Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Parish of Fringford held in Fringford Village Hall – 24 May 2021 7:45pm

1. **Apologies** - No Apologies
2. **Minutes** – The minutes of the 2019 Annual Parish meeting were unanimously approved
3. **District and County Council reports** – The District and County Councillors sent their apologies, however Councillor Corkin has posted a report on the County Council’s website.
4. **Chairman’s Report**

**Fringford Annual Parish Meeting -24th May 2021**

The Parish Council met 10 times between April last year and March 2021, including a meeting with interested parties at the outset of the first lockdown to discuss how the village should respond to the pandemic. Most meetings were conducted virtually using the Zoom app. This proved to be very effective and the Councillor group instantly made the most of the technology. Just as many members of the public attended virtual meetings as would normally join us at the Village Hall.

Very sadly the Council lost a very hard working and much respected colleague when Jan Maciejewski passed away in March. His input, company, and contribution to the work of the Council will be greatly missed.

Our Parish Clerk, Anne Davies decided to retire due to ill-health at the start of 2021 but worked with us to effectively assist in a smooth transition to our new Clerk Bobs Damerell who joined us in January.

As always, a wide variety of topics have been discussed as reflected in the minutes which are displayed on the Parish noticeboard and on the Village Website.

Several significant topics have featured in the activities of the Parish Council this year.

* The redevelopment of the car park at the Butchers Arms
* The efforts to deliver full-fibre Broadband to the village
* A planning application and appeal relating to a housing development on Rectory Lane
* Recruitment and succession planning
* The plans to renovate parts of the village green and alleviate the parking problems

**The redevelopment of the car park at the Butchers Arms**

The Parish Council has continuously pressed Cherwell District Council to ensure that the conditions they imposed when they gave permission for the development are met by the developers. Responses and action from the Cherwell Planning and Enforcement teams have been very poor and complaints have been made to senior management to improve the situation. At the same time the developers have been contacted several times following some appalling and disrespectful practices. The police have been contacted regarding the dangerous parking on the blind corner. Monitoring of the situation and pressure for improvement of Cherwell’s enforcement action will no doubt need to continue into this next year.

**The efforts to deliver full-fibre Broadband to the village**

The Parish Council became aware of an opportunity to acquire grant funding for a project to bring ‘full-fibre to the premises’ broadband to the village.

A huge amount of communication with OCC, Openreach, DCMS and all villagers has been required to progress through a minefield of inefficient processes and poor communication from Openreach in particular. The application and approval process appeared to be reaching a conclusion as this report is written and we have assurances from Openreach that the project will proceed. More work will undoubtably be required to turn the planning into practical delivery.

**A planning application and appeal relating to a housing development on Rectory Lane**

The Parish Council submitted a lengthy and robust objection to the application to build on the small copse on Rectory Lane at the junction with Farriers Close. Substantial support for the refusal was also made by many Fringford residents and it would be good to think that our collective efforts influenced the decision by Cherwell District Council to refuse permission.

An appeal has been lodged by the developer (for the third time) and of course the Parish Council are urging the Planning Inspector to dismiss it.

**Recruitment and Succession planning**

A full process to recruit a new Clerk was put in place including the development of updated job description, person specification, terms and conditions and interview and transition plans. Both advertising and direct approach recruitment techniques were used. Several interviews were conducted (virtually) and a new Clerk was employed form January.

The Parish Councillors have discussed the need to plan for succession and a recruitment campaign was developed to be implemented in May 2021

**The plans to renovate parts of the village green and alleviate the parking problems**

Much work has been undertaken to try to benefit from funding from HS2 to renovate areas of the Village Green and to alleviate the problems of inappropriate parking. Various schemes have been drawn up and numerous quotations for the works acquired. This work continues and currently involved negotiation with the landowner and with Oxfordshire County Council Highways.

Many other topics have been dealt with as reflected in the minutes…

* Consultation with parishioners on planning applications, (mostly minor this year)
* Work with OCC on the issue of flooding
* The ongoing issue of damage to the village green by careless driving and parking
* Speeding, footpaths, playground closure and re-opening

On behalf of the Parish Council, I would like to thank many villagers for their contribution to the community…

The Village Hall Committee that has had to deal with a huge number of changes to legislation and best practice to keep the hall open and safe for key groups and manage the expectations of hirers during the numerous stages of lockdown.

Fringford Friends – for continuing to offer and aid those in need.

The members of the Cricket Club for maintaining the beautiful ground and bringing cricket back to the village

The Editors and sponsor of the Village Voice for keeping us up to date with village events.

The initiators and administrators of the Fringford Mutual WhatsApp group – a very useful communication tool.

The Church PCC and volunteers for looking after the church and churchyard and keeping it available to the community.

The group of volunteers for continuing to undertake the village litter picks and others who take the time to keep the village tidy.

All these people make a real difference and make Fringford the positive and attractive community we all enjoy. All these groups depend on individuals, and all are keen to attract more support so please, if you are interested join in and do your bit.

On a personal note, I would particularly like to thank all the Councillors and Bobs, the Parish Clerk for their time, effort, and commitment. The Parish Councillors all give up their time to attend meetings, read many documents, carry out planning consultations and undertake many other tasks. (All the Parish Councillors are volunteers and make no claims for expenses on travel or other costs).

All villagers are entitled to attend Parish Council meetings and either speak at the beginning if there is something they wish to raise or observe the whole meeting. We generally meet here in the Chinnery Room of the Village Hall, usually, on the third Monday of most months at 7.45pm, if you would like to receive the agenda and minutes by email, please do let Bobs the Clerk know.

John Fargin

24 May 2021

1. **Financial Report**

The Clerk updated that the audit is currently under review by the new Internal Auditor Fiona Lippmann. The accounts should also be ready for viewing by the public by the end of June as the Co-op are sending through two statements that were never received in the changeover between clerks. Online Banking has been arranged with the Co-op and once this has been received the clerk will update the Council. The Bank Mandate is also being amended with Cllr McCullagh being added to the Mandate as a full power signatory.

There is as of 19 April 2021: £33,034.99 in the current account and £16,227.96 in the Savings Account.

The precept for 2021/22 is set at £13,628.

1. **Public Participation** – There were no questions from the Public.
2. **Village Group Reports**
   1. **Village Hall**

**Fringford Village Hall - Chair’s 2021 Report – Helen Fargin**

In my 2019 Annual Report, we set ourselves a target of making further improvements to the booking process, to increase hirings and improve our efficiency. We carried out a lot of research and started a trial of an on-line booking system called Hallmaster. The system is specifically for community halls and is very flexible. It enables users to view availability and make their own booking request. The system will run reports, generate invoices and will integrate with various accounting packages. In January 2020, we completely revamped our documentation and processes and launched the new system. Thank you to the Parish Council for funding the licence. 2019 was one of our strongest year’s for hirings and with better management of both income and costs, we made a surplus of £4,200.

Then in March 2020 the pandemic hit, and the hall was closed with immediate effect. During the early days, the VHC worked through various scenarios for re-opening and discussed these with the Parish Council. We were all of the view that we should take a cautious approach to protect the interests of not only the hirers but also the VH volunteers and villagers as a whole.

Community First Oxford and ACRE have been advising us throughout and we have ploughed our way through reems of government guidelines and amendments to identify how we should go about things. In short, we have restricted the areas that can be accessed, installed various pieces of equipment and displayed all necessary documents and posters. At the outset we decided to restrict our returning hirers to those with their own insurance and independent advisory body, essentially commercial hirers. This has worked extremely well and they have all adhered to the COVID imposed guidelines.

At different times of the year, when allowed, we have welcomed back 6 hirers only, made up of 5 weekly and I monthly. This has obviously meant a massive reduction in income. We have lost 1 weekly hirer to another hall, 2 monthly hirers have said they will return in September and to date we don’t have any further commitment from other regulars. So, it’s going to take some time to get back to the healthy financial position we enjoyed in 2019. We have applied for and received grants from Cherwell and this will help bolster short-term finances as running costs continue regardless of hall usage.

Our plans for 2021 are to continue reviewing and improving the booking process and to decide whether we need to do some marketing to attract either new regulars or more weekend occasional hirers. Also, to keep an eye on the status of major items such as roof and floor which may need to be repaired or replaced at some point.

As you will have seen in the Village Voice, we would very much like new members to join the team ideally at the AGM in June. The village hall currently runs quite smoothly, so being a Trustee is not an onerous task, but it is preferable if a cross-section of villagers volunteer to get involved in running this important community asset. More hands, and more new ideas, will ultimately mean less work overall!

I would like to thank the existing team for all their hard work and support during this very different and challenging period and the Parish Council for their on-going support. We have worked hard to be consistent and to make decisions in the best interests of us all. I’d also like to thank those villagers and hirers who have taken the time to express interest in what we are doing and have thanked us for our efforts during COVID – we really appreciate it and makes it all the more worthwhile. Thank you.

Helen Fargin - 24th May 2021

* 1. **Cricket Club –**

The Cricket Club has recently joined the Cherwell Cricket League. The club is currently in Division 8. There are currently 27 playing members playing on Wednesday evenings and Saturdays.

Alex Waters is the new club captain and has generated new interest in the club through Social Media.

The weather has caused problems, the heavy rainfall has stopped play and has also meant the grass hasn’t been able to be cut.

The Pavilion has suffered over the lockdown primarily through not being used. A renovation program has started and £750 has already been commissioned for the work.

* 1. **Fringford Friends**

**Fringford Friends Report - 2020-2021**

It’s been a busy year for our group, supporting our community with various requests. These have ranged from furniture / rug moving, taking people to hospital appointments and shopping (ongoing and transport to vaccination centres). The main activity which has kept us very busy was the collection and delivering of medical prescriptions. An arrangement was made with Bicester Medical Centre, Alcester Medical Centre and Montgomery House every Thursday and Friday. We collected and delivered medicines to not only Fringford but Hethe, Hardwick and Stoke Lyne too. Some journeys were on bicycle as the weather was good on many days. Circa. 300 deliveries were completed. This reduced the footfall in the practices and alleviated any anxiety of continuity of supply of medicine to the patient. These visits also enabled us to assess the well-being of residents as some were self-isolating and not had any contact from week to week with others. A chat and a catch up was always welcome.

We were also able to offer Sign posting regarding services being offered in Oxfordshire relating to The Census in March, Age UK, Community Connect, Mental Health and Citizens Advice with contact details published in both the Shelswell News and Village Voice. This allowed us to reach a further audience. Electric blanket testing service information was published as the service was changed due to Covid but still available.

I have been attending regular Oxfordshire Good Neighbour Scheme meetings via Zoom. The Oxford team are very helpful with Covid Government guidelines especially relating to car hygiene and transport in order to protect both passenger and driver. These meetings have been very informative and interesting to see how other communities in our county were coping during the Covid pandemic.

We are aware of our communication for awareness of our group with posters around the village and regular details published in the Shelswell News and Village Voice.

Our team has shrunk somewhat from 9 to 6, however we are functioning well on reduced numbers at the moment. If we feel we need extra help I will put out a call for volunteers. We are very fortunate to live in such a friendly and caring community. Residents are very generous with their time and help for one another.

Janie Thwaites, Founder and Co Ordinator - May 2021

* 1. **Village Voice**

**Fringford Village Voice Update for Parish Council AGM 24th May 2021**

**Production**

The **editors** are currently Mark Naylor who responded to the request for help and Linda Mustill, and as one of the founding Editors 6 years ago, Helen Fargin finished summer 2020 as her village hall responsibilities grew.

Understandably submissions over the past twelve months have fallen away as many groups were not meeting and hence nothing to report. Despite this, the Editors manage to produce the FVV using a combination of submissions and “shelf articles” to fill the space as we felt that more than ever it was important to publish for villagers to stay connected.

School continues to be very spasmodic with their submission but luckily FOFS always supply an article. Unfortunately, Playgroup also no longer submit copy. New villagers are encouraged to introduce themselves via the Fringford Folk section.

We are lucky to have a flexible arrangement with Vale Press and are able to alter the number of pages each issue to best match content. We also have a very good working relationship with Adam the designer who has worked on nearly every edition since its inception and continues to help us with the design and layout and works miracles with the copy & photos we supply.

The newsletter continues to be most generously sponsored by Webmart despite the fact that the owner has moved away from the village.

**Advertising** has continued to generate income for the Community Action Fund managed by the Parish Council. There is currently a ¼ page vacant with a couple of possible leads in the pipeline.

**Distribution:** When the Cowlands moved away, we lost Jill as our distributor for St Michael’s and Church End. The response to a little leaflet drop was very speedy & encouraging with 3 volunteers. The route has been shared now between two with the 3rd person on holiday cover standby. Thanks to Penny Wood and Carol Reader, we are also able to deliver to the outlying houses within the Parish boundaries.

**The future:**

With the burgeoning of various Facebook and What’s App groups, the FVV remains the one method of communication to reach all households, so hopefully the newsletter will continue to be welcomed by the villagers with content increasing as groups slowly return to the new norm. In the event of the sponsorship being withdrawn, there is a small buffer in the Community Action Fund to cover print costs.

1. **Any Other Business**

None

Meeting Closed at 8:22pm