

## **BETCHWORTH PARISH COUNCIL**

### **ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2024**

**MINUTES** of the **BETCHWORTH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** held on **Monday 25 March 2024 at 7.30pm., Betchworth War Memorial Village Hall, Station Road**

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

The Chairman (Julie Hardy) welcomed everyone to the Meeting and particularly our invited speakers, Sgt Hannah Whatham and Norman Jackson as well as all of the local organisations who came along to display what they do.

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

Apologies were received from Cllr Randall, Insp James Green, Joosje Hamilton, Valerie Maud (Brockham Green Horticultural Society), Simon Thomas (Betchworth & Buckland Society), North Downs Primary School and Betchworth & Buckland Nursery.

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

Sgt Hannah Whatham gave an address to the meeting highlighting the structure and teams in Surrey Police that cover the area of Betchworth. Sgt Whatham was able to provide high level statistics for the area and noted that there were no trends with crime identified in the area. Sgt Whatham told the meeting about Operation Downsway which is to be launched in April following the success in other areas which has shown a decrease in collisions and anti-social driving. It is expected to see an increased police presence on A24 and A25. Another success is a sticker of eyes that are placed on bins which could deter burglaries, and these are available free of charge. The Clerk will arrange to obtain some of these and distribute.

A question was raised on what to do if you see racing cars along the country lanes in Betchworth. It was suggested that you should report this online, if it is deemed dangerous, please use 101 or an emergency please dial 999. Trends are reviewed so please do report as this will highlight if there is an issue and mitigating action can be taken.

Another question from the audience regarding Pebblehill being deemed too dangerous for the police to undertake speed monitoring on site and yet allowing children who are completing their Duke of Edinburgh levels to navigate along a deemed dangerous road. Sgt Whatham was able to respond that the road is on a speed plan and is reviewed every 6 months but kindly agreed to take away an action to arrange a meeting with the residents (who have kindly offered up driveways as a safe waiting area) and the casualty reduction officer for Mole Valley and Epsom PC Ed Ferris.

#### **4. MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2023**

Cllr Hardy stated that the minutes have been displayed on our website and invited members to propose and second. They were proposed by Cllr Wilson and seconded by Cllr Winter before being signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

## 5. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

*Councillor Hardy gave the following report:*

Parish councils are the first level of local government. They provide communities with a democratic voice and a structure for taking community action.

What does a parish council do? The main issues that concern us are planning, highways, traffic, community safety, housing, street lighting, allotments, burial grounds, playing fields, community centres, litter, war memorials, seats and shelters and rights of way.

Parish councillors act as ambassadors for their community, keeping everyone aware of local needs and concerns and reporting back on district, council and regional matters. They are not paid and give up their time for the good of their parishioners.

All our councillors have special areas of interest and responsibility. I would like to thank them all for their time, good counsel and good humour. They are; Vice Chairman Ed Winter, Ian Wilson, Martin Higgins, Graham Randall (who can't be with us this evening), Robert Ashdown and Alice Laidler who we welcomed onto the council this year.

Thanks also to our three District Councillors, Simon Budd, Paula Keay and Paul Potter, and Our County Councillor, Helyn Clack who regularly come to meetings and help with our queries.

Of course the mainstay of the council is Cheryl, our clerk, who works extremely hard for our village. I certainly couldn't do this without her, so huge thanks to Cheryl.

So, what have we done this year?

### **Maintenance of open spaces;**

We looked after the Goulburn Green; paid for paint to allow Linda Spratt (thank you Linda) to re-paint the play equipment which is checked weekly. We replaced the unsightly metal gate with a safer and more attractive wooden one. Thanks to Katie Leak for help with this.

We supported Re-Betchworth initiatives with the wildflowers and the orchard rejuvenation programme.

We kept allotment rates reasonable and completed the releveling in the burial ground and the crowning of the large oak tree.

We have maintained the 3 defibrillators that we bought and Cheryl has kept our 4 noticeboards up to date.

### **Completed 7 consultations;**

Surrey Boundary, AONB, Polling District Review, Planning Local List, New Council Strategy, Martyn's Law, Zero Vision Road Safety and are in the process of reviewing the local plan for Mole Valley.

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**We represented Betchworth on;**

Gatwick issues, a standing agenda item.

**Planning;**

We reviewed and consulted on 30 planning applications.

We raised a number of enforcement issues.

**We issued grants to;**

Re-Betchworth, FABB, Betchworth Village Archives, Tiny Tots Toddler group and Coronation event.

We are also in the fortunate position to be able to offer further grants this financial year due to a surplus of income from the burial ground, and are delighted to offer them to; Re-Betchworth, Friends of Betchworth & Buckland Nursery, Buckland and Betchworth Choral Society and St. Michael's church website.

**Projects and tasks;**

We organised 2 litter picks; thanks to Ed for organising and the many volunteers.

We installed historical posters on Betchworth Station.

We purchased Kissing Gate plaques.

We bought a new 'no cycling' sign to replace the one on the School Path.

We bought bollards to stop the lorries mounting the kerb on Station Road opposite Something Special. They are not quite right but we are getting there.

We had new bins installed on Pebblehill.

We purchased emergency stones to alleviate flooding on the footpath on Pebblehill as SCC were unable to act. Thanks to those who then spread them effectively.

We installed village gateways on A25 and Pebblehill.

**SCC are responsible for our highways. Please report any issues directly to Highways and feel free to copy in Cheryl. We produce a monthly Highways report to go with our minutes. Here are some of the results of our actions;**

We had speed reductions implemented on Old Reigate Road and Wellhouse Lane following our instigation.

We had lines refurbished on The Street to try and stop cars mounting the pavement.

Cheryl raised numerous jobs regarding maintenance.

We campaigned for a full investigation on the road surface by Betchworth Bridge. Speedwatch was publicised and the number of patrol areas. Increased.

We represented the Parish on a Highways Task Force looking at ways to make processes and maintenance work better.

We made recommendation and representation for bus stops on Pebblehill and rail replacement bus stops.

Pebblehill is our most dangerous road, and there are constant issues with speeding, drainage issues, mud and ice. With help and support from the Pebblehill residents and especially Jim Gear, we have had highways dig out the overflowing culvert and investigate the drainage issues. They have identified the problem and will hopefully be back to fix it soon. Mole Valley have cleaned the road, freeing the drains of mud, at the moment.

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We await the results of the speed surveys and proposed design that Helyn is working through with Highways.

Thanks to Jim and co. but also to Cheryl, Graham and Robert who have persisted in highlighting these problems to SCC. Thanks also to Helyn Clack for working tirelessly to get these issues resolved.

**Relationships;**

We have a good working relationship with local parishes, District and County Councillors and the Betchworth Estate. We hope to build stronger relationships with residents, local businesses and organisations.

**Plans for 2024 / 2025;**

New playground equipment.

Look at upgrading the Church Path and road by the allotments.

Investigation into expanding the burial ground.

Upgrading our website and communication.

Footpath maintenance in some areas.

We have a meeting on the first Monday of every month in The Hamilton room with an open forum that everyone is most welcome to attend. Unless you alert the Parish Council to problems and concerns, we cannot do anything. We have a website and Cheryl regularly sends out information on the village email and on the WhatsApp Forum.

**6. BETCHWORTH PARISH ACCOUNTS 2023/24**

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

Our accounts for 2022/23 were fully audited and approved in September and are displayed on our website as are previous years.

Our draft Accounts for 2023/24 are now almost complete with a couple of days to go before the Financial Year End which is on Easter Sunday this year. These accounts will be internally audited in April by Mulberry and Co, before being sent to our external auditors PKF Littlejohn following formal sign off by the Parish Council at our May meeting.

Today I am just going to go through some of the highlights of last year.

So starting with Income: We receive income from a number of areas so taking each one in turn:

We receive a Precept from MVDC which makes up part of your Council tax, this is to cover **the running costs of the council**, so that includes items such as my salary, insurance for the council and amenities, subscriptions etc basically anything that is needed to keep the Parish Council running. As I mentioned last year over previous years the precept has not covered this and money has been used from the current reserves, but as the running costs continue to increase, we now need to start bringing them back in line which we will have done by next year.

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We also receive money from the allotments and the burial ground. We continue to be reasonable for our allotment rates and are pleased to have kept the charges the same for 2024. The burial ground has sadly been very busy this year and our income surpassed what we predicted, as you can imagine that is hard to predict. The money that we make from the burial ground is for its general maintenance and upkeep for today and in the future, we will get to a point where the income will slow down and will even stop when it is full. In the meantime, we are in a very fortunate position that we can use some of the surplus to give back to the community which we have done over previous years, and again this year in the form of grants, which Julie talked about earlier.

Bank interest is another source of income which we have been able to benefit from the higher interest rates by ensuring that we hold our reserve in the savings account.

And finally, CIL money (Community Infrastructure Levy), this is a charge which is levied by local authorities on new development in their areas which the Parish Council get 15% of. We cannot forecast for this but this year we have benefited from some CIL money. This money **can only be spent on infrastructure** costs such as the projects to improve our playground amenities as well as the Church Path (again Julie covered these off earlier). If you have any suggestions on infrastructure projects please do get in touch and we will consider these.

Moving to expenditure:

We have a line item called S137, (to remind you what this is, the parish council needs to have a legal power to spend any money, S137 enables local councils to spend a limited amount of money for purposes for which they have no other specific statutory expenditure such as open spaces, churchyards, administration of the council, war memorials etc and is reported separately.) this year again as we have heard we were delighted to be able to offer a grant policy (from the surplus of the burial ground) to allow local organisations to apply for a grant to allow them to deliver their key objectives for the community which they may not be able to fund themselves.

We continue to maintain Goulburn Green and the burial ground for your enjoyment. Earlier Julie has listed the projects and works that we have delivered on which will be shown as an expenditure.

The Parish Council continue to budget to cover all capital expenditure from their reserves, the CIL money which we also have will be used in accordance of the guidelines and all future capital spend will be presented back to full council for approval and documentation. We continue to adhere to the Financial Standing Order which is on display on our website.

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

Our Finance Group is chaired by Councillor Ed Winter and is accompanied by Julie our Chair, Councillor Ian Wilson and myself as RFO. Our budget is set annually and reviewed regularly.

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.

**7. PRESENTATION BY GUEST SPEAKER – Norman Jackson**

Norman gave a presentation on ‘Imagine a Biodiversity Park’, the presentation slides can be seen here – [Click to View](#)

**8. Interactive session – Meet the local organisations.**

Cllr Hardy thanked Norman for his presentation and suggested that we moved to AOB before inviting attendees to walk around the tables that were there from the following organisations:

- The Arts Society
- The Betchworth Tennis Tournament
- The Betchworth Operatic & Dramatic Society
- The Betchworth Bellringers
- Pebblecombe WI
- Buckland & Betchworth Choral Society
- The Hamilton Room
- Betchworth Village Archives
- Re- Betchworth
- The Poland Trust
- The Parish Magazine

Cllr Hardy on behalf of Betchworth Parish Council would like to thank all the organisations that attended and took part. Please also look at the reports from all of our local organisations to see what they have been up to in the last year [Click to View](#)

**9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Jim Gear on behalf of Pebblehill wanted to address the meeting to express thanks to Cllr Randall, The Clerk and County Cllr Helyn Clack for the work that has been done thus far and in ensuring that the residents feel part of the parish. Whilst recognising that there is still more to be done, it was felt that great progress has been made thus far. County Cllr Clack responded her gratitude to the residents and said that the collaboration between Parish, Residents and Councils show what can be achieved.

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Paul Ellison Chair of The Betchworth War Memorial Village Hall addressed the meeting with a plea for more volunteers to help and support the committee for the running of the Village Hall. It was acknowledged the importance of the hall in the parish but new committee members are required with new skills to help move the hall forward.

Chairman thanked all of those attending and invited them all to have some refreshments and visit the local organisation tables and formally closed the meeting at 8.30pm.