

EPWELL PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD TUESDAY 5TH APRIL 2022 AT 8PM

Present: Cllr Gavin Lloyd-Thomas (Chairman), Cllr Chris Hurst, Cllr Nicola Rudge, Cllr Norman White and Cllr Paul Neale, Christine Coles – Parish Clerk, Cllr George Reynolds.

From Village Organisations and Businesses: Alison Pollard, VicTofts, Donna Boyles, Julie Bruggenwirth, Stephen Rutledge, Peter Neal, Christian Lejeune, Emma and John Rugman.

Apologies

Dawn Castle, Alan Burkinshaw and Jane Holdsworth

The Chair of the Parish Council welcomed everyone to the meeting. The last APM was in April 2019 and he thanked everyone for coming. Its an informal meeting and a collaborative approach.

District Council - Cllr George Reynolds

Cllr Reynolds noted how nice it was to see so many people in attendance. A meeting was held at OCC today. The County Council is bedding in after the pandemic. At todays meeting they discussed the clearing of bridleways and footpaths, the Code of Conduct and Social Media. The 20mph initiative is rolling on. The development of Castle Quay is progressing and will include restaurants and a new cinema. Some shops look empty but the leases are being paid for. The planning department has struggled due to a 50% increase in applications and a shortage of Officers. Staff at OCC are slowly returning back to the office.

Wildlife Habitats - Alison Pollard

Alison along with Nicola Rudge look after footpaths. Some footpaths need new signage, OCC will provide. Daffodils planted a few years ago have done really well this year. Initiatives to encourage wildlife around the village using bat boxes, swift boxes and hedgehog boxes have been looked at. Tysoe have lots of wildflowers and have signs around their village to say what they are doing. Tysoe's expertise and experience could provide assistance to Epwell. The churchyard in Epwell is an example of a successful managed habitat. Peter Neal noted that the archives have prepared a map of planting throughout the parish. The Chair thanked them both and said this needs co-ordinating with Nigel Prickett who cuts the grass. It has been a discussion point for a few years and more spots could be identified. He suggested to Alison that she attends the next meeting in May. The idea of 'No mow in May' could be considered too. Alison thanked those for supporting the Polly box which has been helping the homeless in Banbury for 35 years. Alison started a walking group in January. It takes place on the last Monday of the month. 4 walks have happened so far. Alison would like to start a coffee morning on the 2nd Wednesday of the month.

Parish Council – Cllr Gavin Lloyd-Thomas (Chairman)

The Chair started by acknowledging what a difficult two years it had been since March 2020. People have lived with the fear of the unknown, the threat to their physical and mental health, to their job and financial security, this anxiety has been multiplied exponentially by the worry for their friends families and neighbours. Let's not forget that in March 2020 and for several months after we had no vaccine, no plan for the long term and things looked very uncertain.

At the very beginning of the pandemic the Parish Council set up the EPWELL VIRUS ASSISTANCE GROUP. A group of volunteers willing to assist in any way, those isolating and vulnerable. The Chair thanked all those people who very quickly stepped forward to offer a helping hand. They had well over 30 names and speculated this service would be inundated with requests for help. This was not the case. It transpired that friends and neighbour took it upon themselves to help those in need without centralised governance.

The people of Epwell can be rightfully proud of the support that they have shown each other and to those more vulnerable in our community.

As we emerge from this enforced hibernation we look forward to once again socialising as a community, getting to know those new to our village and reigniting old friendships.

The forthcoming Jubilee should be a wonderful weekend of celebration even for hardened republicans. In the Easter edition of the Epwell Echo Nicola Rudge has appealed for volunteers to help organise the celebrations. So if you know of likely volunteers please encourage them to speak to Nicola sooner rather than later.

We have not had an opportunity to meet since 2019, so some changes within the Council have taken place. A warm welcome to Christine Coles, our new clerk. Christine clerk for Swalcliffe, Broughton amongst others, she brings a wealth of experience and knowledge and is a welcome addition to the team.

A big thank you to Chris Hurst who steered this ship for the last few years and stood down as Chair last year and has decided not to run again in next months election. Chris has however volunteered to be an Oxfordshire County Council Fix my street super user for Epwell. This is a volunteer position that supplements the OCC highways inspection team. A Super User is the 'eyes & ears' of the area Highways Officer. They are able to raise works orders that go directly to the contractor, to carry out pothole and kerbing repairs on minor low speed roads. We hope this will improve the frequency and quality of road repairs in the parish. The Parish Council still encourage all residents to use Fixmystreet.com to report any problems that are the responsibility of either Cherwell District Council or Oxfordshire CC.

In 2019 the Parish Council had had some positive indications from OCC that that their roads would undergo some major capital expenditure in the near to medium future. The last 2 years has seen OCC priorities change and budgets come under increasing pressure. The Parish Council will continue to lobby the necessary powers, including Cllr George Reynolds to have the roads properly maintained.

As part of the DIY road maintenance plan a few years ago the Parish Council re-established the grips in an attempt to improve drainage and reduce standing water. A major contributor to road surface cracking and subsequently potholes. It's difficult to gauge the effectiveness of this strategy.

Whilst acknowledging that road conditions are bad, how much worse could they have become with out effective drainage. Thanks to the Arnaboldi family for their tireless work on these.

As all here tonight are only too aware, the community relies on volunteers for all manner of jobs.

Thank you to all those volunteers who have painted, hammered, dug, mowed, sawed, carried and made cups of tea. The village appreciates you.

The playing field will continue to require constant maintenance and modification. The Annual inspection last July highlighted repairs needed, some immediately, others ongoing. Thanks to Norman White for coordinating this.

Donna Boyles and Lizzie White have agreed to take on the task of fund raising for The Epwell Recreational Area (ERA). Their fresh approach and enthusiasm will ensure the play area continues to appeal to all our residents

Since our last gathering a set of conventional swings has been installed and a new set of larger goals erected, a small goal post has been re-erected to cater for the smaller football fan.

The introduction of dog poo bins in 2019 was initially a trial to see if we could change some dog walkers habits, we were not fully convinced how successful it would prove to be. Having spent 2 years emptying the bins I can confidently say that it was a resounding success, so much so that we introduced a third bin at the bottom of the village last year. Thankfully we now have a contract with CDC to empty them.

Summer 2021 saw the closure of the ARK nursery after 24 years. A establishment that prepared almost all of the village children for the vigours of primary school. The sight of a snaking line of children being led by the hand on their daily walk was common place. Julia and her staff were very much loved by all the tiny tots that attended.

With Julia no longer resident in the village we lost our only first responder. The village is however covered by an active group centred and administered from Hook Norton. The Parish Council continues to maintain the Automated External Defibrillator located here on the wall of the village hall.

With the demise of the first responders group it was thought prudent to offer a confidence course in the use of the defibrillator as well as some basic first aid. This has been delayed until more people feel comfortable with the relaxation of social distancing requirements. The Parish Council will revisit this in the summer.

The speed of vehicles through the village has long been a concern to most residents. Although a speed survey showed very few vehicles exceeding 30mph it is widely agreed that although not illegal 30 mph is an inappropriate speed. The Chair has spoken to both the police and OCC over the years in an attempt to get the speed limit reduced to 20mph. This has not previously been possible as no evidence of accident or injuries within the parish have been recorded to support the case for a speed limit reduction.

The Parish Council have however supported the 20 is plenty campaign and are delighted that OCC last October voted to endorse proposals to make it simpler, quicker and less cost prohibitive to lower speeds to 20mph on most urban and village streets in places where it is both suitable and supported by residents. The Parish Council supported by George Reynolds have made an application to OCC to have our speed limit reduced to 20mph within the existing 30mph limit. We are expecting a visit from OCC highways in the next few weeks.

Epwell Village Hall - Vic Tofts

The Village Hall is administered by a small Committee of 7 people including Vic Tofts as Chairman and Treasurer, Alex Tait as Deputy Chair and Nicola Rudge as Secretary. They basically split the operation to Events and Infrastructure and Vic takes the lead in the latter and the Ladies on the Committee arrange the events.

They are actually a Charity and non-profit making.

Their 3 Objectives are to:

- Hire out the facilities to Villagers and Visitors at reasonable costs.
- Arrange Social Events for Villagers and Friends.
- Maintain and develop the facilities using funds earned from hiring or fundraising.

The Facilities:

As well as this Main Hall, which can be hired on an hourly or daily basis, they have a newly appointed kitchen and 2 meeting rooms upstairs with WIFI. These can be hired for meetings or general office use. They are currently considering a Projector and Screen downstairs for film shows and presentations, the projector possibly being portable to use upstairs too.

They also have another room downstairs that is soon to be emptied and decorated for general use. There is a patio outside and they are currently considering renovating and improving it so that it can be another useful facility.

Covid

When the Covid pandemic struck 2 years ago they were forced to close the Hall to visitors and lost all of their income whilst still having to pay for Insurance, utilities, PPL/PRS etc.

Luckily the government provided some grants and they applied and were successful on a number of occasions. This gave them enough funds to cover their running costs and general maintenance and also to invest in the facility.

During the last couple of years they have had the funds and the opportunity to carry out the following tasks:

- Put in flooring and insulation to the lofts, moved all of the Costumes and racking into the lofts to vacate the rooms upstairs.
- Decorated, carpeted and equipped the 2 meeting rooms upstairs, put in a telephone and WIFI and a credit/debit card payment system.
- Decorated the whole Hall (except the downstairs room at the rear and the entrance Hall)
- Planed and lacquered the floor.
- Built a shed outside to store the staging equipment, tables and other furniture.
- Installed a total new kitchen with units and cupboards and a new Range Cooker.
- Repaired the Sleepers around the lawn at the front.
- Carried out damp treatment in the kitchen and re-pointing wall to stop damp recurring.
- A number of plastering, plumbing and electrical maintenance jobs.

During the pandemic they took advice from "Community First Oxfordshire" who is the local representative of ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) who supports Village Halls. They produced reports and guidelines for safe operation.

They also produced detailed Risk Assessments, Fire Safety investigations and planning and carried out other overdue administrative tasks.

They have some money left over and plan to improve the patio area and purchase a projector and screen as mentioned. And possibly improve the acoustics.

Please, would everyone help to promote the facilities here for hire and support them in the Social Events that they are organising?

And finally

They are considering opening the Hall as a community Pub as the Chandlers are now primarily a restaurant. There is a lot of work to do to achieve this so they are treading cautiously as they need to be confident that this would be utilised by the villagers.

ERA - Donna Boyles

In 2021 new adult swings were installed and thanks was given to Norman, Simon and Pete. Feedback from the children has been positive.

Plans for the future:

One of the children has requested a basket ball hoop, so they will fund raise for this. They would like to get a couple of picnic tables and benches, this again will be done via some fund raising. Also they are looking at a bench in memory of Oliver.

Epwell Trust have asked if they would like another piece of exercise equipment, details of an exercise bike have been sent to Suzanne Kaye. Fund raising ideas may include a coffee morning, a car wash and party in the park.

Donations for the park:

They will be looking at putting up a sign with a donations page and the donation container needs a label on it. They will need to get the key back from Paul Neal for the donation container.

St Annes Church – Julie Brugginworth

Although for much of 2020 and to a lesser extent in early 2021 the church building had to remain closed and activities restricted, the PCC endeavoured to engage with villagers and the wider church family by email, zoom services and the opening of St Annes for private prayer when restrictions allowed.

Thankfully the church are now getting back to some sort of normal with a full range of services, including Harvest, Remembrance, Christingle, Advent and Mothering Sunday. They have hosted a Lent lunch for the Benefice and are looking forward to the traditional Palm Sunday procession around the village.

Throughout the challenging times of the last couple of years, the church have been fortunate to have had the support of both John Tattersall and our new Rector, the Reverend Cannon Neil Bowler. Together with their Churchwardens, Carolyn and Alasdair, they continue to promote and adapt the church activities to ensure accessibility for all through a mix of physical and online services, home and school visits and the publication of the Wykham Benefice News.

Village Website – Cllr Chris Hurst

Many thanks to Tony Lee for looking after the website for many years. Amanda Laidler has recently redesigned the village website Epwell.com. It is a work in progress and hopefully will develop into a useful asset and means of communication for the village. It is a legal requirement that the Parish Council have a website to put documents on. It does require another person to help Cllr Hurst.

The Trust - Stephen Rutledge

Composition

- The Trust meets about 4 times per year;
- We follow a structured agenda
- Minutes are taken and actions on those minutes follow
- Our current Trustees are (in alphabetical order)
 - Liz Baker, Conway Freeman, Matt Platt, Nigel Prickett, Brian Tustain, Norman White, Christine Woosley, Stephen Rutledge (Chairman) and Suzanne Kaye (Clerk)

Finance

- The Trust owns 2 parcels of land totalling 11.458 acres;
- This is rented out to two farmers under two different types of tenancy agreements;
- The income of The Trust comes solely from the land rental with some minor wayleave payments;
- It also takes out public liability insurance;
- Undertake an annual risk assessment;

Contributions

Over the last year, or so, the Trust has contributed to the village in a number of ways:-

- The Trust has shown support to those either sadly bereaved or receiving medical treatment;
- Flowers to cheer people up after being in hospital or having an illness, to let them know that villagers are thinking of them;
- Gifts for new born babies;
- The Trust has acknowledged thanks, on behalf of the village, to former residents for their significant contributions to village life;
- Management of the overspill church yard;
- which has now been handed onto Epwell Parish Council;
- The Trust has installed a commemorative bench commemorating VE and VJ days and this is in the play park;
- It will be shortly installing another commemorative bench to remember one of the villages young residents who passed away a year or two ago and very much enjoyed playing in the Park;
- And it will be contributing to further adult gym equipment in the play park;
- The Trust will very shortly be undertaking a small tree planting scheme on its land to fill gaps and in some small way enhance the landscape and the bio-diversity around the village;
- The Epwell Trust continues to support the community in its traditional way;
- If anyone feels that we may be able to help, please let us know;
- Everything will be treated in confidence and with discretion.

RBL

Last year they collected £742.60 from the village which was excellent and they will be collecting again this November.

EGG

During the pandemic EGG have not been able to hold any meetings. However as it gets warmer Alan Burkinshaw will be looking to hold a meeting for members to decide what they want to do in the future.

Sand Farm Stud

Emma and John Rugman gave a detailed account of the studs success over the time they have been in Epwell. They have received national recognition (Front cover Horse and Hound Magazine) for their services. A full transcript of the presentation could be placed on Epwell.com

Radway Riding School

Jane Holdsworth offered her sincere apologies as she was no longer able to make the meeting due to staff sickness. They have just celebrated their first year of being at the farm and they have been made to feel so welcome.

EDGE

Dawn Castle sent her apologies.

The Archives – Peter Neal

The Archives are in good order. With most cataloguing done and numbered for easy reference. Items have been added during the past two years, namely newspapers regarding Covid which made such a huge impact on our lives which were donated by Brian Woolsey. A parish map has been drawn up showing all the tree plantings throughout the parish which is already altering the landscape in this area of outstanding natural beauty. Offers of help with the archives are always welcome.

A lady of 92 from Canada recently got in touch trying to find long lost relatives. There was some work involved but it was a pleasing thing to do.

Epwell Echo – Christian Lejeune

A tribute was given to the late Editor Chris Woodcock. Mr Lejeune thanked Cllr Rudge for producing the April edition of the Echo at very short notice following the death of Chris. The future of the ECHO is uncertain due to dwindling revenue and increasing costs. There has been no advertising revenue since July 2021. The newsletter has been going since 1986. A new permanent editor is also needed. Further discussion on the future financing of the Echo needs to take place. The matter will be included on the agenda for the next EPC meeting.

Parish Council – Cllr Lloyd-Thomas (Chairman)

Planning is something which takes a disproportionately large amount of the Parish Council's time. This is entirely appropriate. Planning applications can have a huge impact on individuals as well as the village as a whole. Each application is considered on its own merits and is usually rigorously debated.

In the last 2 years the Parish Council have had an unusually large number of significant building projects apply for planning permission. They have seen the transformation of Rectory Farm to accommodate Radway Riding School, the construction of a house at Sands Farm to allow the owners to live on site. 4 large construction projects on Back lane to convert houses into more appropriate dwellings for modern living.

The Parish Council did not support the building of a new house on Back Lane and have encouraged the applicant to reconsider the design and scale of their proposal. An agricultural building to support lavender production on the Epwell Sibford Boundary has had planning approval. Numerous other smaller projects have had our consideration. The Parish Council have encouraged all applicants to come and talk to them about their proposals.

Communicating with residents has always been a challenge whether for EPC or other village organisations. The notice board and the Echo have been the traditional methods. Epwell Events has been a timely way to disseminate information quickly. A big thanks to Ian Sloane for continuing this service. At present Epwell village residents Facebook page has 109 members and Amanda Laidler has redesigned the village Website Epwell.com.

The Chair would like to hear peoples view on the most effect ways of communicating with our residents.

The cutting of the village verges is a surprisingly Polarising topic. Last year the Parish Council reduced the number of cuts to 2 from a historic high off 4 when OCC were responsible for this job. The thought behind this was to preserve wildlife habitats and enjoy a wilder and more natural village scape. It became apparent that once the spring daffodils and early summer cow paisley had died and withered

to a messy looking brown and the grass began to grow, the look was less naturalistic more neglectful. This year we will try 3.

This subject it turns out is more nuanced than we had imagined and requires knowledge of planting wild flower verges, bulbs and hedgerow maintenance and animal habitats.

Tysoe has already done the research and hard work for us and declared themselves a WILDLIFE Friendly Parish. A group of Epwell residents have visited Tysoe's wildlife coordinator to seek advice, inspiration and to unashamedly poach their best ideas. We hope they will be implemented in Epwell in the years to come. Volunteers will be needed for the grunt work.

A reminder that the Parish Council holds 6 meetings a year to discuss and decide on issues affecting the village. All are welcome to attend and propose topics to be included on the agenda.

Open Forum

Communication in general was discussed. It is apparent that a coordinated approach to village communications is needed, which can be used by all village organisations to reach our residents. Flyers and A Boards are effective. The Church communicates by email and the Benefice News is published monthly. The idea of collecting email addresses to circulate information was discussed. Further work needs to be done to establish the most effective method. It is likely to be a combination of methods. This will be discussed further at a future meeting.

Whether a 3 Hills Walk, coffee mornings, fund raising or the Jubilee Celebrations the need to recruit and encourage volunteers to organise events is needed.

Stephen Rutledge raised the issue of ensuring that village organisations were not competing with one another for finances or resources.

For those interested in discussing issues raised tonight a further meeting on the 20th June was proposed.

Meeting finished at 9.46pm.