

**THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**  
**HELD AT HIGH HAM VILLAGE HALL**  
**TUESDAY 17<sup>th</sup> MAY 2022 AT 7.00pm**

Present: David Vigar (Chairman), approx. 17 Parishioners,

Apologies: None

1. **2019 Minutes** Had been displayed on the noticeboards no action outstanding and were signed as a true record.
2. **Chairman's Report** Having welcomed everyone to the meeting the chairman thanked all the councillors and volunteers for parish groups. Report is attached as appendix A.
3. **Parish Volunteers** The Parish Council thanked all the Parish volunteers who had been active in helping out in the period since the last Parish Meeting. This covered the course of covid where volunteers who had assisted with shopping for those affected with covid and all those who had assisted neighbours etc throughout the pandemic in many other ways were thanked. The following thank you from Amanda Chuter on behalf of the Parish Council was made.  
On behalf of parish residents and the PC, thanks must go to the volunteers who, over the last year and sometimes longer, have freely given their time and energy helping to care for various parish assets:  
\*Nick Fear - clearing overgrown sections of footpaths  
\*Geoff Webb and Roger Powell for the refurbishment of the BT Kiosk on The Green, and to those of us who manage the books, keeping the stock tidy, removing those in poor condition.  
\*Dave Fisher, Danny Walker and Paul Green for the refurbishment of the Henley BT Kiosk in readiness for the installation of the AED.  
\*Roger Powell for his work in the Cemetery and Millennium Wood.  
\*Liz Daniels for her 2 resus/AED sessions -  
\*Max Westphal for refurbishing the 2 seats on The Green  
\*The residents who have been litter-picking over last 2 years, some for longer.  
\*soon to join the volunteers, Harry Plant to assist Nick Fear.  
And anyone else I may have forgotten.

4. **To receive the following reports**

a) **School Governors report** – The report below was presented by Chris Palmer.

**High Ham Primary School**

It has been a very challenging time for our school community since the last Annual Parish Meeting not only due to the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic but also due to the loss of our much respected and experienced Deputy Head, Clare Wills, in early 2020. Despite all these significant challenges, the school has remained fully operational fulfilling its obligations to our children whether they were actually in school or learning at home.

This has been a remarkable achievement under the circumstances with Mrs Edwards being appoint-ed 'Acting Assistant Head' to cover the loss of Clare and our Headteacher, Mrs Rosser having to self-isolate and work from home for long periods of time over the last few years.

The Governance Board also appointed a very experienced professional Clerk to the Governors, Mr Mel Hillman, just before the commencement of the pandemic along with a new senior teacher, Mr Tom Briggs, towards the end of the 2019/20 academic year. Tom took up his position with the school in January 2021 as he had to fulfil his commitments to his old school during the autumn term and he has settled in extremely well. Mel has made a significant difference to governance needs with his experience and knowledge being put to good use. At this moment in time we have 162 children in school.

When the school was closed at the start of the pandemic, only the key worker's children were in school and great strides have been made since then, from experience gained, in terms of the 'blend-ed learning' approach which involves the curriculum being delivered at home via tablets etc. In fact, Mrs Rosser's approach to this during the pandemic was very well-received by Somerset County Council's Education Department and her approach has been seen as best practice with Mrs Rosser being invited to attend a number of virtual presentations so that other heads could embrace what was being delivered at our school. This, once again, is a very significant achievement which brings great credit to our school community.

In the early part of this year, Covid cases rose significantly with 20% of our children off school with the virus along with a number of staff. This created even more challenges for obvious reasons but at no stage did the school close its doors.

For me as Chair of Governors, and all my fellow governors, the last few years have been extremely challenging also. Our obligations and responsibilities to the school, and most importantly, the children, have continued via virtual meetings held on Microsoft Teams with all our scheduled meetings taking place as normal. On top of this many other regular meetings have taken place such as Business Meetings/SIAMS/Monitoring and a weekly catch up between Mrs Rosser, Mrs Sally Roy (Vice Chair), and myself.

The school was last inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in 2017 and we are expecting OFSTED to arrive at any time. As a means to ensure the school is best placed for this, Mrs Rosser, Mrs Roy and myself have had a number of meetings with our School External Partner (SEP) over recent months along with a meeting held a few weeks ago with our Somerset Education Authority Senior Advisor. There is a tremendous amount of scrutiny involved in this process by these professionals into how the school is performing and meeting the priorities and targets set out in the School Development Plan (SDP). I am pleased to confirm that the meetings held have delivered a very positive outcome in that both scrutineers concluded that the school is in a very solid position at this moment in time as a consequence of everyone being engaged and delivering high quality teaching and learning opportunities for our children to expectations set.

Inevitably, from time to time, there are some concerns raised by local residents to the school about the volume of traffic and associated parking issues at drop off and pick up times. There have been a number of attempts in the past to address this with some new measures and protocols introduced including a voluntary one-way system. In the summer of last year a Parish Council led working group was set up consisting predominantly of parents to reappraise the situation and make further recommendations. We still await the outcome of this group.

As a relatively small rural community, we are very lucky to have such a successful and respected school with a strong, determined and committed group of staff that are passionate about doing their best for our children in all respects including their welfare needs when the going gets tough. All our staff have done a remarkable job no matter what their role in school is over the last few years and I would take this opportunity to offer my sincere thanks to them for the support they have given to the children under their care under very different and difficult conditions, keeping them engaged with their learning in a safe environment. Likewise, my fellow governors have also continued to give up their valuable time and juggle family commitments with their own professional commitments yet still managed to honour their voluntary commitments to our school.

High Ham Church of England Primary School remains in a very strong position despite the many challenges faced and new ways of working that have had to be introduced!

**4b. Village Hall report** – The following report was presented on behalf of Gwen Chubb (Chair) by Margaret Porter  
Good evening everyone, its great to see the village hall getting back into business after this difficult time we have had. During the year we had coffee morning which were greatly appreciated and enjoyed by all, it is with regret we could not continue with them.

We also had some very successful fund raising events, ie flower show, Big Breakfast and bingo all bringing in much needed funds.

On Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> June there will be music and dancing to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. A local band has been booked to provide the music for this event which is advertised on email/electronically from Hannah Rice. We continue to fund raise to keep the Hall in good repair and upgrade where we can.

Plans for the future are already in the pipeline to refurbish the toilets and upgrade the kitchen. This will involve a lot of money so we are looking towards grants and a lot of help and support from the Community.

Thank you.  
Gwen Chubb (Chair Person).

**4c. High Ham Parish Community Land Trust** – Bill Bishop (Chair) presented a short verbal report. The project's aim was to achieve 6 affordable homes, only for locals. Zoom meetings had continued and searches etc had all gone well. The draft designs were changed according to advice and it was hoped that a planning application could be put in shortly. Anyone who was interested in being a tenant would need to be on the 'homes in somerset' housing register in order to be able to be considered.

**4d – The Hext Almshouse Trust** – Jane Vigar presented the following report.  
The Hext Almshouses are situated in the centre of Somerton and provide 'accommodation for elderly people of limited means who live in or have strong connection with the parishes of Somerton, Langport or High Ham.' The residents are a variety of ages, one being over 100 years old.

There are 7 trustees who meet to oversee the running of the almshouses.  
The trustees have met twice this year in July 2021 and February 2022 and have approved the accounts and the budget.

In December 2021 surveyors carried out a quinquennial survey and produced a comprehensive report. A costed 5 year maintenance schedule has been produced and work will be done as appropriate.

In August 2021 the trustees took 5 of the residents on a social river cruise on the River Parrett aboard the Duchess of Cocklemoor, kindly arranged by Ian McNab a former resident of High Ham who now lives and is a trustee for Langport.

Jane Vigar May 2022

**4e. Footpath Users' Group/Somerset Strimmer Project** - Dave Vigar presented the report from Nick Fear who was unable to attend.

Good evening, for any of you that don't know me I'm Nick Fear, I am the volunteer footpath strimmer for High Ham Parish. My role involves keeping the Parish footpaths clear of vegetation so that they can be used and enjoyed by everyone. My role is supported by Somerset County Council Rights of Way Officer Martin Cooper, the council supplies the equipment needed to maintain the footpaths along with the necessary training, guidance and insurance.

I am just starting my 3<sup>rd</sup> season in this role with the last year totalling around 22 hours of footpath clearance. I have two main enclosed footpaths which require most of my time, Breach Furlong Lane and Poor Close Lane, the rest being mainly stiles and gateways on open farmland. I always take photos of work done which are posted on the High Ham Parish website, this keeps residents informed of newly cleared paths so that they can make the best use of them.

We hope to have a new addition to the Volunteer footpath Strimmer team, Harry Plant, a High Ham resident who has a gardening business with his father and who has kindly offered to help out.

I have put Harry in contact with Martin Cooper and he is now in the process of applying to become a volunteer Parish footpath strimmer.

Harry has to complete the necessary training which is funded by High Ham Parish Council and will hopefully be on board very soon.

#### **4f. The Parish Tree Warden** – Paul Brunsdon presented his report as tree warden for the Parish.

The parish was fortunate to be offered 100 saplings from e.forests many of which I planted on the playing field mostly in a strip by the gate and around the infant play area. With some reinforcement planting around the BMX track. A number of specimens were small and are now growing on for planting next season. Most trees have leafed up with a few losses due to vandalism. There have been no consultations from members of the public apart from a letter received by the parish concerning overhanging hedge growth at Picts hill which was referred to highways for their attention. This was a historic complaint.

In the Millennium wood the Ash die back has been tackled by removing infected trees and brave citizens have manually countered the alien Parrot weed and invasive Bullrush colonies that threaten to fill the open water space. Well done to all who maintain this valued community asset.

The cemetery continues to host one of the best wild flower meadows in the parish.

#### **4g. Planning** – The following report was presented by Chris Palmer.

Despite the prevailing pandemic conditions since spring 2020, the flow of planning applications requiring the PC's attention continued unabated. All these applications were considered by the PC via email, initially, then as it became clear the pandemic was going to be around for some time, virtual meetings via Zoom software were held.

One of the most notable applications dealt with during this time was Application: 19/02777/FUL for 3-dwellings at Turn Hill Road on pasture land adjacent to Morganside. This application first appeared in the spring of 2018 when contact was made with the Parish Clerk by the agent. The original proposal was for 14 dwellings including 5 affordable houses and parishioners were invited by the agent to attend a presentation of the proposal in the Village Hall. Various other iterations appeared with final approval sought for 3-dwellings.

Due to the level of opposition raised against this proposal across the community, along with the impact on the setting and distinctiveness of the nearby heritage assets, the PC recommended refusal. The application, subsequently, went for consideration by the District's Area North Committee in May 2020 and I represented the PC at this virtual meeting with two other parishioners also sharing their opposition views. Additionally, a representative from the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) also spoke in support of the PC's view. The Area North Committee supported our Ward Member's recommendation to refuse the application. It then went to the appeal stage.

The PC also had an opportunity to make representation to the Planning Inspector at appeal and did so. There was also a further opportunity for the PC to confirm its position on a Landscape Assessment document that was not shared by the appellant in October 2020. The Planning Inspector concluded that the appeal be dismissed in November 2020.

This was a huge win for the PC and the many parishioners who were concerned about the implications of development in this area on designated agricultural land and the adverse impacts this would have on the character, setting and distinctiveness of valuable heritage assets. Many, many hours were put into contesting this proposal and this provides absolute proof of what collective perseverance and determination can achieve when doing the utmost to protect what is a very traditional rural Somerset environment.

In November 2020 the PC also had an outline planning application before it: 20/02278/OUT re-garding a substantial development of 6-dwellings adjacent to Poole Farm. Whilst this is still yet to be determined by the planning authority, the PC's recommendation was refusal due to overdevelopment of the site, the loss of designated agricultural land in a traditional farming community such as ours and no identified need being met. 19 local residents took the opportunity to voice their concerns regarding this proposal and I hope that local people will continue to engage in the planning process by taking an active part during the consultation phase not only for applications that raise concerns but also for applications they wish to support.

Interestingly, also around this time, the District Council confirmed that it could meet its 5-year land supply for housing requirements. This was a well-received development for communities like ours as potential developers could not use this as justification for new builds because certain sections of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) placed positive emphasis on approval if the land supply requirements were not met. However, I believe that the District is no longer able to meet its land supply needs at this time.

There was another notable proposal before the Parish Council in June 2021. This was Planning Application: 21/01331/FUL the 'Proposed change of use of land from former Agricentre site to Residential. Proposed demolition of existing Agricentre and erection of 8 No. dwellings, associated car-ports, landscaping works and new vehicular access with pedestrian footpath.

This application received 9 objection letters from local residents with the main concern being water management in the immediate area. A very productive PC meeting took place in June 2021 and the applicant was able to provide the necessary reassurance to

some of the concerned residents attending the meeting along with some concerns held by the PC. The outcome was that the PC offered no objection in principle to the proposal as it was deemed to be good use of a Brownfield site that also provided housing benefit to the community. However, the Planning Authority were advised to fully consider the areas of concern raised and we await the decision on this proposal.

So, the time that has elapsed since the last Annual Parish Meeting held has been a very busy one from a planning perspective that has not been made any easier by the pandemic conditions that have prevailed and frustrations experienced with a Planning Authority that appears to be in a constant state of chaos with a large exodus of experienced planning officers and numerous changes at the top. There was a time when sound working relationships existed with planning officers and you could make contact with them easily but, sadly, this appears to be a thing of the past!

To conclude, I would highlight the fact that the Planning process itself is often one that generates contention and conflicting views across any given community and this presents a huge challenge to Parish Council's if they are to play their part as statutory consultees in the planning process objectively. I wish the Parish Council well in their future endeavours and would urge them to be ever mindful of the huge responsibility they shoulder on behalf of the High Ham community and its built environment.

Chris Palmer

At the conclusion of this report Michael Stanton and Richard Wilkins joined the meeting and presented themselves as the new County Councillors, who would be the Unitary Councillors once the change-over was completed next April.

#### **4h. Parish Lengthsman** - Craig Howe's report was presented to the meeting by Amanda Chuter.

Craig Howe assisted by Rachael Howe

(Craig began his time as High Ham Parish Lengthsman in 2010 when SCC funded the Parish Lengthsman scheme. When SCC funding stopped in 2016, the PC employed Craig directly. The key advantages of the Parish Lengthsman is their ability to develop and use local knowledge, to act rapidly to deal with problems; to work more cost-effectively compared to contracting out work.) The year opened in May '21 with the key tasks focusing on vegetation, drainage, and tree management. The work continued through the year, whatever the weather: strimming key visibility splays; mowing cemetery paths and strimming grave edges; clearing hedge growth around signs; clearance of bramble and ivy from the walls of The Pound; management of storm-damaged trees on cemetery boundary; various tasks in the Playing Field/Play Area; clearing blocked grips, grids and road-side ditches in various parish locations.

In December, the work of pollarding the trees on The Green, started in October, was finally completed. This required requesting permits to work on trees in a Conservation Area, and to arrange 2 power shut-downs with Western Electric.

For details of work in Millennium Wood, refer to MW Report

Nb. While many of the tasks described are part of my regular programme of work, I do respond to one-off requests from the PC, these sometimes as a result of a resident notifying the PC of an issue.

#### **4i. Playing Fields Report**

Chair report High Ham Playing Field AGM 2022

Throughout the second year of the pandemic the playing field has been a continued asset to the village It has provided a valued public open space with good facilities no known to be vital for the general wellbeing of the community.

A good deal of work goes into the general maintenance of this cherished amenity, and I would like to thank all those who have played their part in this work. From litter picking to detailed safety checks, minute taking to grant application there is a great deal of dedication and free time given up for the greater good.

Although events were limited by law or common sense there was a good footfall over the year. Young families picnicked, parents and children socialised after school, footballers practised their skills and youngsters enjoyed the zip slide, swings, BMX track and all the other installations .

In the second half of the year, It was finally decided that the old climbing frame [now well over its 15 year life span] had failed its last safety check and happily a private buyer parted with cash and his time to demolish it and leave the site ready for a newer version. The parish council offered financial help for a replacement and fund raising begun in earnest. We were fortunate to secure a grant of £2500 from an application submitted by our very diligent secretary big congratulations to her it's a lot of effort and for every successful bid there are at least 5 rejections. It was decided to direct possible funds from the SSDC community grant scheme in the direction of this project thus filling the pot for this work.

In order to select the best fit from the shortlist and using their close links with the local primary school committee members with children s organised a class led selection process of the new equipment. This ensured that a proper mandate had been sought from the end users. At the time of writing, we still await SSDC's final decision on the grant bid.

Regarding the fund raising for the pavilion, it was decided that we seek professional help. Endless rejections are very disheartening, and both the chair and secretary gave it their best efforts.

The climate for grant aid for this sort of project has worsened since the pandemic and resulting financial crisis. With the parishes support we engaged the help of Andrew Rainsford who continues to work on this on our behalf. We await the response to the many applications made on our behalf.

We continued to develop the wildlife potential of the site and achieved good results in the wildflower circle above the BMX track with Pyramid orchids and Cowslips flowering and setting seed.

The parish was given a number of saplings most of which were planted on the field in appropriate locations with voluntary labour. Thank you to the Christmas crew for their very generous contribution this year.

A final thank you is due to the teams who maintain the grass and hedges. Including our lengthsman and contractors.

#### **4j. Millennium Wood** – the following report was presented by Amanda Chuter

In the last 2 years, there is evidence that the woodland has seen an increase in visitors, some for the first time. With restrictions of the first Lockdown, local residents had somewhere explore, to picnic, to build dens.

Throughout the last two years, the rides and paths of Millennium Wood were mown. The programme of thinning out 'nurse' trees, removal of dead and diseased trees (Ash die-back), coppicing, raising crowns, continued to allow the woodland to lose its plantation appearance, and allow the healthy trees to thrive. One diseased Ash tree in the bottom hedgerow was left as a pollarded stem - it will be monitored to see if it regenerates.

Felled timber and brash have been left in situ, with some moved to the Den Building Area.

Some large banks of bramble have been cut back, still leaving plenty as wildlife habitat. Craig Howe assisted the MW volunteer group to clear the pond of invasive Parrot Weed. and he reduced Reed Mace that, if left, will envelop the whole pond. Boundary hedges were cut by Olly Howley.

**4k. Speed Indicator Device Report** Dave Vigar presented a short verbal report. A SID was shared between 3 parishes and High Ham was included on the rota and used it for its 2 weeks maximum in one go with no return to the same site for 6 weeks. The Parish had the SID for one month in every three.

#### **4l. Community Website Report** – Amanda Chuter presented the following report.

Parish Social Media

\*Parish Website: <https://www.highhamparishlife.org/>

As well as the statutory Parish Council pages, the website gives space to community groups to provide key information and contact details: school, church/chapels, village hall, Playing Field. Interest groups such as HH Book Group, Knitting for Charity, St.

Andrew's Bellringers, High Ham Ladies, each have a page. There are also pages providing essential local information. Currently, updating content is reliant on 2 people, Parish Clerk - Vicky Young and Amanda Chuter.

For the website to be relevant, useful throughout the year, more contributors to the content is needed - to update what is there, or to create new pages. Anyone interested in sharing ideas and/or contributing content, please let me know.

\*Facebook: High Ham News and Events

Since the first Lockdown, membership has doubled, and posts continues to be a useful way of sharing parish-related news/information to local Facebook users.

There are also Facebook Groups for the Village Hall and the Playing Field.

\*Instagram: High Ham Nature - weekly posts written by David Reid with supporting contributions from Amanda Chuter

Millennium Wood - regular posts written by Amanda Chuter about Millennium Wood, and other parish-related items of interest - bellringers, other woodlands, whatever may be of interest.

#### **4m. Any other report**

##### **Community Project**

Community History Project

<https://hhparishbooks.wixsite.com/highhamparishhistory>

The Parish Archive of photos and interview transcripts, collected over recent years, provided a valuable resource during much of the first Covid year. Photos posted daily, then weekly, on High Ham Facebook, provoked many local people to recall stories, people from the past, and the donations of new photos. When St Andrew's Church reopened, there were 3 displays of photos and transcripts, each on a different theme. During Jubilee weekend, there will be display of Newspapers and other ephemera from the time of the Coronation, and many photos of the parish celebrating the previous 3 Jubilees. There are 2 sets of the Parish Archives: one is kept at the Somerset Archives, the other in the parish - please contact Amanda Chuter. A new seat, funded by the Project, will soon be installed in the Cemetery.

**History Hut Report** – Karen Cook gave a short verbal report on the events taking place at the History Hut. The Parish History books were still available. Books were being lent to the school etc and the History Hut had visits from schools and other interested groups.

**Christmas Crew** – Karen Cook reported that they had been overwhelmed with the support shown to them and that the donations would be going to the air ambulance, playing fields and defibrillators.

#### **4. To receive the annual account of any Village Charity.** There were none.

5. **To Consider any Matter or Motion.** There were none.

Meeting closed at 8.05pm

D Vigar

Chairman High Ham Parish Council