

Askerswell Parish Meeting

Thursday 19th October 2023 at 7.30p.m.

In attendance: Harry Coutts (Chair), David Altree (Dep. Chair), Peter Ballard (Clerk), Tim and Denise Boden, Liz and Nigel Guard, Mandy and Graham Hall, Lara Altree, Mike Green, Antony and Jessamy Wilsdon, Elaine Ballard, Richard Hobbs, Don Allcock, Maggie and Geoff Barrett, Nick and Rumbi Evans, Graham and Gillian Fowler, Frank Hemmings and Harriet Laurie. Councillor Anthony Alford also attended.

Item 17/23: Chairman's opening remarks. Harry welcomed everyone to the Meeting, thanked them for their attendance

Item 18/23: Apologies for absence. Gill Reypert, Laurie and Romaine Deards, Godfrey and Alison Lancashire, David and Rose Wintle, Michael Dyson and Janet Thomasson, Alison Green, Sara Gay and Eileen Bryan.

Item 19/23: Minutes of the meeting held on 20th October 2022. There were no comments or amendments, and the Meeting approved the minutes, which were subsequently signed by the Chairman.
Proposed by Liz, seconded by Peter.
15 in favour, 0 against, 6 abstentions.

Item 20/23: Matters arising not covered below: The review of the Standing Orders was approved by the meeting.
Proposed by Gillian, Seconded by Frank,
21 in favour, 0 against, 0 abstentions.

Item 21/23: Correspondence: Harry noted that we had received a request for a donation to Citizens Advice bureau as they have provided a service to residents of the Village and are experiencing a shortfall in funding. It was agreed that Harry will discuss whether the shortfall represents an existential crisis to CAB and we may consider fundraising for them at a later date.

Item 22/23: Chair's update: Harry paid a very heartfelt tribute to Gill Evans whose contribution to the Parish Meeting and to Village life over more than half a century was extraordinary and an inspiration to us all. We will all miss her very much. He went on to note some of the successful events in the Village and thanked everyone that attended and assisted.

Item 23/23: Finance Update (Clerk) Peter noted that the second tranche of the Precept had been paid, the outstanding (due to TSB's inability to add new signatories) funds paid to the Church and Village Hall, and with routine outgoings, the balance (excluding the Provision for Defibrillator) stands at £1,895.73.

Item 24/23 He confirmed that there had been no expenditure from the Washingpool account and the balance remains at £627.94

The Budget shown at the last meeting was displayed and the proposal made to Maintain the Precept at the same level of £2,550 per annum for FY 2024.
Proposed by Nigel, seconded by Don
20 in favour, 0 against, one abstention.

Item 25/23 Summary of Planning Applications and Highways work. Harry confirmed that only one notification was received, which was the Appeal to the decision not to allow the Shepherd's Hut at Medway Farm. The village was notified via Askerswell Post, but there were no responses and therefore no requirement for further discussion or formal response to the appeal.

Item 26/23 Local Reports. Harry invited Tony Alford to address the Meeting and he noted that the Local Plan had been delayed until 2026, but that we may see a draft before then. He mentioned the disparity in funding for rural communities compared to urban areas, but commented that Dorset had been very successful in obtaining Government grants to make up some of the shortfall, for example the Dorset Schools Safety Valve of £42M and the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme of £18M, which were helping to improve efficiencies – and in part had enabled savings of £96M over the life of the Council (four and a half years) and that there were further plans to integrate services to create further savings via a “Counties Deal” arrangement, where several neighbouring counties join together to procure services with much greater purchasing power.

The Council is increasing provision for people in poverty with a Household Support Fund which will enable applicants to receive supermarket vouchers, and the Housing Strategy, aimed at building the right houses in the right place, has successfully delivered 604 new houses (an increase on the 529 in the previous year) and includes affordable housing. A consultation has begun on a Council Tax reduction scheme which should publish rules for applicants in the next financial year.

The Council acknowledges that Children are our future, we need to teach them well and let them lead the way, and Dorset's OFSTED results are good. A number of schools have become independent but all schools are doing “pretty well”.

Tony stated that the Council adopted a sensible strategic approach to the RAAC (ageing aerated cement) issue and were pleased that there are no significant risks in Dorset.

Tony was asked about the provision of bus services – whether, if we have received a DoT grant, a reduction in our service is justifiable and responded that he would send details of how the grant was allocated later, that the Councillors had done a lot of work on public transport provision and all recognise the need for buses.

He was also asked how, if there is a 60% disparity between funding for rural areas and Urban areas, this difference has evolved over time, and once again, this will be provided later, though he stated that this is something that can be improved through a County Deal – and at least Dorset is doing better than many councils – Birmingham and about five others are bankrupt.

From previous correspondence, Harry noted that there is potential to work more closely with Bridport Town Council and Dorset community transport to compensate for the loss of the West Dorset and Axe Valley Ring and Ride service which is being withdrawn. Harry encouraged villagers with particular transport needs and bus dependency to get in touch with the parish meeting which, with enough interest, will push for enhanced transport links according to the needs of the community.

Village Hall Geoff gave a brief report on the Hall and thanked all of the members of the Village Entertainments Group and those that had enabled so many good nights.

Washingpool maintenance and nature report Harry noted that the mower was in need of attention, that there had been times when the grass had overgrown due to long periods of rain when it could not be cut – and was asked whether it might be possible to bring in a contractor to keep it under control.

Flower Tubs Harry thanked David and Rose who have taken over care of the tubs in

the Square and Lara Altree for taking on the tubs at the Village Hall.

Website Harry thanked Mandy for the following report – “we have been averaging over 300 hits per month. The Events Calendar is available on the Village Hall section- drop down and select calendar.

Many thanks go to Maggie Barrett for her sterling work in keeping it up to date.

A list of upcoming events throughout the year can be found on the Home page of the website along with information re Green Waste Collection, Refuse Collection, Askers River Project and Minutes of the Parish Meeting plus much more.

My thanks go to the web master without whom this website would not exist.” Harry thanked Mandy for her service and noted that she now steps down from this role, and asked if there was a volunteer to take over the running of the website, and Nick Evans immediately and enthusiastically put himself forward. Harry thanked him on behalf of the Meeting and offered our support in keeping the Website up to date.

Parish Lands charities update Antony updated the Meeting and explained that the Parish Lands are two fields – the Fuel allotment and Gravel allotment, both of which are rented by Medway farm, the income from which is used to provide grants for education or support hardship in the Parish. The Trustees, Antony along with Graham Hall and Richard Hobbs. No grants have been made this year, hence the balances stand at: i) Askerswell Fuel Allotment: £768.39, and ii) Askerswell Gravel Allotment: £768.38. He confirmed that the Return to the Charities Commission and statement (agreed by Geoff as Examiner) will be sent. (As previously advised, a Grant application form is available from Antony (wilsdon@tiscali.co.uk); 01308 485780). Harry thanked Antony for his report and the Trustees for their efforts.

Rights of Way Peter reported that all paths had been walked, (some more than others) and that he had replaced a number of way markers, cleared a number of stiles and removed one large fallen branch... well, tree, actually. It required the use of an axe!. He had met with our local Ranger and received brief instruction on the requirements of the role of the RoWLO and would aim to keep our footpaths unencumbered for the good of the community. He asked that if anyone notices any issues with any of our paths, to let him know.

Village Clean-Up day Harry thanked villagers for generally keeping everywhere tidy and suggested that the first Saturday in March, (2.3.24), would be a good date to hold a community litter pick.

Marquee / Sandbags Harry noted that the Marquee had been used to good effect in the summer, was still at the farm, is 8m x 4m and in excellent condition, is free to use by any of the villagers, £50 for others (reduced to £25 for charity events) he reiterated that more sandbags could be obtained if needed and that we received 50 at the end of last year.

Item 27/23: Defibrillator Signage It has been suggested that the signage is factually accurate but insufficient. In response we will add “Call 999 – the Ambulance Service will provide directions, the location will be shown (with a map) if you Google “Askerswell Defibrillator” and the What3Words location is “Soil Clocking Hype”.”

There was brief discussion about the excess funding for the initial outlay for the unit, and it was proposed that this would be transferred to the Washingpool Fund and ringfenced (along with the contributions from the Precept) ready for future replacement costs.

Proposed by Nigel

Seconded by Frank

Carried unanimously.

Item 28/23: Election of Officers. Harry informed the meeting that it would be his intention to stand down as Chair at the next meeting, so asked for anyone that wishes to serve the Meeting to make themselves known.

Item 29/23: Any Other Business. Harry stated that there had been rumours about the earthworks in the fields south of Nallers Lane and informed the group that there have been no applications for any form of Planning, that there may be works going on as Permitted Developments but that we had been advised by the new residents that this is merely to redirect water runoff and prevent flooding in the barn. Several members of the group expressed concern and felt that such extensive works were significantly more than should be necessary for rain water and it was agreed that we would keep a close eye on the situation.

Jessamy made an appeal for volunteers to assist with the pre-distribution of copies of the ECV, which Gill had done for many years, and Nick stepped forward once again, with Harriet offering to provide holiday cover if necessary.

Harriet also asked if there was a recent River Report on the condition of the Asker, to which Harry replied that that he had asked Howard who was currently collating data gathered over the summer, and that it will be possible to provide a detailed report soon – but that Howard felt it was not only one of the healthiest rivers in Dorset. It was noted that it is also the westernmost chalk stream in the country.

Finally, it was suggested that we have a permanent memorial to Gill as a lasting tribute to all she did for Askerswell – perhaps a tree or renaming the VH “The Gill Evans Memorial Hall”? It was agreed that this will be considered in more detail and a proposal made at the next Parish Meeting.

Item 30/23: Date of next Parish Meeting was agreed as 16th May 2024. Maggie confirmed the availability of the Village hall.

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 20.34.