the village hall to meet the new Covid and post Covid requirements of having fresh air in the building consequently all the windows in main hall needed replacing as none of them opened. We also took the opportunity to meet one of the key reasons the community hub project was started, increasing the available rental space, and proving a number of different room sizes and types. Following a public vote, the Parish Council decided to take out a loan to cover part of this costs, this is now looking like a good financial decision as the loan is on low fixed rate of 1.49%. With inflation increasing rapidly this means the cost of the loan is reducing in real terms.

The real benefit to the whole community of the refurbishment of the village hall is through the increase in revenue from booking the various rooms. The enhancement of the facility has meant that we have attracted new customers who could not rent space in village hall as it was because it did not meet their requirements. The effect of this is revenue is up more than 30% and growing. This is one of the reasons that the parish council has not increased the precept this year.

The threat that Covid presented has dimmed but the impact of the war in Ukraine is beginning to have a big impact on all of us, as we did during Covid, we will continue to support and invest to make our community a stronger and happier place.

## **Appendix B: Governance & Finance Committee**

The Finance and Governance committee is made up from the Chairs of the various committees within Burghfield Parish Council and its remit is to monitor the Council to ensure fiscal prudence and good governance.

It is one of the less glamorous committees, but it is probably the most important in that it is the guardian of public money.

The success of the committee can be measured by the manner in which it handles the finances of the council, and this is born by the fact that there has been no increase in the precept served upon West Berks Council for the last 3 years. We have managed to deliver a soundly financed and extensive refurbishment to the village hall at no increase in costs to the parish taxpayers.

I'm sure a number of you have seen the anonymous leaflets displayed within the parish referring to a massive overspend of the hall during its refurbishment. Wildly inaccurate figures have been quoted and the truth is there was an overspend, of just £53.20. When dealing with a budget of more than a quarter of a million pounds I think that is an excellent achievement. The same leaflets have also been critical of the loan taken out by the council of £100k payable back over 20 years, that equates to £508 per month, just 2 regular hirers nearly cover that cost. It is a pity that the anonymous authors do not check their facts before spreading misinformation.

The Governance side of the committee regularly reviews the Council's standing orders to ensure they are up to date and fit for purpose. We also review the FOI requests that come in and have noted that

recently there has been a significant increase. Whilst we understand and believe in the Freedom of Information, we are aware that the costs involved in complying to these requests does divert money away from other projects. To date FOI request have cost the Council £11,552 - £7,600 of which being in the last financial year.

The committee will continue to work for the benefit of the community and not be diverted by a small number within the parish who want to be disruptive.

Ian Macfarlane  
Chairman- Finance & Governance

### **Appendix C: Community Committee**

The Community committee is one of the busiest committees on the Parish Council and looks after the Recreation Grounds, the allotments, the pavilion and the jewel in the crown, the refurbished Village Hall.

The committee is also responsible for the play areas within the recreation grounds and ensures that regular safety reports and inspections are carried out and that any recommendations are acted on. For instance, one report noted that the safer surfacing area on part of the common rec is in need of attention, the committee has undertaken to obtain quotes to ensure the work is carried out in a timely manner.

Thanks to the hard work of two councillors on the committee, Councillor Ansell and Councillor Gallagher, the committee has introduced regular meetings up on the allotment sites so we can better understand the requirements of the plot holders. The recent price increase in the allotment rents was noted and the committee acted swiftly to reduce the rent for allotment holders who found the increase unaffordable and who had been tenants for a considerable period of time.

The village hall has gone from strength to strength following its refurbishment and has increased its income substantially since it's reopening. We have had some wonderful comments from 2 regular hirers who have been delighted with the Wi-Fi connectivity and the layout of the hall which now allows access to all the rooms without having to cross through occupied rooms. More is to be done in the next few months to take it up a further level as areas of improvement having been identified through customer feedback. Disappointingly, there have been some negative and anonymous comments about an alleged budget overspend, I know the Chairman of the Finance and Governance committee will address those in the later report.

The committee is also responsible for maintaining the trees within the parish of which there are many. The rolling 5 year tree plan ensures that diseased trees are dealt with and regular replanting takes place.

This committee works very hard and does it's best to provide great facilities for the Parish. Please remember that we are elected members trying to do our best in what can be trying and difficult times.

Finally, I would like to thank all the committee members for their hard work and diligence over the last 12 months, you all make the Community Committee what it is today.

Ian Macfarlane  
Community Committee Chairman.

## **Appendix D: Infrastructure Committee**

The Infrastructure Committee continues to investigate, review and comment on planning applications submitted to West Berkshire Council that are within the parish or that may affect the parish, to ensure they are in accordance with the Village Design Statement and planning policy.

If you have concerns about an application that has been submitted, it is important that your comments and observations are made direct to West Berkshire Council, so the case officer is aware of your concerns. Please feel free to forward your comments to the Parish Council so the Infrastructure Committee can take them into consideration when reviewing the application.

Three applications of note are;

22/00325/RESMAJ	Land North Of Dauntless Road and South Of Pondhouse Farm, Clayhill Road, Burghfield Common, Reading.
22/00535/FUL	Erection of a temporary cafe (prefabricated unit), Pavilion, Recreation Ground, Recreation Road, Burghfield Common.
22/00244/FULEXT	Erection of 32 dwellings, Land at rear of The Hollies, Reading Road, Burghfield Common.

The Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) through the community lead Steering Group has delivered the proposed NDP to the Parish Council for comment.

And finally, the Committee also considers is Road Safety and Highways Improvements utilising funds from the Community Infrastructure Levy. If there are any areas roads or paths that you believe would benefit from improvements, please let the Council know so the committee can consider them.

P.Lawrence  
Chairman, Infrastructure Committee.

## **Appendix E – Communications Committee**

The purpose of the Communications Committee is to gather the wishes and opinions of local people, reflect those wishes to the PC and communicate the actions through various media and events.

Our objective is to develop links within the community and to inform parishioners of the aims and aspirations of the Parish Council. The committee's aims are to develop printed publications, the website and social media to build a stronger community by way of effective communication.

As Chairman of the Communications Committee, I would like to thank the team for their contributions and energy during the past year.

We have produced 4 newsletters (one for each season) and that pattern will continue. The latest is going out at the end of this month.

I must mention the PC website which continues to improve. with a plethora of items from the latest local news to information about all aspects of the Parish Council's work. There is also a section on the development of the plans for the cafe and archive copies of newsletters and Parish Council meetings and much more. It is really worth a regular visit.

Our other channels of communication are:

The noticeboards and the Burghfield Parish Council Facebook page.

We are also responsible for progressing the diary of community events for 2021.

We are also happy to back the wonderful events that the Burghfield Santas run.

Thank you to the other committees for your help this year, to the inhabitants of Burghfield parish and in particular to Cally and Claire for their unstinting support.

Libby Sharp

Chair of Communications Committee

### **Appendix F: Asset Management/Community hub Committee**

In 2019/2020 I wondered whether COVID-19 would blow over in a matter of weeks or whether it would be something that changes our lives forever including the way we as BPC conduct meetings. As we emerged from the various COVID-19 restrictions and started to return to something like business as usual, it became clear that COVID-19 is with us for the long-term and that we must try to live with it. Being guided by legislation we resumed in person meetings at the appropriate time.

The committee held x 5 meetings in this municipal year

2020 has seen the completion of the Village Hall Refurbishment project, the committee extends our thanks to the tireless work, co-ordination, project management and attention to detail to both our Parish Clerks.

The Community Hub project commenced in 2017. During this municipal year the council formed a dedicated committee to drive this project forward, and contracted ABC Business Consulting in the development of a business plan. It was agreed to proceed with an MVP (Minimum Viable Project) to provide a temporary café to be opened during 2022.

Notwithstanding, the councils originally planned hub as a solid building cost was also taken into consideration.

The Parish Council acknowledge a deviation from the original design of the Community Hub, however, within all designs presented, a Cafe has formed the main part of the brief. Whilst parishioners have expressed an appetite for a hub with a Cafe since 2017, the Parish Council has been extremely mindful of both risk and the potential financial burden upon the council and consequently in providing the originally discussed facility outweighed the financial commitment required without a test to the market to determine the success of a Cafe.

The action plan for the first phase of the Hub being the café was then discussed by the members of the Asset Management Committee at various meetings and ratified by the Full Parish Council. All minutes are available on the Parish Council Website.

The parish council have ear marked a reserve of £49,000 with the intention to obtain further grant funding. The parish council was successful in securing a total of £49,000 in grants for the village hall refurbishment project and is therefore confident in being able to secure external funding for a significant proportion of the cost in the provision of a community café.

Cllr Carol Jackson-Doerge

Chair of Asset Management Committee