

Little Milton Parish Council
Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 11th May 2022
in the Pine Lodge, Little Milton

Present: Cllr Francois van der Merwe (Chairman)
Cllr David Wakeling
Cllr Steve Sidhu
Cllr Adam Sheppard
Cllr Howard Harrison

Mrs Andrea Oughton (Parish Clerk)
39 members of the public

Apologies for Absence

County Councillor Freddie van Mierlo, District Councillor Caroline Newton, Parish Councillor Denby

Introduction by Chairman

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting.

01/05/22 Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 19th May 2021 were taken as read and approved as a true record of the meeting.

02/05/22 Report by Chairman of Parish Council

The current council gained one new councillor, Giles Denby, over the last year. He was co-opted by the council from a shortlist of people who put their names forward following the resignation of Alaric Smith in 2021.

Andrea Oughton was appointed last year as Clerk and has just completed her first year's tenure. We are delighted at having Andrea with us – she has done an excellent job. Raymond Fergusson, a stalwart of our parish, continued to provide the council with invaluable support, especially with our internal accounts and finance and, as always as editor of the village newsletter. Thanks also go to Barry Coward in his role as chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan steering group – his robust and detailed technical guidance on planning matters for the council continues to be of immense help to us when considering planning matters.

The potentially very large Chalgrove Airfield development still looms in the background – our understanding is that Homes England (HE) is planning on re-submitting a plan to address the issues raised by the Civil Aviation Authority. We will continue to monitor this and work closely with our County and District Councillors who have both been championing our concerns.

The problem of unacceptable HGV traffic through the village remains a key area of focus for the council. Our focus has shifted to engaging with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) at a political level after a tepid response from officers at OCC to our letter requesting a weight limit for the A329 through Little Milton. With valuable assistance from our county councillor, I made a speech at OCC cabinet in person highlighting Little Milton's HGV plight. We also delivered a substantial input to the consultation for OCC's Transport plan. This has led to a continuing dialogue with the cabinet member in charge of OCC's new freight plan. The County Council aims to develop a county-wide plan for tackling HGV traffic through unsuitable towns and villages, and I hope we will see advantageous developments in this area over the next year.

The council ran an initiative to gather interest, and engage with potential suppliers of, a village wide Fibre-to-the-Premise (FTTP) scheme on the back of government funding available via the Gigabit Voucher scheme. The process has been a frustrating and confusing one as those who followed the various missives in the village newsletter will know. As of today, the voucher scheme has been paused, and there is not an agreed village-wide scheme in place. Airband, a commercial internet provider, has laid a fibre spine down the High Street and into some areas like Oldfield, and will very soon be going live for those premises close to their spine. A locally led smaller scheme for a part of the village has



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met their pledge target for voucher funding, but no work has taken place yet. However, there are still significant parts of the parish not currently covered for FTTP. We continue to engage with OCC and OpenReach to try and secure a plan that will ensure ALL parts of the village is covered for FTTP. We will keep the village informed via the usual channels of any progress.

The resurfacing of the tennis and MUGA courts remain a priority for us – however this has not seen any significant progress over the last year. We hope to make better progress this coming year.

Each councillor has been given specific areas of responsibilities over the last year. Here is a summary of their work:

Communication – Cllr Sidhu

It is important for the council to reach every household in the village using all available means, including social media, the newsletter and website. Communication via FaceBook is regularly reaching more than 300 people. The council has approved a budget to renew the village website. I am planning the initial build out but will probably need to buy-in support. The aim is to create a website where all community groups can come together.

Utilities and Highways – Cllr Sheppard

The council has supported the implementation of a village wide 20mph speed limit and this is being supported by our County Councillor. Little Milton has been included in the first tranche of the roll out which will hopefully start in September.

Ongoing issues with the pumping station have been raised with Thames Water (TW). TW will carry out exploratory works to detect leaks and will then realign pipework and manholes.

I am now a Super User for Fix My Street and can order repairs of potholes within the 30mph speed limit of the village. If anyone notices any path or road defects please let me know. Super Users are not able to markup A and B grade roads.

Recreation Ground, Green Open Spaces – Cllr Harrison

Verge and grass cutting continues, several new benches have recently been acquired. There is a plan to plant two new oak trees in October to replace those that did not survive. There are also plans for a picnic area in a corner of the recreation ground. A grant has been awarded to the parish council to plant trees and replace the waste bins. A meeting has taken place with interested residents to discuss biodiversity.

I have contacted BT about the damaged phone box on Haseley Green and been advised it can take up to three months for the broken door to be replaced.

Village Hall, Village Shop, Orchard Nursery, Little Milton Primary School – Cllr Denby

Cllr Denby had sent his apologies. All organisations had presented their individual reports to the meeting.

Planning, Playground – Cllr Wakeling

The council has considered 15 planning applications over the last year. The council makes recommendations to the planning authority after considering the information and receiving input from local residents.

The playground continues to be popular, the pandemic meant it had to close for a time but as soon the council were able to it was reopened following the necessary checks and pandemic related notices displayed. Signage is displayed on bins encouraging people to recycle waste. District Councillor Newton provided a grant towards purchasing a double waste bin which will be in place for the summer.

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03/05/22 Financial report

Andrea Oughton presented the financial report as Clerk for the financial period being reported.

The council's finances are very straight forward. The council provides services and facilities to its parishioners and does so by managing the finances responsibly holding an appropriate level of reserves to meet future needs. As the income and expenditure for the year is below the £25k threshold it allows the council certify itself as exempt from an external audit. However, finances continue to be reviewed by our internal auditor Mr Ian Dennis who also reviews the council's internal control systems.

Not all services are funded through the Precept, which is the amount of income the council requests the District Council to include in the Council Tax that residents pay each year. For every £1k the council raised through the Precept it adds around £4.65 per annum to the Council Tax bill. The Precept of £13.5k costs a Band D equivalent property £62.70 annually.

The sources of income of £21,685 this year were: Precept £13.5k, newsletter advertising £6,032, Grants (OCC re verges) £529, MUGA income £1,021, other income £573 and bank interest £3. The village newsletter continues to be self-financing and in 2021-22 generated a net contribution of £1,401.

Total expenditure to 31st March 2022 was £16,965, the main headings being: newsletter £4,631, open green spaces £4,820, council administration £3,788, other expenditure £3,018, playground £391 and MUGA £317.

The council is addressing the wider green issues and has increased its expenditure on the management of verges and hedges. It has also invested in providing five new benches, a number of which are in the recreation ground.

Reserves are what the council needs to manage the unevenness of its patterns of expenditure as well as to manage the cost of any planned or unexpected expenditure. Overall reserves of £24,891 showed an increase of £4,693 from 31st March 2021. The council recognises that reserves have increased over the last two years but has plans to improve the facilities of the MUGA by addressing the floodlights and surfaces. The council believe that this level of reserve is adequate to meet known future events and normal ongoing expenditure.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Raymond Fergusson for his invaluable support during my first year as Parish Clerk. Raymond continues to support the council with financial related matters. My thanks also go to the Chairman and Councillors for their support during my first year.

04/05/22 District Councillor Report

The District Councillor Caroline Newton's report was delivered by the Chairman, the key issues covered:

Local Plan 2035: The administration at South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) has continued working towards the implementation of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (LP2035), the strategic development plan which determines where housing, employment and infrastructure will be focused up to 2035.

The site in LP2035 that most affects the Haseley Brook ward is Chalgrove Airfield. Like most local residents Cllr Newton has been most concerned about the impact this would have on surrounding villages. Apart from the sheer scale of the development, the local road network does not have capacity for the additional traffic it will bring (during construction and afterwards). Following the Civil Aviation Authority's objection to the outline planning application for the site, Homes England (the agency responsible for bringing forward the development) has been working on developing a new application

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that will allow Martin Baker to continue to operate safely. If and when that comes forward residents will be able to respond to the consultation.

Local Plan 2041: Work has been underway throughout the year on the next development plan, Local Plan 2041, which is due to be adopted in 2024 which SODC is creating with the neighbouring Vale of the White Horse District Council. The scale of LP2041 will be driven by the longer-term 'Oxfordshire 2050' strategy being determined by the Oxfordshire Growth Board (a high-level body which brings together businesses, local authorities and civic bodies from across the county).

Caroline will be working hard to ensure that any developments proposed in, or near, this ward are small scale and will be well-supported by infrastructure and will strongly resist any attempt to include a new town at so-called Harrington near Great Haseley.

05/05/22 County Councillor Report

County Councillor Freddie van Mierlo's report was delivered by the Chairman, the key issues covered were:

In the first year of taking control, the new administration has not wasted any time and developed new strategies for transport and HGVs, libraries & SEND. Instituted a new policy to meet the promise of delivering 20mph communities and secured grants following ambitious bids to central government to improve bus services. Youth services will be brought back for the first time since they were scrapped. OCC have engaged closely in the Oxfordshire 2050 process to express concerns on the projected growth targets being set and were a key driver of getting the ox-cam arc and expressway scrapped.

In February this year, the new administration's first budget was passed at Full Council. It is true that a rise in council tax comes at a time when the rising cost of living is hitting people hard. However, to continue to meet obligations on social care which makes up over half the budget there was little choice.

In Chalgrove, Cllr Freddie van Mierlo continues to campaign against the airfield development. In August last year, he facilitated a meeting with the new Leader of the Council, Liz Leffman, and Martin-Baker. In March 2022 Cllr van Mierlo spoke against a reference to the airfield development at cabinet in papers prepared for HIF1 – a housing infrastructure project around Didcot. In April, Freddie brought a motion to Full Council to position the County as opposed to the development. It was voted down by a Con-Lab coalition, but he will continue to oppose in any way he can.

Across all villages and towns in the division Cllr van Mierlo has championed local efforts to reduce traffic speeds and volumes. He is pleased that many of the villages in this division have applied to have 20mph zones.

Over the next 3 years the Liberal Democrats will move towards tackling the climate emergency and protecting biodiversity; taking on the inequalities in the county; improving social care and special educational needs provision; and investing in active and sustainable transport.

06/05/22 Report from Village Hall Management Committee

Mr Steve Willis gave the following report on behalf of the Village Hall Management Committee.

Along with all public venues in the UK, The Pine Lodge has had a patchy year with respect to activity as a result of the Covid pandemic. As with the previous year we made every effort to reopen the hall whenever government guidance allowed.

In the latter part of the year the Hall fully reopened without restrictions and the Hall is now being used daily. We are glad to have all our previous regular users back. New weekly users include a children's preschool class (Discovery Den), and a large jazz band for rehearsals.

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There have been a couple of additions to the Hall Committee during the year with Paul Connolly taking on the role of Secretary. Our thanks to Steve Willis who had been filling in as we waited to fill this role. We were also very happy to welcome Wendy Newby to the Committee.

In August the Hall organised and sponsored "Little Milton Unlocked", afternoon and evening events celebrating the lifting of COVID restrictions. There were several hundred attendees during the afternoon for a Family fun day, and in the evening 150 people came to listen and dance to a 20-piece Swing Band. The cost of the two events was supported by ticket sales for the two events, a bar, generous local sponsors, and £2500 donated by the Hall.

The Hall also sponsored two First Aid related classes for village residents only in February and early April, with the Hall contributing £450 towards the cost of the classes. The courses were delivered by First Aid for Oxford and were fully booked. The first class was training for the 3 Defibrillators located around the village. This class was well attended by 36 residents. The second was a First Aid for Families class with 12 participants.

As usual the Hall supported the Xmas Fayre in December running a refreshments stall with the net takings shared between the Orchard, School, and St James's Church.

Other events organised by the Management Committee included the Quiz Nights that remain popular during the autumn, winter and spring. Also, the annual village Fireworks Evening in November that was a great success with about 350 attendees, with free tickets for children.

With the Hall now more than 15 years old we have spent money on a variety of maintenance items. In a series of storms in March many of the bitumen panels stuck to the roof were blown off or lifted. The roadside sign for the Hall, Shop, and Orchard had rotted and needed replacing. The full cost of which was paid for by the Hall. Following the annual stock inventory, it became clear that the Hall has accumulated an eclectic collection of cutlery, jugs and glasses which have now been rationalised and gaps filled to make consistent sets.

On the financial side the Hall again, this year benefitted from two government grants totalling £10,667 that offset the loss of income from closure. On the cost side the incremental maintenance items above plus sponsorship of events were an incremental £6,000. Hence the Hall made a small net loss of £734 in the year. However, we continue to have a solid cash reserve as a result of the government grants over the last two years and the historical cash reserve. In 2022 we plan to have a structural survey of the Hall undertaken to prepare a future maintenance plan so that we can ensure the Hall is able to anticipate future routine works and be able to adequately fund them. This year like most venues we plan a review our hiring rates for the Hall to offset significant increases in our operating costs (utilities, insurance, etc).

Once again, we are hugely grateful to volunteers and the Committee who help with events and keep the Hall functioning (for the Unlocked event we had 30 helpers), and to all of the village for their continued support of the Hall. The Committee is made up of elected and co-opted members representing communities in the village.

07/05/22 Report from Little Milton Shop

Mr Kevin Hunt sent his apologies. The report from the Village Shop was delivered by the Chairman.

Firstly, as always, I want to thank wholeheartedly the ever-smaller number of resolute volunteers and shop staff who give their time and effort consistently every week on behalf of our community so, at this point I wish to reaffirm the notice which I placed in this month's village magazine which highlights the reason the shop and post office was forced to close for several days in April this year and the two main factors which could negate a reoccurrence.



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It is not extreme to say that if a substantial number of people within our village community do not heed this warning the longevity of the shop, café and post office could be under threat. The pandemic demonstrated the importance of having a Local Shop and Post Office whose existence should not be taken for granted therefore it would be remiss of me if I do not thank those within the village community who consistently support the Shop, Cafe, and Post Office with their patronage.

I apologise for starting my update with a negative statement, but it had to be said and has been consistently in previous years, unfortunately to no avail, so I hope my more forthright statement reverses the situation. Let us now move on to more positive news, an overview of the year. The year has been one of financial consolidation where overall revenue is down by 6.6% compared to the previous year, and value per transaction following the same trend at 6.07% both of which was expected following the Covid period, however overall revenue is 3.15% up when compared to the last pre covid trading period 2019-20.

In addition, during the same period, we have been able to improve the shop environment further with an upgrade of the air conditioning and replacing the dated display chiller. Moving onto the disappointing news, unfortunately, the shop was broken into recently but thankfully except for damage to the shop's exterior and interior walls the thieves left with little to show for their criminal endeavour, and it is hoped to have repairs completed within the next 2 to 3 weeks.

Looking forward to this year I must be mindful of the cost base pressure on the overall business due to significant increases in supplier costs, energy, and the overall inflationary pressure however it is my remit where possible within our price structure not to pass that burden onto our customers whilst maintaining the business positive financial position.

Lastly, I wish to mention again the importance of the SODC lottery to the shop as it contributed more than £2,000 in cash terms to the shop, this enables us to consider ongoing improvements to the facility for the benefit of the Little Milton Community, so I make no apologies for mentioning again this year. if you currently do not support our shop by participating, please consider visiting www.socharitable.co.uk as the shop is granted 50p for every one-pound ticket purchased by supporters and in addition a yearly one of payment based on the overall success of the fund. The process is very straight forward but if you have any questions, please ask in the shop for clarity if required.

08/05/22 Report by Chair of Little Milton School Governors

Lucinda Arnold presented the report.

As we celebrate our 150th anniversary, Little Milton CE School and Nursery continue to serve the local community and beyond, offering high quality, personalised learning in small classes.

The gradual lifting of coronavirus restrictions has meant that our children have once again been able to enjoy all that our village church school is proud to offer including Forest School, French, specialist music and sports tuition together with a range of visits and extra-curricular clubs.

Our staff have continued to provide exciting and high-quality teaching whilst observing stringent safeguarding and hygiene measures to keep everyone safe. Wellbeing has been prioritised whilst interventions have been introduced as necessary to address gaps in learning caused by the pandemic.

We are fortunate to have a very loyal and committed staff team. Our co headteachers, Hannah Blest and James Bell, continue to do an excellent job leading the school calmly and purposefully. Two Teaching Assistants, Diane Austin and Juliette Ford, celebrated 20 years of service this year and we said farewell to Karen Post, our Early Years teacher, who has retired after 18 years of providing Little Milton children with an excellent start. We are pleased to welcome Sarah Brombley, our new teacher in Willows class.

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Children have been proud to share their work with parents and carers during termly class assemblies and Open Mornings, a new initiative this year, following the lifting of restrictions. Good Work Assemblies continue to provide a weekly opportunity for families to celebrate their children's work in person or via Zoom.

OCC is reporting a 20% reduction in pupil numbers entering Reception classes this year and, in common with many village schools, our roll is lower than we would like it to be. Given that school funding is based largely on pupil numbers, governors are working hard to ensure that our school is sustainable and forward looking. In this academic year we have welcomed several flexi-school families to our school community as well as six Afghan refugee children to our nursery. All settled well and are valued members of our school family.

Our school continues to be very well supported by the parents' group, 'The Friends'. They organise wonderfully innovative fundraising and social events for the school community, and we are extremely grateful to them. Our next event is a Maypole and 150th Anniversary Celebration on Friday 10th June, where the children are looking forward to demonstrating their dancing skills, after a two-year hiatus. Details will be published in the village newsletter and all villagers are welcome.

In this significant year of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the school's 150th anniversary, Little Milton School is proud to play its part at the heart of the community and we thank the parish council for its support.

09/05/22 Report from Orchard Pre-School

Emily Gresty presented the report.

Currently we have 31 children attending the pre-school across the week, with a long waiting list and parents making enquiries to secure places for their children from June 2023 already. In June 2021 Jessica Ford stepped up from Deputy Supervisor to Supervisor of the Orchard pre-school, and in October 2021 we hired a new member of staff, so we currently have five members of staff working at the Orchard.

Fundraising this year has helped bolster income at the Orchard. We have held a Harvest coffee morning in October, Little Milton Christmas Fayre with school, Spring coffee morning and another joint fundraiser with Little Milton school before Easter. This means that we will be able to use the funds raised to build a shelter at the back of the building to provide cover for resources such as bikes, and also more outside play space for children.

This winter, time and money were also invested in the upkeep of the outside space. The sandpit was emptied and is in the process of being refurbished. We have collaborated to clear inside and outside, allowing more space for the children.

It's worth mentioning, that alongside so many other early years providers, we had a tricky period with Covid spreading through the staff team in February and March this year. We managed to cover some days with committee volunteers but had to close the pre-school for one Monday and then a whole week. Obviously, this was disruptive, but there was nothing we could do. Looking into staff cover, in the absence of the availability of any agency staff, is an ongoing project.

10/05/22 Report on St James' Church

Reverend Simon Cronk gave a report on behalf of St James' Church.

Over the last two years the pandemic has presented extraordinary challenges, but we kept going, coming together to worship via virtual services. Last year we emerged into the 'new normal', together with the

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other two churches Sunday services have been reduced from three to two. St James' is taking turns in hosting an afternoon family gathering. The services last half an hour and are followed by refreshments.

St James' does not currently have any church wardens, but things are carrying on with people volunteering to take on various tasks. The biggest challenge is the building and responsibility for its maintenance and finance. The church cannot rely on the small congregation who attend each week. The afternoon Service of Remembrance continues to be well attended.

The old boiler was condemned and has been shut down. New electric pew heaters are being investigated and if installed will be more economic. Finances are a concern, during the pandemic the Christmas and Church Fetes were 'roving' events around the village. A more traditional fete is planned for the summer.

11/05/22 Parish Forum

A resident thanked everyone involved in provision of facilities and events held in the village.

20mph speed initiative – A resident asked if the new speed limit will cover the whole village, it was confirmed that it would. The resident said it was good news and thanked everyone involved.

A further resident referenced the National Churches Trust whose mission is to keep churches open for the public and encourage tourism and asked if a poster can be displayed as widely as possible.

The meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.

Signed by: *FRANCIS VAN DER MEER*

Chairman.....*[Signature]*.....Date.....*10 MAY 23*.....