

Launton Annual Parish Meeting 2019

DRAFT Minutes of the meeting
held on Thursday 25 April 2019
at 7.30pm in Launton Parish Hall

Chairman: Councillor Simon Turner (Chairman Launton PC)
Clerk: Jane Olds (Parish Clerk)
Launton Residents: 16 residents
District Councillors: Cllr David Hughes (CDC)

1. To accept apologies for absence

Apologies were received from three villagers; Cllr Ian Corkin (OCC); Friends of Launton School; Launton Congregational Church; Launton Historical Society; and Mechelle Harris (Hummingbird Centre)

2. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting on 19 April 2018

All were in favour of the Minutes being confirmed as an accurate record and they were signed by the Chairman

3. Matters arising from these minutes

There were no matters arising.

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 Parish Hall and near the War Memorial, and are also available from the council's web site at www.launton-pc.gov.uk along with other paperwork for the meetings.

The council has only had its 12 regular monthly meetings this year, with no extraordinary meetings. We have commented on 48 planning applications, a significant increase on recent years (37–40 had been the norm for some time, with both of the past two years having 37). The number of consultation documents remains relatively small: notable consultations in the past year include East/West Rail and the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. As I have now reported for the last three years, the Cherwell Local Plan Part 2, in which housing targets for the villages will be stated, is still no closer to going to consultation: when I challenged them on this at a recent Parish Liaison meeting, Cherwell District Council officers appeared distinctly evasive, leading many to conclude that this vitally important plan will never actually be produced.

I am indebted to our wonderful clerk, Jane Olds, whose support, great knowledge, hard work and calm cheerfulness are a huge asset to the council in general and me in particular, as well as to the Parish Hall Working Group (more on that subject later). I also owe thanks to my fellow parish councillors for their hard work and support: although we all work together as a team, and it therefore feels strange to single out individuals, I would like to make particular mention of Lesley Thompson, who has worked tirelessly on the village's Emergency Plan; Chris Fox, whose ongoing pursuit of the Royal Mail to honour their promise to install a proper pillar box outside the Post Office would put a terrier to shame; and Ed Sanders, who provides great support and input to the Parish Hall Working Group. During the year we were sorry to say farewell to Bobby Clements, who resigned as a councillor due to changes in his work and living arrangements, but in his place we have recently been delighted to co-opt Mike Murphy to bring us back up to full strength.

I reported last year about meetings we had had with our County Councillor, Ian Corkin, about possible highway improvements to help with the traffic problems in the village; with Ian's help we should be getting a part-time 20 mph limit around the school, which will be active during school arrival and departure times. Ian will report separately on his work with, and for, the village, and I do not intend to repeat the items in his report; we find his support and ability to get things done at the County level invaluable. We are also pleased to work with David Hughes, the most local of our three District Councillors, who comes to our meetings when his District workload permits and is a great supporter of the village. We look forward to continuing to work with both of them in the years to come.

Our Spring Clean this year took place on 6th April, and was again very well supported, doubtless due in no small part to the tea and excellent cakes provided by the W.I.!

The Parish Council's work with the Parochial Church Council and the Parish Hall Improvement Project group towards leasing the Parish Hall continues to be frustratingly slow; last year I reported that the Heads of Terms for the lease had been agreed, but despite the PCC's solicitor racking up an eye-wateringly large bill, agreement on the terms of the lease itself still eludes us. Progress has been hampered by the poor energy performance of the hall, making it unlawful for the PCC to lease it as it stands; to avoid having to waste a significant sum of money on temporary improvements just to get it up to the minimum standard required for the lease, we are now having to work on a legally-binding Agreement to Lease as well as the lease itself. However, the Parish Hall Working Group, comprising representatives from all three groups, has been making good progress behind the scenes so that we are ready to hit the ground running when (yes! when) the lease is eventually sorted out.

We are continuing to maintain the areas of public space in Sherwood Close and The Glades, and have the pedestrian refuge on Station Road, and the walkway between Ancil Avenue and Sycamore Road, cleared; our responsibility for some additional highway duties (including cutting back the vegetation on highway verges) seems to be going reasonably well, and we hope to improve again this year. Our precept, which last increased three years ago, was increased by a modest amount this year (an increase of 61p per Band D household) to allow us to continue providing the services that we do, with an eye to improving things where possible.

We continue to represent the village at meetings with external bodies, notably Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council, but also including the East-West Rail team

and the Police, and joint meetings with representatives from other local Parish and Town Councils. We have also been engaging with Bicester Heritage – which is, of course, in the Parish of Launton – about their plans for the future, which are certainly impressive.

The council has 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 supporting organisations whose work provides benefits to the people of the village. We are also pleased to continue supporting the wonderful band of volunteers who organise the village fête, by acting as a "parent" organisation and giving them some degree of protection from personal losses in the event of unforeseen disasters.

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

The Clerk reported that the Parish Council accounts for the year 2018 / 19 had now been closed and the internal audit has been arranged for the following week.

The draft Statement of Accounts which is available, explains the Parish finances.

The income and expenditure for the year remained reasonably static.

However, there would be some additional expenses over this next year as we will be buying a couple of new rubbish bins to replace ones which have been damaged over time together with another dog waste bin for the footpath near the Wyndham Hall care home (which is in our parish).

A full budget for the 19 / 20 year was agreed in January together with the Precept. Due to the fact that there was doubt whether the Council Tax Reduction Scheme portion of the settlement would be awarded by CDC this year, which comes to over £630, it was thought prudent to put up the Precept to accommodate this loss. The Precept was, therefore, increased from £20,250 to £20,840 (an increase of £590) which meant that Band D properties would pay an additional 61p over the year.

The Parish Council's responsibilities remain the same - including verge cutting, in and out of the village, emptying the numerous dog bins (twice a week in summer and once a week in winter), and making sure that the Parish Council is compliant with all the legislation including data protection and transparency.

The Reserves Policy has recently been reviewed in order to ensure that we are able to meet the various obligations; these include holding the recommended three months' running costs, the possibility of having to pay for an election (at about £1,600), and various contingencies, including the transfer of the Parish Hall Lease. Unfortunately, unless the Parish takes out a loan which is agreed by the Public Works and Loans Board, the Parish is unable to borrow money, so it is essential that funds are set aside in ear marked reserves to pay for things when needed.

The Statement includes the S137 expenditure allowance. This allowance is published by Government and gives Parish Councils the power to 'to incur expenditure for certain purposes not otherwise authorised' such as the poppy wreath for Remembrance Day which wasn't otherwise possible. However, as the Council has adopted the General Power of Competence,

there is more flexibility in the awarding of grants. The Parish Council now considers grants quarterly in April, July, October and January. These grants cannot be awarded to individuals, but the Parish was recently pleased to be able to support Bicester Good Neighbour Scheme and the Clean Slate Group.

The accounts would be available for inspection shortly.

6. Presentation from Bicester Heritage on the future plans

Bicester Heritage made a PowerPoint presentation on their future plans which was received with interest. The Vision Document had been published in the Annual Parish Meeting section of the Parish Council website.

7. Parish Hall Improvement Project – Report from Martin Evans

Once again we have had a successful year with more events raising money for the Parish Hall Improvement Project and progressing with the lease.

Fund raising has included a Walking Treasure hunt and afternoon tea on a very hot summer's day which proved to be very popular, and also a very generous donation from The Village Players' Summer show "Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." We have also had 2 successful Film Nights, showing "Mamma Mia" and "Mamma Mia, here we go again." We have had donations from individuals and the W.I, our many thanks to all. We have had another Tythe Barn Quiz, our thanks to Will and Emma Deeley for hosting this, and we had 120 people come to this event so another very successful quiz! £595 was raised and we also launched another 50:50 draw at the quiz. This will be drawn at our Walking Treasure Hunt on June 30th.

Huge thanks must go to all who help organise these events and especially to the committee who turn up at each meeting and come up with ideas and make them a reality.

We have made progress with the lease of the Parish Hall and by May 2018 a draft lease was being considered by the Parish Council, and the Parochial Church Council. Several amendments have been requested and this is still on-going. Last autumn we had an EPC done on the Parish hall. The hall was rated a "G" grade which is the lowest grade and since last April it is illegal to lease a property which is lower than an "E" grade. It would be a waste of money to do work on the hall to bring it up to an "E" grade only to have all ripped out when the renovations begin. So we have written to our MP and contacted the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy but the reply has not been very helpful, for example, telling us to look at the exemptions which we have already done. Our Solicitor and Property Consultant have advised us that the way forward is to put in place "an agreement to lease" and this is the way we are going.

The priority now is to finalise the wording of the lease as we need this in place in order to "agree to lease."

A working group has been set up to represent the four main groups involved, the Parochial Church Council, the Parish Council, the Hall Management Committee and PHIP. This group have been visiting other halls, designing plans for the hall, talking with hall users and researching funding sources as well as reporting back to the 4 groups for their ideas and thoughts.

We look forward to the next year and hope it will be a positive year for our well- loved Parish hall.

8. Reports from representatives of village organisations

The Clerk had contacted 46 people or organisations and 15 had submitted reports or presented them at the meeting. The following organisations responded:

Friends of Island Pond Wood
Friends of Launton School
Launton Historical Society
The Hummingbird Centre
Launton over 60s
Launton Parish Hall
Launton Parish Hall Improvement Project
Launton PCC
Launton Plotters
Launton School Christmas Tree for Cancer Research UK
Launton Transport Representative
Launton Village Players
Launton Walking for Health Group
Launton Watercolour Group
Launton Women's Institute

The written reports would be available on the Parish Council website.

9. Report from the Cherwell District Councillor for Launton

Councillor Hughes reported that the District Council was running well and that he was due to be Chairman of the Council from May. The new partnership with Oxfordshire County Council was working well.

10. Report from the Oxfordshire County Councillor for Launton

Councillor Ian Corkin was not able to attend.

11. Report from Thames Valley Police

No report had been received.

12. Any other business

There was no other business.

13. Date and venue of next meeting

Launton Parish Hall date to be arranged due to it being an election year.

The meeting closed at 9.02 pm.

Signed..... Dated.....