

## **BETCHWORTH PARISH COUNCIL**

### **ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2021**

**MINUTES** of the **BETCHWORTH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** held on **TUESDAY 30 March 2021 at 8.00pm., held remotely via Zoom online platform**

#### **1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME**

The Chairman (Julie Hardy) welcomed everyone to the Meeting and particularly the invited guests, including Mary Huggins, Chairman of MVDC, and Sir Paul Beresford, MP. The total attendance amounted to 34 people, equalling 2019 'in-person' attendance. In a break from tradition a separate document was prepared for village groups and societies' reports. The meeting was recorded to assist minute-taking.

#### **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from District Councillor Paul Potter and Linda Slater (BODS and St Michael's Church), and Joosje Hamilton.

#### **3. SURREY POLICE REPORT**

MV Borough Commander DI Vinny Wagjiani (short term replacement whilst Karen Coyne is on secondment) gave a report outlining a 'culture change' initiative he is rolling out within the force. Better policing presence in rural areas. Rural garage burglaries have increased – this is being specifically targeted by DI Wagjiani's team identifying and preparing for 'seasonal burglaries' with his force in the area. Targeting vulnerable adult incidents have increased (online, telephone and door-to-door), as well as domestic incidents due to people spending longer time indoors together during the lockdown periods. Stalking and harassments, Coronavirus/lockdown breaches/public order crimes have all been relatively low within Betchworth. He encouraged any unusual activity to be reported. Questions and comments from the public included Antisocial Behaviour relating to vehicle noise offences on the A25/A24 and local village roads, as well as speeding. DI Wagjiani outlined plans for a 'noise camera' installation which will assist in combating these complaints and offences. He reported an overall increase in incident logs which help to create a picture of criminal offences.

#### **4. PRESENTATION BY JOHN EVANS, DARK SKIES MATTER**

Due to technical difficulties this presentation took place later in the agenda than scheduled (after the presentation of Accounts).

Councillor Hardy introduced John Evans, founder of the Dark Skies Matter environmental movement and Dark Skies Adviser to the Federation of Astronomical Societies, as well as being someone with a love for the natural world.

#### **5. MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2019**

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic the 2020 Annual Meeting was cancelled at short notice.

Copies of the 2019 minutes had been circulated prior to the 2021 meeting. They were proposed by Cllr Wilson and approved by Cllr Edwards before being signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

## **6. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

*Councillor Hardy gave the following report:*

Well, it has been an interesting year (!) At the first lockdown, in March 2020, Betchworth picked up on the postcard idea and about 400 of these were delivered to every house in the village. From that the Betchworth Assistance Network was born, and thanks to some inspirational residents (you know who you are!) including Parish Councillors, groups were set up to help anyone who needed it. Not just the Parish Council but supported by the Parish Council. Marion, the Parish clerk, kept us all up to date with regular village emails too.

We all re-discovered walking and found that some of our footpaths needed attention. Our footpath officer, John Foreman, retired and moved to Devon with our grateful thanks ringing in his ears. Ed Winter, our Parish Council vice chairman, took over the responsibility of getting the footpaths upgraded and accessible. We now have a Footpath Champions WhatsApp group who report any problems back to Ed.

We also re-discovered nature and have started a Greener Betchworth initiative. We bought 100 flat pack nest boxes which have been assembled by residents and school children and placed at sites around the village including the Nursing Homes. We are re-wilding an area of the Goulburn Green to encourage birds and insects, and have also had a local craftsman, Tim Lyver, build us two beautiful bug hotels now situated by the Hamilton Room and the nursery. Councillors Hilary Edwards and Martin Higgins have overseen this and involved a lot of enthusiastic villagers. We are keen to promote and educate about sustainability.

One good thing about the pandemic is the quiet, with much less aircraft overhead. Councillors Ed Winter and Ian Wilson have still been monitoring flight paths and Gatwick so that we are aware of what is going on.

Ian also oversees the Burial ground with the Burial Ground caretaker, Bernard Hawkins. They keep it well maintained and peaceful.

Councillor Colin Rogers is the Chairman of our finance group which reviews and sets the yearly budget.

Martin Ferrett left as a Parish Councillor during the year and Graham Randall has joined us. A former Chartered Surveyor, he is, among other things, helping us get to grips with various different traffic calming ideas in the village including gateways and vehicle activated signs. The Parish Council have been mindful of concerns from Parishioners on highway issues & through their Working Party have established liaison with County Council Highways Engineers to address the most significant issues. We are in consultation over speed monitoring to some local roads, traffic calming measures, gateway signage & outstanding repairs. An assurance has been

secured on the repairs to Betchworth Bridge. Flood issues on Station Road have also been discussed.

Speeding on 30mph roads could be potentially reduced with increased activity from Speed Watch volunteers & we would welcome Parishioners to contact our Clerk, Marion, if they would like to participate.

Marion is also our responsible financial officer. She deals with all the day to day running of the council and tries to keep us in check (we can be exasperating). We couldn't manage without her.

Thank you to Marion, to all of the councillors past and present and to Bernard too who cheerfully give their time for the benefit of the village. Thanks also to our two District Councillors, Paul Potter and Simon Budd and Our County Councillor, Helyn Clack who regularly come to meetings and help with our queries.

The agenda and minutes of all our meetings are posted on the three village notice boards and on our website. Anyone is welcome to attend our meetings on the first Monday of the month on Zoom or, hopefully soon, in The Hamilton Room.

**Here is an outline of some of the things we have been doing (Accompanying pictures displayed).**

New fingerpost at the triangle by The Street

Old fingerpost to be used for bird feeding station by Goulburn Green

New 'No cycling' signs on the school path

New Hi-Viz Jackets and litter pickers bought

Two well attended litter picks

Discussion of about 30 planning applications

Two new maps at bus shelters

Removal of extraneous posts at roundabout

Consultations w Clarion about retaining boards on The Street

New excess soil container and fencing at the Burial Ground

100 bird nesting boxes around the village

Two bug hotels at the nursery and the Hamilton Room

Re-wilding on the Goulburn Green

SCC clearance of footpath from roundabout to The Coombe

Continual reporting of speeding through the village

Continual reporting of flooding from drains on Station Road and Wonham Lane

Checked play equipment on Goulburn Green

Pruned trees on Goulburn Green and Burial ground

Zoom meetings with;

Neighbouring Councils, Plane Wrong, SSALC, GACC, Betchworth Estate, MVDC, Clarion Housing, SCC Highways, Surrey Hills Society. We also continue to support the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE).

**7. BETCHWORTH PARISH ACCOUNTS 2019/20**

*The draft accounts were displayed. Clerk Marion Hallett gave a brief report outlining income and expenditure over the past year:*

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Our accounts for 2019/2020 were fully audited and approved in June 2020 and I confirm that our bank balances remained in a healthy position with a slight increase in funds at the year end.

Our draft Accounts for 2020/21 are now almost complete with one day to go before the Financial Year End which is tomorrow. These accounts will be internally audited in May by Mulberry and Co, before being sent to PKF Littlejohn for external audit in June.

The Precept amount received from MVDC rose 3% in 2020/21, in line with inflation, as did the Council Tax Support Grant and Concurrent Grant. This covers the increase in the Clerk's costs and salary. You will see that income from the burial ground has increased significantly. This is in fact as a result of an increase in the number of pre-purchased plots from individuals who do not reside in Betchworth or nearby, and is not directly COVID related as you might initially expect. A revision to the burialground fees in order to bring charges in line with neighbouring Parishes has also taken place. In June we received a £10k 'Small Business Support Covid Grant' from MVDC which we have partly used to facilitate the Birdbox Project and the cultivation of a section of Goulburn Green to facilitate nectar rich flowers and wildlife. We plan to use the remainder of the grant to pay for footpaths upgrades and improve accessibility from stiles to kissing gates throughout Betchworth. 100% of the allotment income was received this year and rates will continue to remain the same for 2021/22; £35 for a full plot and £17.50 for half (6 full plots in total).

Due to the combination of events outlined above the overall income received for 20/21 has increased by just over 100% (from last year). Extraordinary times indeed. Moving to expenditure, administration costs increased slightly (6%), as expected. Spending of S137 money was again low, used to cover printing costs for the COVID leaflets. Expenditure in the burialground rose this year as maintenance charges increased slightly. Elsewhere in the village our pavements received a welcome tidy-up as over time, leaf and twig drop from overhanging trees turns to soil in which weeds grow.

We have fulfilled three capital projects this year. The first being the installation of a containment facility at the west end of the burialground to store soil and stop it encroaching on the graves nearby. The second project was to purchase and install a new landmark fingerpost at the top of The Street. The third was to put large scale OS print maps in our two bus stops; one opposite the Village Shop, the other opposite Knights Nursery on Station Road.

The Parish Council budgeted to cover all capital expenditure from their reserves, However the unexpected income from the Burial Ground means that the cash reserves are unexpectedly very high and our bank balances show a significant overall increase from last year.

Final audited accounts will be posted onto website later in the year.

Our Finance Group is chaired by Councillor Colin Rogers and is accompanied by Julie our Chair, our Vice Chair Ed Winter, Councillor Ian Wilson and myself as RFO. Our budget is set annually and reviewed regularly. Due to COVID and consideration for financial hardship within our community the decision was taken not to increase the Parish Council Precept for 2021/22 financial year, however a 0.7% increase is visible on your Council Tax statement issued by MVDC. This is as a result of a calculation made by MVDC which reflects a fluctuation in the number of dwellings in the Parish.

Internal Auditors Mulberry and Co were scrupulously thorough when auditing our accounts last year, and as such the Finance Group have agreed to retain their services. We continue to be very grateful for their support.

Copies of these draft accounts will be available on the website in due course.  
Thank you.

#### **8. PRESENTATION BY JOHN EVANS, DARK SKIES MATTER**

Councillor Hardy introduced John Evans, founder of the Dark Skies Matter environmental movement and Dark Skies Adviser to the Federation of Astronomical Societies, as well as being someone with a love for the natural world. Due to technical difficulties this presentation moved to this part of the meeting, later in the agenda than scheduled. He highlighted the impact of light pollution on the environment and suggested ways which communities can confine lighting to emit less wastage into the night sky. Meeting attendees were invited to ask questions.

#### **9. REPORTS FROM VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS**

Representatives of the following local organizations submitted written reports which can be found [here](#).

#### **10. ADDRESS BY SURREY COUNTY COUNCILLOR HELYN CLACK**

*County Councillor Helyn Clack (Member for Dorking Rural Division, Vice Chairman of Surrey County Council) delivered the following address:*

I have been your County Councillor representing the County Division of Dorking Rural for the last twenty years. Dorking rural Division covers eight parish councils across many communities in the southern villages of Mole Valley including Beare Green, Betchworth, Brockham, Buckland, Capel, Charlwood, Hookwood, Leigh, Newdigate and Ockley at Surrey County Council.

The last year has been a year like no other. COVID19 has been challenging for everyone in different ways – loss of those dear to us, restrictions on our freedoms, huge changes, lack of social contact and financial worries. But throughout people have come together. Our communities have stood up and show remarkable generosity and care for our neighbours and those less fortunate. Across Surrey all agencies have worked together to guide the county through the pandemic. Our Councils – County, District and Parishes - the police, health services, Surrey Fire and Rescue, our schools and thousands and thousands of volunteers. Our County Council's Public Health Team have shown leadership right from the moment we had the first UK contracted case in February 2020, setting up a Surrey wide response to the pandemic within 48 hours of lockdown, handling over 10,000 calls, sourced, sorted and delivered over 10 million items of PPE to the frontline and delivered over £10million in grants to help care providers deal with the impact of Coronavirus.

To protect the NHS and each other, our Government told us we should stay inside and only go out for essential journeys, we should not hand deliver leaflets or knock on residents doors or attend meetings as we normally do, so we have all got to grips with Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Facebook, Twitter, NextDoor and Whatsapp social media platforms, meeting online and posting articles of interest.

To ensure we can continue to meet with residents, we have all had to 'go digital', using Zoom or Teams or other platforms, we have learnt to put up our digital hands, stay mute until asked to speak and turn off our cameras to improve connectivity when broadband is struggling. Many of the County Council Staff are working from home, some have been redeployed to support the vaccine delivery project or fill in

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for others when staff have gone sick from COVID19. And working from home is a struggle for those with families and children all vying for their time.

Locally, I have represented residents at Gatwick Airport, as Vice Chair of GATCOM, the airports regulatory body and as Vice Chair of the airport's noise management board (NMB). I will continue to make sure your voice is heard.

I have continued to work together with our dedicated parish councillors and district councillors, I have:

- Worked to give local villages more say on County services including, highways maintenance, speed reduction, clearing vegetation and youth services.
- Lobbied against unsustainable and unsuitable developments such as energy schemes, mineral extraction and housing development on flood areas
- Listened to and lobbied against inappropriate event licencing applications
- Devolved more power for decision making to local communities, through our Surrey Local Committees

Over the last two years, I have been honoured to have been the Vice Chair of Surrey County Council meeting many of the amazing voluntary organisations in Surrey who help to deliver County Council services to children and young people, older and elderly folk, countryside and environment. I am proud to live and work in this beautiful county division made up of our many rural villages and communities and appreciate the work that parish councils do and the important role they play as well as listening to your views and of all Dorking Rural residents.

## **11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 9.32 pm.