

Annual Parish Assembly – 25.5.21

DRAFT

CHAIRMAN: Ron Dark

CLERK: Jenny Hollington

MINUTES OF THE SHEET ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY TUESDAY, 25TH MAY 2021 AT 7.00 P.M. AT SHEET VILLAGE HALL

PRESENT: Ron Dark (in the Chair) Gail Martin Tony Clear
Robin Forrest Chris Wilton

IN ATTENDANCE: Russell Oppenheimer (County Councillor)
Nick Drew (District Councillor)
Jenny Hollington (Clerk)

APOLOGIES: Cllrs. Alan Biddlecombe, Brian Bird and Will Glancy

There were 4 members of public present

APA21/01 **MINUTES – ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY 2019** – The Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on Thursday, 9th May 2019 were approved and signed.

APA21/02 **ANNUAL REPORT** – The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that because of the pandemic which dominated 2020 and early 2021, there had been no Annual Parish Assembly in 2021. This year's Assembly has been organised with social distancing regulations in mind, so sadly there was to be no speaker and no socialising with wine and nibbles after the meeting as per the normal format of the Sheet Annual Parish Assembly.

With input from Parish Councillors with responsibility for various areas/assets, the Chairman reported on Parish Council activities over the past 2-years, as follows:

Elections – Elections were held in May 2019 and 7 Councillors were returned unopposed. This left one vacancy following the resignation of Vaughan Clarke, and Sheet P.C. were pleased to welcome Chris Wilton on board.

Coronavirus – During the pandemic, new government regulations were passed to authorise virtual meetings and Sheet Parish Council resorted to monthly on-line Teams meetings. Agendas were advertised as normal with details of how to join the meetings.

It became apparent from early on, that the more vulnerable members of the parish would require support. The Parish Clerk received enquiries from prospective volunteers and after consultation with Councillors, a circular was had delivered to every household offering support for those needing assistance in any way. Over 60 Sheet parishioners volunteered to help – something that we should all be very proud of! The joint initiative was co-ordinated by Jean Morgan (Age Concern Village Agent), Jenny Hollington and, of course, the volunteers, and was a great success - the efforts of all involved was greatly appreciated by very many vulnerable residents as well as members of the Parish Council.

Planning – Sheet Parish Council is a statutory consultee for all planning applications within the parish and as a result have made views known on a steady stream of applications - mostly quite straightforward. No major issues have arisen.

Roads and Traffic – The Chairman introduced Cllr. Gail Martin who has led on roads and traffic problems on behalf of the Parish Council - she has covered a phenomenal amount of work over the past couple of years, for which the Parish Council is very grateful.

Cllr. Martin explained that as well as day-to-day issues, the overriding concerns during 2019-2021 were:

- To increase safety for all people passing through the village
- To eliminate the persistent problem of large vehicles becoming stuck in Village Street
- To slow the speed of traffic on London Road, Pulens Lane and Inmans Lane

Annual Parish Assembly – 25.5.21

In 2018 S.106 money arising from the development at Tanners Reach was used to commission a feasibility study via Hampshire Highways to pinpoint locations in the centre of the village which needed attention – 9 locations were identified, and the junction of School Lane and Farnham Road with its crumbling steps and use by high numbers of children, and mothers with prams, was prioritised. This project to ensure safe pedestrian access to School Lane was finally completed in April this year.

As part of this scheme, a new TRO was necessary to regulate traffic access to and from School Lane which put a delay into the scheme - this was only one of a number that had to be overcome. The support of individuals such as County Councillor, Russell Oppenheimer, and the excellent work of Alex Hawkins, EHDC's road engineer, were essential to helping us achieve a successful result.

The other project which has just been concluded is the narrowing of the London Road junction with Village Street to prevent large vehicles turning in to the very narrow Street from the A272. The buildout has just been installed and village gates are due to be installed shortly. This is the result of a CFI (Community Funded Initiative) between Sheet P.C. and Hampshire Highways, and it is intended that there will be a second phase of the project to also narrow Village Street at the Farnham Road end (on the Village Hall side of the road) once a traffic survey to assess what the impact the new School Lane junction has on traffic around the Village Green.

Other smaller issues which have been dealt with since May 2019 include:

Flooding Issues - A blocked culvert near to Laundry Cottage has caused intermittent problems over many years. Conversations with Hampshire Highways led to their accepting responsibility for clearing it and to reducing the tree roots which have added to the problem.

In 2019 a WhatsApp Flood Group was successfully established to co-ordinate alerts immediately floodwater starts to accumulate in the River Rother. In addition, the Parish Council has provided a Flood Pod, which is sited in the Millennium Field car park and stocked it with lightweight sandbags accessible to Mill Lane residents whose properties are affected.

Yet to be dealt with is the flooding which occurs at the junction of Mill Lane and Village Street after heavy rain. The Council is supporting the efforts of a local resident to establish responsibility for the clearing of a nearby drain which it is hoped will soon be resolved.

Erosion of the bank in Mill Lane - The eroding bank alongside the allotments has been discussed with Hampshire Highways and as a result, specialists were called in to analyse the soil before action was decided upon. Work to stabilise the bank was delayed due to funding constraints but, in the event, nature seems to have partly resolved the problem. The commitment by HCC to resurface the Lane remains.

The other area of erosion occurred on the Rother riverbank – following conversations with the Environment Agency, it was agreed that members of the Hampshire Monday Group, led by Cllr. Biddlecombe, would construct a berm to reinforce the area. The result in July 2020 was very pleasing but within months the berm had been destroyed by dogs being allowed to enter the river at that point. It has been decided to leave things as they are for now since establishing that there is no danger to the stability of the nearby telegraph pole.

The Parish Council has also played a part in the following issues:

- Regularising chicane parking in School Lane
- Support of a campaign to reducing emissions from car engines left idling
- Liaison with the emergency services to ensure their vehicles can access via tight spots in Village Street and Mill Lane.
- Support for speed watch groups monitoring speeds on Inmans Lane, Pulens Lane and London Road.
- Liaison with EHDC and Hampshire Highways to organise a trial of Speed Limit Reminder signage to monitor speed of traffic on London Road and Pulens Lane.

The Millennium Field – Cllr. Clear reported that the field continues to be well used and enjoyed. It is noticeable that there are now many more species of wildflowers. A new community orchard has been planted and, in addition, over 100 whips were planted in conjunction with the Woodland Trust. A new dog bin has also very recently been installed to try to prevent the bin in the car park spilling over. The Chairman thanked Cllr. Clear for his hard work, especially with the watering of the new planting during dry spells – it had been no easy task!

Annual Parish Assembly – 25.5.21

Grass Cutting Contract/Lengthsman – Sheet P.C. were sad to lose the services of Bill Robinson at the end of March – his work had been both timely and excellent. Tom Hartley, who had worked with Bill from time to time, has been appointed for 21-22.

Village Hall – Cllr. Wilton reported that things have been very quiet at the Village Hall due to the pandemic and it is just starting to come to life again now that social restrictions are being lifted - the Management Committee are looking forward to welcoming back regular hirers as soon as possible.

The disabled toilet was refurbished in 2019 and the hall provides good facilities for many local groups and activities. Plans are now afoot to redecorate the exterior frontage over the summer months. Cllr. Wilton thanked Clare Glancy for her hard work in keeping the hall clean, safe, and well run.

Sheet Recreation Ground – Cllr. Forrest reported that the Recreation Ground continues to be well used and is popular across all ages. New doors have been installed on the shed to make it secure, and hedging planted around it to shield and protect it from wayward footballs. New safety surfacing has been installed around the table tennis table. Cllr. Forrest continues to inspect the play equipment bi-weekly, and a more in-depth safety check is carried out quarterly by Steve Day.

Village Green – The recommended survey and pruning of the Horse Chestnut has been carried out and a wonderful time-lapse film of the pruning of the tree can be viewed via the Sheet Village website – the tree is now in beautiful shape again thanks to Jamie Myers and his team.

Allotments – Cllr. Forrest reported that the allotments have never looked better than during the recent lockdown and it has been wonderful to see ploholders making the most of additional spare time to enjoy their green space. All the plots are currently taken and there is a now a waiting list.

The perennial problem of large potholes in the track will be addressed in the coming months with tarmac planings as opposed to scalplings which tend to sink into the soil profile.

BMX Track – Cllr. Forrest is in regular contact with the BMX Track User Group, and there is a good relationship between the Parish Council and the Group who regularly help clear up rubbish on the Common and alert the Parish Council to any problems. The BMX track is inspected quarterly, and any issues are dealt with. In addition, both Cllr. Forrest and Cllr. Biddlecombe regularly walk and inspect the area.

Sheet Common – In Cllr. Biddlecombe's absence, the Chairman reported on his continued hard work in looking after the Common. Cllr. Biddlecombe is a member of the newly formed, hard-working Hampshire Monday Group - a team of local volunteers who cut back and tidy the area to ensure it can be enjoyed by all. In return, Sheet Parish Council together with Hampshire County Council provided grant funding towards the purchase of several essential tools for the group.

APM21/03 **FINANCE REPORT 2019-21** – The Chairman reported that the precept had been held steady for 2019-20 and 2020-2021, and residents will benefit from a slight reduction during 21-22. A breakdown of the end of year figures 20-21 was circulated to those present and is attached to these minutes. Any resident who wishes to inspect the accounts can do so by contacting the Parish Clerk and more information can also be found on the website.

In general, Sheet Parish Council finishes the financial year 20-21 in good shape and broadly on budget with only a very few anomalies. Income from the Village Hall has, of course, been much reduced from that of previous years, due to the pandemic – however, this has been offset in part by a £10,000 Government support grant and reduced running costs. In addition, the £6000 provision for the repair or replacement of windows was not required and S.106 monies in the sum of £4700 was received to help cover the cost of the refurbishment of the disabled toilet facilities.

Currently income exceeds budget at the allotments reflecting the high demand for plots over the past year. Of the budgeted £19,000 for new road schemes only the admin fee of £1250 has been spent – although it was noted that one of the projects will be completed shortly – this cost for narrowing Village Street will be met from general reserves.

Annual Parish Assembly – 25.5.21

APM21/04 **COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT** – County Councillor, Russell Oppenheimer, was welcomed to the meeting. He said he was very pleased to have been re-elected in May and promised to continue to work hard for residents of Sheet. He had missed being able to canvass around the area during the pandemic as it is always interesting to meet with and hear resident's views.

The year has, of course, been dominated by Covid but Cllr. Oppenheimer said how proud he was of local communities and the way local councils had worked together. The cost of the pandemic is still being counted at Hampshire County Council and the precise amount not yet known. There will, of course, be less funding generally for Parish Councils in the immediate future, but he hoped the finances would soon be on a more substantial footing.

Cllr. Oppenheimer's full report is appended to the Minutes and will be made available via the Sheet Parish Council website.

APM21/05 **DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT** – District Councillor, Nick Drew was welcomed to the meeting – Cllr. Drew's ward covers Froxfield, Privet, Steep and Sheet. He praised the work of Sheet Parish Council who set a great example during the pandemic and worked hard for their residents – chasing, engaging, and getting people involved.

Cllr. Drew explained that the EHDC offices at Penns Place had been closed during the pandemic and officers have been working from home. However, they had worked hard to co-ordinate services across the district to support residents, communities, and businesses and to keep essential services going. EHDC's finances remain relatively strong, having invested in businesses and property, and maintained a strong financial budget - no services have had to be cut.

The Planning Department has been extremely busy as with more time spent at home many residents had contemplated home improvements. There had also been a large amount of compliance issues to deal with and Cllr. Drew confirmed that officers are now back on site and any concerns will be addressed.

The notable increase in visitors to the area during lockdown had unfortunately brought with it an unwanted increase in litter – EHDC litter officers are back on the streets and more serious problems should be reported to EHDC.

APM21/06 **OPEN FORUM**

Allotments – It was queried whether it would be appropriate to create “starter” plots from a vacated large plot to help reduce the waiting list and to enable residents to get started. The Clerk confirmed that most people on the waiting list do want a smaller plot, and this is being explored.

Sheet Common – Having witnessed bonfires on Sheet Common during lockdown, it was queried whether the Parish Council would consider installing a barbeque, to stop this problem? The Chairman said that Sheet Parish Council has tried this and installed a barbeque in 2018 - however it seems that residents prefer making fires!

Verge Cutting – It was queried what the Parish Council's approach to verge cutting was? The Chairman explained that HCC are responsible for cutting the verges. Cllr. Oppenheimer said that HCC are working closely on this subject with a group called Plant Life and are following their guidance that an early cut is best. He also noted a trial being carried out by Froxfield Parish Council who have taken responsibility for their parish's verges and aren't cutting them over the summer. He will keep Sheet P.C.informed of the results of this trial – if successful it could be rolled out to other parishes.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending this year's rather strange socially distanced Annual Parish Assembly

The meeting closed at 8.00 p.m.