

MUCH HADHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Much Hadham Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday, 5th December 2023, in the Green Tye Mission Hall, at 7:30 pm.

Cllr B Bird
Cllr K Hamilton
*Cllr I Hunt (Vice Chair)
*Cllr J Liversage
Cllr D McDonald

Cllr B O'Neill
*Cllr S Smith
Cllr P Taylor (Chair)
*Cllr K Twort

* denotes present

In attendance: F Forth, Clerk and 4 members of the public.

23/171. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and approved from Cllr B Bird, Cllr K Hamilton, Cllr D McDonald, Cllr B O'Neill and Cllr P Taylor. In the absence of Cllr P Taylor, Cllr I Hunt chaired the meeting.

23/172. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

The Chair declared an interest in a payment to be approved (agenda item 23/182 (i)) and would therefore not be participating in nor voting on the related motion.

No other declarations were made or applications for dispensations sought.

23/173. NOTIFICATIONS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

23/174. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair thanked those residents that had joined Cllrs for refreshments and provided the following information:

- a reminder that the parish-wide survey on affordable housing need could still be completed online, details of which were in the parish magazine and on the Parish Council website. The importance of the information that this survey would provide for responding to planning applications was highlighted, as well as residents' views on car parking at the Village Hall, 20mph speed restrictions and the future use of the Pavilion on the Recreation Ground;

- the dates for 2024 Parish Council meetings published in the December parish magazine were incorrect and will be corrected in the February magazine. The correct dates are available on the Parish Council's website; and
- some tickets were still available for the Christmas party event with the fabulous What's That band in the Village Hall on the 16th December. This is a fund raising event for the Village Hall and Acorn House at Addenbrookes.

23/175. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 7th November 2023 be accepted as a correct record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair after the meeting.

23/176. REPORTS ON OUTSTANDING MATTERS AND RESOLUTIONS

The Chair highlighted that an updated version of the outstanding report had not been circulated but a number of matters would be covered by subsequent agenda items. Clerk's action still required in relation to the fixed asset register and closing the Barclay's bank account, and residents' assistance sought for the completion of the nominations for designating properties as Assets of Community Value.

Finally, the Chair stated that the negotiation of a new lease for the bridge at The Hoops will be included on future reports.

23/177. MEMBERS' REPORTS

(i) Community

Pavilion

The Chair reported that quotes are still being sought for the replacement of one or more heaters in the Pavilion lounge.

The Clerk added that the remedial works agreed at the November meeting should be completed in the next couple of weeks.

In addition, the Clerk reported that:

- the Sunday football team, Hadham Rovers, had used the Pavilion a number of times and are keeping it clean and tidy, as well as sweeping outside the Pavilion;
- a full clean every 6 weeks is keeping the Pavilion looking respectable, along with shorter cleans when use is more frequent. The tabletops are now back to grey, and the next challenge would be to tackle the carpet stains; and
- fire extinguisher equipment was checked and serviced on the 13th October and some remedial work was required in relation to an extinguisher and the kitchen fire

blanket. These remedial works total £90 + VAT and an instruction has already been issued for these works to be completed.

The Chair thanked the Clerk for the Pavilion cleaning.

Village Hall

On behalf of Cllr B O'Neill, the Chair reported that East Herts Council had been notified of the parish's interest in Electric Vehicle charging and solar generation provision, should funding and support become available.

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

Public Rights of Way

Cllr S Smith reported that after a relatively mild first 3 weeks of November, the first signs of winter began in earnest with a sharp cold spell which has seen most trees lose their remaining leaves. The ground underfoot has remained very wet so walking the footpaths and bridleways has been, and still is, a very muddy experience.

- Footpath 29: after a lengthy delay due to commitments elsewhere, contractors are now ready to install the two new bridges and re-surface the footpath area in between them;
- new way marker posts and signs: have been installed on Footpath 7 near Brands and on Footpath 29 at the top of Mill Wood;
- Footpath 32: a contractor has been requested to repair the bridge which lies opposite The Hoops Inn;
- Footpath 36: steps have been replaced; and
- Financial constraints: as Herts County Council (HCC) has virtually used up all its allocated budget for the current financial year, emergency work only will be undertaken until the new financial year starts in April. Capital projects are the only exception to this such as:
 - the general autumnal knock back: - a final trim and cut back on tree branches and encroaching vegetation on several footpaths and bridleways in the parish over the next couple of weeks; and
 - the bridge repair on Footpath 20: is still scheduled for a start in March next year once the fish breeding season is over.

River Ash

On behalf of Cllr B O'Neill, the Chair reported that a river survey (and analysis with the help of students from St Elizabeth's) was postponed due to adverse weather conditions.

In addition, the Chair stated that Thames Water's website reported that the Hadham Mill pumping station's last storm discharge was on 13th November for almost 4 hours.

(iii) Highways (inc street lighting)

On behalf of Cllr P Taylor, the Chair reported that a meeting had been held on the 8th November with Cllr G McAndrew (HCC) and a Herts County Council (HCC) Highways representative. HCC's recruitment drive in the summer had secured some good new employees, and things were looking up in the Highways department.

The following specific updates were provided:

- Danebridge Road: Ringway (HCC contractor) have included improvements to the Cut Grips and Ditch works (cuts through the bank, so water can drain into the ditch) in their schedule, but no idea when it may happen. The resurfacing of the road would be within the "Integrated Works Programme", which is outside the budget of the HCC Highways department liaised with. Priority for major works, such as is required at Danebridge Road, is based on various technical assessments including a Scrim Survey (measuring the wet skid resistance of a road surface). It is not clear when Danebridge Road would come to the top of the list for this action;
- Malting Lane/Danebridge Road signage: although reported last month that the draft suggested signage had been received (Minute ref: 123/160(iii)), the actual signs are yet to be forthcoming, but promised within this year's budget; and
- Kettle Green Lane passing places: these have now been re-instated in proposed works, and will definitely happen in the next financial year (April 2024-25), and sooner rather than later.

In addition, Cllr S Smith reported that it was not just the surface of Danebridge Road that needed addressing as the road itself needed to be redefined as the roadside edges have been obliterated. It was noted that more than one HCC Highways department was involved, resulting in no overall responsibility within HCC Highways for this action.

iv) Media

Cllr S Smith reported that a Parish Online webinar had been attended that demonstrated a standardised website for parish councils that had been launched. These websites have a ".gov.uk" address, are secure, provide email addresses and are easier to update. Suitability for the Parish Council is being investigated.

(v) Security

Based on information from OWL messaging and PCSO Leon de Bruyn's crime report, Cllr J Liversage reported the following matters:

- theft from a motor vehicle in Much Hadham reported so a reminder to lock all vehicles;
- beware of fake emails and websites when shopping online. It's not a bargain if you spend money on something that does not exist;

- having different passwords for different online accounts is a safe approach, but ensure passwords are kept safe. A police suggestion is to write them in a book that sits amongst many others on a bookshelf; and
- make sure your car is winter ready: lights, tyres, screen clear.

Remember that for all non-emergency matters please call 101.

(vi) Stansted Airport

On behalf of Cllr D McDonald, the Clerk reported that Stansted Airport Watch (SAW) had made the decision to convert SAW to a Foundation and the process to do this was now underway.

In addition, the Clerk highlighted that SAW were encouraging members and supporters to object to two aspects of the Draft Uttlesford Local Plan, namely:

- the proposal to allow housing and other development on the Countryside Protection Zone ('CPZ') south of the airport; and
- proposed Uttlesford District Council (UDC) policy towards the expansion of Stansted Airport – which in SAW's view is "far more liberal and supportive than even Government policy".

The deadline for any objections is the 18th December 2023 and Cllr D McDonald will identify whether any objection from the Parish Council is required. If required, the objection would be agreed by email and ratified at the January 2024 meeting.

(vii) Other

None.

23/178. REPORTS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR AND DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

Cllr I Devonshire (EHC) reported on the following matters:

- affordable housing Gilston Development – a response from EHC's Head of Planning had been obtained regarding the reduction of affordable housing to 23%. The key points from this were:
 - viability assessments submitted by the applicants had been extensively scrutinised in line with the District Plan policies and national guidance, and professional advice had been used;
 - all information was made publicly available in 2022;
 - decisions to grant outline planning permissions, subject to completion of a s106 agreement, included a decision that there would be an upwards only review mechanism for affordable housing in future;

- the scheme will be completed over a 20-year + period during which time a number of economic cycles are likely to take place;
- s106 agreement will require a minimum level of affordable housing to be provided regardless of future costs and whether or not the scheme is profitable for the applications; and
- bin outside the Scout Hut – as previously raised, the bin is overflowing and attracting rats. It was noted that the bin was not in a good condition and rat poison was not considered appropriate given children use the hut. It was understood that Cllr P Taylor was looking into this.

23/179. RESIDENTS' COMMENTS

(i) Fly tip at Bourne Lane

A resident highlighted that a recent fly tip at Bourne Lane, comprising of large chunks of tarmac, had been cleared, partly by local people and the relevant authority. It was noted that the matter was highlighted on the hamlets WhatsApp group which helped with the clearance and avoidance of traffic issues.

Cllr J Liversage agreed to raise the continued problem of fly tipping at the next Police forum meeting.

(ii) Danebridge Road

A resident pointed out that Herts County Council Highways would need to ensure that any cut grips and ditch works undertaken in Danebridge Road avoid expecting water to run up hill. This had been the case when previously undertaken.

(iii) Road by Joyce's Cottage

It was highlighted by a resident that the road and verge by Joyce's Cottage was in a very bad state.

23/180. ACTIONS FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Chair explained that this agenda item was to review and consider what action the Parish Council proposed to take in relation to the priorities detailed within the Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish Council, particularly where there was a financial consequence. Given the number of apologies received for this meeting, it was agreed that it was prudent to defer this item to the January meeting.

23/181. TREE WORK

As requested, the Clerk explained that a tree management plan had been established a number of years ago which had been updated annually. A quote had been obtained for the work required from this plan for this year, following which a further quote was sought for an aesthetic approach which was more costly.

The Chair stated that a compromise from the two approaches had been drafted, particularly for the Recreation ground which proposed that maintenance work would be undertaken for the trees on the roadside front left-hand side and aesthetic work would be undertaken on the roadside right-hand side. This approach would cost £13,731.67 + VAT and funding was in place for this, partly from the unused revenue/capital projects budget (£5,000) and the remainder from the Open Space earmarked reserve.

In discussion, it was noted that:

- funding for further tree work would be included in the 2024/25 budget;
- once the proposed work had been completed, further tree work could be scoped;
- only 1 quote was obtained as it is difficult to obtain quotes in this area, particularly as the previous contractor used by the Parish Council no longer undertakes this work;
- likely for the work to be booked in from March with consideration to undertaking the work when dry to avoid damage to the Recreation Ground from machinery used. In addition, it may be better to undertake the work during school holidays or consider the need for traffic management; and
- a specific tree across from the Recreation Ground roadside may need sooner work – Cllr K Twort to identify the specific tree on the Recreation Ground map.

RESOLVED to approve the quotes from Contractor A for tree work at the Recreation Ground and Green Tye for £13,731.67 + VAT.

The Clerk confirmed that the relevant applications for tree works had been made to East Herts Council.

23/182. FINANCIAL

(i) Payment of Accounts

Note – as the Chair had declared an interest (Minute ref: 23/172), he left the meeting and this item was chaired by Cllr J Liversage.

RESOLVED that the accounts, as shown overleaf, be duly authorised for payment.

PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS - DECEMBER 2023

Ref	Payable to	For	Amount
OP277	T Walker	Mow & strim footpaths	£645.00
OP278	Mr C Copper	War Memorial maintenance	£660.00
OP279	Home & Office Fire Extinguishers Ltd	Annual service	£243.54
OP280	I Hunt	Reimburse for Planning magazine subscription	£495.00
OP281	MH Village Hall	Hall hire 2023 (part)	£57.00
SO	M Windmill	Litter picking (Dec)	£91.00
OP282	FM Forth	Clerk's salary (Dec + backpay)	£1,249.04
Total payments			<u>£3,440.58</u>

Payments will be authorised online following the meeting by Cllr S Smith and Cllr K Twort.

(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 A. No matters were highlighted by the Clerk.

SUMMARY FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 5 DECEMBER 2023

	Parish Council £	Burial Authority £	Total £
Opening balance - 1 April 2023	64,058.77	33,469.72	97,528.49
Income	46,184.25	2,335.00	48,519.25
Expenditure	- 29,583.04	- 5,083.66	- 34,666.70
Closing balance	<u>80,659.98</u>	<u>30,721.06</u>	<u>111,381.04</u>

FUND BALANCES

Barclays Bank Business Reserve Account		47.46
Unity Trust Current Account	114,774.16	
Add: Outstanding deposits	-	
Less: Unpresented items	<u>-3,440.58</u>	111,333.58
Total Fund Balances		<u>111,381.04</u>

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

Parish Council closing balance		80,659.98
<u>Earmarked Reserves:</u>		
(1) Section 106 receipts for sport or recreation	1,570.00	
(2) Open spaces	9,905.00	
(3) Community Football Coaching grant (balance)	73.40	11,548.40
General balance available for Parish Council		<u>69,111.58</u>

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

(iii) Initial 2024/25 Budget and forward financial plan

The Clerk stated that following last month's meeting, a number of changes had been made to the forward financial plan, summarised as:

- further investigations in relation to inflation, resulting in some expenditure items in the next financial year being increased by 5% and thereafter 2% apart from insurance which was increased by 10% for the next financial year and thereafter 2%;
- inclusion of £500 to improve the website or change to a new provider;
- with respect to further tree work, inclusion of £10,000 in the next financial year to fund work over and above the sum approved earlier in this meeting, or to increase the earmarked reserve, as the impact of a changed approach to tree work needs to be fully understood and costed; and
- £5,000 remains unallocated for revenue/capital projects and it is assumed that any projects derived from the Neighbourhood Plan priorities would be funded from this.

These changes demonstrate that, with an annual £1,000 increase in the precept, the Parish Council can plan to operate within its resources, with a general balance of £30,000 – the level approved when the last budget was set and still an appropriate level.

The deadline for any further changes to the proposed budget and forward financial plan is the 18th December, to allow time for the budget to be finalised in conjunction with Cllr I Hunt for the January meeting.

Finally, the Clerk stated that she hoped to send out the council tax base information by the end of next week, once the East Herts Council report is available.

In discussion, it was noted that:

- it is likely that an earmarked reserve will need to be established for legal costs as this work is not likely to be completed in the current financial year; and
- the Burial Authority budget for Burial Ground maintenance should be increased and this will be considered at the next Burial Authority meeting.

Note: the Parish Council does not need to consider the Burial Authority budget as any costs are covered by the ring-fenced Burial Authority balance. The Parish Council will only consider this expenditure when the ring-fenced funds are depleted, and such costs become a charge to the precept.

The Clerk was thanked for her work on the budget and forward financial plan.

23/183. PLANNING

The minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held 7th November 2023 were received and the decisions taken were noted.

23/184. BURIAL AUTHORITY

The minutes of the Burial Authority meeting held 7th November 2023 were received and the decisions taken were noted.

23/185. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

23/186. CLERK'S INFORMATION

None.

23/187. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be Tuesday 9th January 2024 at 7:30 pm at the Much Hadham Village Hall.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8:26 pm.

MUCH HADHAM PARISH COUNCIL

YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

BUDGET TO ACTUAL COMPARISON AS AT 5 DECEMBER 2023

(Parish Council only)	FULL YEAR	YEAR TO	COMMENT
	2024	DATE	
	BUDGET	ACTUAL	
	£	£	
INCOME			
Precept	43,000.00	43,000.00	
Pavilion income	300.00	474.00	Football sub from 2022/23 (£300); current football sub to date (£50); Party hires (£124)
Grant	300.00	250.00	Grant from St Andrew's School
Other	60.00	-	
VAT reclaimed	5,000.00	2,460.25	
TOTAL INCOME	48,660.00	46,184.25	
EXPENDITURE			
Staff costs	9,844.00	7,497.36	
PWLB loan repayment - Pavilion	5,387.46	5,387.46	
PWLB loan repayment - Parish lights	2,734.64	2,734.64	
Administration costs	3,015.00	2,107.65	
Legal costs	1,000.00	-	
Insurance	2,850.00	1,089.75	
Audit fees	815.00	780.00	Internal Audit fee slightly less than expected
Election expenses	-	-	
Maintenance of open spaces	7,500.00	4,760.52	
Litter	2,000.00	819.00	
War memorial (lighting and maintenance)	1,085.00	751.88	
Pavilion	5,550.00	1,759.01	
Grants and donations (Section 137 expenditure)	1,000.00	826.60	Grant to PG/GTPS for King's Coronation event (£300); Donated goods to Community Football Coaching £426.60; Donation to Citizen's Advice East Herts (£100)
Sport and recreation grants (Section 106 funded)	-	-	
Revenue/Capital Projects (to be allocated)	5,000.00	-	Will be used to part fund this year's tree work
VAT	5,000.00	1,069.17	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	52,781.10	29,583.04	