

CHRISTCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Community Centre on Tuesday 22 March 2022 at 7.30pm

Present: Cllrs P Owen (Chairman), S Aldridge, R Gladwin, G Harper, J Hughes, K Miller, W Sutton (FDC), D Gibbs (Clerk), J Brame (Cambridgeshire ACRE), R Sutton, (Cambridgeshire Neighbourhood Watch Association), 20 members of the public

1 Welcome and Introduction

Cllr Owen welcomed everybody to the meeting, thanked them for attending and summarised the agenda for the evening.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr J Bliss.

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The adoption of the minutes of the Annual Assembly held on Monday 8 April 2019 as an accurate record of the proceedings was proposed by Cllr Harper, seconded by Cllr Gladwin and approved.

4 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5 Affordable Housing

The Chairman introduced Jenna Brame, Rural and Community-Led Housing Enabler for Cambridgeshire ACRE. Jenna explained that her role is to develop rural affordable housing schemes in partnership with communities, that are appropriate to their location and provide housing options exclusively for local people. Properties may be offered for rental at 80% or less of market values or on a shared ownership basis, with a proportion of the property being purchased, whilst rent is paid on the remainder, with the option to purchase a larger share over time. Rural affordable housing sites may use land not normally available for residential development, either within or adjoining existing settlements. A housing needs survey is used to define the scale of the development and the mix of housing types. The surveys are usually funded by a housing association interested in developing the scheme. An alternative means of delivering local housing is via a Community Land Trust (CLT), which is a not-for-profit organisation created within the community. A CLT may also develop amenities such as shops, pubs, or village halls.

Average house prices in rural areas are higher than in urban areas, making them less affordable to low-income families, who might need more than eight times their salary to afford the cheapest homes, so affordable schemes have an important role to play in sustaining village communities.

Cambridgeshire ACRE's role is to promote potential locations to housing associations, bring together the partners, carry out the housing needs survey and support the Parish Councils and their communities. Since 2013, 68 surveys have been completed, leading to the development of 30 schemes comprising over 400 new homes. The role of the Parish Council is to promote the scheme locally and garner support, identify suitable sites, assist with the survey, and encourage local people to register for the new homes.

In answer to questions from the floor, Jenna explained that such developments usually comprise a mix of 1, 2 or 3-bedroom properties suitable for young families and people downsizing from larger properties. Sustainability is built into the properties, with high levels

of insulation, photovoltaic panels and air source heat pumps as standard. Local infrastructure issues can be addressed in the delivery of the developments, but only those relating specifically to the development.

A question was asked about whether the absence of settlement boundaries in the current Local Plan affects the identification of potential sites in relation to their community. This has not been seen as an issue and the next Local Plan will include settlement boundaries.

The Chairman thanked Jenna for her presentation and committed to further discussion of this at the next meeting of the Parish Council.

6 Parish Council Report

Cllr Aldridge highlighted some of the recent work and achievements of the Council. The Council continued to meet monthly, meeting virtually by Zoom when face-to-face meetings were not possible. The new canopy was installed on the back of the Community Centre to enhance the facility and provide more flexibility for events. Sixteen street lights were replaced with LED's, making them brighter whilst lowering maintenance and energy costs. Two new MVAS speed monitoring signs have been purchased and a new litter bin placed outside the Community Centre. Numerous reports were submitted to the County and District Councils of fly-tipping, defective street lights, potholes, blocked drains and damaged street furniture. Thirty planning applications were considered, some large, some small. Grants were awarded to The Heron, Christchurch Brownies, Christchurch Eco, Lunch Break, Citizens Advice and the Magpas Air Ambulance.

Following an approach from residents of Padgetts Road, the Council has submitted an application to the County Council for funding for traffic calming measures at the junction with Church Road. Various options are being explored, including a traffic island in Church Road and a reduction in the speed limit. The outcome of this application will be known shortly.

The Council has contributed to the cost of installing solar panels on the roof of the Community Centre to reduce their energy bills. Surplus electricity will be sold to the National Grid.

To provide ideas and inspiration for the development of the new community field, the Council has recently visited a similar site created by Colne Parish Council and has also undertaken a tour of local children's play areas and rural affordable housing developments.

A question was asked about the possibility of extending street lighting further out of the village. The Chairman explained that this would be too costly at present.

7 Neighbourhood Watch

The Chairman introduced Robin Sutton, Chairman of the Cambridgeshire Neighbourhood Watch Association. Robin explained that Neighbourhood Watch is 40 years old and that it exists because it works. It is a simple example of communities working together to help each other. Whilst it is not possible to prevent yourself becoming a victim of crime, there are simple steps anybody can take to minimise the risk, especially in relation to domestic burglary, such as alarms, locked gates, no valuables on display, irregular patterns or routines. Christchurch is recognised as a low crime area, but not a no crime area.

The Neighbourhood Watch website includes many free resources and toolkits to help to minimise the risks of falling victim to crime. Smaller communities are well-placed to recognise victims of crimes such as modern slavery and domestic abuse, where minor changes in behaviour may indicate a larger problem. Neighbourhood Watch is no longer purely about crime and now includes wellbeing in its remit, creating kinder, happier communities.

Membership of Neighbourhood Watch is free and individuals and communities are encouraged to set up new schemes. There is no recognised scheme in Christchurch. A question was raised about stickers in properties from previous NHW schemes in the village. Whilst these may serve as a deterrent, Robin suggested visiting the website and registering a new scheme.

The Chairman thanked Robin for his presentation.

8 Parish Council Future Plans

Cllr Hughes outlined the Council's plans for the forthcoming year. He noted that the play equipment in the Recreation Ground is mainly for younger children, so the Council is considering provision for older children and adults, including outdoor gym equipment, following the recent visit to other local sites.

The Council has now taken back control of the field alongside the Recreation Ground with a view to creating a new community open space. The intention is to create a dog walking area, as dogs are not permitted in the Recreation Ground, a wildlife area, an orchard and small woodland and seating areas. Councillors visited a similar project in an old orchard in Colne, with features including bird, owl and bat boxes, a sundial and picnic tables. This project will be costly and will take a number of years to deliver. The loss of rent on the field and the cost of creating the new facility will be covered by grants and an increase in the precept. The Woodland Trust will supply free trees and hedging plants. The Whitemill Environment Fund provides grants for community green spaces and wildlife habitat enhancement in Christchurch, so could be the major funder for the project. At this stage, the project needs ideas and volunteers and Cllr Hughes asked residents to consider offering their time and skills.

In answer to questions from the floor, Cllr Hughes explained that it is the Council's intention to manage this open space with dogs in mind and the focus will be on encouraging responsible dog ownership rather than banning dogs if fouling becomes a problem. When incorporating trees into the plan, consideration will be given to future maintenance. The demand for gym equipment is unknown, but a phased implementation will help to assess this.

Concerns regarding parking outside Townley School were also raised. Cllr Hughes explained that the new development adjacent to the school had offered additional parking spaces.

9 Your Community Centre

Cllr Harper outlined the process by which the Community Centre had been conceived, funded and constructed as a replacement for the former Memorial Hall. The Recreation Ground charity is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Centre and Cllr Harper has served as Chairman of the charity since the Centre opened in 2016. The charity raises money from hire fees charged to users and from its own fund raising events, with grants obtained for major works. Lockdowns forced the closure of the building for periods of time, but Government grants have allowed improvements to continue, with the acoustic panels in the Hall, a new path to the storage container, a bench seat in the playground and two flat screen televisions to attract more commercial bookings for meetings and training. Most user groups have returned after the pandemic, although some have found it difficult to restart. The Bowls Club will not be continuing, so a new use is needed for the bowls green and suggestions are welcome.

10 Soap Box Presentations

The Chairman invited representatives of village groups and organisations to say a few words about who they are and what they do.

Christchurch Brownies - Rainbow and Brownie groups meet every Wednesday during school terms and met on Zoom when they were unable to meet face-to-face. Each term has a theme that connects their activities. They welcomed the installation of the new canopy and patio at the Centre, allowing them to undertake more outdoor activities and would like to be involved in the plans for the new field. They thanked the Council for the financial help they received towards their set-up costs.

Lunch Break - Lunch Break meets on the second and fourth Wednesdays of every month and is free to attend thanks to a grant from the Council. They would like more members and everybody is welcome.

The Heron - The Heron parish magazine is produced and distributed entirely by volunteers. They would like more articles of interest from residents. The Annual General Meeting takes

place on the first Monday in July and new committee members are always welcome. Covid caused a gap of several months and some editions were published online with a much smaller print run for those unable to view the online version. They thanked the Council for its ongoing financial support and the team of deliverers who ensure that every household in the Parish receives a copy.

Art Club - The Art Club meets twice a month and everybody is welcome to attend.

Gardening Club - The Gardening Club also seeks new members. Recovery from Covid has been slow, with some members and some of their regular speakers reluctant to venture out, however they are optimistic about the future. They could assist with tree planting and other village projects.

Christchurch Eco - The project started in 2019, using recycling and other activities to reduce our carbon footprint. All activities stopped for the lockdowns. Waste collections and recycling have so far raised over £300 for Townley School, however many of the waste streams are no longer being collected for processing, so this part of the project will be closed down. Online activities will continue.

Street Pride - The Street Pride group meets once a month for litter picking, with all equipment provided by Fenland District Council. They have also planted the raised beds outside the Community Centre. Their AGM takes place in April and everybody is welcome.

Book Club - The Book Club met on Zoom through the pandemic, including former residents who were able to join. New members are always welcome.

The WI - The WI has fewer members, but continues to operate. They recently yarn-bombed the village sign to celebrate the centenary of the Isle of Ely Federation of Women's Institutes and hope to do the same for the forthcoming jubilee celebrations.

Indoor Bowls - The outdoor bowls club closed permanently during the lockdowns, so a new Indoor Bowls club has been set up every Monday evening. The Club has a strong membership but there is still room for a few more. Equipment is available for beginners.

11 Ask Your Council

The Chairman invited questions from the floor.

Concern was expressed regarding the lack of organised activities for teenagers and young adults. Councillors responded that such activities need volunteers to run them. The village has good facilities for football and some equipment from the former youth club is still in store, including table tennis tables. Advice and support, including funding, is available from the County Council, the Parish Council and youth projects in other Fenland villages.

Is the school swimming pool still useable? The resident was advised to contact the school.

Is it possible to install a memorial bench in the village? Yes, speak to the Parish Council.

12 Closing Remarks

The Chairman thanked everybody for attending the meeting, the Councillors for their support and those who volunteer to run and support the activities that contribute to the quality of life in Christchurch.

13 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next Annual Parish Meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 28 March 2023.