

Minutes of the Askerswell Parish Meeting

held in Askerswell Village Hall 7.30pm 21 October 2021

Present: John Mahoney Chair
Frank Hemmings Deputy Chair
14 Electors 1 Observer

Item 18/21 Welcome and safety information

Item 19/21 Apologies for absence from

Isabel James, Liz Guard, Nigel Guard, Ursula Mahoney, Maya Pieris, Gillian Fowler, Graham Fowler, Laurie Deards, Romaine Deards, Mike Dyson, Janet Thomasson, Buffy Sacher, Mandy Hall, Jenny Hemmings, Mary Russell, Eileen Bryan, Alison Lancashire

Item 20/21 Minutes of 25 May 2021 meeting

Acceptance of minutes proposed by Jessamy Wilsden, Seconded by Richard Hobbs
In favour 14 Against 0 Abstention 0

Item 21/21 Matters arising from May 2021 not covered below

Further discussion of a defibrillator was deferred to the next meeting.

Item 22/21 Correspondence

None

Items 23 & 24 /21 Summary of planning applications and highways work

JM reported that the clerk had received no consultation requests from Dorset Council, apparently due to a communication problem. He had requested the Council to ensure the correct email addresses were in use and would monitor these communications until a new clerk was in place.

JM noted that only minimal work had been done to the damaged surface at the east end of Hembury road and encouraged anyone who felt that further work should be done to please email or phone Dorset Council to demonstrate the strength of concern. There were no other highways matters of significance.

Item 25/21 Dorset Council topics

Councillor Alford was welcomed to the meeting and thanked for his time. He reported several items about the Council:

- experience of work patterns in the last 18 months has allowed reappraisal of office space and the vacation of South Walks House in Dorchester; it will be let commercially, a first tenant is the NHS for use as an annex to Dorchester hospital
- a high volume of planning applications has extended response times; notifications to neighbours have been stopped and on-site notices are now sent to applicants for display rather than being put up by council staff. Unification of the previous 7 district systems is nearing completion and should improve efficiency and speed.
- Land Charges (local searches when buying property) have experienced long waiting times
- Consultations are under way about rights of way, local bus routes and library services – AA encouraged people to contribute their views.

- The Council is working to resolve a gap of £36m between the projected need and the available budget of £310m before the Council Tax is finalised in February.
- Anyone on the housing register needs to re-register before 1 December.

[AA left the meeting after this item].

Item 26/21 Finance report for 2020/21 and Approval of statements for external auditors

Item 23/21/1 Confirming submission of Financial Returns for 2020/21

The reports had been submitted on time and there were no queries from the auditor.

Item 23/21/2 Interim Financial Report 2021/22

The meeting noted the report previously distributed. (see annex to these minutes)

Item 23/21/3 Washingpool Fund

Frank Hemmings summarised the situation of the fund with a balance of around £750. £350 will shortly be paid towards work on the Washingpool pond and a similar sum is expected as a donation of the profit from the sale of printed copies of the Askerswell Millennium File. The meeting thanked Howard Atkinson for his work to produce and sell those copies.

Item 23/21/4 Possible payments to Village Hall and Churchyard

The meeting discussed options for the total of the payments and how they should be divided between the hall and the churchyard.

Jessamy Wilsden as chair of the VH committee said it was in a relatively fortunate financial position although Geoff Barrett as VH treasurer expressed concern about the diminished number of regular bookings. Nigel Guard (PCC treasurer) had written that churchyard maintenance expenditure for the current and previous two years was £730 (projected), £2,157 and £705. Godfrey Lancashire (PCC chair) reported that the recent quinquennial review requires substantial further expenditure.

The meeting decided the total of payments will be £1,000, £400 to the hall and £600 to the churchyard.

proposed by Richard Hobbs, seconded by Frank Hemmings

In favour 12 Against 0 Abstention 2

Item 23/21/5 Setting the Precept for 2022/23

The meeting considered whether to raise the precept in line with inflation, to maintain the previous amount or to reduce it. Several viewpoints were expressed and following discussion it was agreed to retain the precept for 2022/23 at £1,800.

proposed by Maggie Barrett, seconded by Ian Russell

In favour 9 Against 4 Abstention 1

Item 27/21 Possible contribution to Queen's Green Canopy 2022

The meeting expressed enthusiasm to engage with the project and noted that possible sources of funding could include the Washingpool Fund, a parish meeting contribution, external grants in kind or in cash and local fund raising. FH agreed to lead a working party with JW and HA to identify suitable sites and to outline possible ways forward.

Item 28/21 Transfer of phone service to BT Digital Voice

BT's plan to migrate phone services to its new digital connections has caused some uncertainty and concern. The meeting exchanged experience and asked JM to include relevant information in a forthcoming Askerswell Post mailing.

Item 29/21 Local reports and acknowledgements

Item 29/21/1 village hall [Jessamy Wilsdon]

It's great to be back! although there's concern about the diminished number of bookings

and how that will affect on-going revenue. All the work planned for the closed period has been completed. The committee is now seeking quotes for improved loft insulation, funding for which will probably have to be found locally since there are no government funding schemes available.

Item 29/21/2 good neighbours' scheme [Godfrey Lancashire]

GL reported that the scheme continues quietly and effectively, exactly as it's intended to do. He thanked all the helpers and particularly Liz Guard as a main coordinator.

Item 29/21/3 Washingpool maintenance and nature report

[Howard Atkinson – see annex to these minutes] Work has continued at Washingpool in line with the plan prepared by Toller Tree Care last year. Little expenditure has been required this year other than mower fuel and a few fence posts but additional professional help is likely to be needed next year.

The pond has been deepened to prevent drying-out in the summer, so that invertebrates can survive and to prevent invasion of sedges.

A recent survey positions the river Asker in the top 15% of healthful rivers and although fish are not numerous they are in good condition. Good results from trail cameras, monitoring wildlife activity, will continue to be reported in the ECV. Nearly all bat species in the UK have recently been detected in the village, including some very rare ones.

[Graham Hall for Mandy Hall] The tubs in the Square have been replanted for the spring, again with species that deer don't eat. The tubs themselves will need replacing soon; GH and MH will find the best deal and arrange delivery before the end of March.

Item 29/21/4 Rights of Way [Antony Wilsdon]

AW has continued to monitor and maintain all the routes in the parish, reporting more serious issues to Dorset Council. There have been a higher number this year than typically, some already fixed and some still to be done. AW asked that problems and concerns continue to be reported to him.

Item 29/21/5 Parish Lands charities update and confirmation of trustees [Howard Atkinson]

Trustees' reports are on the parish website. The two charities have a combined balance of just under £1,680.

Item 29/21/6 website [Graham Hall for Mandy Hall]

Searches on the website, lessened during 2020, have increased again to around 200 per month, mainly it's thought by people outside the parish seeking information about it, although it remains an important reference point for residents too. MH asks for regular information about forthcoming activities or other items to be sent to her for inclusion on the site.

Item 29/21/7 Homewatch [appointment of new coordinator]

Nobody has yet volunteered to take this role.

The meeting thanked all the people who had spoken and all the others who contribute to these activities. Their work sustains and enriches us all.

Item 30/21 Local history news from Dorset Museum

GL summarised the exciting find of a hoard of Roman coins, anticipating more news to come shortly in the ECV and through possible fund-raising initiatives.

Item 31/21 Forthcoming vacancies for PM chair and clerk

JM explained that there is a vacancy now for the Clerk although Isabel James may be able to resume the role at some future time. JM will take that on for the time being unless someone else can help. However, he will stand down at the next meeting or when his house is sold, whichever is sooner. Nobody offered to take on either role and members of the meeting agreed to seek to find suitable candidates.

Item 32/21 Next meeting and agenda items

The date of Thursday 5 May 2022 7.30 in the Village Hall was agreed.

Item 33/21 Any other business

Following the unexpected but very pleasing sell-out of the first two print runs, the meeting agreed to ask HA to arrange further reprints of the Millennium File to meet future demand. The cost will be met from the Washingpool Fund which will be reimbursed as copies are sold.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9.34 pm.

Chairman's signature Date

DRAFT

Annex 1 - Askerswell Parish Meeting Financial decisions, October 2021

Chair's statement

The financial position for 2021/22 is on track with the plan that we agreed at the meeting in October 2022. We have, as previously agreed, built a reserve of £1,000, giving us the ability to respond to unexpected issues. The Clerk's report summarises the figures. We need to make two decisions.

1. What contribution should we give to the village hall and the churchyard?

The Parish Meeting usually supports the hall and the churchyard. Last year we were able to return to giving £1,000 in total, having been able to afford only £800 the previous year. In last year's exceptional circumstances, we departed from previous precedent of giving equal amounts and gave £300 to the hall and £700 to the churchyard. We can afford £1,050 this year. We could we give £525 to each or more to one than the other. As usual, the money will be paid towards the end of March, being the end of the Parish Meeting financial year.

Decision 1: should we give £525 to each of the hall and the churchyard? If not, what should we do?

2. What precept should we request for next year from Dorset Council?

A reminder of the background: Parish meetings raise money by requesting a precept from the Council. That's the only possible source of funds. Some parish meetings raise no precept. Askerswell's is one of the lowest. The Council divides the precept equally between each household and adds the cost to the council tax bill (the 2021/22 precept of £1,800 costs each household about £34 a year).

If we decide to give a total of £1,050 to the churchyard and the hall, the Parish Meeting should end the year with the full intended reserve of £1,000 and a small surplus of about £35. That can go towards any intended Queen's Green Canopy commemoration.

The precept has been £1,800 for several years. In discussion of the precept at this time last year, several people said they would prefer to see gradual, small increases year-on-year rather than infrequent but larger rises. Therefore, I propose that we establish a regular arrangement to calculate the change in the annual precept for the coming financial year by the rate of CPI (Consumer Price Inflation) in September preceding the start of that financial year, for ratification by the October Parish Meeting.

The September 2021 CPI rate will be announced on 20 October, the day before the parish meeting, and the proposed precept increase will be available at the meeting. For information, the CPI rate for August 2021 was 3.2%. That would increase the precept from £1,800 to £1,858 in total, an increase of about £1 per household from about £34 to about £35 per year.

Decision 2: Do we raise the precept in line with inflation or keep it at £1,800? If neither of those options, what should the precept be and why?

Annex 2 - Reports from Howard Atkinson

Washingpool Green

I thank the 15 volunteers who cut grass this year at Washingpool Green and the Village Hall. I took responsibility for brush cutting 6x over the growing season instead of mowing. We need more volunteers to populate the Rota in 2022 and this need will be expressed via Askerswell Post soon.

The tree management is following the report provided by Toller tree care and has not resulted in external costs this year will soon if we carry out all its recommendations.

The group tasked with reviewing the early drying of Washingpool pond have progressed effectively. The team was Graham Fowler, Geoff Barrett, Antony Wilsdon, Howard Atkinson and John Houston. John has expert knowledge and considered it likely that the pond and the Asker where hydrologically connected with the pond bottom being at a higher level than the river bed.

Patrick Cray then used his expertise and surveying equipment to determine levels and demonstrated that John's opinion was correct. Therefore it was decided to dig out the pond. The aims were to enhance the volume of water that the pond held and to ensure that its bottom was at a lower level than that of the river so reversing any flow when the pond was fairly empty.

This work was carried out by Shaun Webb when the pond was dry. There was too much soil for volunteers to wheelbarrow away and so it has been piled up at the south end of the pond. The pond has been increased in depth by 50 cm in its centre and 25 cm in a more peripheral width. Its maximum depth is now 90-100cm. Before any rain occurred, the pond did fill to a depth of about 10 cm by hydrological flow suggesting that the approach adopted has been a success. The expectation is that it will not dry out as in recent years before amphibian reproduction has been completed.

The south side currently looks unsightly because of the soil piled up there but the expectation is this area will be colonised by plants in the coming year as will the shallower water in the pond. The central region is assumed to be too deep to suit the growth of sedges. The opportunity was taken also dig a drainage trench from by the North stile down to the current French drain so eliminating wet ground by the nearby bench. This was filled with a French drain connected to that already in place and back-filled with gravel. The additional help of Dave Altree and both Tim and Peter Boden ensured the work progressed quickly. Safety notices have been put in place on both the south and north edges of the pond. the total cost of the efforts was £430.16 pounds which is being met in full by the Washingpool fund. This cost is somewhat offset by the profit of £288.10 made from sale of all 50 reprints of the Millennium File originally completed in 2006.

Environmental matters

The four Asker Riverfly monitors and four others based further down stream have completed their work for the year. They will meet in early November to discuss the results. In brief the Asker is within the top 15% of UK rivers for its health. Recently the fish population have has been assessed and we await the results. The density of brown trout may be limited by the lack of large river plants probably caused by shade from trees.

The trail cameras provided by DAONB has established large number of birds and animals including otters make use of the river's resources. A survey of bats around Askerswell village with a bat detector was carried out as the trail cameras do not detect them. We may have

all or if nearly all UK species in the Parish including rare species. I provided details in the ECV recently.

Parish Lands Charities

This report covers the period from the last made to the Parish Meeting as recorded in the Minutes of October 2020 which are available on the Parish Website. The three trustees, John Mahoney, Antony Wilsdon and Howard Atkinson met in both May and October. The Agendas and Minutes or draft Minutes of those meetings have been sent to our webmaster for addition to the Parish Website.

I thank Richard Hobbs for again being our independent examiner of the accounts for the financial year 2020-2021 which were subsequently submitted in September 2021 to the Charity Commission. The balance of the accounts on 30th September 2021 are: The Gravel Allotment, £838.38 and the Fuel Allotment £838.39.

Alistair Coutts took over the tenancy for both plots of land from his father and duly paid the first annual fee of £40 to each charity for the year ending 31 March 2021. There was discussion in the May trustees meeting about the possibility of selling both plots of land but the trustees decided that the cost of this and uncertainty about the future value of land was such that the decision was taken not to proceed. Any views about this matter are very welcome and will be considered at the next meeting of the trustees in spring 2022. An extension of three years beyond the current five-year tendency of Alistair Coutts was offered to him to enhance the stability of his farm business with the intention of supporting a local farmer. This offer has been accepted.

There have been no applications for awards from the new grant scheme the aims of which summarised in the Parish Meeting's Minutes of October 2020. Its objectives will be again be included in the Askerswell notes for the ECV at the end of the year. The trustees considered that requests to the scheme are likely to be infrequent and therefore decided not to review it deferring that to incoming future trustees.