

Launton Annual Parish Meeting 2022

DRAFT Minutes of the meeting
held on Thursday 21 April 2022
at 7.30pm

Chairman: Councillor Simon Turner (Chairman Launton PC)
Clerk: Jane Olds (Parish Clerk)
Launton Residents: 12 residents
District Councillors: Cllr David Hughes

1. To accept apologies for absence

Apologies were received from five villagers; Cllr Ian Corkin (OCC); Mechelle Harris (Hummingbird Centre)

2. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting on 22 April 2021

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

None.

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

The past year has been somewhat less of a challenge than the previous one, but has still had its moments. With the government failing to renew the legislation that would have permitted English councils to continue meeting virtually after 6 May 2021 – even though the other devolved UK governments managed to do so for councils in their nations – we were forced to hold a brief Annual Meeting of the Parish Council outdoors last May, to avoid breaking rules on indoor gatherings. For the next two months, council powers were delegated to our clerk, who exercised them very carefully in consultation with councillors and the public. Normal indoor in-person meetings were able to resume in August.

The Parish Council usually meets on the first Thursday of the month, and meetings feature a public participation session from 7:15 p.m. (at which councillors are available for parishioners to talk to them about any subject they wish), 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. One new thing this year is that we now have a data projector, which enables the clerk to display documents for all to see during the meetings; this has made many things much easier, and has reduced the amount of printing that needs to be done.

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 had its 12 regular monthly meetings this year, with one extraordinary virtual meeting at the end of last April (while we were still able to meet virtually). We have commented on 50 planning applications, a large increase both on last year's 33 and on recent years in general – doubtless making up for lost time with the loosening of restrictions caused by the pandemic. The number of consultation documents remains relatively small.

I remain entirely indebted to our wonderful clerk, Jane Olds; as ever, her vast knowledge, seemingly effortless efficiency and extremely hard work – which remains well above and beyond the call of duty, especially when dealing with social media – provide the bedrock for everything that this council does. Her constant good cheer, even in the face of some utterly contemptible abuse she has received from ignorant “keyboard warriors” on social media, who should all be thoroughly ashamed of themselves, is as astonishing to me as it is an inspiration when times are difficult. I simply do not know what I, or this council, would do without her.

As ever, I also owe a debt of thanks to my fellow parish councillors for their continued hard work and support under still-trying circumstances; I would particularly like to express my thanks to Ed Sanders, my Vice Chairman, who has chaired three of our meetings in the last year. At last May's elections we gained three new councillors – Abi Dowman, Janice Hawes and Jackie Webber – who were rapidly joined by Kyle Michael, who was co-opted at our May meeting. Sadly Janice was forced by personal circumstances to tender her resignation during the year, but the vacancy was short-lived and was filled by Andy Briant last November. I would like to extend my thanks to all of them for their enthusiasm, commitment and dedication.

We have also benefitted greatly from the support and hard work of our District and, in particular, County Councillors, especially with ongoing flooding and road problems. We look forward to continuing to work with them in the future, noting of course that two of our three District Council seats are subject to elections next month.

The Parish Council's work with the Parish Hall Working Group, comprising members of the Parochial Church Council, the Parish Hall Committee and the Parish Hall Improvement Project group (now in the process of becoming Friends of Launton Parish Hall) towards leasing the Parish Hall so that we can improve it and secure its future was finally rewarded on 26 August by the signing of the Agreement for Lease, which has enabled us to engage an architect and make plans for the future of the Hall. I would like to thank all the members of the Parish Hall Working Group for their tireless efforts on behalf of the community as a whole.

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, as well as cutting back the vegetation on highway verges. Our precept again increased by a modest amount this year to allow us to continue providing the services that we do, always 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 in particular including the East West Rail Alliance team, with whom Jane has been in nearly constant contact as roads are closed and re-opened, with some unfortunate communication problems not exactly helping. We have also held some useful and informative meetings with developers, in accordance with our policies, and with the Police and representatives from other local Parish and Town Councils.

The council has continued to provide financial support to Launton Lines and St Mary's 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 remain pleased to support the wonderful group of volunteers that comprise the Launton Village Support Group. I would again like to thank Lesley Thompson for her work with the group on behalf of the Parish Council.

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 2021 / 22 had been closed and the internal audit had been completed.

The draft Statement of Accounts explained the Parish finances and was available on the website.

The income and expenditure for the year remained broadly reasonably static despite the situation over the last two years.

Expenditure was incurred cutting back the poplar trees in The Poplars; more Parish Hall work including the architect's condition and feasibility report; the purchase of the new data projector to reduce the paper needed for meetings and present planning applications now that we don't receive paper copies; together with adding small noticeboards to the bus shelter on Station Road and in the wooden shelter on Bicester Road by Sherwood Close.

A full budget for the 22 / 23 year was agreed in January and was confirmed at the April meeting. Following very careful consideration of the budget, this year the Precept was increased to £29,895 (an increase of £6,899 on the previous year) which meant that Band D properties would pay an additional £9.90 over the whole year.

The Parish Council's responsibilities remain the same - including verge cutting, in and out of the village, emptying the numerous dog bins, and making sure that the Parish Council is compliant with all the legislation including data protection and transparency. We have also spent a lot of time liaising with staff at East West Rail, the teams at OCC responsible for buses, highways and public rights of way to mitigate some of the impact of the various projects around the village which have been beyond the Parish's control.

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. 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 shows 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 (possible when the Parish has a qualified Clerk and two thirds elected members at the time of

adoption), there is more flexibility in the awarding of grants. The Parish Council generally considers grants quarterly in April, July, October and January. These grants cannot be awarded to individuals, but over the last year the Parish has been pleased to be able to support the Friends of Island Pond Wood together with the Launton Community Café and the Parish Hall Management Committee with funds applied for from Cherwell's Containing Management Outbreak Fund.

The Parish Council website now has a wealth of information, and even a news section. If you haven't already signed up to receive regular updates and meeting notices, please do – you can find a quick form on the left hand menu bar. Also, if you're a use of Facebook the Parish Council now has its own presence – please do 'like' it.

The accounts would be available for inspection shortly.

6. East West Rail Project

Ms Gilly West made a presentation which Mr Jolliffe had prepared for the meeting. It was anticipated that the project would have a 200-year life span. The presentation outlined the remedial work which had been undertaken on the bridge over the railway; this included the construction work on the vehicle restraint system and the building out of the embankment.

Many of the footpaths / public rights of way to the south of the project had been re-opened but the Station Road / Grange Farm paths were still to be finalised.

7. Parish Hall Improvement Project – Report from Martin Evans

Our 2021 AGM was postponed due to the Lockdown in the early part of the year. We met in April when we held our AGM and an ordinary meeting via Zoom.

The Chairman updated the group on progress with the Agreement to Lease describing changes to the wording of the documents. This document was later signed and dated on August 26th 2021 and so is now a legal and binding document.

The Parish Council have now bought new tables and chairs and many of the old blue tables have found homes in Launton residents' gardens.

At the AGM the treasurer reported that we have £21, 071.54 in funds and all of our officers agreed to continue for another year.

Fund raising has continued despite government regulations and we held a Produce stall in July which was divided between PHIP and Christian Aid. Another produce Stall was held in October and was shared between PHIP and St Mary's Church. At the end of the year a "Deck the Halls " event was organised, again funds from this were shared between FoLPH and St Mary's Church.

At our July meeting PHIP decided to look into becoming a charity and a sub group was set up to begin an application. At our next meeting in September we looked at getting trustees for the proposed charity and 5 people came forward. They are Simon Turner, Jackie Webber, Cathy Prociopiu, Rob Cornford and myself. The meeting also agreed to change the name of the group from PHIP to "Friends of Launton Parish Hall." An application has been registered with the Charity Commission which we now hope will be successful.

At this meeting we gained a new treasurer and our thanks to Audrey Deeley for all she has done over the past years and we now have Cathy Procopiou as our treasurer assisted by Jackie Webber. Our thanks to them both. Cathy has set up a new bank account with the name "Friends of Launton Parish Hall."

The Parish Council have engaged an architect, Alex Bond from PCMS. A consultation period has been organised and obtained feedback from the community on the Options for the future layout of the hall. Option A was eventually selected and this is the same layout as we have now. The architect is now updating the plans and we hope soon to be able to apply for planning permission.

Our thanks to all who have helped with the running of PHIP (now FoLPH) and we are hoping that we will have a very busy year ahead as plans for the Hall move forward.

8. Reports from representatives of village organisations

The Clerk had contacted village organisations and 11 had submitted reports or presented them at the meeting. The following organisations responded:

Friends of Island Pond Wood
Hummingbird Centre
Launton Community Communications Group (incorporating *Launton Lines*, Facebook page and website)
Launton Fete
Launton Historical Society
Launton Over-60s Group
Launton Parish Hall Management Committee
Launton Plotters
Launton Support Group
Launton Village players
Launton Village Rock Chorus
Launton Village Speedwatch
Launton Women's Institute

The written reports were available on the Parish Council website.

9. Report from the Cherwell District Councillor for Launton

Councillor Hughes congratulated the community on how active the village was. He reported that he had represented the village at the CDC Planning Committee regarding the consideration of the Richborough Estates / Grange Farm planning application; while the Officer had recommended approval, the Planning Committee had rejected the application.

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

No other business was raised.

- 13. Date and venue of next meeting**
Launton Parish Hall at 7.30pm on Thursday 20 April 2023

The meeting closed at 8.58pm.

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