

# **MINUTES OF THE NORTHCHAPEL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

## **Held on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

### **At Northchapel Village Hall at 7.30pm**

**Present from the Parish Council:** Mr Alex Baker, Miss Laura Green, Mr Melvin Greet, Mrs Sharon Holden, Mr John Sochovsky and Mr Ed Warren

**Also present:** No members of the public  
Mrs Helen Cruikshank (Clerk)

The Chairman welcomed all to the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting (APM). As previously agreed written reports from the various organisations were read out by the Parish Clerk.

**1. Apologies for absence:** Parish Councillor Mrs Daphne Trussler

**2. Minutes of the 2022 Annual Parish Meeting:** The minutes of the 2022 Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> April were approved and signed as a correct record.

#### **3. Parish Council's Chairman's report: Sharon Holden**

Welcome everyone. Rarely do we get members of the public to our meetings but you are always very welcome.

We continue to support many local organisations giving grants or donations to St Michaels Church, Northchapel Primary School, Little Oaks Pre-School, Fruit & Flower Show, Village Hall, Waverley Citizen's Advice Bureau, Petworth Cottage Hospital, Kent, Surrey and Sussex Air Ambulance and Petworth over 60's Club.

We continue to maintain the village and in particular the village green with fortnightly grass cutting from April to October. Many thanks to Laura who ensures this is done well. The Coronation grant from CDC has been used to purchase another bench for the Village Green and can be used by everyone. This will arrive in July. We also continue to organise and pay for the grass cutting in the Churchyard. The play area had to have the playhouse removed as it was deemed to be dangerous this was added to the village bonfire.

Sadly, we have lost two of our councillors – Rob Moss & Amanda Harman who have decided they needed to revisit their work/life balance. Although Rob will continue to look after our winter plan. My thanks go to both of them and to all my other fellow councillors who work tirelessly with me to do the best for our Parish. Thanks to our District and County Councillors who attend as many meetings as they can and who are always at the end of an email ready to help. Thank you to Willie who continues to oversee the allotments. Huge thanks must go to our hardworking and efficient Clerk, Helen who continues to be a great asset not only to myself as chair but to all council members.

Laura Green thanked Sharon Holden for her hard work and commitment as Parish Council Chair.

#### **4. Youth Club report: Ed Warren**

Ed reported that it has been just over a year since we formed our youth club. Now thanks to the leadership of Emily formerly and now Bianca Dowsett, along with a great core of helpers, it is thriving and going from strength to strength. The older children are now also starting to take supervised visits into the club as well. The parents are all very supportive and the children are as much a joy, as a challenge too, typical of their varied ages.

Nothing would be possible without the support of not just the amazing helpers, but the parish council too. Namely Laura and John who are staunch helpers most weeks.

Thanks to Emily Stocker who has now stepped aside due to expecting a baby herself. She was very keen and gave her time to help the club run. Now in Bianca, it's also in very good hands. Also, with Frances Bayliss and her many years of experience, the future is very bright.

We also now have a newly formed Toddler group on a Friday mornings term time 9-11, which we hope will be every bit the success the youth club has been. Thanks to Deborah Coggin for her support, and Laura and the PTA for being the force behind it with insurance etc.

Here's to many more years.

### **5. Churchyard report: Clifford Bell**

Work to pollard the lime trees, plane and willow in the churchyard has recently been completed by the contractor. The result is a significant change to the amount of light brought in to the pollarded area. This is benefitting the extensive flower growth with the best show of primroses, cowslips and other native flora this year. Additionally, a fallen tree was removed earlier in the year which had collapsed across a gravestone. Grass cutting by the contractor has been highly effective in regulating excessive growth and ensuring access to graves. All of this work was funded by the parish council.

There have been three burials in the last twelve months and several interments of ashes. The lower part of the churchyard is now in use and the need to make best use of all available space is apparent. For that purpose the monthly work party is clearing vegetation near the southern boundary to ensure access, light and eventual space for burials. Additionally, the footpath is maintained to ensure easy access to both church and churchyard. It is a popular route not only for walkers but also for school pupils between their homes and bus collection point.

Limiting waste from the churchyard is a challenge as much of the material is plastic, such as flower wrappers and Oasis sponge, which cannot be composted and has to be separated. There is also an occasional problem with people leaving glass containers for flowers which tend to get lost in the grass and get broken. The use of real flowers and naturally degradable decorations are preferred.

I will mention the churchyard shed which is used to store tools, a barrow and material for repairs. It is in a dilapidated state and will need restoration in the for near future.

Attracting volunteers to the work party was reduced during the period of Covid restrictions and has not really recovered. All volunteers are welcome to help keep our churchyard in good shape and any message the parish council can propagate to that effect will be welcomed.

In closing can I express a heartfelt thanks to the Parish council for its funding of the churchyard through contractors. It has really made a difference and on behalf of the parochial church council I convey thanks. Finally, we do hope that funding continues for future years.

### **6. School report: Deborah Coggin**

Northchapel has been on a journey of change since the pandemic. Ofsted inspected us in 2022, we remained a 'Good' School, with some areas to work on. Staff and governors have worked tirelessly over the past year to implement these changes with the advice from the local authority. Through our journey, we have worked closely with a small school federation in Kent, 'Aspire Federation' and Executive Headteacher Emma Hinkley. The area we have focused on with them was to improve our curriculum content to cover the necessary change to 3-year cohorts in a class. Other areas have included Phonics training for all staff and focusing on our SEND offer to parents and the adaptation of our curriculum for all children to be successful

and make good progress in their learning. We expect Ofsted to return soon to inspect the recommended changes and improvements.

Since September 2022, we have seen a number a change to staffing, with 3 new teachers being brought in to drive change and improvements in the teaching and learning. They have settled well and are working hard to improve outcomes and make the school a great place to come and learn.

Nationally, there has been a decline in numbers of children attending maintained primary schools, and there is nowhere that has felt it as hard, as Northchapel Primary. We have recently seen a progressive decline in numbers attending the school, with very few, new families attracted to living in the area. This is an area of concern for all of the schools in the Rother Valley locality, but Northchapel has been hit the hardest, along with Stedham Primary. However, we are pleased to report that over the last year and next year our numbers of intake in reception are on the increase. We have had 9 new starters in 22/23, rising to an expected 13 or 14 in 23/24. We hope to maintain these intakes over the coming year to increase numbers.

Our amazing Parents & Teachers Association (PTA), who have worked diligently and alongside the villagers of Northchapel to raise a good amount. In September last year, they donated £4000 to the school, alongside the Parish Council to make urgent repairs to the outdoor classroom, install new raised beds for our keen gardeners, Forest School, Pantomime Travel and a trip to the London museums, Natural History and Science Museum for the whole school in February 2023.

We continue to develop a strong ethos of enjoyment for reading and our achievement in reading outcomes meets National standards. Our Book Week focus this year was based on the author Emily Gravett and we took part in a clean-up of the village and Little Woods as part of our focus on the book 'Tidy'. We had a fabulous dress up day for characters from books written or illustrated by Emily Gravett on the last day of term in February.

At the end of the spring term, the children who have music lessons, participate in the choir and years 4-6 performed in the spring concert, arranged by our very own music specialist, Anneli James.

The children were also proud to participate in the celebrations of the King's Coronation last week, cakes and fruit were provided by the PTA and the children all came together with Little Oaks Pre-school, to sing songs. We even performed our own Coronation Carol to the parents at the end of the day.

Thank you to a local community trust fund we have been able to reinstate our Emotional Literacy Support Assistant for a year. We will be looking for external funds to ensure that we are still able to offer this support to the children and families. As part of our therapeutic approach to behaviour and wellbeing, we have introduced 2 cocker spaniels, Olive and Ivy to the school, Miss Coggin's dogs. They have provided a beneficial support to children to help calm and soothe, bring interest and enjoyment and have also aided the wellbeing of staff around the school. A soothing pat, lick and cuddle cheers everyone up! Children have also overcome fears of dogs. We hope to introduce more animals to the school in the future as the benefits are so worth it.

Community projects:

- Carol Concerts for the senior citizens of Northchapel village Christmas dinner.
- Choir performed at the 9 Lessons & Carol service at St. Michael's Church.
- Scrub and Grub (PTA) event to highlight the importance of raising money for the children's residential to Oxford (Y5&6) and Polaris Survival Camp (Y4).
- Hosting a Mother and Baby group on Friday mornings in the school hall. This has been open since Easter.
- Working with South Coast Sports to provide holiday clubs at the school for disadvantaged pupils and for holiday childcare purposes.
- Community swimming and use of the pool has been able to continue, thanks to community volunteers who help to maintain the pool and run sessions.
- Working with the village to run events for the whole community, such as, the Village Fair.
- Regular services at St Michael's Church, promoting the Christian community and educating children to appreciate and understand the annual cycle of religious observance and festivals.
- Working with the local allotment to raise awareness of living a healthy lifestyle through gardening club.

- The list goes on...

## Challenges

- Finances impacted by budgets cut by the government over the past 4 years. Increasing staff wages rising and lower numbers of children attending the school all impact and limit resources.
- Recruitment and retention are impacting our local rural schools significantly currently.
- Building condition – the school is in need of urgent repairs to the roof, drains and redecoration throughout. This will be a focus of a community project over the coming years.

## Little Oaks Pre-school

The pre-school has successfully risen from previous challenges of pupil numbers and being financially viable. Good advertising and the loss of other local pre-schools has helped raise the profile and numbers. Sharon Hill, the pre-school lead, has expanded her team considerably over the past year. Our aim is to market for new pupils for next year, with a large number of the children moving on to Primary School in September. The pre-school children have all participated in some great events over the past year. 'Susie Song time' visited regularly to inspire singing and dancing. Little Street visited to give the children a fantastic role play session. Recently they were visited by local farmer Paul Gibbs who brought a lamb to the school for a hands-on session for the children.

## **7. Village Hall report: Jane Dadswell**

The Hall has had an unremarkable year, but the lottery, lunch club, Pilates and Quiz evening continuing to provide an excellent source of revenue. General hire (bookings & functions) was down compared to last year which is concerning.

We continue to keep on top of repairs and maintenance and there have also been some exceptional items of expenditure. These have created a deficit for the full year of £4,612 this can almost entirely be explained by an upgrade to the lighting £2,120 and the new cooker £2,420. A generous contribution to the cost of the cooker was made by the Parish Council but this was booked in the 2021/22 accounts, the delay in ordering was due to us being unable to find a suitable cooker that didn't require three phase electricity being installed at vast expense.

We are acutely aware that there are a number of major items of expenditure for the coming year. Decoration of the main hall which has suffered a lot of wear and tear over the past year and the car park which is in urgent need of repair. Before these items, we are anticipating a loss of £1,000, including these items the projected shortfall is £6,000. We will discuss the cost benefit of sound proofing at our next meeting. But as Trustees our objective must be to try and ensure that the hall breaks even, at the very least.

## **8. Sports Club: Laura Green (Secretary)**

Laura reported that there was a big push for football team for the next season. It has grown again but since Covid it has suffered with lots of away games cancelled. The Sports Club wants to keep the football going as it is important but more players are required.

Stoolball has re-started for the summer but it too has suffered since Covid. There are not so many teams going now so there are less matches.

Planning for the proposed MUGA has had to be re-submitted as it had expired. The application has yet to be validated as there are more reports required than before. It is hoped permission will be achieved very soon so fundraising can re-start and lottery grant applications can be applied for. Laura is going to speak to the person who managed the Fernhurst pavilion project who will hopefully give some advice and share some learning. There is currently £30,000 in the pot for the MUGA project.

## **9. Parish News: Debbie Rumbold**

Over the last year the parish magazine has undergone several changes. Due to financial restraints I have had to reduce the number of pages and the number of copies printed each month. It is a shame because the magazine was beginning to attract articles from the surrounding villages but I have been asked to prioritize Northchapel and Ebernoe submissions to save space.

It has not grown in the way I expected it to as the support I received in the first year is no longer there. When we discussed the magazine there were several offers to go out and interview people locally who had a

story to tell, but sadly this has not materialized. The school have also not given me any articles for several months which is a real shame. We do have our core contributors who faithfully send me something every month, which really lift the magazine. There must be clubs within the villages who would like to contribute, giving villagers information on what's going on and how to join in, but sadly I am unaware of any. Is there anything like a sewing circle, W.I. or walking group, for example, that people have contact with and who would like to encourage greater membership?

All that being said I think that people do enjoy the magazine and would miss it if it wasn't there. There has also been talk of the magazine going online but this would exclude quite a number of villagers who are not computer literate, so for the moment I believe that a paper copy will be produced.

I have been advertising in the magazine for a volunteer to take over the editing as due to personal circumstances I will not be able to continue after September. I hope that someone is found soon so that I can hand over and the magazine can continue to be published. So far, I have not been contacted by anyone interested although Sharon indicated that maybe the PCC would undertake this role.

## **10. Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

*The meeting was closed at 7.55pm*

Signed..... Dated.....