

Woodchester Parish Council

Clerk: Sylvia May

Lancaster House, Selsley Road, Woodchester, Stroud Gloucestershire GL5 5NQ

Telephone: 07863 098710

E-mail: woodchesterparish@gmail.com

Website: www.woodchesterparish.org.uk

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 13th May 2021
In Woodchester Endowed School at 6.30pm

Present:

Cllr. Hamilton (Chair)

Councillors Baynham-Honri, Dunbar, McNealey, Lead

County Councillor Steve Robinson

4 members of the public

Clerk

Welcome

Cllr. Hamilton welcomed all those present to the meeting.

Receive apologies for absence

Apologies were received from District Councillor Ashley Smith

Approve the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 21st May, 2019

The minutes were signed as a true record by Cllr. Hamilton.

Presentation of the Village Annual Report

Cllr Hamilton began by explaining that due to Coronavirus restrictions the Annual Parish Meeting had to be offered in a very much reduced format this year without the usual presentations by organisations in the village. However, he stated that the Parish Council plan to run a Parish Forum later in the year to discuss a four-year plan for the village, including the possibility of revisiting the Parish Plan and Design statement. He also highlighted the role the two Churches in Woodchester, Woodchester village shop volunteers and Cllr McNealey had done to form a community outreach group to support the community of Woodchester throughout the pandemic. He went on to summarise the Chairman's report, attached as an Annex to these minutes.

Agree a date and format for a Parish Forum

It was decided this should be discussed and agreed in a future Parish Council Meeting after wider discussion were concluded.

Questions from the public

A member of the public raised a local planning issue of ongoing concern. A note was made of their concerns and the issue will be addressed in a Public Planning Meeting to be held in the near future.

Thanks and close

Cllr. Hamilton thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting closed at 6.55pm.

Chair..... Date.....

Annex

WOODCHESTER ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING 2021 REPORT OF WOODCHESTER PARISH COUNCIL ON ITS WORK FOR THE PAST YEAR

1. INTRODUCTION

What a difference this last extraordinary pandemic year made to all our lives, not least on the inhabitants of Woodchester. In so many ways adversity has drawn us together as a community, providing encouragement and support to those of our residents in greatest need. In spite of the difficulties imposed by lock down and the curtailment of the work of the many voluntary agencies active in the village The Parish Council has managed to surmount the worst of the difficulties by meeting virtually on-line and conducting much of its business by e-mail. Below are some of the key issues the Council has dealt with in the past year.

2. CHANGES IN PERSONNEL

In the autumn of last year our long-standing Clerk to the Council, Ann Bijkerk, who had served us faithfully for the past nine years, decided to resume her career in teaching. The Council were fortunate in appointing as new Clerk Sylvia May, a fifteen year resident of North Woodchester who had previously run her own business. Fortunately her induction has been made easier by the efficient organisation of her predecessor and the continuing support of our Parish Councillors and local residents.

We also regretfully said goodbye to two of our long serving councillors. We thank both Uta Baldauf, our young people's advocate who is continuing her full time nursing career and Barbara Warnes, whose activities on the Highways and Rights of Way Committee have ensured our footpaths remain open and passable. Happily we shall still benefit from Barbara's expertise as a vigilant pedestrian in her regular walks around the village

We welcome as their replacements our two new councillors, Liz Hasinski and Caroline Noon both of whom, we are confident, will be able to add their considerable experience as local residents to the work of the council.

3. FINANCIAL ISSUES

The precept, (the sum voted each year from the Council Tax for carrying out the essential functions of the Parish Council) has this year, allowing for inflation, remained the same as 2019-2020, still with a healthy reserve for emergencies.

The Council agreed a budget of £14,880 for the financial year with a precept of £12,500 to cover priority expenditure plus an extra £1,790 to cover secondary expenditure ,the shortfall being met from the reserves.

The budget for the maintenance contract in the village remains the same at £2420 as does a sum of £350 to keep the popular Bike trail in good repair.

The financial position of the Woodchester Word, an important source of local news and communication, was reviewed last autumn. It has become increasingly difficult to source sufficient revenue from advertising to cover the cost of printing four editions each year. As a result of Covid-19 restrictions door to door distribution were temporarily curtailed.

In order that the Word can continue, meetings are being held with the editor to reduce the number of editions to three a year and content from 16 to 12 pages and to reintroduce deliveries to each house.

4. PLANNING ISSUES (Cllr. Peter Lead)

The majority of planning decisions considered by the Parish council are straightforward and non-contentious. However there are four major issues which have required more than a usual degree of vigilance on behalf of our local residents.

The Rooksmoor Mills development. While the final design may not be to everyone's taste, after some delay due to last minute planning changes and the Covid-19 restrictions, construction work on Block One has been completed and work commenced on Block Two. Local residents in Rooksmoor have expressed their concerns about noise and inconvenience arising from the development, the ongoing road works, the moving of local bus stops and the loss of their post box. Most of these problems have been resolved by on-site meetings and by the exchange of emails between the developers and residents of Rooksmoor.

The Old Piano Factory development of housing and flats appears to be on hold with no current progress on site.

Two years ago Stroud District Council granted the owners of The Ram Inn planning permission for improvements to the interior of the pub including a new kitchen, plus the construction of two new houses on the site of the lower car park. Permission was contingent upon the existing parking facilities being improved and completed before any building work was commenced. Now an application has been submitted for—a single house with a bigger footprint than previously permitted and the development of the lower section of the car park. As the land subject to this application overlaps with the declared Community Asset, clarification from Stroud DC is being sought before we as a Parish Council meet to discuss and submit our views. An open meeting will be held soon. The date will be notified as usual.

Finally, the Convent having mainly lain empty for several years has been purchased. We understand that an internationally based hotel group now owns it and has plans to convert it into a hotel and wedding venue. Invariably a planning application will be made, when we will be able to view the proposed development. We are told these plans will include a new access road to the A46.

5. HIGHWAYS AND RIGHTS OF WAY (Cllr. Barbara Warnes)

The last year or so has been a challenging time for our footpaths. We have all been using them for our exercise through several lockdowns and sadly in the early months of this year, they were showing signs of wear. Thankfully, following the recent dry spell there has been significant improvement and everything seems to be back to normal. Unfortunately, at the same time we have been dealing with the extra hassle of additional gates to open and close over the route of the water main. Some of these have now been removed but there are still several around.

For the last few years, I have reported on the status of the cycle track and most of that doesn't need to be repeated. An enormous amount of resurfacing has been done and finally the bridge between Pauls Rise and Birds Crossing has been refurbished. I'm sure everyone will agree that it is a big improvement and feels much safer. There are still some sections to re-surface and we must all be patient whilst the work is ongoing. Please don't climb over barriers while the new surface is still soft – you will only damage it and prolong the process. There is also a major

piece of work to be done on the bridge over the access road to the properties beyond the narrow section at Giddynapp. We don't have a date or duration for this work.

We usually have a very good response to fallen trees etc. on the cycle track but it is important to remember that the authorities will not deal with something they do not know about. Blockages should be reported to the parish clerk who will pass them on. The response to issues on footpaths is not so good and broken stiles are often reported several times with no improvement.

We are always grateful to the landowners for cutting back vegetation, especially nettles, on footpaths to allow us to walk through and we have missed the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens who quietly improve conditions for us. Please be aware that rights of way only have a right for their particular designation and the right only exists on the path ie bicycles and horses are not allowed on footpaths and there is no right of access to other parts of fields and woodland just because they look attractive! Unfortunately, in recent months I have seen evidence of cyclists using footpaths.

The path through Rooksmoor Mill which had been closed during the development, has been replaced with a better one in a convenient position. Unfortunately, the shrubs are already growing over the cycle 'gully'.

Remember we have walks from Woodchester and a tree walk on the website, so please take a look and walk our footpaths.

6. PARKING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Though traffic through the village has reduced (at least until recently) as a result of the Covid lockdown regulations. Regrettably careless and illegal parking, especially near junctions and on bends, is on the increase. This is a cause of concern to residents worried about poor visibility, both for pedestrians and other road users and the consequent increased risk of accidents. The PC has encouraged residents to report to their local neighbourhood watch (or in serious cases the police) any repeat offenders and/or place warning notices on their windscreens.

Unfortunately, despite repeated requests by residents to the Parish Council, we can do little or nothing about speeding in the village. Legally enforceable 20mph speed restrictions combined with 'village gateways' and even more so yellow parking restriction lines must meet Ministry of Transport criteria, require special traffic orders and are prohibitively expensive for small communities such as ours.

The parking issue has been brought even more to the attention of residents and the PC by the continuing inconsiderate parking of cars in St Mary's Hill, mainly by folk visiting Woodchester Park. Local residents and the PC have been working with the police, Gloucestershire Highways, the National Trust and Steve Robinson to attempt to stop this. However, it is an ongoing battle.

7. SCHOOLS AND VOLUNTARY BODIES

Covid-19 had a serious impact on our community organisations, clubs and support groups. Early in the pandemic, Woodchester Parish Council took the lead in setting up a Community Outreach Group. Working with members of the Church and village shop volunteers we were able to ensure that anyone who was elderly, housebound or isolating was provided with essentials including food, medicines or just a friendly chat.

We support Woodchester F.C. in their efforts to find new players and members. We hope the club will be able to start up again in 2021.

For the churches, lock-downs has meant restrictions on public worship and for our schools, with a few exceptions for local key workers, no classroom teaching.

Sadly, despite strong support for St Dominic's RC Primary School to continue, the Education Authority ceased the funding and it has been closed. It's future remains uncertain.

8. CONCLUSION

This report shows the wide level of commitment and activity your Parish Council has undertaken in the past year.

This is my final report as Chair of the Parish Council as I step down from the post after ten challenging and interesting years, though I will continue to sit as a Parish Councillor for the foreseeable future.

I am therefore taking this opportunity to thank my fellow parish councillors for your support while I was in the post that has made my task easier and more satisfying -

- Peter Lead, my vice chair and head of the planning committee
- Iain Dunbar, our lead on traffic and road safety issues as well as providing support for the maintenance of the bike trail
- Barbara Warnes for her invaluable work on the highways and rights of way committee
- Paul Baynham-Honri for his advice and expertise on the finance committee
- Uta Baldauf for her youth work support
- Katharine McNealey for her work on events, personnel and networking skills.
- Our two clerks for handling all the administrative and local government material that the PC has to deal with.

I look forward to continuing to serve the Parish Council in one capacity or another.

Dr. Gervase Hamilton,

Chair Woodchester Parish Council

.