

Launton Annual Parish Meeting 2023

DRAFT Minutes of the meeting
held on Thursday 20 April 2023
at 7.30pm

Chairman: Councillor Simon Turner (Chairman Launton PC)
Clerk: Jane Olds (Parish Clerk)
Launton Residents: 19 residents
District Councillors: None
County Councillor: None

1. **To accept apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from two villagers; Cllr Ian Corkin (OCC)
2. **To confirm minutes of the previous meeting on 21 April 2022**
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 back to normal, after two years of COVID-induced turmoil relating to how the Parish Council meets.

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. Documents, including the agenda, are displayed for all to see using a data projector.

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 documents for the meetings.

The council has had its 12 regular monthly meetings this year, with no extraordinary meetings. We have commented on 28 planning applications, a return to more normal levels after last year's 50. The number of consultation documents remains relatively small.

The Council in general, and I personally, continue to benefit enormously from having a quite exemplary clerk, Jane Olds; she remains our strength and stay, to borrow a phrase from the late Queen Elizabeth, bringing her good cheer, seemingly inexhaustible fount of knowledge, supreme efficiency, dogged tenacity when dealing with recalcitrant external bodies (including

both district and county councils, who should both know and perform better) and sheer hard work, which remains well above and beyond the call of duty (including taking on further roles with the Society of Local Council Clerks, who clearly know a good thing when they see one!) I make no apology for repeating my comment from last year: 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; I would particularly like to express my thanks to Ed Sanders, my Vice Chairman, who is always ready to step into the breach. To my great dismay we lost Kyle Michael during the year, who resigned after suffering abuse directed not only at him but his staff and family. We have still not been able to replace him, but I am very pleased to say that all the remaining councillors have stood for election and, with nobody else coming forward, have all been elected unopposed for a further term.

We have also benefitted greatly from the support and hard work of our County Councillor and our new District Councillors, elected last year. Angus Patrick has decided to step down for various reasons after his elected year in office, but we look forward to working with his replacement as well as continuing to work with our remaining District and County Councillors.

The Parish Hall Working Group, comprising members of the Parish Council, Parochial Church Council, Parish Hall Committee and the former Parish Hall Improvement Project group (now Friends of Launton Parish Hall, a registered charity) continues to work towards the improvement of the Parish Hall, and having successfully obtained planning permission, are currently considering bids from contractors. The pace seems slow at times, but progress is steady. 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. Other tidying has also been undertaken in various locations such as The Poplars. Our precept again increased by a modest amount this year to allow us to continue providing the services that we do, as 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, HGVs violate agreements about times etc. The unfortunate communication problems I mentioned last year remain firmly in place, and definitely do not help. We continue to liaise and meet 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 and making other charitable donations supporting organisations whose work provides benefits to the people of the village.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the great loss of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II during the year after a long lifetime of public service; I still find it hard to think that she is no longer a presence in all our lives. We look forward to the coronation of our new monarch, King Charles III, and expect that he will continue in his mother's footsteps – a daunting task, I'm sure you will agree.

5. Financial Report of Launton Parish Council for the year ended 31st March 2023

The Parish Council accounts for the year 2022 / 23 had been closed and the internal audit had been completed.

This year's draft Statement of Accounts, which explains last year's Parish finances, was available in the Finance section of the Parish Council website and would be formally considered at the May meeting.

The income and expenditure for the year has changed this year. Income increased predominantly due to the increase in Precept and to a larger VAT refund.

Expenditure has also increased. This is partly because of the two previous years when we weren't able to 'do' much, but also projects have now started to be implemented.

The Parish Council was pleased to be able to support a village Speedwatch project and has bought a radar 'gun', hi-vis jackets and signage as part of the road safety project and has put the unspent budget aside to start saving for a new, more effective, Speed Indicator Device.

Both the noticeboards have been refurbished. New litter bins with tops – one for the entrance to Island Pond Wood and one for outside Costcutter have been bought; we hope that the new design with the top will stop the wind taking litter. Thanks must also go to Chris Blake who installed them for us.

The Parish Hall expenditure has included two tranches of architects' fees – the first for the concept and detailed design, the Design and Access Statement and the submission of the planning application and the second for preparing the construction detail, structural design, specification of works, preparing the tender documentation and other technical details.

A full budget for the 23 / 24 year was agreed in January and was confirmed at the April meeting. Following very careful consideration of the budget, but mindful of the increasing costs, this year the Precept was increased to £39,743 (an increase of £9,848 on the previous year) which meant that Band D properties, once the increase in occupied houses was taken into account, would pay an additional £11.77 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. Again, this year we have also spent a lot of time liaising with staff at East West Rail, and the teams at County Council responsible for highways and public rights of way to mitigate some of the impact of the various projects around the village which have been beyond our 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 earmarked reserves to pay for things when needed.

The S137 expenditure allowance is included in the Statement of Accounts. 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 will be able to adopt the General Power of Competence (possible when the Parish has a qualified Clerk and two thirds elected members at the time of adoption) at the May meeting following the uncontested election, 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, grass cutting in the churchyard, the Royal British Legion and the Citizens Advice Volunteer Connect / Driving Service.

The Parish Council website now has a wealth of information, and a news section. If you haven't already signed up to receive our regular updates and meeting notices by email, please do – you can find a quick form on the left hand menu bar. I have also used the email list recently to alert people to the road closures, so it's worth signing up.

Also, if you're a user of Facebook the Parish Council also has its own presence – please do 'like' Launton Parish Council Page.

While this is not totally Parish Council finance-related, the Clerk had been pleased to have been elected as Vice Chair of the Society of Local Council Clerks National Forum and was separately also working with the SLCC on helping to create a qualification for Parish Council Internal Auditors. She had also been able to represent Parish Councils at various events in the last year as Chairman of the Oxfordshire branch of the Society of Local Council Clerks and was wanting to raise the profile of smaller councils and support their Clerks.

There were no questions.

6. East West Rail Project

No representative was available to attend.

7. Parish Hall Improvement Project – Report from Martin Evans

The AGM was held in May 2022 and Cathy Procopiou took over as treasurer and Ruth Ng became secretary, many thanks to both of them for taking on these roles. Also many thanks to Audrey Deeley and Celia Evans for the time they had previously been treasurer and secretary.

During the beginning of 2022 PHIP applied to become a registered charity and this was achieved in the summer of 2022. FoLPH now has 7 trustees who have been working on

various policies and procedures. Our thanks to Matt Hill for our new logo and everyone who worked so tirelessly to achieve the charitable status.

The Working Group, a sub group of the Parish Council, reported back to FoLPH regularly and progress is being made, an Aboricultural Method Statement was needed and so a consultant was engaged, and the location of the bin site has been considered. The Working Group have heard from the architect who has 4 builders that completed the initial questionnaire and these builders have now been asked to tender. Another group is investigating fund applications and once we have costings will be working towards finalising this.

A What3Words treasure hunt was held in the autumn, and this proved to be very successful. This was followed by an Autumn Fair again with an amazing amount of produce, thanks to all who contributed or came along, and especially Mary Brydon for the many pots of marmalade etc. In January a film night was held and then in March FoLPH shared in the running of the Tythe Barn Quiz, thanks to Will and Emma Deeley for hosting us again and we received 50% of the profit.

Many thanks to all involved in FoLPH for their time in the day to day running of the charity and also to all who help with events and fund raising.

8. Reports from representatives of village organisations

The Clerk had contacted village organisations and 12 had submitted reports or presented them at the meeting. The following organisations responded:

Friends of Island Pond Wood

Launton Community Communications Group (incorporating *Launton Lines*, Facebook page and website)

Launton Historical Society

Launton Over-60s Group

Launton Parish Hall Management Committee

Launton Parish Path Wardens

Launton Plotters

Launton Village players

Launton Village Rock Chorus

Launton Village Speedwatch

Launton Women's Institute

St Marys PCC

The written reports were available on the Parish Council website.

9. Report from the Cherwell District Councillor for Launton

The District Councillors were unable to attend.

10. Report from the Oxfordshire County Councillor for Launton

Councillor Ian Corkin was not able to attend but submitted a report which was read out at the meeting.

- 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 18 April 2024

The meeting closed at 8.37pm.

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