

MUCH HADHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Much Hadham Parish Council annual meeting held on Tuesday, 16th May 2023, in the Much Hadham Village Hall, at 7:30 pm.

#Cllr B Bird	Cllr B O'Neill
#Cllr K Hamilton	*Cllr S Smith
*Cllr I Hunt (Vice Chair)	*Cllr P Taylor (Chair)
Cllr J Liversage	Cllr K Twort
*Cllr D McDonald	

* denotes present and # denotes co-opted at the meeting (Minute ref: 23/70)

In attendance: F Forth, Clerk and 3 members of the public.

23/67. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of a new 4 year administration. She highlighted that 7 Cllrs from the previous administration had been elected uncontested in the recent election with the remaining 2 Cllrs being unable to submit their nomination forms in time. Co-option of these 2 Cllrs will be considered later in the meeting. (See Minute ref: 23/70)

23/68. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE

RESOLVED that Cllr P Taylor be duly elected to the office of Chair of the Parish Council for the ensuing civic year. She duly signed her declaration of office.

23/69. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR AND ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE

RESOLVED that Cllr I Hunt be duly elected as Vice Chair of the Parish Council for the ensuing civic year. He duly signed his declaration of office.

23/70. CO-OPTION

RESOLVED to co-opt Bill Bird and Kathleen Hamilton as Parish Councillors. Both duly signed their acceptance of office forms and provided the other required governance documents to the Clerk.

23/71. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and approved from Cllrs J Liversage, B O'Neill and K Twort.

23/72. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

None.

23/73. NOTIFICATIONS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

23/74. FURTHER CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair thanked her fellow Cllrs for their hard work in the preceding year and their continued support of her as Chair, especially Vice Chair Cllr I Hunt. The key achievement in the past year had been the adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan for which Cllr I Hunt and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group were thanked.

The Chair also reported that the Coronation Big Lunch at the Recreation Ground on Sunday 8th May had been successful with up to 400 people attending. The Parish Council's thanks were expressed for the small number of residents that organised the event.

Finally, the Chair reminded those present that the Parish Council was hosting the Annual Parish Meeting on Tuesday 23rd May, starting at 7:30 pm, and everyone was welcome to attend.

23/75. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 4th April 2023 be accepted as a correct record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair after the meeting.

23/76. REPORTS ON OUTSTANDING MATTERS AND RESOLUTIONS

The Chair reported that very little had changed on the outstanding matters report since the previous meeting. An updated report would be provided to the next meeting.

23/77. PORTFOLIOS, COMMITTEES AND REPRESENTATIVES

The Chair reported that the allocation of portfolios had been reviewed and would remain largely unchanged, as shared prior to the meeting. RESOLVED to approve the allocation of portfolios, detailed in Appendix A.

The Chair outlined that the proposed membership of Committees would remain the same apart from Cllr B Bird replacing Cllr K Twort on the Planning Committee to enable a planning perspective from the hamlets. RESOLVED to approve the membership of Committees, including designation of Committee Chairs as follows:

- Planning Committee: Cllrs B Bird; I Hunt (Chair); D McDonald; B O'Neill and S Smith;

- Burial Authority: Cllrs K Hamilton; J Liversage; B O'Neill; P Taylor (Chair) and K Twort; and
- Staffing Committee: Cllrs J Liversage; P Taylor (Chair) and S Smith.

The Chair highlighted that Parish Council representatives on other bodies would also remain unchanged. RESOLVED to approve the Parish Council representatives on other bodies as follows:

- Much Hadham Sports Association: Cllrs D McDonald and K Twort; and
- Much Hadham Village Hall: Cllrs K Hamilton and B O'Neill with Cllr I Hunt serving as a Trustee.

Cllr I Hunt reminded Cllrs that training through Herts Association of Parish and Town Councils (HAPTC) was available, and referred to the recently circulated list of courses currently on offer. Courses are either online or in person with the cost being covered by the Parish Council. Courses needed to be booked via the Clerk.

23/78. MEMBERS' REPORTS

(i) Community

Cllr D McDonald reported that he was still waiting for legal advice quotes in relation to the funding review of the Recreation Ground.

Village Hall

Cllr K Hamilton reported that she and Cllr B O'Neill had attended the Village Hall Management Committee's Annual General Meeting (AGM) on the 18th April. The key points from the AGM were:

- the Bookings Secretary had been thanked for her many years in the role;
- a new website developed for bookings and invoicing which was now working well;
- re-decoration of the Main Hall had been completed last September;
- additional electrical work had been required following a 5 year electrical safety check;
- challenges with the role of Treasurer, and new Treasurer appointed;
- Trustees for the Village Hall are Neil Clarke, Mary Bryne, Mark Prisk and Cllr I Hunt;
- hire rates will be going up in January 2023;
- no health and safety issues in the last year;
- maintenance and development priorities will be reviewed together with sources of potential funding. Currently, the main priorities are the car park, roof and drains.

(ii) Environment (inc Public Rights of Way (PRoW))

General

Cllr S Smith commented that the weather had been mixed since the last meeting, with the consistent rainfall significantly increasing the growth of all types of vegetation. Consequently, the first of the two annual trimming and mowing schedules has been brought forward by a couple of weeks. In addition, the growth of the hedgerows in the village lanes had impacted visibility for drivers which needs to be addressed in some of the danger spots.

Public Rights of Way

Cllr S Smith provided the following update:

- Footpath 11 Diversion: pre-order consultation is still underway and there is no further news on the outcome as yet;
- Footpath 20 Bridge Repair: new 6 month closure notices have been installed by Herts County Council (HCC). Highways/Ringway have formally indicated that completion of the repair will happen in October/November this year;
- Footpath 32 Bridge Repair: damaged handrails on this bridge (opposite the Hoops Inn) have been repaired;
- PRoW: all clear with no new issues reported or pending; and
- HCC Appointment: HCC have appointed a new Capital Contracts officer which means that some outstanding work, including the Footpath 29 bridge replacement, can be started.

River Ash

Cllr B Bird reported that he and Cllr B O'Neill had completed testing in the River Ash in April, finding clean water at that time.

It was acknowledged that the health of the river deteriorates with heavy rainfall, particularly with the water draining from the fields into the river.

(iii) Highways (inc street lighting)

Cllr S Smith reported that there had been no further news regarding the forthcoming work to improve the surface and general condition of Danebridge Road. This was becoming concerning for the residents on that road given it is well used by through traffic as well as local vehicles.

Cllr S Smith also noted that there had been some potholes on the B1004 had been repaired but potholes still remain an issue on several roads and lanes in the parish.

The Chair reported that difficulty was still being experienced in terms of receiving updates on other outstanding highways matters. Top dressing of Kettle Green Lane is expected at the end of the month but no news on when the work relating to the passing places will be undertaken.

In addition, that Chair reported that a list of drainage works had been received but it was unclear what would actually be happening and where. This was being followed up.

“20s plenty”

Cllr D McDonald reported that the residents survey on this topic was still being organised. In addition, he noted that the political party changes as a result of the recent elections might have an impact: the Green Party had won the most seats in East Herts Council and may have policies more conducive to a lower speed limit.

(iv) Media

Cllr S Smith reported that required posts to the Parish Council’s Facebook page had been made, primarily in relation to the recent elections. In addition, he stated that the initiative to improve the website and to improve channels of communication with all residents in the parish was still in progress.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the Annual Parish Meeting would be advertised once the poster was received.

(v) Security

On behalf of Cllr J Liversage, the Clerk reported the following information, based on OWL messaging, the crime report from Leon de Bruyn and liaison with the Rural Police Team:

- the police were appealing for witnesses following a serious road traffic accident on the A120 at 7.30am on Tuesday 18th April, involving a Black Vauxhall Vivaro van, white Mercedes Sprinter van, black Volvo estate car and a white Ford transit van. Reference to quote is 41/31090/23;
- reported crimes were:
 - sit on mower stolen from High Street, Much Hadham;
 - theft of number plates from a vehicle parked in Church Lane;
 - damage to cropped fields at a farm premises in Bromley Lane;
 - attempt to take a tractor from a farm premises in Blackridge Lane; and
 - a break in at business premises in Kettle Green Lane where a quad bike and tractor GPS were stolen as well as damage caused to the tractor and locks to gain entry to the property;
- the **Rural Police meeting** on 19th April discussed the previous priorities of speeding, flying tipping and burglary. Reported incidents had increased slightly from 146 in February 2023 to 152 in March 2023. The police remain dependent on the public for

reporting incidents and continue to urge the public to keep reporting all suspicious vehicles, incidents and unexpected activity through 101 or via www.herts.police.uk/contact;

- following an increase in attacks from 'Stray Dogs' on animals and livestock in this village and locality, the Police intend to focus on this as a priority and to identify the responsibility of owners to keep their dogs under control;
- speeding, fly-tipping and burglary remain just as important and will come under the day to day attention of the Police;
- the OPALS (Older Persons Activity Learning and Safety) event was well attended in Much Hadham where residents were advised on aspects of safety and a range of services available to reduce the vulnerability of senior citizens; and
- a reminder to be aware of scammers claiming to be a council conservation officer, asking for money.

(vi) Stansted Airport

Cllr D McDonald reported that he was still waiting for the changes which Stansted Airport propose to make to flight paths to be announced.

(vii) Other

Station Road

Cllr I Hunt explained that Station Road is a private road and its residents were responsible for maintaining the road directly in front of their property but there is no mechanism for this to be done collectively. Consequently, this has led to an unsatisfactory patchwork of repairs and potholes.

On the 13th May, Cllr I Hunt and the Chair hosted a meeting attended by a majority of Station Road residents, in response to a request to provide assistance with addressing issues around road maintenance. In summary, those attending had decided to form a residents' association with the preference being to organise a resurfacing of the entire road, dividing the cost evenly between all the households.

Cllr I Hunt concluded that full notes had been made and distributed to every household. It was hoped that there was now momentum for the residents to organise themselves into an effective association and that all households will contribute to it.

23/79. REPORTS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR AND DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

The Chair congratulated Cllr I Devonshire (EHC) on being re-elected.

Cllr I Devonshire (EHC) commented that the Green Party had formed a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, and a number of new Cllrs had been elected. As yet, the direction of East Herts Council was unclear apart from a plan to stop the Gilston development.

Finally, Cllr I Devonshire (EHC) stated he was now a member of East Herts Council's Development Management Committee.

23/80. RESIDENTS' COMMENTS

(i) Compliment

A resident complimented the Parish Council on its hard work over the past year, noting it was good to have a full Council in place. In addition, the resident commented that the Station Road initiative looked good.

23/81. TREE PLANTING ON COMMON LAND

The Chair stated that a proposal from the Perry Green & Green Tye Preservation Society had been received to plant a native cherry tree on each of the greens at Green Tye and Perry Green, and on the triangle at the Bucklers Hall junction. These trees would be in honour and remembrance of the Queen's 70th Jubilee and her subsequent passing in 2022. There was also a proposal to plant a "Christmas Tree" on each of the greens.

In discussion, the following key points were made:

- evidence was needed to ensure that residents in Green Tye and Perry Green fully supported this proposal given anecdotal evidence suggested otherwise, including a resident's desire for the greens to remain open spaces;
- concerns raised on the size and maintenance of the trees proposed, especially the Christmas trees; and
- the potential ongoing cost to the Parish Council given the Society was only intending to be responsible for costs associated with getting the trees established.

It was agreed to defer a decision on these proposals to the July meeting. The Chair will seek further evidence from the Society regarding the community's support. In addition, it was suggested that a public meeting could be held to consider the merits of the proposals, to be considered separately in future.

Note: Standing Orders were properly suspended and reinstated during this item to allow input from residents.

23/82. INTERNAL CONTROLS

The Clerk highlighted that the Internal Audit report, Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and the effectiveness review were available on the Parish Council's website. [Website: <http://www.muchhadhamparishcouncil.co.uk/parish-council/accounts/>]

(i) Internal Audit

The Clerk highlighted that the annual Internal Audit review had been completed for the last financial year, 2022/23, and the conclusion was that the Parish Council had the expected controls in place and no recommendations were made. Page 3 of the AGAR 2022/23, completed by Internal Audit, and the supporting detailed report were noted.

(ii) Review of effectiveness

The Clerk reported that the effectiveness of the internal controls in place from April 2022 to March 2023 had been reviewed and no issues had been identified. This review underpins the Annual Governance Statement for the last financial year which is part of the next agenda item.

Cllr I Hunt commented that he had reviewed the information presented, highlighting that it had been updated appropriately to reflect the last financial year.

RESOLVED to approve the review of effectiveness of internal controls for 2022/23.

23/83. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) AND ACCOUNTS

The Clerk highlighted that the unapproved, subject to external audit, AGAR and detailed financial accounts were available on the Parish Council's website.

[Website: <http://www.muchhadhamparishcouncil.co.uk/parish-council/accounts/>]

(i) Annual Governance Statement

The Clerk highlighted that the Annual Governance Statement reflects that the Parish Council has a system of internal control in place, as reflected by the review of effectiveness approved under item 23/82(ii).

RESOLVED to approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23, Section 1 in the AGAR.

(ii) Accounting Statements and year on year comparison

The Clerk highlighted that there are two versions of the annual accounts. A very summarised version is documented in the AGAR, Section 2, which is supported by the detailed Financial Accounts.

In addition, to support the understanding of this financial information, there is a year on year comparison, related to both formats of the accounts, that explains significant movements, which was noted. The version relating to the AGAR is submitted to the external auditor.

Cllr I Hunt commented that he had reviewed the information presented, highlighting that it had been completed to a high standard.

RESOLVED to approve the Accounting Statements, Section 2 in the AGAR and the detailed Financial Accounts for 2022/23.

Period for the exercise of public rights

The Clerk stated that the period for the exercise of public rights would be Monday 5th June to Friday 14th July. In addition, she explained that during this time, local electors can inspect the supporting accounting records and ask questions as well as raise an objection with the external auditor – PKF Littlejohn. Full details of the rights of a local elector are available on the website.

In response to a question, the Clerk confirmed that the correct year was detailed on the notice published on the website.

This information was noted.

Finally, the Chair expressed the Parish Council's thanks to the Clerk for another year of exceptionally well-kept records and accounts. Not a single adverse comment or suggestion for improvement was made by the internal auditor – an excellent result.

23/84. FINANCIAL

(i) Payment of Accounts

Cllr I Hunt expressed concern in relation to the **Pavilion electricity expenditure** (OP233) given that the building was essentially empty. It was noted that cost was based on actual readings as a smart meter had been installed some time ago. In discussion, it was considered that the high electricity usage may have been due to the immersion heaters being left on for the water. Options to address this include larger notices for users or the installation of timers on the heaters.

Cllr I Hunt also expressed concern regarding the contribution to the Sports Association for the **Recreation Ground grass cutting** (OP235). Whilst it was noted that the reduced sporting use of the Recreation Ground meant that the grass cutting was more for the general benefit of the public, the Sports Association do currently have sufficient funds to cover this cost. Cllr D McDonald has requested further information in relation to this payment therefore it was agreed that approval of this payment should be deferred.

RESOLVED that the accounts, as shown overleaf, excluding OP235 MH Sports Association Grass Cutting at Recreation Ground, be duly authorised for payment.

PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS - MAY 2023

Ref	Payable to	For	Amount
SO	M Windmill	Litter picking (May)	91.00
OP233	MH Sports Association	Pavilion electricity	252.46
OP234	East Herts Council	Annual dog bin charges	1,847.12
OP235	MH Sports Association	Grass cutting at Recreation Ground	2,000.00
DD	PWLB	Loan repayment (Pavilion)	2,693.73
OP236	D Billson	Pavilion cleaning (May)	80.00
OP237	FM Forth	Clerk's salary (May)	781.04
Total payments			7,745.35

Payments will be authorised online following the meeting by Cllr I Hunt and Cllr B O'Neill.

(ii) Financial Statement

The financial statement for 2023/24 to date was received. The summary financial position is as below and comparison to the annual budget is attached at Appendix B. No matters were highlighted by the Clerk.

In response to a question, the Clerk confirmed that the grant of £300 to the Perry Green & Green Tye Preservation Society for its King's Coronation event had been paid, as noted on page 2 of the financial statement.

SUMMARY FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 16 MAY 2023

	Parish Council £	Burial Authority £	Total £
Opening balance - 1 April 2023	64,058.77	33,469.72	97,528.49
Income	24,260.25	1,715.00	25,975.25
Expenditure	- 12,500.20	- 450.00	- 12,950.20
Closing balance	75,818.82	34,734.72	110,553.54

continued

FUND BALANCES

Barclays Bank Business Reserve Account		47.46
Unity Trust Current Account	118,791.43	
Add: Outstanding deposits	-	
Less: Unpresented items	<u>-8,285.35</u>	110,506.08
Total Fund Balances		<u>110,553.54</u>

Earmarked Reserves are excluded from the Parish Council balance to identify the general balance available for the Parish Council:

Parish Council closing balance		75,818.82
<u>Earmarked Reserves:</u>		
(1) Section 106 receipts for sport or recreation	1,570.00	
(2) Open spaces	9,905.00	11,475.00
General balance available for Parish Council		<u>64,343.82</u>

Note: general balance not to fall below £30,000 unless due to cash flow, or in the case of unexpected events or emergencies.

23/85. PLANNING

The minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held 4th April 2023 were received and the decisions taken were noted.

23/86. BURIAL AUTHORITY

The minutes of the Burial Authority meeting held 4th April 2023 were received and the decisions taken were noted.

23/87. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

23/88. CLERK'S INFORMATION

None.

23/89. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be Tuesday 6th June 2023 at 7:30 pm at the Much Hadham Village Hall.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8:53 pm.

APPENDIX A

PORTFOLIO & Areas of responsibility	Committees	Cllrs
GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE Insurances, legal issues, training, ensuring that Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct are adhered to, co-options, agenda management, risk management, finance oversight, complaints handling. Liaison with PG>, Recreation Trust, EHC, HCC, HAPTC Priorities: Policy reviews / updates		Ian Hunt Penny Taylor
STAFFING Management of employee (Clerk) and HR issues Priorities: Performance management	Staffing Committee Staffing Sub-committee Chair: Cllr P Taylor	Jan Liversage Stewart Smith Penny Taylor
BURIAL AUTHORITY Burial grounds maintenance and expansion, church liaison Priorities: Burial Authority 10 year plan. 2017-27 progress	Burial Authority Chair: Cllr P Taylor	Kathy Hamilton Jan Liversage Bill O'Neill Penny Taylor Ken Twort
COMMUNITY FACILITIES Community groups liaison (Sports Association (SA), Pavilion management, Village Hall (VH) management), war memorial, bus stops, telephone boxes, millennium sigh, playground Priorities: Work with SA on re-organising management of Recreation Ground, work with VHMC on its priorities, sustainable future for Pavilion	VH and SA reps	SA reps: Duncan McDonald Ken Twort VH reps: Kathy Hamilton Bill O'Neill Playground: Jan Liversage
ENVIRONMENT including PRoW Parish paths, PC-owned land maintenance, tree surgery, litter and dog bins, conservation area, river and stream quality, flood plan (culverts & ditches), Stansted Priorities: River Ash, improve bridleway / footpath networks		Stewart Smith + others when required for specific issues
HIGHWAYS Maintenance reporting (potholes, drains, pavements, street lighting etc), traffic calming, parking etc. Priorities: Traffic management, 20's Plenty, parking		Duncan McDonald Stewart Smith Penny Taylor
MEDIA Facebook, Twitter, Website, publicity in general Priorities: Facebook policy – required; Increase website usage		Stewart Smith
PLANNING Planning applications Priorities: Work with EHC to improve planning enforcement; a solution for Jolly Waggoners?	Planning Committee Chair: Cllr I Hunt	Bill Bird Ian Hunt Duncan McDonald Bill O'Neill Stewart Smith
SECURITY Police liaison, Fire and rescue liaison, Neighbourhood Watch liaison, Rural Watch liaison		Jan Liversage

MUCH HADHAM PARISH COUNCIL

YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

BUDGET TO ACTUAL COMPARISON AS AT 16 MAY 2023

(Parish Council only)	FULL YEAR	YEAR TO DATE	COMMENT
	2024	2024	
	BUDGET	ACTUAL	
	£	£	
INCOME			
Precept	43,000.00	21,500.00	
Pavilion income	300.00	300.00	Football sub from 2022/23
Grant	300.00	-	
Other	60.00	-	
VAT reclaimed	5,000.00	2,460.25	
TOTAL INCOME	48,660.00	24,260.25	
EXPENDITURE			
Staff costs	9,844.00	1,562.08	
PWLB loan repayment - Pavilion	5,387.46	2,693.73	
PWLB loan repayment - Parish lights	2,734.64	1,367.32	
Administration costs	3,015.00	814.18	
Legal costs	1,000.00	-	
Insurance	2,850.00	1,089.75	
Audit fees	815.00	-	
Election expenses	-	-	
Maintenance of open spaces	7,500.00	3,589.27	
Litter	2,000.00	182.00	
War memorial (lighting and maintenance)	1,085.00	1.48	
Pavilion	5,550.00	480.44	
Grants and donations (Section 137 expenditure)	1,000.00	300.00	Grant to PG/GTPS for King's Coronation event (£300)
Sport and recreation grants (Section 106 funded)	-	-	
Revenue/Capital Projects (to be allocated)	5,000.00	-	
VAT	5,000.00	419.95	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	52,781.10	12,500.20	