

GREAT GRANSDEN PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 22nd April 2021

Those present were:

Andrew Pett Chairman	Giles Scott Vice Chairman
Catherine Fox Clerk	Peter King Parish Councillor
Michael Capps Parish Councillor	Jeff Gorton Parish Councillor
Nick Ginn Parish Councillor	James Catmur Parish Councillor
County Councillor Julie Wisson and District Councillor Richard West and 2 members of the public	

1. The meeting was opened at 7.30pm with a silent prayer.

2. Apologies. There were apologies from Parish Councillors Nigel Day and Lisbeth Ricciardi.

3. Minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting, held on 19th April 2019 had been circulated to councillors soon afterwards and were considered at the Parish Council meeting on 13th May 2019. The minutes were then approved and accordingly initialled. At this meeting the initialled minutes of 19th April 2019 were approved and accordingly signed by the chairman. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, there was no Annual Parish meeting in 2020. However, all reports from that year are available on the website.

At the invitation of the Parish Council, Rebecca Neal joined the meeting to introduce herself and her role within the Wildlife Trust at Gransden and Waresley Woods. Primarily, Ms Neal's role will be focused on people engagement not access and management. However, it is hoped that having a named point of contact will help to alleviate communication breakdowns that have happened in the past.

4. Chairman's Report. The Chairman spoke about the unprecedented challenges of the past year. At the start of the year in May 2020 it was agreed that all Officers of the Parish Council remain in their current roles, to ensure continuity until such time as face-to-face meetings could be resumed.

With Lockdown in place at the beginning of the year, the Bluebell-19 Group were given great assistance by Cllr Catmur in setting up a database to render support to the village. During the year there have been numerous notices on Touchbase offering help and assistance to parishioners. Special thanks were made to the Basra's and all their staff at the Village Shop for the way in which they have provided for village needs during this time

The Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group has continued working hard throughout with monthly meetings, updates to the Parish Council and now most of the written sections of the report are available to read on the website. There is hope that by the fourth quarter of 2021 the plan should be ready to go to consultation. David Prest, the Chair of the group and Anne Constantine, the Secretary have been the driving forces but the whole group has worked hard towards its goal.

A survey undertaken by the NDP Group had shown that residents were keen to see improvements to road safety within the village, improved sports and leisure facilities and better access to open spaces. It has become vital to improve road safety and to that end Cllr Scott produced a compelling application for Local Highways Improvement Funding this year. The bid made the case for priority narrowing

measures for both Ladies Hill and on Middle Street. The Council is still pushing for safety signs along Meadow Road to moderate speeds.

This year the Parish Council decided to raise the precept by £10,000 to allow for similar improvement measures to cope with an anticipated increase in traffic generated by the A428 upgrade and also greater usage of village facilities generated by the changes in working habits.

Flooding has been a popular theme at meetings due to one of the wettest winters in the recent past and some progress has been made on drains in Middle Street, East Street and Church Street although drains in general around the village still remain a problem, with many being completely blocked. The Parish Council continues to press for a 'village-wide' clearing on a regular basis.

During the year the long-time caretakers of the Reading Room retired necessitating the appointment of a new tenant for the cottage. Georgia Yarrow accepted the role of Caretaker at the Reading Room, effective 1st November, and signed a new tenancy agreement. The Reading Room Committee requested that the Parish Council consider resurfacing the car park to the rear of the Reading Room. However, the overall cost is outside the Parish budget at this point, although low level lighting is being considered for the future.

Other improvements noted this year have been:

- Risk Assessments for the MUGA & Playing Field have been implemented in addition to the installation of plastic grass protector around the entrance to the field from Little Lane. Thanks go to Cllr King for his hard work around this.
- A Grazing Licence for the Cemetery Extension was signed.
- No Cycling signs were placed on Doctors Lane.
- Various repairs were made: a broken swing and see-saw at the Park, the sign was replaced at the entrance to the field and opening & closing times have been posted on the gate.
- The introduction of BACS and Automated payments by the Parish Council.
- Support for improved facilities at the Sportsfield and Tennis Club. It was noted during the year that the Sportsfield is in excellent condition, with grass cutting being performed regularly and well, due to the lockdown and lack of use.
- The renewal of the licence for the Sportsfield between the Parish Council and the GSRA in March 2021.
- The opening of the winter walk in Gransden Woods (due to pressure from a group formed for the purpose of ensuring that the woods remained partly open for use by the village).

As usual there are many things that are ongoing causes of concern. The conclusions of the Government's White Paper on Planning are as yet unknown and the Sand Road development (now named Dutton Gardens) has been a constant source of nuisance for the Council and the village in general. Enforcement action has been imposed on the developer, Hayfield Homes, by HDC for frequent breaches of the Planning Agreements.

The number of Consultations seems to have proliferated this year, all of which are of vital importance for Great Gransden. These are:

- A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet,
- East West Rail with the route corridor.
- The holding/stack consultation for Luton airport.

The Tree survey, now done annually, was undertaken in early 2021 and planning applications are now with HDC for permission to do the required works. Thanks go to Cllr Capps, who has taken the lead in checking the works needed. Finally, Councillor Julie Wisson was thanked for always been extremely informative and helpful in opening doors for the Parish Council on County matters such as Highways & Drains. Councillor Richard West was thanked for attending all the Parish Council meetings and for fielding a tide of complaints about the Planning at HDC with great forbearance. His wholehearted support for this village is well documented and very much appreciated. The Chairman expressed thanks to all his fellow Parish Councillors, especially Cllr Gorton who is due to retire this year after 27 years' service to the Parish Council. Finally, thanks were given to all other Councillors who have worked hard all year to maintain the very high standards of this Council and village, and to the Clerk for her hard work and assistance. Councillor Capps expressed his confidence and thanks to the Chairman on behalf of his fellow councillors.

5. County Councillor Julie Wisson reported that during the last 12 months, officers at all councils were deployed to pick up roles in areas that were needed in the emergency, such as contacting residents that were shielding and distributing food parcels. The service director for Education Jonathan Lewis has been praised for his role in keeping communication open with all schools in the county and interpreting government guidance for schools whilst education settings came to grips with Covid lockdowns and providing an educational setting for key workers children.

The preferred route for the A428 has now been submitted in detail with plans for junctions, borrow pits and compounds to the Planning Inspectorate and is available to be seen on the PINS website. a decision from the government is expected later this year with a construction start date in 2022.

There is now further clarity on the 5 route options for an east West rail link between Oxford and Cambridge and the 6 possible stations. The preferred routes are the most northern routes keeping the infrastructure in one travel corridor with the railway and the new A428, to be named A421 once opened.

Later this year the county council will be moving to their new hub at Alconbury Weald named New Shire Hall away from Shire Hall in Cambridge; making the building more accessible to residents.

Finally, Cllr Wisson thanked Parish councillors and District Councillor West for their continued support

6. District Councillor Richard West spoke about his roles at the district council have the role of (Chairman of the Employment Committee, and Chairman of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group working with Cambridgeshire County Council).

Cllr West is also a member of the Corporate Governance Committee and member of Licensing Committee / Licensing Protection Committee.

Cllr West felt that service levels at district level had been a cause for concern. However, the district council are investing in equipment and staff to reduce and improve waiting times for the telephone to be answered. The planning service have had a change of leadership and senior management. This is expected to further improve service delivery to meet the expectations of both applicants and residents.

Cllr West passed on his sincere thanks to Cambridgeshire County Councillor Julie Wisson for her dedicated and balanced support during her time on the council, wishing her a very happy retirement, Similarly, Cllr West thanked Cllr Gorton for his tireless service in the best interests of village residents – also wishing him a very happy retirement. His report is filed hereafter as Appendix No. 2.

7. Financial Statement. The clerk's summary for the year had been circulated. The summary is filed hereafter as Appendix No. 3.

8. The Poor's Land Charity. The Chairman reported that there had been one new request this year for financial assistance with 5 villagers now receiving 5 payments per annum at a total overall cost to the Charity of £3375. Various grants had also been made to village organisations including the Tennis Club, Gransden Foxes, the PCC at the Parish Church and other Great Gransden activities. The trustees are the Chairman, Councillor Scott and Councillor Gorton who had met on 3 occasions discussing the objects of the charity and its income which is available for the benefit of Great Gransden residents. The charity has a moderate risk strategy and the trustees are guided by the charity's financial advisor.

The aim in the long term is to grow capital and maintain income. The strategy and active ongoing daily management has helped to protect the portfolio in what are unprecedented times and the recovery to date further demonstrates the necessity to remain invested through difficult times rather than to try and time the markets. Trustees have analysed the performance of the investments over the last 6 and 12 months. The portfolio has shown a strong recovery from the lows experienced immediately after the COVID 19 lockdowns in 2020 and, pleasingly, is now standing above the levels at the end of December 2019 (£455,723) prior to the pandemic. Over the 6 and 12 months to 1st April 2021, net of fees and all underlying portfolios costs, the investments increased in value by 7.1% and 21.9% respectively. The target Income yield for Poor's Land is c2.5% with Capital Growth in addition to this, albeit the income yield has fallen somewhat below 2% given the pandemic and economic uncertainty this year.

9. The Parish Council Cemetery. Jeff Gorton presented the report that is filed as Appendix No. 4. The grass cutting within the cemetery was excellent last year. This year, the Parish Council have decided to use an alternative contractor who also services Abbotsley cemetery to a good standard. The first cut has now taken place, and all seems well. The Memorial Garden continues to be well maintained, but it will be necessary to look to replace the boundary dwarf privet hedging around the garden since numerous shrubs have succumbed to privet blight and a more sustainable shrub type may have to be substituted. The heavy rain during winter has caused flooding on the banks of the brook that divides the cemetery and the graveyard, and flotsam had blocked the watercourse in a number of places. A work party successfully cleared the obstructions so that water flow is now satisfactory. However, the rear fencing to Rectory Farm has collapsed towards the brook, and a tree on their land has also fallen and is bridging the brook. The retaining wall at the side of the brook (cemetery side) near the bridge is showing signs of breaking up, and is starting to lean. Should this collapse, it will cause a major blockage. During the next 12 months this retaining wall needs to be examined by a structural engineer, and remedial action taken. The agreement between the Parish Council and the owners of the Dole Field, to acquire a strip of land adjacent to the cemetery for a cemetery extension, has now been finalised although the additional land will not be required for a number of years.

10. Reading Room Management Committee. Peter King read out the report prepared by Anne Constantine on behalf of the Reading Room Management Committee. The report is filed as Appendix No. 5 together with the accounts. The pandemic has had a devastating effect on activity in the Reading Room. Full closure was required in the first lockdown and only childcare activity allowed in subsequent lockdowns. A full COVID risk assessment was drawn up and approved by the Management Committee in July to enable limited re-opening for Barneys Club. The Club made use of the Reading Room and the school (for different ‘bubbles’) for a short while when parents went back to their workplaces but subsequent restrictions led to a drop in numbers which made continuation unviable.

In theory lettings were possible in the early autumn but numbers were limited to 14 because of the distancing rules and only one small letting took place in addition to Barneys. Hirers were obliged to sign an addendum to the hiring agreement confirming adherence to the COVID measures set out in the risk assessment. The Management Committee will consider how something similar needs to be explicit in the hire agreement itself in future.

Lettings income was £4968.70 in 2020 compared to £9,236 in 2019 and £7,837 in 2018 (affected by summer closure for re-thatching). This substantial loss of lettings income was entirely due to COVID and the enforced closure of village halls and will continue into 2021. It is not known when village halls will be able to re-open or return to normal or whether the experience of COVID will have a longer-term effect on hiring. The Management Committee will devise a marketing strategy for the Reading Room and ensure that the highest standards of hygiene remain in place permanently to reassure potential users.

Huntingdonshire District Council has been providing businesses forced to close with financial support for loss of income and village halls have been included in this. The Reading Room received £11,334 in support from HDC in 2020 and has already been notified of further support for 2021.

11. The Gransden Sportsfield and Recreational Association. Cllr Ginn summarised the main points taken from the minutes of the AGM of the GSRA held on 31st March 2021. These minutes along with the unaudited accounts are filed as Appendix No. 6.

Currently, there is approximately £46,000 in the bank. The Committee wants to keep a reserve fund to cover 2 years’ expenditure (approx. £20,000). £10,000 has been committed to the tennis club to support the installation of a new toilet block.

Approximately £5000.00 is needed for new security gate, pending finalisation of details.

The remaining amount (circa £15,000) is available for other projects. Options include car park repair, field drainage, outdoor gym etc.

12. The Gransdens Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Society. In Deb Greenland’s absence, Jeff Gorton presented the report that is filed as Appendix No 7. There have been some changes to plot assignment this year as some people moved on, and new members joined. All plots are allocated at this time, and there are few people on the waiting list. It is expected that some plots (or half plots) will become available in the Summer. The Autumn 2020 Risk Assessment was conducted and, apart from the need to keep abreast of compost bin turning to disrupt vermin, things have improved. The Pest Controller from HDC was called out twice last year.

There being no other business this meeting was closed at 8.19pm.