

Launton Annual Parish Meeting 2016

Minutes of the meeting
held on Thursday 21st April 2016
at 7.30 pm in Launton Parish Hall

Chairman: Councillor Simon Turner (Chairman Launton PC)
In attendance: Caroline Dunn (Parish Clerk)

Present: Celia Evans (The Village Players), Martin Evans (The Village Players), Howard Hill (Launton Parish Council), Patsy Stephens (Launton Watercolour Group), John Stephens (Launton Watercolour Group), Chris Frost (St Mary's Church), Sarah Kidney (Launton Friends of Cancer Research), Pat Mitchell (Launton Friends of Cancer Research), Maureen Roberts (Friends of Island Pond Wood), Bob Roberts (Friends of Island Pond Wood), Pat Tucker (Launton Lines and Launton Historical Society), Ed Sanders (Launton Parish Council), Pat Court (Launton Over 60s Club), Katharine Harbison (Launton WI), Jackie Hackett (Launton Plotters), David Hughes (Cherwell District Council), Robert Cornford (PHIP & Launton Lines) and Brian Tegg (Oxfordshire Home Guard Living History Group).

1. To accept apologies for absence

Apologies were received from WPC Caroline Brown (Thames Valley Police), Magda Gould (Launton Facebook Page) and Mechelle Harris (Hummingbird Centre).

2. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting on 16th April 2015

Proposed: Maureen Roberts

Seconded: Celia Evans

All in favour

Minutes were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman

3. Matters arising from these minutes

There were none

4. Report from the Chairman of Launton Parish Council for the past year

The Parish Council usually meets on the first Thursday of the month in the Parish Hall, with a public participation session from 7:00 p.m. (at which councillors are available to talk to parishioners about any subject they wish, and any planning applications for the meeting may be viewed), prior to the council meeting starting at 7:30 p.m. Part of the meeting itself is set aside for members of the public to address the council about items on the agenda, subject to individual and overall time limits.

The agenda for the forthcoming meeting, and minutes of the previous meeting, are displayed on the two Parish Council notice boards outside the Post Office and near the War Memorial, and are also available from the council's web site at www.launton-pc.gov.uk.

The council has met 13 times in the past year: our 12 regular monthly meetings, plus one extraordinary meeting to deal with an urgent planning matter. We have commented on 40 planning applications – the most for many years and a large increase on the previous year's 28, even taking into consideration that 13 of them related to Bicester Heritage – and, mercifully, only a handful of consultation documents. On the subjects of planning and consultations, the Cherwell Local Plan (Part 1) was finally adopted this year, but hopes for designated "green buffers" to protect villages from being overrun by Bicester were dashed by

the policy's removal at the hands of the planning inspector conducting the public inquiry. We now await the consultation on the draft Local Plan Part 2, in which housing targets for the villages will be stated.

There are some changes to announce: our previous clerk, Niall Campbell, was forced by family circumstances to tender his resignation late last year after just over a year in the post; our new clerk, Caroline Dunn, took over in January. I would like to thank Niall for his cheerful hard work and support during his all-too-brief tenure, and warmly welcome Caroline, who took over at a fairly daunting time (with budgets and annual accounts to deal with) but is proving herself well up to the task; I look forward to working with Caroline in the future. Additionally, with the four-yearly parish council elections upon us next month, we find ourselves losing three councillors: Howard Hill, Penny Stephens and Wendy Foster. Howard and Penny decided not to seek re-election, and Wendy resigned earlier this month. Howard had served on the council for around 14 years (neither of us can remember exactly when he joined), and had been vice-chairman for some years; Wendy had been a councillor for almost eight years, which also included time as vice-chairman; Penny had "only" been with us for around five years. All three had contributed greatly to the work of the council: Howard's experience and practical approach, Wendy's enthusiasm and getting stuck into things, and Penny's calm, sensible comments will be greatly missed. However, change is inevitable and is often beneficial. Disappointingly, only five candidates stood for election for the seven places, so there will be no ballot; we know that Bobby Clements will be joining us in May, and that we will be seeking to co-opt two further councillors to bring us back up to strength.

Our Spring Clean this year took place on 5th March during the "Clean for The Queen" weekend, and was well supported, not least by the W.I., whose tea and cakes afterwards were quite splendid and very welcome.

The improvements to the footpath from West End to The Closes were finally completed, thanks to grants from TOE2 and WREN supported by additional funding from Oxfordshire County Council and Launton Parish Council; an unexpected bonus was the gift of a new kissing-gate by OCC.

The road changes at the crossroads, which had drawn many concerned comments from villagers and ourselves, dragged on for many months with nothing happening except broken promises of when remedial work was due to start; however the work has finally been done, complete with the realignment of the white lines on the road. We can only hope that this provides the hoped-for improvements in safety.

The long-running saga of the pedestrian footway and traffic calming on Station Road continues; having stalled for some months over funding concerns, a conversation between myself and OCC caused additional funds to be identified that allowed the project to restart. OCC are currently drawing up revised project plans, about which we will report in due course.

We have again been involved in meetings and consultations with the team responsible for the East-West Rail project; details are not much less sketchy than last year, and it seems unlikely that work will start before 2019. We will continue to work with the project team and press them to come up with transport solutions that avoid the dreadful road problems that were caused to other villages during the earlier phases.

Last May, rumours began to circulate about a possible large development on land between Station Road and Blackthorn Road. There is still little concrete information; the housing targets to be proposed in the forthcoming Local Plan part 2 may have a bearing on this.

With the above possibilities in mind, we are running a traffic survey that will update our results from 2011 and may be of use when it comes to discussing railway works traffic and possible new developments.

Having had a presentation on Community and Neighbourhood Plans from Community First Oxfordshire (formerly ORCC, Oxfordshire Rural Community Council), we will be discussing what approach to take for the future of the village. We have also been looking into the possibility of establishing a joint planning committee with Caversfield PC for commenting on planning applications by Bicester Heritage at the former RAF Bicester airfield; while everyone agrees this would be a good idea, there are some legal obstacles that are being looked into.

We have continued to maintain the areas of public space in Sherwood Close and The Glades, and to have the pedestrian refuge on Station Road cleared; having had our grass-cutting grant from Oxfordshire County Council reduced by around 50% last year, necessitating a small increase in council tax to maintain an acceptable number of cuts, we and many other town and parish councils are in the process of taking over some additional highway duties from OCC (which – sadly or otherwise, depending on your point of view – do not include actual road maintenance), since it has been recognised that the smaller councils are now in a better position to provide them. This extra work has prompted another increase in our precept, which has again meant a small increase in council tax.

We have continued to represent the village at meetings with external bodies, notably Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council, but also including East-West Rail as noted above.

The Council has also continued to provide financial support to Launton Lines, St Mary's Church and Launton Congregational Church, as well as making contributions to the Friends of Island Pond Wood, to assist with grass-cutting in the woodland, and making other charitable donations.

5. Financial Report of Launton Parish Council for the year ended 31st March 2015

The Clerk described the Parish Council's finances, which included a slight profit for the year ending April 2016, as well as having a healthy reserve in all three bank accounts. With responsibilities due to be taken on by LPC from Oxfordshire County Council an increase of 15% will be made to the precept in 2016/17. This will allow LPC to cover any costs not met by OCC when they devolve powers, as well having funds available to maintain the bus shelters, benches, war memorial and notice boards, and hopefully take on a long term lease for the Parish Hall as well as potentially aid in traffic calming within the village.

6. Parish Hall Improvement Project – Report from Robert Cornford

The Parish Hall Improvement Project (PHIP) started life as an informal group "to do something about the Parish Hall" as - without something being done - it would get shabbier and shabbier and eventually become unusable. The trigger for the group get together was a realisation that there was not enough money in the Church accounts to carry out more than very basic maintenance, and that any more extensive remedial or enhancement work would need serious fundraising, both within the village and from external sources.

The group was originally brought together by Wendy Foster late in 2015 for an informal meeting, but it now has a more formal structure. At a meeting on 19 April in The Black Bull it elected a Chair (Martin Evans), a Secretary (Celia Evans), a Treasurer (Audrey Deeley) and a Communications Officer (Robert Cornford).

The group also decided that it wanted to clarify its relationship with the Parish Hall Committee (PHC) itself a sub-committee of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) (enough sets of initials!). PHIP wanted to concentrate its work on supporting the Hall, so the relationship needed to be with the PHC rather than with the PCC. Simon Turner and Robert Cornford have been invited to join the Parish Hall Committee, and Joan Packer and Audrey Deeley from the Parish Hall Committee are members of the PHIP group. So it all looks more organised, and is still full of ideas and energy.

Wendy Foster has withdrawn from the PHIP after helping to set it up, but will be supporting it with grant applications to external sources of funding.

So far the project has raised over £2,000 in donations, from individuals, from the Village Players' February Pantomime *Cinderella*, from the Home Guard Living History Group take-over of the Hall in March, and from the Carol Concert in December last year. There is a forward programme of fund raising events through the rest of the year, being added to all the time. PHIP will be one of the two beneficiaries (34%) of the Village Fete on 11 June (St Mary's Church will be the other with 66%), and The Village Players' Summer Show in July will give all its profits to the project.

The other main activity of PHIP has been to establish, through a survey questionnaire across the village what support there is for "doing something" and what the "something" should be. We delivered 549 surveys to all households and to organisations that are regular bookers of the Hall, and have collected back 329 so far (a few more are due to come in soon), or a 59.9% response – which is impressive and demonstrates significant village support for "doing something".

A quick, top level analysis of results shows a lot of support for a programme of full refurbishment of the Hall (79% of first choices and 7% of second choices, so 86% of respondents want "something" done.

There have been a couple of other initial highlights from the survey. We asked what village organisations people belonged to or supported. The top five responses were:

St Mary's Church	9.1%
Launton School	9.0%
Friends of Island Pond Wood	8.4%
Launton Lines	6.8%
Friends of Cancer Research UK	6.7%

We also asked which meeting places people used in Launton. The results showed how important the Parish Hall is:

Parish Hall	21.5%
The Bull	17.7%
St Mary's Church	13.9%
The Black Bull	12.0%
Playing Fields Hall	11.8%

What do we now plan to do?

1. Carry out more detailed analysis of the survey results to build up a picture of what people think the "something" should be
2. Establish a legal framework for going forward. This will need to involve some long term lease arrangement or similar if we are to be able to access a full range of funding sources. This is the most important next step as without it being resolved we cannot make progress on either fundraising or making progress with detailed plans and drawings.
3. Work with the Parish Hall Committee to develop a brief for architects and planners to submit plans.
4. Work on identifying external sources of funds we can approach once we have plans developed.
5. Carry on with village-based fundraising initiatives.

We will continue to report to the village as the project moves forward.

7. Reports from representatives of village organisations

The Clerk, Caroline Dunn, had contacted 33 people or organisations and 14 had submitted reports or presented them at the meeting. The following organisations responded:

Launton Congregational Church	Report read by Simon Turner
Launton Lines	Report read by Pat Tucker
Launton Historical Society	Report presented by Pat Tucker
Launton Home Guard Living History	Report presented by Brian Tegg
Launton Playing Fields Association	Report read by Simon Turner
Launton Over 60s Club	Report presented by Pat Court
Launton Watercolour Art	Report presented by Patsy Stephens
Hummingbird Centre	Report read by Simon Turner
Launton Plotters	Report presented by Jackie Hackett
The Village Players	Report presented by Martin Evans
St Mary's Church Launton	Report presented by Chris Frost
Friends of Island Pond Wood	Report presented by Maureen Roberts
Launton WI	Report presented by Katharine Harbison
Launton Friends of Cancer Research	Report presented by Pat Mitchell

8. Report from the Cherwell District Councillor for Launton

Councillor David Hughes informed the meeting that he was there just to observe. Having been our District Councillor for 15 years Councillor Hughes admitted to having a soft spot for Launton and its villagers and also to being particularly impressed by the amount of activities that take place in such a small community.

9. Report from the Oxfordshire County Councillor for Launton

There was none

10. Report from Thames Valley Police

There was none

11. Any other business

There was a brief discussion about the amount of litter surrounding the playing fields and the road leading to the playing fields. The Clerk is to see if a solution can be reached with the Launton Playing Fields Association and the new managers of the bar in the ex-Sports & Social Club.

12. Date and venue of next meeting

Launton Parish Hall at 7.30 pm on Thursday 20th April 2017

Meeting closed at 8.51 pm