

TWYFORD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

ST MARYS CHURCH CENTRE 20th April 2022

AT 8PM

Present: Mr R Mantel (Chairman), Members of the Council – Mrs E Ashley, Mrs B Ditcham, Mrs J Duffield, Mrs A Evans, Mrs L Jarvis, Mrs T Ramsden, Mrs S Wisdom, Messrs R Abeywardana, M Alder, J Bowley, M Bray, J Jarvis & C Wickenden.

Borough Councillors: Mr S Conway.

Members of the public – 16.

In attendance: Mrs L Moffatt, Clerk & Mrs L Povey, Assistant Clerk.

Apologies – Borough Councillors Mr L Ferris & Mr W Smith.

1. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 21st April 2021 – Noted.

2. Matters Arising – No items.

3. Parish Lands Report – Mr Bray reported on the Parish Lands Committee activities this year.

The Parish Lands Committee is responsible for managing all the Council's land and property. This includes King George V Recreation Ground, Stanlake Meadow, the two allotment sites, the Burial Ground, Bell Corner, Jubilee Corner, and Polehampton Corner. The Committee also oversees the work of the Village Ranger and Park Warden. This report details the work of the Committee over the last year.

The Covid-19 epidemic has continued to cause disruption to normal activities in Twyford; and the green spaces of the parish have again proved invaluable recreational areas for our residents. Some regular community events had been cancelled or modified to cope with this situation.

The Parish Lands Grounds maintenance specifications were reviewed and extended to include work previously carried out by volunteers at Jubilee Corner and Polehampton Close. A new 'small grounds' maintenance contract was let in December 2021.

King George V Recreation Ground

We still have occasional incidents of minor anti-social behaviour issues. The council have funded help from outreach workers from the Twyford Youth Centre and we hope this engagement will help.

We continue to do what we can to improve the environment and work with volunteer groups who manage the various wildflower areas. In response to resident requests, we have also installed a larger waste bin in the playground. Repairs have been carried out to play equipment as items have become worn. The Council purchased 4 new 9 aside football goals for use by Twyford Comets. The entrance gates were updated with some being replaced or rehung.

Last year we were approached by some young members of the public asking if we could enhance the skate park; and a working group has been formed, including members of the public, to investigate our options.

A new CCTV system has been installed to replace the existing system which was old and ineffective. There are 16 cameras also providing night vision which can be viewed remotely.

A tree has been planted in honour of the Queens Platinum Jubilee and we plan to add a commemoration plaque in due course.

The Tennis Club met the committee to explain their plans to improve the clubhouse and courts. The Committee were happy with the ideas outlined. The Tennis Club agreed to submit a more detailed plan for approval by the Council before applying for planning permission.

The Scouts have raised issues regarding their lease. This matter is the subject of ongoing discussions between Loddon Hall, the Scouts, and the Council.

Allotments

The allotments at Hurst Road and London Road remain popular. They are fully occupied, with waiting lists for both sites. Tenants and the Allotment Association have worked with the Council to enhance the general amenity of the sites.

A new computer program for allotment renewals & payments was purchased and is now in use. Most transactions with allotment holders are completed using this system saving time and making the work of the Clerk's office more efficient. The History Society had the use of one plot as an experiment in growing and harvesting willow. This was a feature of life in bygone times. That experiment being complete they will gradually wind down and return the plot to the Council.

Some acts of vandalism have occurred involving steel pellets fired from the access road alongside the railway line at greenhouses on the allotment. They were reported to the Police and Railway Authorities. The Council is in contact with the railway and hopes to get some assistance in deterring this activity.

Twyford Growers is an initiative funded by Twyford Parish Council, with welcome additional financial support from Ruscombe Parish Council, to help residents with low to mid-level anxiety and depression. It provides therapeutic gardening sessions run by a horticultural therapist. The members of the group are referred to it, primarily via social prescribers at Twyford Surgery, the Involve organisation, and by direct application. The initiative has been promoted using leaflet drops and social media and has had positive reviews in the local press. The group has capacity to consist of up to eight people with one project leader and volunteers to assist. If you would like to join the group or know someone who would benefit, please let the Clerk know. The Parish Council has reserved a 10-pole plot for the use of the group and allocated monies to cover the cost of employing the group leader for a 26-week period in 2022. Support is supplied by Age UK Berkshire to control expenditure and reports back to the Council on a regular basis. The plot has been brought back into a useable state and is maintained in that condition by the efforts of the project leader and volunteers from the community.

Burial Ground

The Circular flower bed in the Millennium Garden has been tidied up and bulbs planted. A lack of space for future interments is noted. The wooden slats on the benches have been replaced.

Stanlake Meadow

In preparation for further tree planting a new water supply was installed to help with watering. Last November, in National Tree week, we held a Tree Festival. This was a tree planting event where 25 trees were added to the 75 planted last year. These again, were crowdfunded by Twyford residents. There were a number of educational and environmental stalls and activities for children. We welcomed Freely Fruity who gave out free strawberry plants to residents and who planted a number of fruit trees. The event was well attended, and the Council planted a tree as a memorial to the late Mr Gordon Storey who did much to promote Twyford in his lifetime. The Committee are mindful to only plant trees that we can commit to care for and water and are appreciative to the team of volunteers who support this initiative.

The Beer Festival took place in June. It was well organised and met with the general approval of all. An electrical connection to the north side of the field was discussed. It was decided to defer any decision on this topic until later this year.

The friends of Stanlake Copse working group have worked closely with Conserve Reading on Wednesdays (CROW). They have carried out further clearance work, dug out a small pond, created a dead hedge and created a stag beetle habitat. The stag beetle habitat has been added to Google Maps and is attracting lots of interest. A stag beetle information board will soon be located nearby.

Hedge laying from the Pavilion pedestrian gate to the vehicle entrance was started, but completion has been delayed by the onset of the bird nesting season. Work will resume later in the year.

The Stanlake Pavilion Working Group was created to look into replacing the current structure with a building more suitable to modern requirements. A meeting was held with Wokingham Borough Council's Mark Redfearn who suggested ways of moving forward with this project. This is under discussion. In the meantime, general maintenance on the building continues with the shower valves recently being replaced ensuring that the showers are in good order for the start of the cricket season.

Remedial work to the tractor gate hinges is being completed by the contractor.

Eleven short posts at the main entrance gate had deteriorated and are due to be replaced.

The Forestry Commission have issued a statutory Oak Processionary Moth notice and spraying will take place over the coming year.

We are appreciative to our groups of volunteers who work hard to care for our garden areas, copse, new trees, and wildflower areas.

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, I'd like to thank the Clerk's office and staff for their hard work.

4. Planning and Amenities Report – Mrs Ditcham reported on the Planning and Amenities Committee's activities for the past year.

It is good to be able to present this report in real life after a period of necessarily enforced online meetings. Although it seemed that much had come to standstill, whilst reviewing the actions of the Planning and Amenities Committee in last year, it is apparent that the Parish Council and our Clerks have achieved a great deal. All minutes of our meetings and further information is available on our website.

Planning Applications

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) have continued to receive applications for individual house extensions at approximately eight per calendar month. These are forwarded to Twyford Parish Council for our comments, based on our local knowledge, before applications are accepted or rejected by WBC. A recent application we were happy to see was one for a modular building with three classrooms for the Piggott School. This will increase the capacity of the school and has ensured that all Twyford Pupils who applied this year have been granted a place.

The Bridge Farm Site is not confirmed as an area for development although we have objected to a proposed possible exit from the site on to the A4.

Our Neighbourhood Plan contains detail on new homes.

Highways and Footpath

This is a regular monthly item on our agenda. Matters arising are reported to WBC. You will be aware that all residents can report complaints re Highways directly to WBC via their website. Members of the Planning and Amenities Committee have regular quarterly meeting with the Highways Department to discuss a variety of highways related matters including road surfaces, road markings, traffic lights, signage, speeding, pedestrian crossings, and of course parking. Generally, these meetings are productive and give us the direct opportunity to encourage action!

A long-arranged project to have gateway entrances to Twyford is almost complete, the delay is due to suppliers not your Parish Council! Gateway entrances are believed to have a traffic calming effect as motorists realise, they are entering a built-up area, they also define our identity and are an attractive feature, their actual siting was the decision of the Highways Department of WBC.

There are very useful maps of local walks and cycling routes on the Parish Council website.

Our Neighbourhood Plan contains a great deal on Highways and Traffic.

Climate Change Policy

The Planning and Amenities Committee has responsibility for the monitoring of Twyford Parish Council Climate Change Policy which can be viewed on our website and contains a section on Air

Quality. Our local schools are involved in a WBC scheme to improve air quality measuring devices are attached on the school campus and posters remind drivers to switch off engines whilst waiting.

Climate Change and sustainability forms an important part of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Twyford In Bloom

This initiative is going from strength to strength despite the problems of the last two years. It is a whole village work involving many volunteers. Although we are delighted that our achievements are recognised by The Thames and Chiltern In Bloom Committee and RHS the most important aspect is the impact on our village. You will see from the accounts that TPC budgets for this however in addition, shops and businesses, individuals and groups of residents have enthusiastically paid for hanging baskets in their areas.

A resident suggested the adoption of a privately owned strip of land at the entrance to the village from Charvil to improve the area. With the help of CROW this will start soon.

Tree Canopy is also an item in our proposed Neighbourhood Plan.

Areas around the village have been planted with wildflower seeds to attract pollinating insects and add seasonal colour. These areas include outside Bridge House, Stanlake Meadow & King George V Recreation Ground and this year will also include Malvern Way and Ruscombe turn. As part of the 2022 In Bloom initiative, Twyford Parish Council have also put together envelopes of both Wildflower & Sunflower seeds & residents are encouraged to plant the seeds in their garden – these are available from local estate agents – enough to seed one square metre.

A local resident has started an initiative to map all ponds in Twyford so if you have a pond in your garden check our website to get it included.

Our website also includes lots of information on all things In Bloom!

Litter

We were very pleased to hold our annual litter pick at the start of this month, many thanks to those who spent the morning clearing litter from the usual black spots. Many thanks to the Adopt a Street volunteers who do a sterling job all year round keeping our village tidy, and of course thanks to Gerry and Chris Wise the organisers.

Defibrillators

The Planning and Amenities Committee have responsibility for the defibrillators in our village. Ensuring that the equipment is up to date and functioning.

Neighbourhood Plan

This has been a major project for the last 4 years and at last we can be able to see the possible end which with your help will make it all worthwhile. This very important issue will be reported on by Charles Wickenden who has led on this and will update you after this report. I urge you to support this as it will have a great impact on our village for the next 30 years.

Thank you

Thank you to all the Committee for the work of the last year and enormous thanks to Lynn Povey our Assistant Clerk whose efficiency and enthusiasm has enabled the Planning and Amenities Committee to fulfil its duties.

5. Neighbourhood Plan Report – Mr Wickenden reported on the Neighbourhood Plan.

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. I'd like to give you an update on the significant progress we've made with the plan this year. Our team of Councillors and residents have been concentrating on formulating policy since we last met. Working with our consultants we have developed 19 policy areas, excerpts of which you can see here today. We've also commissioned 2 studies, one on a Housing Needs Assessment for Twyford and the other a set of Design Codes for future development in the village.

Additionally, we have successfully bid for a study on High Street Regeneration. This will therefore be carried out in the summer to look at how we can regenerate and enhance the retail centre of the village. This is to make the experience for pedestrians travelling to and moving around the village centre more pleasant and to encourage more people to come and to stay longer.

As a reminder the Neighbourhood Plan is a statutory planning document, that, sitting below the Borough Local Plan provides an additional level of policy which is more tailored to our specific community's needs. It also gives us more say on determining applications and enhanced Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which means that we will receive more money directly if development takes place.

Due to the delay in the Local Plan the plan period has been extended and now runs from 2018 to 2038. This plan will influence and steer the future of the village until well into the last half of the century.

We have recently entered what is known as the Regulation 14 Consultation which is the latest milestone in our journey. This is a formal 6-week consultation, with residents, workers, and businesses in the village, conducted by the Parish Council. It is running from the 8th April until the 20th May.

Once we've finished this there will be a formal response from the Borough Council, the appointment of an external examiner and then, if we are successful with this, a referendum of residents conducted by WBC. One point of concern is the amount of time it might take Wokingham to get to referendum and formal adoption. We would like to complete this by the end of the year, but it might be some months after this, and we'll be working with the Borough Council to shorten this period of time.

Our policies are based largely on the information we gained from the 2019 village wide survey. The 19 policy areas cover transport, the village centre, nature recovery, housing provision, climate change, infrastructure, green spaces, and community facilities.

We are aware that one of the problems with the plan is its technical nature and that this may put some people off from engaging with it or, indeed, appreciating the importance of it. However, it's vital that we get a good response during the consultation and from the vote later on. The more engagement we have from the village the stronger the plan will be when dealing with development proposals and with the Borough Council and other Authorities. The plan contains important protections for our conservation areas, our green infrastructure, and the type of housing we need amongst many other things. Our stated aim is to ensure that by the end of the plan period Twyford retains its village atmosphere, that we deal with traffic issues, with housing needs and ensure a thriving village centre.

Please respond to the consultation and not just if you have concerns but also write in if you support what we are trying to achieve. Your voice is more important than ever as we move into the final phases. Please spread the word with your neighbours. We will keep you informed of our progress with WBC, but it's important that we keep the conversation going. You are all critical to the success of the plan. We as residents will be the reason Twyford develops in the way we want whilst retaining the things we like. The plan gives us a structure to support that but, in the end, it will be the efforts of all of us that will determine whether it succeeds or not.

To those who haven't seen it please look at the displays this evening. Members of the team are here, and they will try to answer any questions that you may have. We will also be available on the 14th May at Waitrose entrance, so look out for us there.

Finally, I can't close without thanking the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group. People have put in tremendous efforts over the last 4 years, and I'd like to thank all of them for this and especially the group who have developed the plan as we now have it. I'd also like to thank our consultant without whom we could not have produced the policies that you see here. Last but not least I'd like to give a heartfelt thanks to the Clerks for supporting us through what has often been a stressful and complicated journey. They have ensured we have got this far, and the Assistant Clerk in particular has worked tirelessly with the Working Group to ensure we kept on point, which has not always been easy to do!

Many thanks to you all.

6. Financial Report – Mr Bowley reported.

It's the job of the Finance and General Purposes Committee to oversee the finances of the Parish Council, as well as the policies and procedures it uses to operate.

The largest yearly job of the Committee is to compile the annual budget for the Council. This is an amalgamation of the budgets coming from the other Committees. The work these Committees are doing on behalf of you, the residents of Twyford, continues to expand year on year, and so their budgets have increased in line with this expanded work.

Based on these expanded budgets the Finance Committee decided to use £17,000 of reserves to lessen the impact on the Parish Council's portion of the Council Tax whilst allowing the Committees to continue their valuable work. Now that we have finalised the accounts for the last financial year there was an underspend of around £10,000. This was mainly due to better-than-expected incomes, but still depressed spending due to COVID. One example being the Summer Fete. This will reduce the amount we take from reserves this financial year from £17,000 down to £7,000.

The full details of the budget can be found on your chairs and will later be published on the Parish Council website. There you can see a detailed breakdown of the areas the council spends money on.

Whilst the council receives income from rentals and donations, rental income having increased by 4% with the loosening of the COVID-19 restrictions, the majority of the budget income comes from the Parish Council's proportion of the Council Tax. This year, for a band D property, the annual charge is £42.04. This is an increase of £3.80 from last year. Across the whole tax base for Twyford the rise in the Parish Council's portion of the Council Tax is 9.9%.

Based on Band D this places Twyford number thirteen in the list of Parish Councils within Wokingham Borough. With Woodley being number one, with a charge of £112.88, and Finchampstead being number seventeen with a charge of £29.32.

Comparing the local Parishes of Wargrave, Ruscombe, Hurst, and Charvil, Twyford has the lowest charge of all of them. Full details of all the bands and charges across all the parishes can be found on the Wokingham Borough Council website.

The Committee has continued to recommend grants to organisations that benefit you, the residents of Twyford, under the Council's Section 137 powers. The total of the grants distributed in the last financial year was £5,100. With grants being made to Berkshire MS, Age UK Berkshire, Keep Mobile, Twyford Youth and Community Centre, Me 2 Club and Citizens Advice. All of which provide us with information about the number of Twyford residents who benefit from the services they provide.

The Committee also recommended using money from its reserves to fund items such as: Thank the NHS benches, Twyford and District Youth and Community Centre outreach youth work, King George V Recreation Ground new gates and repairs, playground repairs, Stanlake Meadow hedge laying, and the Platinum Jubilee Hornbeam tree.

On a final note, we urge anyone who is struggling financially to contact us, and we can sign post you to organisations like Citizen's Advice Bureau who can provide detailed and confidential advice.

7. Fête Report – Mr Bray reported.

In 2021 no Fete held because of continuing Covid-19 concerns. With the lifting of restrictions by the UK Government, it was decided to hold an event in 2022 and planning is underway for the event in August.

8. Twyford Twinning Association – Reported by Mrs H Evans.

We have now had two years where we have been unable to arrange visits between Twyford and our Twinned village of Cuincy in Northern France. However, we have some exciting news as Twyford Comets have arranged to take their under 12 and under 13 teams to Cuincy in June to play for the Twinning cup. You may remember that Twyford won the cup the first and only time a tournament was held in 2019 so Cuincy are looking forward to trying to win it back! Brian Rogers of Comets has asked me if I would like to join them, and I am very much looking forward to that.

During the pandemic we held a few Zoom sessions with our friends from Cuincy and also held a few coffee mornings in Twyford as an awareness raising exercise. I also wrote to all the schools and preschools in Twyford to ask if they could donate a new English book to send to Cuincy for their new library. We had been given a box of French books and these are now in our library in Twyford. Sadly, response from schools was poor and only Happy Hours came up trumps with a lovely new book. Audrey Curtis has also donated two of her books about Twyford. Dolphin school however produced a whole box of books (not brand new) for Cuincy so I will be taking all these with me next time I visit.

We were pleased to see the new village gateway signs which may promote more awareness of the fact that we are twinned with Cuincy. I understand something will be added to the existing sign as you enter the village from Hurst.

We look forward to arranging more visits to Cuincy now that visiting France is easier. However, we have discovered a side effect of Brexit in that a lot of French people do not have passports as they always used to use their ID cards. Therefore, for them to come to Twyford involves a bit more effort and expenditure. Hopefully this will be resolved eventually. In the meantime, we have invited some people from Cuincy to join us for the Platinum Jubilee celebrations the weekend of 4/5th June. Alain Losero (chairman of their Twinning Association) has replied to say that there are definitely some who are interested but we have heard nothing more as yet.

A teacher of English in Cuincy has also written to me to set up video conferencing between his students and people from Twyford. No French required as the idea is to improve their English! I have a list of interested people, however, this is on hold at present as teacher Freddy has been unwell as have I!

Looking forward to a more promising time for the Twinning Association!

9. Borough Council matters – Reported by Borough Cllr Stephen Conway.

In the period since I last reported to the Annual Parish Meeting, there have been some frustrations but also some progress.

The frustrations have concerned the new library, which the Borough Council had committed to providing and had even included money in the capital programme to pay for. We came – as we have done many times in the past – very close to final completion, when the Council's Executive decided to 'pause' the project on the grounds that building costs had risen and the amendments were needed to deliver the new library within budget. Since then, the Council's Capital Programme has been 'reprofiled', which has meant that our long-awaited new library has been pushed back another year.

Lindsay Ferris and I, as 2 of the 3 Borough Councillors for Twyford, have been campaigning for a new library for more years than I care to remember. We have faced setbacks before, and we are not going to give up now. We will continue to put pressure on the Council's Executive to honour its promise to deliver a new Twyford library.

More positively, the Council has finally moved forward with parking schemes to reduce the pressure on various parts of the village. Lindsay and I submitted a series of petitions relating to parking problems back in 2019, and the schemes now being developed and put out to consultation are the belated response to those petitions. The schemes are bespoke, with different solutions suggested for different locations. They will not solve all of the village's parking challenges, but I hope they will be a step in the right direction.

On the planning front, the application submitted for 200 new dwellings on the Bridge Farm site is unlikely to be determined by the Council until its Local Plan has been tested at public enquiry; the site is in the draft Local Plan, but the Council's Executive has not yet decided what sites will be in the final version. I know many people in Twyford have objected to the Bridge Farm site on sound planning grounds and recently the Environment Agency, in its response to the draft Local Plan, has raised concerns about this site (and may other identified sites) in terms of flood risk.

A more positive planning development came in March, when planning permission was granted for Hare Hatch Sheeplands to become a garden centre, ending many years of controversy over the site. Lindsay wrote in to support the Sheeplands application, which the Planning Officers recommended for refusal. As a member of the Planning Committee, I argued that the application complied with Green Belt policy and could be safely approved. I'm pleased to report that a majority on the Committee supported my argument. A much-valued local business now has a secure future.

Finally, I want to thank local musician and music teacher Tony Lyons for the concerts he put on in the village centre in the autumn and again in March. The funding for these musical events I managed to secure from the Council, using money provided by the EU regional fund to assist local centres to revive after the lockdowns. The concerts amply repaid the investment: they provided opportunities for local musicians; increased custom for local shops and businesses; and lifted people's spirits.

Reports by Borough Cllr Lindsay Ferris & Cllr Wayne Smith. Cllr Lindsay Ferris & Cllr Wayne Smith did not submit a report.

10. Chairman's Review of the Year – Mr Mantel reported.

This Council has now finished its third year in office. Next year Parish Council elections will be held in May and a new Council will be elected.

When we started our 3rd year in May 2021, Covid restrictions meant we could not meet in person. A dispensation by the Government allowed us to make legal decisions by meeting via Zoom. The Government ended that dispensation last June and we had to meet in person to make decisions that were legal.

To be safe our first meeting was held in the open air in Stanlake Meadow.

The next meeting was also held in the open air in Stanlake Meadow, but we decided to hold indoor meetings again from October, albeit with various safeguards.

The reports you just heard told you about the work of the Council through its Committees.

Twyford Parish Council is still committed to reduce the use of plastic through the TRIP (Twyford Rethinks its Plastic) action plan.

The Adopt-a-Street volunteers still give their time to clean the streets in their neighbourhood and I want to thank them for that. The Parish Council awarded it's Citizen of the Year Plaque, together with a gift, to Mr. Gerry Wise for his work as organiser of the Adopt-a-Street volunteers and for his work with Twyford in Bloom.

I would also like to thank the volunteers who help with watering the trees we have planted.

The Council also has a Working Group to extend the Council's engagement with the public. Shortly the group will propose that the Council starts again the "Meet the Public" sessions in the cafe at Waitrose. We had to stop this because of Covid but it always took place every other month on the first Saturday.

11. Public questions.

Lorraine Cousins

- Traffic problems in Hermitage Drive. Commuter parking is a problem. Bollard outside her house. Raising with Stephen Conway.
Mr Conway responded on the parking schemes. Where there is no or limited off street parking there will be a zone scheme where residents will have to purchase a pass. For areas with off street parking such as Hermitage Drive, they will be looking at a restriction in parking in the middle of the day to avoid commuter parking.
Mr Abeywardana suggested collaborating with the school to incentivise parents to walk as part of the Climate Change Plan.
- Problems on the recreation ground (late at night) – vandalism, breaking glass, graffiti, littering & trollies from Waitrose being taken into the grounds. The skate park is a target.
Mr Bray reported on the new CCTV cameras.
The Clerk confirmed that the Council is aware of antisocial behaviour taking place and a report to the Wokingham Borough Council enforcement team has been made. The Parish Council are funding outreach workers from the Youth Centre.
Mr Abeywardana urged residents to inform the Council as to when this was occurring to provide a better understanding as to when this is taking place.
Mr S Conway stated that he would take this issue to WBC and ask them to include it within their next meeting with Thames Valley Police.

Mo Elderfield

- Bad smell due to farmers spraying the surrounding fields (lasted for 3 weeks).
The room noted the comment.

Gerry Wise

- Reported on the litter and broken glass around Loddon Hall.
The room noted the report.

Simon Gibbs

- Bridge Farm development – examination in public – will the Parish Council be represented and what will the attitude of the Parish Council be?
Mr Conway described the Local Plan process.
Mr R Mantel stated that there is no allocation for legal fees in the budget to examine the application, however, should the Council wish to take this form of action, it could be within their powers to gain specialist advice.
Mr Wickenden stated that Twyford is a hub, and that any local development would have an impact to the village.

**The meeting
closed at 9.10 pm.**