

ASCOTT UNDER WYCHWOOD PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON MONDAY 30 APRIL 2012
AT THE TIDDY HALL AT 7.30 pm

Councillors Present: Rob Morgan (Chairman)
Bridgette Crundwell (Vice Chairman)
Laurence Mellor
Philippa Carter
CCllr Rodney Rose
DCllr Hilary Hibbert-Biles

Responsible Financial Officer: Stuart Fox

Parish Clerk: Angela Barnes

Members of the public:

APS 1256 Lindsay Nursaw and PC 6894 Mick Anderton (Thames Valley Police),
Clive Fieth, Mary Fieth, Nigel Wild, Wendy Pearse, Jim Pearse, Pauline Plant,
Roger Shepherd, Pete Moss, Elaine Byles and Mark Pidgeon,

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Pauline Marshall, Mark Dawbarn, John Cull, Debra Cull, Jane Ridley.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the Annual Meeting held on Monday 18 April 2011 were agreed, dated, signed and filed.

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This is my second annual report as Chairman of the Parish Council having been duly elected in May 2010. The Parish Council has met eleven times during the year and we have continued our quarterly walkabouts of the village to assess the condition of our various assets which helps us in preparing our Risk Assessments.

There have been several notable successes during the year. The Parish Notice Boards around the village and the entrance gates to the playground have been refurbished, as has the stone track to the sports pavilion. We have also arranged for the dedication plaque at the entrance to the sports ground to be refurbished before the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. We have signed a licence agreement with Network Rail to allow us to renovate the area on the southwest corner of London Lane and Shipton Road, opposite Sunset House. The Helpers of Ascott group has been formed and has successfully undertaken various tasks around the village during the year.

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT cont'd

There have been a small number of planning applications submitted for consideration. As last year one planning application that did affect us all was that submitted for the Swan Public House. This application was refused by West Oxfordshire Planning Sub-committee at its April meeting.

December featured the third Carols round the Christmas tree which again proved to be very enjoyable and we were pleased to see an increased attendance.

Following requests from parishioners it was decided that the lights on the tree should be left on permanently during the Christmas period.

The annual litter pick took place in January this year and a very large amount of litter was collected. The Parish Council has decided that future litter picks should also be in January because the vegetation has not started to grow and also the 'Christmas litter' can be removed.

February brought snow and the opportunity to test both the Parish Contingency Plan and the new gritter. Both worked well. It was not necessary to use the snow plough but it is always comforting to know that it is there.

In March the playground sub-committee held meetings with three equipment suppliers to assess what could be done to enhance the present equipment. Also in March the Parish Council agreed to form a sub-committee with interested parties in the village in order to assess any further planning applications for the Swan Public House and to present the best case for it to re-open.

One problem which is on-going within the village is the amount of dog mess which is being deposited. Parishioners should be aware that it is an offence not to remove any dog mess and put it in the bins provided. It is always the few who spoil it for the many.

Another problem which has been on-going is the effect of the tower light at the level crossing on the surrounding area. The Parish Council heard today that Network Rail has issued an order to their contractor to erect shields around the light so that the illumination is only directed on to the area of the level crossing. Finally my thanks are extended to my fellow councillors, our Parish Clerk and to parishioners for their co-operation, assistance in pointing out things that needed doing and for their patience when it has taken longer than one would have wished. My thanks are also extended to County Councillor Rodney Rose and District Councillor Mrs Hilary Hibbert-Biles who have attended most of the PC meetings and who have helped to get things done at County and District level respectively.

4. PARISH FINANCIAL REPORT

Stuart Fox, the Responsible Financial Officer reported that the Parish started 2011/12 with cash in hand of £8,310 and set a precept for that year of £10,875 an increase of £375 (or 3.57%) on 2010/11, with the aim of maintaining a similar year end balance in March 2012. However, during the year it became apparent that some additional expenditure on Parish property, which had not been budgeted for, was required.

4. PARISH FINANCIAL REPORT cont'd

These items included £476 for repairs to playing field gates, £296 to refurbish the notice boards, £2,143 to repair the roadway in the playing field and £500 for additional fencing also in the playing field. These items of expenditure are included in the accounts under the heading Buildings & Services. These additional costs reduced the Parish general fund as at 31st March 2012 to £7,544, a level that was felt to be rather low, hence the increase in 2012/13 precept to £14,550. This large increase was also as a result of having to set the precept before we knew if we were going to receive our grant towards the purchase of the snow plough and grit spreader, having already purchased the snow plough and contracted to purchase the grit spreader.

During 2011/12 the Parish received two significant grants: £8,625 to purchase equipment to clear snow and ice and pay any costs involved and £2,000 for work at the Railway Station to improve and soften the overall appearance. We have spent £4,525 of the snow and ice clearance grant on a snow plough attachment and a grit spreader. This leaves £4,100 to be spent by March 2013. If this is not spent by that date the money will have to be returned. We have spent £1,663 of the railway grant, building a retaining wall for a new flower bed, leaving £337 carried forward to set against future costs.

Ignoring the above exceptional items our core costs were actually £600 lower than the previous year.

Our year end bank balance was £10,559 and we are owed £2,192 which includes advance payments and a VAT refund of £1,626, making the net worth of the Parish £12,216. Of this total £4,100 may be refundable if not spent on snow & ice clearance, £235 has been donated for playground improvements and £337 must be spent on the Railway Station, leaving £7,544 for the general Parish funds.

5. PARISH CONTINGENCY PLAN

Cllr Carter reported that the stretch of the River Evenlode designated High Priority by the Environment Agency (EA) is between the A361 road bridge at Shipton-under-Wychwood and the Chipping Norton Road Bridge at Ascott-under-Wychwood. Ascott Parish Council keeps a watchful eye on the river from the Parish boundary at Gypsy Lane to the Chipping Norton Road Bridge and communicates with responsible party/ies when there is a problem.

Residents, particularly those who suffered flooding in July 2007, were perplexed and angry when the EA tipped stone into the river downstream of the Chipping Norton Road Bridge. This was to help improve fish stocks but some felt that it was a retrograde step when the EA had supported and partly paid for clearing under the road bridge not long before. The officer for flood risk management assured us that the quantity of stone would not have a detrimental effect but accepted that other sites should have been sought.

5. PARISH CONTINGENCY PLAN cont'd

For several years now regular meetings and communications have taken place between the PC and the EA Flood risk Officer but since that incident I have also developed good working relations with officers from the Conservation and Fisheries departments and have asked all 3 officers to keep the Parish Council informed of any future issues or developments. Recent meetings with the EA, landowners and the Chairman of the Fishing Club, Pete Moss, have concentrated on finding a way to keep the river well-maintained whilst at the same time preserving a healthy balance of wildlife and vegetation.

Pete Moss has voiced concerns about low stocks of fish in this reach and an interesting discussion took place with the EA officers responsible for fisheries and conservation. This could lead, within 2-3 years, to the river being linked to one or more breeding pools, but taking care that these pools will not adversely affect flood risk management. Also under consideration are links being created for fish to pass more easily between the reaches at Shipton and Ascott where there are sluice gates. The reach at Shipton has better fish stocks

There have also been 2 occasions when someone has built a dam under the Gypsy Lane bridleway bridge. Landowners have very angrily had to dismantle these. Whoever is responsible should bear in mind that this is private land and they were therefore trespassing. Also, it is essential for flood relief that all three bridges (bridleway, rail and road) are kept as clear as possible at all times. There have been several occasions when residents or councillors have removed items of rubbish from within the river or from the river banks and one occasion when the Environment Agency was called to remove a fallen tree trunk. They responded very promptly.

At present there is no concern about serious blockages in the river between Gypsy Lane and the Chipping Norton Road bridge but an acceptable method of keeping reeds under control is currently being sought, so that growth does not become too difficult and costly to manage. During this heavy spell of rain the river has stayed in banks and the roads have not been flooded by the usual brooks, streams or culverts. Yesterday water was gushing through the culvert under the Chipping Norton Road and freely flowing through the Charity field, so many thanks to all parties involved in having that cleared this year.

We have very recently been informed that the EA has completed surveys at Ascott, Shipton and Milton and has built a new hydrological model. They are currently running this model to see if recent works to alleviate flooding will change the EA flood risk maps and they hope to have results shortly. I shall report to the Parish Council as soon as the results are known and contact residents who would be affected by the change in mapping. Our thanks go to all who have kept an eye on the river at Ascott and contacted us when they see a problem. Please continue to do so.

5. PARISH CONTINGENCY PLAN cont'd

Cllr Mellor reported that the Parish Council has invested £3,000 in the purchase of a snow plough in an effort to ensure that vehicular access to the village is maintained during severe winter weather.

To supplement this and further increase our ability to respond the Parish Council submitted a bid to Oxfordshire's Big Society Fund for £8,625 to allow the purchase of a grit spreader, bulk store of grit, pavement plough, shovels and protective equipment. The bid was approved and the grit spreader was used on several occasions in February during a period of snow fall and icy roads, further equipment will be purchased during the summer.

The Parish Council is very grateful to Chris Badger for his help and support with this project and the fact that he has kindly offered to store the plough, gritter and grit. Chris together with 2 of his drivers, plus Robin Walker and David Cooke have all volunteered to be available to drive the machinery if required.

6. ASCOTT- UNDER- WYCHWOOD SPORTS CLUB

Cllr Mellor read his report - first of all my thanks to Cllr Philippa Carter for all her hard work as Secretary and Treasurer in running the bookings diary and keeping a careful eye on costs. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mary Barnes, who cleans the Pavilion and always goes beyond her call of duty, keeping a careful eye on it and reporting anything necessary to either myself or Cllr Carter.

The Club and especially the football teams continue to thrive; we have a men's senior team, ladies team and youth team who all play regularly. During the summer with the help of generous donations from the Parish Council and Village Charity we were able to install new goal posts and nets to replace the old ones which had become rusty and bent.

Following a Fire Safety Inspection we have installed 2 heat detectors, extra emergency exit signs and this summer will complete work on the exit leading from the kitchen door.

This summer we hope to provide a junior size football pitch with goals kindly loaned by the resident football team. We will also mark out a rounder's pitch and provide temporary cricket wickets to encourage people of all ages and abilities to have a go. Subject to funds being available we also hope to provide a volley ball net and pitch.

7. ALLOTMENTS

Cllr Mellor read his report - I am very pleased to report that allotment holders seem to be taking much more interest in their plots, some of which in the past had been neglected but are now a credit to the village. We have 2 vacant plots and are keen to see these taken into use. A review of rents for 2013 has been undertaken to ensure that costs are covered and to standardise the amount charged which in some cases was inconsistent. The last review was over 10 years ago so this was long overdue.

8. HELPERS OF ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD

The volunteer group 'Helpers of Ascott-under-Wychwood' was founded in August 2011.

The Parish Council is keen to maintain a safe and attractive village and it had been concerned that there were tasks around the village that were not being addressed as regularly as they should. Some issues were the responsibility of the PC, however many were the responsibility of other parties and over years these had been disputed or ignored, despite repeated reminders.

Following the successful example of the volunteer group in Shipton-under-Wychwood the PC decided to see if there was enthusiasm among our residents to help with these tasks. Over 50 volunteers came forward and it was agreed that 3-hourly sessions would be called at the end of every month, alternating Saturday mornings and Monday afternoons, as these were the days preferred by the majority. Those unable to work on either day were prepared to make themselves available for individual tasks when convenient.

It was agreed that this should never be an exclusive 'club' and that notices should be displayed to announce the next session so that all residents could attend if they wished.

The 'Helpers' have met most months since September and have undertaken tasks such as planting daffodils at the entrances to the village, litter picking, sprucing up the play park and cutting back ivy and brambles around the church and opposite the Signal Box. The enthusiasm of our volunteers is wonderful – we regularly have a dozen appear at the official session and others working 'behind the scenes'. I would like to record an enormous thank you on behalf of the Parish Council to everyone involved. I do hope that residents appreciate our efforts. As always, I would encourage anyone to speak to me about tasks that the 'Helpers' could undertake in the future or to explain misgivings they might have about tasks already completed.

8. HELPERS OF ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD cont'd

Ascott Station Enhancement

Last June Ascott-under-Wychwood held a Gardens Open weekend which raised a substantial sum of money. Yvette Keauffling was the organiser and many thanks must go to her as well as all involved. The funds raised were earmarked by Yvette for the enhancement of the village and are held by Ascott Village Charity awaiting Yvette's instructions. Some money was used to buy the daffodil bulbs, planted by the 'Helpers' in October and currently brightening our verges. It was decided that the rest should be used to add planting to soften the hard edges of our newly renovated station.

As current organiser of the 'Helpers' I was asked to negotiate with Network Rail and First Great Western, who are also keen to see the station 'enhanced'. Permission has been granted to work on designated station land and funds donated by Network Rail, First Great Western and the Cotswold Line Promotion Group. I would like to record our thanks for all their support and in particular for the tremendous support and enthusiasm given by Teresa Ceesay, our First Great Western Station Manager. Some NR funds have already been used to pay for a low retaining wall around the bank between the disabled ramp and the car park. Our strongest volunteers have worked really hard to clear the bank of weeds and it will soon be planted with a temporary red, white and blue theme to match the mood of the Queen's Jubilee. Under the guidance of Stuart Knight, son of Pat and Lorraine, we plan to undertake the permanent planting in the Autumn. There are already plant tubs on the platforms and we hope to install a trough (or two) in front of the ramp walls. NR has recently donated 3 renovated Great Western Railway benches.

9. MR RODNEY ROSE - COUNTY COUNCILLORS REPORT

HEALTH – during the last year, I have had major health problems and a major operation in November. I apologise for not seeing too many of your Parish Council Meetings during this period. I decided early on that I would avoid evening meetings to aid my recuperation. My PA and the Area Steward Group were there to cover for me, and I hope you found this successful and helpful. I am now well on the road to recovery, if you will pardon the pun.

CABINET POSITION – I retained Transport again, but with even more emphasis on Strategic Development. As a Member of the Cabinet, I have worked very hard to get the savings of £119M we require over the Council as a whole in the 4-year Medium Term, while trying to keep our front-line work intact. As an example, we have this week signed a ten year deal for an external provider for all our Facilities Management [inc. Cleaning and catering] which will save us in the region of £500,000 a year.

AREA STEWARDS - this operation is now bedding in quite well, and the Area Steward Fund seems well received – at least to the extent that we doubled the value of the fund to £2 Million in the current financial year. It is in the gift of each County Councillor to spend this money as they see fit, and it was my choice to share it equally between Parishes in my Division. The Area Steward is there to advise you on costs and possibilities, but it is up to me to decide how it is spent, which would only be along lines that you all help me to decide.

COUNCIL TAX – a zero increase again this year for the County, which amounts to about 80% of your bill

SEFRCC Ltd – at last the Regional FireControl Centres were disbanded, on which I was a Board Member. This due to a complete failure of the software designed by EADS to actually send a fire engine to the incoming 999 call with any real confidence. I was very glad I had used the Oxfordshire power of veto to prevent the £1.45M lease of the building in Fareham being taken up, with associated “on-costs”.

Dial-a-Ride – with Districts withdrawing from part-funding this provision, I have been happy to adopt what is not a statutory duty on behalf of the County, and keep a provision in West Oxfordshire to what we have been used to.

COGGES LINK ROAD – still await Sec Of State approval of Inspector’s Report following EIP, expected mid-May

LEADERSHIP ELECTION – Cllr Ian Hudspeth will become Leader of Oxfordshire County Council at the Annual Meeting of the Council on May 15th, with me as his Deputy.

THANKS - my thanks go to all on Ascott Parish Council for their support over the year, and especially to Angela for always keeping me in touch with Agendas, Minutes and especially Ascott Parish.

10. MRS HILARY HIBBERT-BILES DISTRICT COUNCILLORS REPORT

2011 -12 has been a difficult year for the Council given the difficulties with the economy nationally. All Councils have had to take the responsibility of cutting costs mainly through re organisation. In West Oxfordshire we have shared more officers with Cotswold District Council. We have still maintained our front line services.

The waste contract seems now to have bedded in and our recycling rates have now increased to 62%. Of course the Council are aiming for a higher rate in the future. Dean Pit closed amid a great deal of publicity and this in turn caused a great deal of worry to many – as to how we would manage without a tip. This seems to have abated, mainly due to the fact we have an increased service weekly in the District.

Council tax has again been frozen for the second year running and WODC is still the second lowest Council tax in the Country.

The First Aid unit at Chipping Norton hospital has been kept for a further two years and I will work towards an even better service for the area once the Chipping Norton G.Ps move their surgeries on site.

10. MRS HILARY HIBBERT-BILES DISTRICT COUNCILLORS REPORT cont'd

Concessional fares. These are now dealt with by OCC

A recent survey about how fair and helpful the Council are during inspections and visits, and when dealing with queries, found that 88% of the public are satisfied. The Councils building control team have an excellent 94% satisfaction rate.

I am no longer a Cabinet Member at WODC and it has been good to have a year with lighter duties. I serve on Economic & Social Committee and I also represent West Oxfordshire on the County Joint health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. As I served on planning for 6 years I am still called on to substitute however that is in my gift as to whether I do that.

Of course I am always available to any resident.

Finally I have received notification of flood alerts and the sandbag container at Tiddy is now open as I understand. Please contact me if there are any flooding issues I am able to help with. ANY TIME!!!

11. ORGANISATIONS REPORT

Chipping Norton Police

APS 1256 Lindsay Nursaw reported that there had been 10 reported crimes in Ascott-under-Wychwood from 1 April 2011 to 1 April 2012 which were broken down as follows:

- 1 criminal damage to a dwelling
- 3 thefts
- 1 harassment
- 1 domestic
- 1 assault.

In the period 1 March 2010 to 1 March 2011 there were 9 reported crimes, broken down as follows:

- 1 domestic
- 1 burglary (other than a dwelling)
- 1 assault (without injury)
- 2 thefts
- 1 hunting (Act offence)
- 1 harassment

APS 1256 Lindsay Nursaw reported that the hours Chipping Norton Police Station were currently manned were scheduled to be reduced and would be 10am to 2pm.

Cold Stone Angling

Pete Moss reported that this season has been a very good one, an all rounder for the club with a rise in membership, an excellent fund raising night with a record number of people attending. It was the club's 40th anniversary which was celebrated with a dinner and disco dance. This function was also very well attended and very much enjoyed by those attending.

Cold Stone Angling cont'd

He reported that on the downside the river from an angling aspect continues to deteriorate due mainly to low water levels and severe predators and so the outlook for the future looks very bleak. One thing which will go some way to help, was the stocking by the environment agency of approximately 3,000 small fish.

Financially the club remains in a stable position due mainly to our fund raising exploits. Finally on behalf of the club I would like to thank the patrons of the Village for all their support especially at our functions.

Pre-School

Pauline Plant read her report - Ascott Pre-school has had another busy year with numbers continuing to be high, children coming from Ascott and surrounding villages giving a total of 43 children on roll. We aim to give priority to those in the village itself and those who have had siblings in Pre-school. We have a strong management committee run by parents who help to ensure the smooth running of Pre-school. Staffing has remained the same – 7 contracted staff and 2 supply with additional back up from Leafield Pre-school when needed. Links with Leafield have continued -sharing staff, knowledge and resources.

The children have experienced a wide range of themes during the year including minibeasts, traditional stories and rhymes, colours, animals and their babies, festivals, seasons, harvest, holidays, music and lifecycles – we have recently had tadpoles from our frogspawn and 6 eggs have hatched into chicks in our incubator.

Forest School continues to flourish and we currently have 2 groups of our older children carrying various activities at Bruern Woods by kind permission of the Astor family. The children have been out in all weathers and come back extremely muddy.

Cookery Club runs weekly for groups of 4 children and have cooked a variety of things during the last year including pasta bake, fish pie, pizza, apple crumble, bread, banana toffee pudding, muffins and chicken nuggets.

Little Dancers also runs weekly and is led by Dancing Sally. A lively music and dance session with a different theme each week.

We had our Ofsted inspection in June and were graded good with outstanding in 7 of the 16 areas.

We have had various fundraising events during the last year including a Frock Swap, Film night, Autumn craft morning, train trip to Moreton in Marsh, Easter activity day, Christmas concert, summer barbeque and sports day.

The toddler group continues to run in the cricket pavilion on a Tuesday morning and has had the recent addition of mums who are trying to improve attendance by having extra activities such as face painting, drama and crafts. We hope this will prevent us from having to close a very poorly attended but much needed group.

Tiddy Hall

Roger Shepherd read his report – the Tiddy Hall and its users have enjoyed another busy year serving the community in many different ways. Once again we thank the regular users, Pre-school, using the hall each weekday, and many others including Roseneath School of Music, Yoga, Badminton, Circuit Training, Post Office and Parish Council. More recently a Zumba class has arrived.

One-off events held by village groups and villagers including, Coldstone Angling's 40th Anniversary Dinner Dance, the Panto, Musical Workshop Weekend and numerous Children's Parties have all added to a busy programme. The income received from all these users is fundamental to the future viability of the hall and their support is very much appreciated by the Trustees.

Tremendous fund-raising events have been held and organised by supporters and trustees of the Tiddy Hall during the last twelve months. Last year Acousticana held a fantastic concert raising over £250. Committee members tested our knowledge with a rather tricky quiz and held a table top sale, these two events raised nearly £600.

The Ascott Fun Run was re-introduced and proceeds were split between the Village Charity and Tiddy Hall raising £425 for the hall. Later in the year the beloved folk night, with local artists and main guests Quicksilver gave us wonderful entertainment and raised over £1,000. In January 2012 we kicked off our Centenary Celebrations with our Anniversary Dinner Dance entertained by Darwins Wish raising over £500. Acousticana returned in March with a fabulous evening of eclectic music, raising £475, with special guests Rag 'N' Roll, who were such a hit with the audience, have now been booked as main guests for our Folk Night on October 20th. Robin Martin-Oliver's Music Workshop performed a superb Sunday afternoon concert donating over £200 to funds. In March local talent in the form of the Ascott Songsters, directed by Daphne Abe, performed a wonderful journey through well-known musicals, raising £1000. Very many thanks to all those who organised and helped run these events raising nearly £4,500.

Income from 1st June 2011 to 11th April 2012 was approximately £11,000. Expenditure for the same period was approximately £9,800, including costs of £2,800 for refurbishing the main hall floor and resurfacing the car park. Are current cash reserves are approximately £12,000 and our fund-raising efforts at present are geared towards improving the kitchen facilities.

A big thank you to the volunteers who started the internal redecorated programme, including the hallway, toilets and kitchen, leaving us only with some material costs.

Tiddy Hall cont'd

Our Centenary programme continues leading up in five weeks time to the BIG WEEKEND starting on Friday 1st June with an evening of entertainment celebrating 100 years of Tiddy Hall and Saturday 2nd June a Ceilidh Barn Dance, both with guest Morris sides.

Parochial Church Council

Clive Fieth, Secretary of the PCC read his report - the PCC's business during the year ending 31st December 2011 covered the normal topics, i.e. Fabric, Finance and Fund-raising. In addition, much time was devoted to discussing the purpose of the Church in Ascott, and the future working of the PCC. This process is still ongoing.

The Village Fete was again held on the recreation field on Saturday 11th June. The weather was not as kind as the previous year and as a result the net profit was £2739, compared with £3744 in 2010.

The Coffee Mornings are now well established in the Church on the first Saturday of each month. The initial motive for these was to welcome people in the village to the church and to familiarise them with the building. Thanks to the work put in by Anne Braithwaite and June Holmes, these Coffee Mornings have raised £853 in 2011.

The Cotswold Churches Festival in May 2011 saw the church decorated splendidly. Volunteers acted as stewards in the church during 'opening hours' and served coffee and cake. Whilst the numbers of those visiting was disappointing the PCC hopes to join in with a similar event to be held to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

The Easter and Christmas Day services attracted 24 and 57 people respectively, (29 and 27 in 2010). The Carol Service on 11th December took the form of Nine Lessons and Carols, with a congregation of 52 (61 in 2010).

Occasional Services in 2011 totalled 10 – 5 baptisms, 4 funerals, 1 wedding. We were pleased to welcome The Windrush Valley School into Church for their weekly assemblies and also the Ascott Pre-School for a harvest service.

The PCC very much appreciated the extremely valuable work of Fred Russell, Tim Lyon and others in maintaining the churchyard in good order, the providers of flowers in the Church organised by Debra Cull, and the helpers and stallholders at the summer fete. The PCC would also like to thank the bell-ringers, led by Stuart Fox, the organist, Rosamund Campbell, and Mary Barnes who cleans the church.

For ten out of the past seventeen years, expenditure in Ascott Church has exceeded income, and we have only met our commitments by eating into our slender reserves; these reserves are now much depleted. Every year, the church costs £20,000 to run, and that figure is subject to inflation. In the past, we have managed to raise £17,000 towards the total cost, leaving an annual deficit of £3,000. Unless we take action now, this will be the case in 2012. Equally, unless we do something fairly quickly, the church will be forced to close in 2014. The PCC is addressing this as a matter of urgency.

Ascott Grapevine

Wendy Pearse read her report - the Grapevine continues to be well received and increasingly added to by many different aspects of village life. We are grateful to all our contributors, advertisers, etc. who keep the magazine alive and provide interest for all types of people. We also commend the printers for making such a good job. Special thanks go to Maggie Lyon who puts all the contributions together and spends hours bringing the magazine up to her exacting standard. New ideas are always welcome. Just approach any of the editorial team with your questions. Please continue to support us with articles and donations and ensure the continuation of the village magazine.

Leafield C of E School

ICllr Rob Morgan read the report on behalf of the HeadTeacher Jane Ridley - Leafield School continues to be a popular place for local children to learn and grow. We have continued to grow as a school and currently have 101 children on roll. Many children from Ascott-Under-Wychwood continue to attend Leafield School, making good use of the transport provided by the County.

Last July our Key Stage 2 pupils performed a production of 'The Lemonade Kid' which was very well received by parents and friends of Leafield School. Our year 5 and 6 children are currently writing scripts for their own production of 'Time Travel through the Ages', which will focus on three key periods of world history: Egyptian times, Roman times and Ancient Greece.

The children have continued to enjoy lots of extra-curricular clubs this year and are currently able to attend cooking club, football club, knitting club, construction club, rounders club, recorder club, Spanish club and gardening club. Pauline Carter also provides piano lessons for our pupils.

Educational visits have taken our pupils to Boulogne in France, to Chedworth Roman Villa, to Portsmouth Docks to see Nelson's ship (Victory) and to the Earth Trust. The whole school also enjoyed a visit to the theatre in Chipping Norton to see 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves' at Christmas. Members of our School Council were fortunate to be selected to take part in the Oxfordshire Children's Parliament this year. The Headteacher accompanied them to Oxford where they worked alongside children from schools across the county to hold a debate of issues affecting young people in our society. Our younger children in the Foundation Stage have enjoyed outdoor learning at the Millennium woods and the park and once again have experienced a Chinese lunch at the Pearl Restaurant in Leafield to celebrate Chinese New Year.

Our Year 5 pupils performed in the Burford Partnership Music Festival in February and our younger children will be performing in the Key Stage One Festival in June. Both festivals provide our pupils with the opportunity to perform with children from neighbouring schools. Our children also enjoyed singing at the Ascott Fete last summer. The children have competed in partnership sporting events, most recently taking part in the tag rugby tournament. We have also been fortunate to have coaches lead sporting festivals in dance and multi-skills.

Leafield C of E School cont'd

Friends of Leafield School (FOLS) continue to provide excellent support for the school. FOLS recently organised a quiz night for the local community which was very well attended and lot of fun. They also ran an Easter raffle and have hosted regular cake stalls in school. FOLS funded our whole school theatre visit, have provided funding for visualizers for all classrooms, have provided equipment for outdoor learning and have also contributed towards educational visits. We are also fortunate to have support from the local community on educational visits, helping with children's learning within the classroom and providing additional extra-curricular activities, i.e. cycle proficiency training. Paul Mansell, Vicar of the Wychwood Benefice, also supports our school with weekly assemblies and has helped run Philosophy for Children sessions with our older pupils.

Leafield School hosted its first Enterprise Event last summer. Children worked in groups to create a business plan and were able to provide a range of products and services. The event was a huge success and we will be hosting our second Enterprise Event at the end of May. Our children have also helped raise money for other charities. The children, led by the School Council, decided which charities we would support this year and they chose Children in Need, Bishop Simeon Trust (who work with orphaned children in South Africa) and Blue Cross.

Wychwood Foresters Football Club

No report was received

The Village Shop

Nigel Wild, Chairman of the Village Shop Committee read his report - In 2011, we traded very well. Our turnover rose from £156,000 to £164,000 and our net profit was £5,750 against a budgeted £700. We increased our gross margin to 21.37% against a budgeted 20%. At year end, we had £22,000 at bank and paid off our mortgage in early 2012. Nonetheless, trading conditions are difficult. In terms of inflation, we are keeping pace but no more than that.

People are spending less and we have to work hard to keep our sales buoyant. Our 'Right Up Your Street!' campaign, pointing out the benefits of shopping locally, seems to have borne fruit. It is noticeable how many customers now use us for a major shop as opposed to just top-up. But, April 2012 has seen a steep drop in sales and we have to keep up the momentum and remind the village that we are there.

Mind you, they seem to have no problem in finding us when the snows close us in! We are there at the heart of the community and only too pleased to help our villagers in times of emergency.

We continually research and evaluate new lines and services. At our 8th anniversary in November, we held a food and wine tasting, from which we introduced both new food and new wine items.

From customer feedback, it became clear that the quality and freshness of fruit and vegetables were key and we have focused on this area to great effect.

The Village Shop cont'd

In November 2011, our long time bread supplier, Huffkins, announced that they could no longer deliver. Finding a new supplier proved more difficult than expected, but we finally settled on Palace Cuisine of Witney, who supplied us in our early years. We had to stop using Palace when they were flooded in 2007.

In October, we brought in dry cleaning, a thrice weekly collection and delivery service by Midlands Dry Cleaning, with an average two day turnaround. Their prices are extremely competitive and the quality excellent. After a slow start, the service is proving more and more popular.

Our thanks to Nigel Braithwaite, who researched a number of companies before we selected Midlands.

We have now introduced a high quality takeaway hot drinks service. The bean to cup machine grinds fresh beans for each cup and uses freeze-dried milk, which tastes just like fresh. The machine also offers tea, hot chocolate and a delicious coffee/chocolate mix.

Our truly wonderful staff are the lynchpin of the shop, always offering a warm welcome and an enjoyable shopping experience for customers.

In terms of volunteers, who make up the majority of our workforce, the tide ebbs and flows. We lose volunteers for such as family reasons or relocation and gain new ones for the same reasons. Right now, the tide is out further than normal and we are struggling to man the decks at times. A volunteer recruitment drive is in progress – your shop needs you!

The Committee is small, just five, and really put their shoulders to the wheel. Unfortunately, illness and family matters have taken their toll this year and at times, keeping that wheel turning has been a touch difficult. A sixth committee member was co-opted in early 2012, but owing to a sudden and sharp increase in work commitments, had to give up both the Committee and working in the shop.

We no longer attend the Wychwood Forest Fair, but support the Ascott Fete.

We are so fortunate to have such an attractive, purpose-built shop. Most community shops are located in village halls or similar.

Work is in progress to revamp and upgrade hygiene and storage in the store room at the back. A new sink, a wash basin, flash water heater, new worktops, cupboards, extra storage racking and a painted floor will enhance facilities and make life better for staff.

The Sinqua system itself is sound and invaluable for keeping track of stock, costs, selling prices and margins. Unfortunately, the IT support company is extremely poor, with response slow to non-existent.

The Village Shop cont'd

Earlier in the year, we were plagued with a till printer problem that often froze the system and it took much pressure and time to resolve it. It is also not user-friendly and instinctive. Training is being undertaken by three staff members from another Sinqa support organisation, who may replace the existing backup. The shop is also appointing a paid member of staff to handle data and IT on a part-time basis.

The building fabric needs only the occasional refresh. It is always chillers, freezers and the air conditioning that cost the money. We have contracts for all the refrigeration/cooling items, but breakdowns are expensive. The aircon recently failed and it took a week for repairs. Chocolate had to be stored in a chiller to prevent it melting. We now have a cleaner for three hours every Tuesday.

We entered the Oxfordshire Village Shop of the Year, which we won in 2007, but were not successful.

This year, the West Oxfordshire Business Awards had a new category, the Blenheim Palace Rural Business Award.

After completing a lengthy entry form, we had a visit from two judges and were one of three finalists. Our competitors were Foxbury Farm Shop and Agrivert, an ecological farm waste enterprise. At the WOBA Awards dinner on 16 March, we gained a Finalist's certificate. The winner was Foxbury Farm. Much as we love them, it was a bit galling to be pipped for the top spot by one of our suppliers. But, both our rivals are much larger businesses than ours, so to even reach the final was an accolade for the shop and everyone connected with it.

The shop continues to be a great success and to be at the heart of the village. We are now half way through our ninth year.

Trade is almost entirely with residents, with little passing trade or customers from outside the village. We have to be constantly aware of sales and keeping our profile high.

The new coffee machine will, we envisage, be popular with not only residents, but also walkers and others visiting Ascott for events. Right now, we urgently need volunteers to fulfil trading hours and refrain from overburdening the willing horses.

The enlargement and upgrade of the storage area will be most welcome to shop staff.

As Chairman, I would like to express my thanks and my delight to everyone connected with the shop for their unswerving help and enthusiasm over the past year. I would also like to thank my Committee for their support and willingness to go that extra mile.

The Village Charity

Cllr Morgan read the report on behalf of Mark Dawbarn - this charity was originally set up for the relief of poverty in the village and to provide financial assistance to its young people towards their education. Its predecessors were known as the Poor's Estate and as the Lower Green Charity.

The Village Charity cont'd

The Trustees of the Charity meet regularly under the chairmanship of John Cull and throughout 2011 the Trustees were **John Cull, the Revd Mark Abrey, Elaine Byles, Stuart Fox, Keith Ravenhill, Pauline Marshall** (a member of the Parish Council) and **Mark Dawbarn**. The Constitution of the Charity states that there must be at least five Trustees of whom at least one should be a member of the Parish Council.

The Charity owns the field known as **Lower Green**, which is near to the bridge over the river Evenlode on the Chipping Norton road. The field continues to be let to local residents on a 25-year lease for grazing purposes, expiring on 1st January 2030

The purposes of the Charity include **environmental** projects, and works on restoring damage caused by local floods are seen as part of the Charity's remit. In 2011 the Trustees arranged for works to be carried out to improve the Lower Green drainage ditch. The work which was completed to the satisfaction of the West Oxfordshire District Council is thought to be likely to improve the surface water drainage for the village generally. The Trustees still have a limited amount of funds in hand that could be used for amenity purposes such as flood prevention or relief in appropriate cases. Part of the available funds have been committed for the purposes of planting bulbs and shrubs around the village.

In their **educational** activities The Trustees have continued with their scheme for assisting young residents with grants towards the purchase of books or equipment in connection with their further education and training. Beneficiaries of the scheme have expressed their appreciation and the Trustees hope to continue with this activity. They would like to find ways of ensuring that all eligible residents are aware of the Scheme and encouraged to apply.

A marquee purchased in 2008 for the benefit of the village has continued in use and is available for local charities and fund-raising causes free of charge. The Charity contributed to the organisation of a Fun Run held in October, the proceeds of which went to the Tiddy Hall. The Charity has offered to assist with funding and organisation of events celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the centenary of the Tiddy Hall.

The Trustees have continued to seek to find ways in which their activities could be made widely known in the village that the Charity is set up to serve. Notices have been placed on village notice boards and an article written for the Ascott Grapevine. They would welcome suggestions on any other ways of achieving publicity for their activities and availability and would like to involve the community as far as possible in their work. To make the Charity more recognisable in the community the Trustees are seeking to develop a logo for use in notices and published items

The Trustees consider that the **financial position** of the Charity remains sound and they have three sources of funds, namely the General Fund, the Poor's Fund and the Flood Relief Fund from which they can make grants to local causes. The Charity's bank balance as at 31st December 2011 was £5,471 and there were additional ring-fenced investments valued at £7,251.

Queen's Diamond Jubilee

The final preparations for the Jubilee Lunch are well underway. Almost 152 tickets have already been sold, and we have just had another 100 printed. We have been able to secure a large marquee from the Chipping Norton Rugby Club, the Village charity marquee and one more from friends in the Village. Table and chairs will be placed under the marquees, with the side flaps up or down, depending on the weather.

A deposit has been paid for 2 x Pig roasts and next month we will be finalising the quantities which will be needed for the vegetables, salad and puddings. Alcohol will be ordered a week before.

We have estimated approx 35-45 children will be joining the Adults on the day, and Richard Smith and Jack Mitchell are in charge of providing the entertainment for them. Punch and Judy and the miniature ponies are amongst the activities for them, and details of an Olympic style competition are also included, although being kept under wraps! For the Adults, we have the Debbie Arthur Jazz Band, a favourite from the Fete.

Raffle tickets go on sale in the next couple of weeks and our aim, as always is to sell over a 1,000. Prizes are £100.00 (1st) £75.00 (2nd) and £25.00 (3rd)

The Tiddy/Jubilee mugs will be with us early May and we would like to have a table on the Green, (possibly May 19th) so that children can collect them. Additional mugs have also been ordered and will be on sale for £5.00 each. There's already a lot of interest in them, so I don't anticipate any problems in selling them. When we hand the mugs out, would it be possible to have a PC member present as well, as you've so kindly made a contribution towards them? We would also like, if possible to secure some bunting on the Green on that Saturday and then for it to remain up until after the celebrations? We have plenty which has very kindly been made by Mary Barnes and Jacquie Bugeja

A full break down of costs will be available after the Lunch, however we're still on track to raise funds for the new playground equipment, and anticipate raising approximately £1,200-1,500.

I would like to record in writing my personal thanks to Lyn Collins who very kindly printed the tickets and donated them to us. Jon Woods for designing the mugs and Richard M Smith who F1 use, and who has very kindly paid half towards the mugs and also waived the V.A.T. Finally, to the Jubilee team who I'm working with: Mary Barnes, Jacquie Bugeja and Louise Woods.

9. CONCLUSION

The Chairman addressed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending the Village Meeting and asked if there was any other business?

Q: Elaine Byles asked if the support group for the Swan Public House was a sub-committee of the Parish Council?

A: Cllr Rob Morgan explained that the group was a sub-committee and he would check the Terms of Reference with WODC.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.20pm.

