

ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY
18:00 MONDAY 8th APRIL 2024 IN THE VILLAGE HALL

Present: Cllr Alice Foster (AFo) – Chairman
Cllr Angie Filippa (AF)
Cllr Sarah Johns (SJ)
Cllr Beccy Soper (BS)

In attendance: Clerk Gill Bulpitt, Ian Jeffrey (IJ) TVBC Councillor and 1 resident

Apologies. Cllr Selina Musters (SM), Cllr Charles Grieve, Cllr Kirsty Dominick-Gibson, David Drew HCC Councillor (DD), Colin McIntyre of Leckford Estate, PCSO Spiros Mouzakis

1. Welcome: The Chairman welcomed everyone present
2. The Minutes of the Annual Assembly of 13th April 2023 were unanimously approved and signed by AFo.
3. PC Chairman's Report

Following the election last May, we welcomed two new members of the parish council – Sarah Johns and Beccy Soper – saying goodbye, and thanks, to Hugo Denée. 12 candidates put themselves forward, triggering an election, and Longstock had the highest voter turnout across the whole of the Test Valley at 66.4%. This shows just how passionate Longstock residents are about who represents them! Gill Bulpitt has also finished her first full year as clerk and is brilliant – she has also managed to get us into the 21st century with online banking. I was also appointed Chairman, last May, with Selina Musters as Vice Chairman.

It has been a year of perseverance. It cannot be ignored that since COVID-19 and the subsequent financial crisis, our local council services have been stretched to the limit. The potholes have become more commonplace and larger, and the drains that exacerbate the problem still haven't been fixed. We have reported over 20 potholes, with 5 particularly pressing ones that we have had to escalate to get fixed urgently. This, of course, has not been helped with all the wet weather this past year. Flooding has also been an issue with the drainage system not able to cope due to the drains becoming blocked with silt. We continue to flag up these issues with Hampshire County Council, and we are grateful for their help and determination to get things done in the current circumstances. We are also grateful for the continued support of Test Valley Borough Council, who has supported us with several grants this year.

We have handled 10 planning applications this year, and another three for tree works. The Lengthsman, under Charles Grieve's excellent guidance, continues his work on general maintenance throughout the village, and we are grateful that Hampshire County Council is continuing to fund this for another two years. Charles also works hard to keep our footpaths as well-maintained as possible – as well as providing new wooden signs to replace damaged and missing ones.

We have also focused a lot this year on our village playground. Following the annual safety inspection last May, we have had to remove a few popular items of equipment as they were deemed unsafe. However, this has spurred us on in our mission to build a new playground for all to enjoy. Spearheaded by Beccy Soper, we have already raised a net total of £7,992.13. In the past year, we have organised numerous events, including a wonderful summer's afternoon at Longstock Water Gardens, a spooktacular Halloween party, and our Easter Egg Trail last weekend, which have all been well attended and enjoyed by locals. We are also engaging with the local community to see what they would like for our new playground. It's wonderful to see the village all coming together to help. The next stage will be to apply for grants to (hopefully!) help pay for the bulk of the new equipment. We know this won't be easy, but with Selina Musters and Gill Bulpitt on the 'Grants' team, we are in safe hands.

Longstock Fete, and the separate evening BBQ, were also very successful last year. The money raised was split between the playground and the Church, with £1,293 generously donated towards the playground fund.

There has also been progress on the affordable housing. Thanks to the Leckford Estate ‘near-gifting’ a small plot of land in Church Road to English Rural Housing Association last year, English Rural have since put in planning for five low-cost properties. These will be homes in perpetuity for people with a village connection, which the parish council has been trying to achieve for many, many years. We are thrilled we have progressed to this stage and are now just waiting for the sign off the Section 106 agreement to be completed between Test Valley Borough Council and English Rural, then they will be ready to progress. The parish council is very grateful to The Estate for making the land available.

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, under Angie Filippa’s expert guidance, is also progressing. We are aiming for a NHP public consultation event late summer with the opportunity for residents to view the proposals. This will be alongside the Longstock Road Traffic Safety Plan, which hopes to bring traffic calming and safety measures to the heart of the village. We are also currently consulting with Test Valley Borough Council for the 2040 Draft Local Plan.

Kirsty Dominick-Gibson does a brilliant job keeping our cemetery and allotments in check, as well as updating the cemetery guidelines. Kirsty is also in charge of the Henry Smith Charity, which continues to give Longstock welcome and generous support. We disbursed £3,844.90 in grants this year, as well as hosting our annual pensioners’ lunch.

Sarah Johns has taken over the trees and all things ‘environment’. As well as organising a new dog poo bin in the recreation ground, she has abundant enthusiasm for the ‘Shoots on Roots’ initiative and is looking into how the parish council can support in other ways.

Sarah has also taken over from Selina Musters as the newsletter liaison for the parish council. However, Selina, with her beautiful turn of phrase, continues to contribute. We are so lucky to have her local village knowledge and warmth. Selina also continues to maintain the new streetlights, and helps to run the village hall, which continues to prosper – with bookings now back to their pre-COVID levels. She is also an enthusiastic member of the playground ‘sub team’.

Lois Opperman continues as editor of the newsletter, having taken on design duties too, since Heli Cole’s departure. Nigel Rugman is a worthy sidekick, sourcing and writing features and helping on the advertising side – as well as providing his wonderful photos.

I keep up with Test Valley School, the newly formed River Test Pollution Working Group, and the traffic management scheme that I previously mentioned. I also enjoy putting on events for the village - from playground fundraising to national celebrations. Last year I helped to organise a big King Charles III Coronation Party in the playground, and this June we are planning two events for the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings.

The flower beds at the cemetery and war memorial continue to be beautifully cared for by Peter Moore and Dave and Joy Watts respectively; and the parish council led a working party of villagers in February to tidy and maintain the cemetery.

Talking of the war memorial, a very good number of residents and visitors attended our Remembrance Sunday commemoration, and the Peat Spade generously served coffee and cake afterwards to those attending. Thanks to the Peat Spade too for helping our playground appeal with a fun ‘Guess the number of chocolates’ fundraiser at Christmas.

We live in a very special village, and I would like to thank everyone on the parish council – and our wonderful clerk – for the considerable work they do in keeping Longstock the lovely, welcoming place it is.

4. The Clerk presented the report on the LPC’s Finances.

The internal review and audit of the 2023/24 accounts will be undertaken by Patrick Coates and has to be submitted by 1st July 2024. As both income and expenditure is likely to be less than £25k the PC is exempt from external audit requirements.

In the meantime, the initial figures are as follows:

- For this accounting year our opening balance on 01 April 2023 was £11,375.43 and we ended the year on 31 March 2024 on £18,953.56.
 - There are two cheques that have been issued but not yet presented to the Bank account – HMRC for the Clerks tax (£500) and to G&M Bulpitt (£600) for reimbursement of the felling of the trees in the chalk pit.
 - We received a NHP grant of £2,400 and have so far only spent half of it (£1,200) with the remainder being spent in the forthcoming months or returned if unspent. £1000 still remains unspent from the TVBC NHP grant.
 - The fundraising for the playground appeal has raised £7,741.05 which remains in the bank account. This will be moved into a separate savings account.
- Taking these three factors into account the ‘real’ PC closing balance as at 31st March 2023 will be in the region of **£7,912**.

Some details:

- The 23/24 precept was increased to £9,000 to partly to cover the eventuality of a contested LPC election (which we had), increased insurance and electricity costs, white lines traffic project and playground maintenance. However, the Playground upgrade/maintenance has changed into a larger project replacing the old and rotten equipment and will be supported by grants and fundraising plus some parish funds.
- On the income side, Cemetery income was below expected at £220. Newsletter income about expected with welcome additions from some new advertisers and subscribers. Additional boost of £7,741 from various fundraising activities which has been earmarked for the playground. This far exceeded the amount originally budgeted to raise. A grant of £500 was received from TVBC to celebrate the King’s Coronation.
- On the expenditure side, Newsletter printing costs have remained static but all other expenditure was predicted to rise in line with the external economy and it did. Insurance costs were up 9.3% and electricity supply costs up 33%. The new contractor (taking over from Ivan Gibson) undertook the grass cutting at the Cemetery & the playground at the same cost.
- To help install the dog waste bin at the recreation ground, TVBC gave a grant of £329 which was two thirds of the cost to purchase and install the bin. The PC have committed to the expense of a weekly removal of the waste at just over £4 a week.
- We had a couple of larger one off expenses – The election of course was £869 and the removal of trees from the disused chalk pit was £600.
- The newsletter itself continues to be self-funded due to support by the volunteers and the income from the advertisers.

Overall, the general income and expenditure was in line with the expected budget and the obvious increases in costs that have affected everyone.

So what next? The precept for 2024/25 was maintained at £9,000, whilst a lot of councils increased theirs. This will result in a cash negative effect on the PC finances as costs still continue to rise but this can be covered from existing parish funds. The Longstock Traffic Management Plan and Playground upgrade/maintenance will be supported by grants and fundraising plus some parish funds. The remaining NHP costs including holding a public consultation has been funded from the related Locality grants, so will have a “net zero” effect on the PC’s financial position, once the associated VAT costs have been recovered.

5. Police Report

PCSO Spiros Mouzakis had submitted the following report before the meeting as he was on duty and

unable to attend. The report was read by the Clerk.

Please find the Longstock crime reports from the 27th March 2023- 8th February 2024.

4. Road traffic collisions - no fatal.

1. Wild life incident

3. Burglaries - 2 Business and 1 no dwelling. No residential.

2. Thefts

2. reports for suspicious activities.

a. There were 5 incidents in Longstock last year

- 1 Shed break in
- 2 Criminal Damages
- 1 Domestic Incident
- 1 Antisocial behaviour

6. HCC Councillors Report

DD unable to attend and AFo read his report.

I regularly attend your Parish Council meetings and provide a written report prior to the PC every month. I'm also available to answer question from the PC as and when they crop up. I thoroughly enjoy working with the Parish team and want to pay tribute to your excellent Chairman, Cllr Alice Foster.

As ever, it has been a busy year for everyone, me included. I am your County Councillor for the division of Test Valley Central, which comprises 20 individual parishes. I'm also a Test Valley Borough Council representative for the Harewood ward. The two roles are different and distinctive, and often complementary.

Hampshire County Council is responsible for schools, roads, social services, waste disposal and some planning matters. The budget is in excess of £2.6 billion. A major challenge at this time of year is the roads and in particular pot holes, which seem to appear faster than they can be filled. It's to do with the weather; rain and frost. The County is currently going through a difficult process of having to make savings – never an easy task.

Test Valley Borough Council is responsible for bin collection, planning, including strategic planning, housing, plus leisure facilities. The budget to do this is about £13m – although TVBC is responsible for billing on behalf of other authorities; I have a cabinet responsibility here for Recycling and Environmental Services.

As well as supporting the on-going traffic calming and road improvement proposals, perhaps the biggest challenge has been potholes and general road maintenance. This is because spring is always a bad time of year for the problems to appear, but also our budgets are particularly tight at the moment. I'm sure you have all heard about this in the media. Sensibly, Hampshire is lining up some difficult budgetary decisions to be taken in the near future. As frustrating as this is, it is my view that it's better to give yourself options rather than just hoping the problem will go away: that is what I would expect any competent business to do if faced with a similar situation.

The County Council, being responsible for Trading Standards, recently prosecuted a person for £650k of roofing fraud over 29 properties – the sentence was 5 years! In many ways, this type of crime is worse than the fly tipping prosecutions which Test Valley is so successful at, because these miscreants focus on the vulnerable and elderly people often living on their own.

In other news, I remain the Chairman of the Hampshire & IoW Air Ambulance and was a governor on the Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust until January. I'm the chair of governors at Norman Gate School in Andover which caters for children with mostly medium learning difficulties, a trustee of the Test Valley Arts Foundation and continue to serve as member of the Hampshire and IoW Fire and Rescue Service.

Finally I would like to say thank you to all your parish Councillors, including your hard working clerk,

Gill Bulpitt, who does such a brilliant and efficient job of keeping your parish council running like clockwork.

7. TVBC Councillors Report (IJ)

The year 2023/2024 has been a great pleasure for me in working with and getting to know the Parish Councillors of Longstock. I must say I find the general tone and atmosphere among your members extremely pleasant and at the same time businesslike. If only other Parishes could find the same formula! I was re-elected Councillor for Mid-Test Ward with Alison Johnston and new Councillor Stewart MacDonald on 4/5 May 2023. My year began with the Coronation of King Charles, which my wife and I witnessed in King's Somborne Village Hall on the cinematic large screen.

An important element of our work with the Parishes in this period has been the drafting and distribution of the Mid-Test Ward newsletter "Mid-Test Matters" on behalf of all three Mid-Test Borough Councillors. I would like to acknowledge the many hours of work contributed by my wife Maura Jeffrey to MTM.

I would also like to acknowledge the excellent work done under the new Ward arrangements by Marie Stubbington, Community Engagement Officer for the whole of the huge Mid-Test Ward. Marie combines energy and imagination in her outstanding support of the three Borough Councillors and their 12 Parishes, based on impressive professionalism combined with extensive experience drawn from her previous role as a local Police Community Support Officer.

My work on behalf of residents has largely been dealing with planning applications and planning policy questions

It has been my pleasure to support several Parish requests for funding from the Councillor Community Grant, especially those for historic events such as the King's Coronation and the 80 th Anniversary of D-Day.

Indirectly, I have contributed to the business of the Borough by membership of the Southern Area Planning Committee and Audit Committee, and Chairmanship of the Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Recently, I have added the role of TVBC's Member Champion for the Armed Forces.

I look forward to another year of successful collaboration with your Parish Council.

8. Questions/Comments from the Public

A resident wanted to thank the Parish Council for their support/hard work during the year.

The Chairman closed the Assembly at 18.35.