

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF TAPLOW PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON TUESDAY 9th MAY 2023 IN THE PERKINS ROOM, TAPLOW VILLAGE HALL, HIGH STREET, TAPLOW, SL6 0EX.

Present

Cllr. Jamie Barnard (Chairman)

Ms. Ruth Senior (Clerk) and 13 members of the public including 6 elected councillors.

The Chairman declared the meeting open at 8pm.

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies received from Vice Chairman Cllr. Prof Alan Sinclair, Cllr. Claire Price, Cllr. Rachel Horton-Kitchlew, Cllr. Spencer Norton, Cllr. Val Pridmore, Cllr. Zoe Hatch and County Cllr. Paul Kelly.

2 Report from the Parish Council

2.1 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2023 – Cllr. Jamie Barnard

In spite of a rather eventful year in world politics, a revolving door of British Prime Ministers, a war in Europe, the death of HM Queen and the Coronation of King Charles III, it has been a positive and peaceful year in the Parish.

Our community spirit is in full swing with Jubilee street parties, the annual Ox Roast and a Coronation picnics, a vibrant village pub, a Village Hall buzzing with the Playgroup, the Scouts, amateur dramatics and music of all kinds. Old Priory Gardens has become a woodland gem in the heart of the village as dog walkers and the Forest School enjoy the tranquillity of its natural pathways.

Taplow has so much to offer now.

- Taplow Lake is teeming with fisherman, water skiers, paddle boarders, Oktoberfest revellers and wild swimmers.
- Taplow Riverside nears completion with the recent opening of the Hall & Woodhouse pub, upstream from the Roux at Skindles by Maidenhead Bridge. These restaurants and bars complement the Old Boathouse at Boulter's Lock and The Blue Riviera which has recently reopened on the Maidenhead side .
- Taplow is now proudly connected to London with the Elizabeth Line providing seamless travel to Bond Street, the West End, Liverpool Street and Canary Wharf.

We have invested in the Village Hall as we continue our programme of refurbishments. The Clerk's office was badly damaged by a serious leak in the roof so that has now been overhauled from floor to ceiling. This was covered by our insurance. The old doors throughout the hall have also been replaced with modern oak fire-doors to match the flooring and oak windows installed last year. And we have painstakingly repaired the damage caused to our treasured mural by the old salt bin outside.

The Parish Council co-funded a project led by the Hitcham and Taplow Society to add the names of those who lost their lives in World War II to the Village War Memorial. The work was completed in time for the Remembrance Service in November.

The perennial headaches associated with speeding and parking continue. The impact of Crossrail is very visible to parishioners yet somehow invisible to Transport for London.

TFL recently wrote to our Clerk saying “we’ve been monitoring the parking situation around the station, and we believe that overall, the situation has improved as commuters balance between using both car parks (north and south). We have tried to improve the area to better balance the use of both car parks as we’ve found the north car park can be full when at the same time as the south car park has ample spaces. For example we’ve tidied the car park, built a new south entrance with ticket vending machines and customer information screens and the step-free access work we completed in December 2019 means that passengers can easily get across to the Elizabeth line platforms.”

This is despite the fact that every week day, cars are parked along the full length of Station Road, even spilling around the corner onto Boundary Road, and increasingly down one side of Approach Road. This is and will remain a top priority for the Parish Council, and we will liaise with TfL and the County Council as necessary.

In more positive news, on the 4th of August 2022 the Beeches Community Board allocated £13,740 towards four Mobile Vehicle Activated Signs, alerting drivers to the 30mph speed limits. Three have already been installed around the Parish and one is still to be put in. We hope that the signs serve as a regular reminder of the 30mph speed limits in the village, reducing the risk of speeding for pedestrians, joggers, cyclists, and horses.

For those of you concerned about the collapsed footbridge at Mill Lane, I’m pleased to report that the Council has set budget aside to complete the works in 23/24.

I am pleased to report a year of stability for the Parish Council itself. No changing of the Guard this year - no leavers, no joiners and no vacancies. This may change next year, of course, and we always welcome interest from parishioners. We can be proud of our diversity on many fronts - we are politically and geographically well-represented, gender-balanced, and we represent a mix of age, background and experience. We won’t win any prizes for ethnic diversity though so as vacancies appear we will embrace this challenge too.

I would like to acknowledge the personal efforts of our esteemed clerk, Ruth Senior, towards self-improvement. Ruth has completed her ILCA training (Introduction to Local Council Administration) after which she received her certificate in Local Council Administration. Her focus for this year will be on Finance with a view to doing a Community Governance degree one day in the future. It seems fitting at this point to thank Ruth personally for her dedication, ingenuity and perseverance over the last year, saving the Parish Council many thousands of pounds through her actions and general management.

And finally...I would like to express my personal thanks to all our Councillors for volunteering their time, energy, passion and diplomacy to the Parish over the last year. We are lucky enough to have a well-rounded, hard-working and collegiate team, with a healthy sense of humour. More like the Vicar of Dibley than the infamous Hanforth Parish Council.

While it isn’t fashionable to prefer one child over another, it would be remiss of me not to call out Roger Worthington whose tireless commitment to planning matters will leave a lasting legacy. As the Chairman of our Planning Committee, he has the toughest job of anyone in the Council, especially as in practical terms, he is a one-man committee. It is also a relentless and often thankless task, but Roger soldiers on regardless.

I’d also like to acknowledge Claire’s impressive work as the Chairwoman of our Finance Committee. As you will see from her report, she runs a tight ship and the Parish finances are in excellent shape.

2.2 FINANCE REPORT 2023 – Cllr. Claire Price

Overview - Despite high expectations of a bounce-back year in terms of hall hire for 2022/23, we were beset with problems as a result of the leak which forced us to close the hall over last summer. This led to a reduction in hall income, but it also meant that all planned hall improvement projects had to be placed on hold.

Although the hall income decreased, overall income levels were largely in line with expectations as a result of Community Infrastructure Levy and insurance receipts. Our expenses were also far lower than expected as a result of the project delays and so we ended the financial year approximately £9k higher than budgeted.

Despite rising inflation, due to ending the year higher than expected, the precept remained the same for the 3rd year in a row.

Plans for this year:

Open spaces:

- We spent £2.8k on a tree survey and associated maintenance in 2021/22, which we agreed to be a biennial cost and this project should therefore repeat at a slightly higher cost next year (possibly as much as £3.5k) to account for inflation.
- Following a recent Eco-Audit, there are plans to discuss and implement some of the suggestions.

Hall repairs, maintenance and capital expenditure:

- Re-oiling windows, door and benches – Advice is to do this every other year. Last done in April 19. We are estimating £1K for this during the summer holidays.
- Replacement of toilets – this has been discussed for some time and it makes sense to complete this work over the summer holidays when it is likely the hall will need to be closed for other works. An estimate of £10k has been included, but we are yet to agree any quotes for this work.
- Mural repair – we have incurred £3.5k to-date, to stop any further damage to the mural. The internal restoration work should be completed this summer at an estimated cost of £5k.

2.3 PLANNING REPORT 2023 – Cllr. Roger Worthington

Some things covered in last year's report have not moved at all or only slowly.

The first paragraph I copy in unchanged:

Following the withdrawal of a draft new Local Plan for the SBDC area, we entered our new year still using the 2011 Adopted Plan, with little prospect of an update before 2026. This keeps in the Green Belt some areas of Taplow that the plan intended to remove but developers can increasingly claim that the 2011 plan is seriously out of date and seek to override it.

Having defined the number of County Councillors as 98 we are still awaiting the formal definition of the new ward boundaries and the distribution within them of councillor seats.

The council recommendations to parliament are due to be published this month after consultations, to take effect at elections in May 2025. Taplow is to be part of a Burnham Ward with three councillors. This will dilute our influence somewhat compared with the current warding but is a reflection of population numbers.

We announced last year the formation of the Local Heritage Asset register by the County and our submission of The Hermitage (off the Bath Road) for consideration. We are pleased that the submission was successful and The Hermitage was one of the first sites to be so registered. Subsequently a developer submitted an application to convert The Hermitage to 6 flats. This was the first of many applications over twenty years for this site that we actually supported and it has been duly approved. It is difficult to know how much the listing helped but so far it is a good outcome.

The difficulties relating to effective enforcements do not go away. The property in Marsh Lane mentioned last year eventually received an enforcement notice in February this year.

Perhaps associated with the completion of the Elizabeth Line there is a growth of applications and appeals over properties in the Green Belt. The laws over permitted conversion from agricultural and equine usage to residential are being probed and tested as never before.

Examples include Cliveden Stud and properties on Hitcham Lane. The concerns over Little Karoo Farm have subsided but activity in the adjacent field has led the Council to require a retrospective application, apparently for some equine activity and Downlands Barn conversion is at appeal.

Parking around Taplow station has become critical, with Boundary Road residents being inconvenienced and even Approach Road beginning to fill up with consequent traffic blockages. Yellow lines are clearly on their way. The County and railway companies continue to show no interest in developing larger facilities by the station. This opportunity will come to an end with the arrival of the new Local Plan in 2025/26 unless incorporated in it.

2.4 Questions from the floor on Parish Council issues

There was a question regarding the ownership of the land where Roots used to be based, The Bishops own this land but the adjacent land going down to the train track is owned by Buckinghamshire County Council.

3 County Council

3.1 Report from County Councillor George Sandy

Thank you for the opportunity to give a short update on some of the past year's activities and achievements for the Buckinghamshire Council. I just want to highlight some achievements which reflect our four key corporate priorities which are; strengthening our communities, protecting the vulnerable, improving our environment, and our prosperity.

A key achievement last year was the adoption of A Town & Parish Charter which was formerly adopted last July. All councils within Buckinghamshire have a common purpose to improve the economic, environmental health & social well-being of Buckinghamshire, its residents, businesses, and visitors. We understand that as independent democratically elected body your councillors work within your financial constraints and they represent your community at a truly local level. The parish council is a key connection between the unitary council and your community to help us improve services and foster greater community empowerment.

The purpose of the charter is to articulate and demonstrate our commitment to work together with all local councils in Buckinghamshire and have developed an action plan alongside it to help embed the charter across the council.

If you would like to learn more about the charter just Google "Buckinghamshire Town & Parish Charter"

Other key achievements I'd like to share with you are.....

The successful establishment of sixteen Community Boards across Buckinghamshire forms an important element of the charter and as you will know Taplow forms part of The Beeches Community Board has three Action Groups.....

The Well-being Group aims to develop intergenerational activities for the older and younger members of society. Funding was recently provided by the Community Board to establish Learning & Sharing Sessions at Lent Rise School where older residents join with the pupils to pass on their knowledge and experience.

A Youth Round-Table event is planned to explore what youngsters feel is missing from their lives and what they need help with. The ultimate aim being to encourage them to engage in friendly social activities.

Funding was also provided towards the foundation of a new mothers group called Sound & Song where expectant & single mothers can enjoy singing together and share their various problems such as post-natal depression, mental health issues and loneliness.

A grant was arranged to provide Christmas parcels to three hundred needy and vulnerable families.

The Environmental Group supports projects such as; planting trees, sowing wild flower seeds, reducing litter, the use of plastics, and encourages recycling.

The Infrastructure & Highways Group deals with road safety and promotes Active Travel by helping to create cycling and walking routes to link with established footpaths. Even obtain funding to drop a kerb to provide crossing points for prams and wheelchairs.

An important link that due to be replaced this Autumn is the Jubilee footbridge.

Danger spots on roads are also considered. For example, speeding at the junction of Cliveden and Taplow Common Roads is a major problem for residents, motorists and tourists. As a consequence the Community Board has agreed to fund a scoping exercise to establish the feasibility of altering the junction to slow traffic heading south towards Burnham. The process has been delayed by the change to a new highways contractor who now has to revisit the costings and confirm before it can proceed.

Highways cannot be mentioned without a nod to the ubiquitous pothole invasion that has attacked the whole country. They resulted from an extremely wet winter which was accompanied by very cold nights. The combination of water filling cracks in the road surface followed by expansion as it froze was the main cause. So many holes were appearing daily that repair crews could only effect temporary filling until such time the weather improved.

To tackle this problem the Buckinghamshire Council has drawn down £5million from its reserves and Government added £2.5m which makes a total of £27.5m is available for repairs in the current year. An exciting new machine has been purchased by Buckinghamshire. It's a "JCB Pothole Pro" and is currently being tested at various locations. It's an amazing machine, that can repair the average pothole for £30. In a competition with a regular repair crew the JCB renewed a 12m area in 13 minutes 9 seconds. The regular team took one hour 19 minutes and 4 seconds – JCB was 6 times faster with the benefit of no hard physical labour. See the JCB Pothole Pro on YouTube.

I would like to take this opportunity to conduct a straw poll concerning the speed limit on Cliveden Road which has become a regular route for huge trucks travelling between the A40 and the A4 Berry Hill Junction. Many of these vehicles are travelling too fast particularly on sections where the road narrows. I've had a few close shaves myself but wonder how many of you and the Parish Council would give support for the limit to be reduced to 40MPH on all the roads between Burnham & Taplow down to Bourne End from the A4 to A40 at Broad Lane to Junction 2 on the M40? (There was unanimous support).

3.2 Questions to the County Councillor

There was a question asked regarding the re-surfacing of Rectory Road, this was delayed in December due to the weather and the suspected instability of the Elibank House wall. This work has not been scheduled as yet due to the Highways contract change over.

4 Community Updates

Rev Jane Creswell – St Nicolas Church, Taplow

Rev Jane Creswell presented an update on the Church, looking back over the past year plus their current and future projects.

Highlights of the past year include:

Celebrating the appointment of curate Suzanne's new appointment.

Welcoming the services back for the Remembrance Day service.

Continuing regular worship.

Supporting new couples to plan their wedding day.

Pop up events.

Taplow4Ukraine.

Current activity includes:

New vision statement – Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors

Coronation art exhibition.

Local instrument teachers performing end of term concerts.

Organist and choir leading Songs of Praise in September.

Friends of St Nicolas continues.

Future aims include:

Increasing relevance to younger generation.

Becoming a focus from community engagement with contemporary world issues.

Building on existing activity to increase opportunities to keep doors open and provide friendship and support to both congregation and the wider community.

Thames Valley Neighbourhood Police's Report - PCSO Ange O'Connell

Burglaries

Burglaries continue to be a major problem and is still the forces no 1 priority.

Over the past 12 months there has been a reduction in reported incidents from 47 to 26, this equates to a 45% decrease.

There has been an increase in the number of patrols and also educating residents on making houses less appealing.

Theft from motor Vehicles

There's been a huge decrease in theft from motor vehicles this year, from 124 to 15. Police have been out patrolling car parks.

Theft of motor Vehicles

There has also been a decrease in reports from 39 to 7

Antisocial Behaviour

The Police and Environment Agency have been working hard together to stop swimming in what was the Jubilee River which has now been re-classified as the Jubilee Flood Relief Channel. Swimming is no longer allowed. There has been planting along lower, easy access sites and life buoys fitted on all bridges.

Unauthorised Encampments

Land Watch WhatsApp group has also been set up for local landowners which is being managed by Beaconsfield Council, Tabish Wazir, if you are interested in joining, please contact him on Projectsupport@beaconsfieldtowncouncil.gov.uk

Andy Bond and Alistair Hill – Taplow Cricket Club

The cricket season is now open and Taplow Cricket Club has been rebranded and has a new crest. The colts are thriving with a new All Stars programme for 5-8 year olds.

Access footpaths to the club are being reinstated.

Alistair is the new president and he presented the new working brief: The club realise they have to invest and provide better facilities, new nets, improved clubhouse and changing rooms.

We were reminded that this is a private members club (social membership is available) and dogs should not be walked on the cricket pitch, there has been an issue with dog fouling recently.

Robert Miles, General Manager, Cliveden National Trust

Once again, in the last financial year, Cliveden was the most visited National Trust property with virtually zero advertising. 83% of visitors live within a 30 minute drive and are repeat visitors.

The car parks and visitor reception are being re-developed with more all weather parking being installed.

The estate are looking at ways to make walking/cycling easier, especially now the Elizabeth Line is open.

There are 2 key focuses going forward:

Climate action – sustainability.

Accessibility – going for gold access standards.

Taplow Court

Taplow Court is slowly getting back to pre-covid levels with regards to members and there are 6 open days over the summer, starting on 21st May.

They are now taking tour bookings again for school groups.

Working with Bucks Environment Monitoring Group to enhance the status of the gardens, planting many more trees, with the aim to be part of the National Garden Scheme in the future.

5 Any Other Business

None

The meeting ended at 9.03pm.