

North Mymms Parish Council

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Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 17 April 2024 at 19.30 hours in the Burns Pavilion, Bushwood Close, Welham Green

Those Present:

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| Councillors | Mrs Teresa Travell
Mr James Bentall
Mrs Jacqui Bouton
Mr Stephen Boulton
Mr Paul Ferguson
Mrs Isabel Moritz
Mr Paul Thomson
Mrs Teresa Travell | Chairman |
| Officer | Mrs Christine Wootton | |
| Members of the Public | Mr Nigel Matthews – North Mymms Green Belt Society | |
| Members of the Press | None | |

1.	<p>Welcome by the Chairman of the Parish Council</p> <p>The Chairman of the Parish Council, Councillor Teresa Travell, welcomed all present to the meeting.</p>
2.	<p>Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Councillor Mia Americanos-Molinaro sent her apologies.</p>
3.	<p>Approval and signing of the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 19 April 2023</p> <p>It was proposed by Councillor Paul Thomson, seconded by Councillor Jacqui Boulton and agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 April 2023 be approved and they were signed by the Chairman.</p>
4.	<p>To receive financial reports of the Parish Charities</p> <p>a. North Mymms Recreation and Charitable Trust The Trustees met on 7th June 2023 for their annual meeting when applications for grants were considered and awarded "...for such charitable purposes for the general benefit of inhabitants of the Parish of North Mymms..." in accordance with the Trust Deed.</p> <p>Donations were made to St Mary’s Church of England School towards ergonomically designed chairs for the Reception Class to enhance Early Years provision at the school</p>

and a bench for outside, North Mymms Cricket Club towards junior cricket teams activities and kit, North Mymms Youth & Community Centre for insurance costs and ongoing maintenance, St Mary's Church towards repair of a medieval stained glass window, North Mymms Memorial Hall towards the Coronation Tea dance which was carried forward from the previous year and a sum for the roof repair fund, North Mymms Bowls Club towards a new gazebo, North Mymms Horticultural Society towards printing costs for the Show schedule, a scout attendee at the Jamboree held in South Korea and the North Mymms Arts Festival towards start-up costs.

The total donations amounted to £5,686.00 for 2023.

It is an ongoing task to encourage individuals or societies to apply for a grant, albeit it might not be for much money.

However, the purpose of the Trust is to encourage and nurture activities in the Parish and the residents in the pursuit of these, so please consider making an application for the benefit of Parishioners.

In 2023 the North Mymms Recreation & Charitable Trust had been in existence for just over 100 years. The Charity was established following a gift from the Burns family and funds raised from the sale of the old Scout hut land and the Social Club in Welham Green.

The date of the next meeting of the Trustees will be held on Wednesday 5th June 2024 at Noon. All applications for a grant should be forwarded to the Clerk at NMPC or the Chairman of the Trust, Mr Chris Measures, ahead of this meeting please.

b. North Mimms Parish Charities Report

The Trustees met on Thursday 11th May 2023 in St Michaels Room, St Mary's Church Minutes of the Meeting of Trustees of North Mimms Parish Charities held on Thursday 11 May 2023.

Mr Stephen Boulton agreed to take on the position of Chairperson.

The Clerk has recently undertaken a full review of the administrative requirements for North Mimms Parish Charities (NMPC). These requirements are detailed within a 'Principal Scheme' document dated 13th September 1932 and were summarised within the minutes.

During the year the assets of the charity were assessed, and various options were discussed for the future.

Accounts (draft version) for the year ended 31st December 2022. These figures were prepared and presented to the Trustees by The Clerk. The Draft Accounts were compared to the accounts, year ended 31st December 2020/31st December 2021 and discussed at the meeting.

Income - £3,862.23 (2021- £3,864.38/2020- £4,057.82) A similar figure from that seen in 2021. The previous difference/reduction of £193 attributable to lower interest being paid on the Blackrock investment.

Expenditure - £3,960.00 (2021- £4,100.00/2020-£5,228.76) A difference/saving of £140 attributable to a reduced number of beneficiaries during the year. Previously a similar change plus a £400 saving as no payments made to schools.

Shortfall - £97.77 (2021- £235.62/2020 £1,170.94) A reduction of £138 for the reasons shown above.

Assets Held - £85,303.95 (2021 - £107,194.31/ 2020 - £115,104.31) a substantial reduction seen of £21,890.36 attributable to the reduced value in the shares / investments held with Blackrock – (2022 £1.46 per unit - share / 2021 £1.84 per unit - share / 2022 £1.97 per unit - share).

From an income/expenditure perspective all remains satisfactory. It is the asset value that has reduced substantially. This reduction is attributable to the current economic situation with the UK alongside general share values. A situation that North Mimms Parish Charities cannot control but needs to monitor going forward. In September 2022 the unit-share price did drop to £1.42. Since 31st December 2022 the Blackrock share price increased slightly to £1.48.

The Clerk would submit the Draft Accounts to the auditor for approval and subsequent submission to the Charities Commission

Review of Widows Grants

There are currently six beneficiaries and this is to remain going forward. A reduction from seven during last year. Matters were discussed and all were reminded about how prospective beneficiaries could be identified. Each beneficiary is currently paid £130 a quarter/£520 a year. With the current economic climate and increasing living costs the Trustees discussed the option of increasing the figure currently paid to each beneficiary. An increased figure of £150 per quarter/£600 a year was agreed with effect from the payment due in June 2023

1932 Schedule, Section 4 – Application of Income 1) To Vicars 2) Possible reintroduction to Junior Schools:

- 1) This is to remain unchanged at £100.00 each – total £200.00 per annum
- 2) This ceased in 2021 and the same remain in 2023. Previously a total sum of £400

The Annual Return for 2022 was submitted to The Charity Commission in October 2023.

c. North Mymms Community Book Swap

When the mobile library services ceased on 30th October 2015, due to a decision that had been taken earlier by Hertfordshire County Council Cabinet, North Mymms Parish Council was very happy to assist when they received a proposal for a Community Book Swap. The North Mymms Community Book Swap opened in March 2016. It initially opened in two small rooms to the side of the North Mymms Memorial Hall with the room at the front used as a community café and the room at the back used as the book swap.

The Book Swap opened every Wednesday morning from 9.30am to 12.30pm and on the first Saturday of the month. The Book Swap was and still is run entirely by volunteers who make tea/coffee and home-made cakes.

The Book Swap was very successful and continued to attract new people until the Covid pandemic when sadly the Book Swap had to close. An amazing band of Volunteers did however take books to those who requested them so that they were still able to have a selection of books to read. Jigsaw puzzles were also introduced at this time so that residents had another way of passing the time during lock down.

When Government rules meant that people could meet outside for recreational purposes volunteers, decided to open the Book Swap on Saturday mornings. Tables were arranged outside the Memorial Hall to adhere to Government regulations and take-away coffee was served.

When Covid restrictions were eventually lifted it became clear that residents needed to socialise and return to some sort of normality. It was decided that the original Book Swap rooms would not be big enough to accommodate the number of people who wished to attend. The Memorial Hall Committee agreed that the Book Swap could use the main hall on agreed dates as this was a much bigger venue and would adhere to post Covid regulations.

It was agreed that the Book Swap would change the day on which it ran to a Saturday but would only run on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month. The community café would be held in the main hall and the Book Swap would still be held in rooms to the rear of the hall which were better set out than the previous rooms.

This has proved to be an even bigger success with approximately 50 to 60 people attending on each Saturday the book swap is open.

Because of the Book Swap's success, the Parish Council, which agreed at the outset to fund the project for 5 years, decided that it was now able to fund itself.

The Book Swap has recently held a very successful Christmas Book Swap and a Macmillan Coffee Morning and continues to provide a community hub.

In February 2021, North Mymms Parish Council (NMPC) approved the holding of monies received by the book swap (contributions, grants, donations and tea room receipts) in an NMPC account with Unity Trust Bank, to be kept by the Assistant Clerk/Bookkeeper with a quarterly report to the Council on the Community Book Swap income and expenditure for transparency and accountability purposes. The Assistant Clerk/Bookkeeper has created forms so there will be formal documentation of any transfer made from the Parish Council to the Book Swap. A receipt letter is provided to volunteers when cash is handed in to the Parish Office and receipt issued. This can be reconciled to the bank statements.

A suggestion was made that the Book Swap set up a committee to manage the affairs of the Book Swap. As many small groups run very successfully without an elected committee, the entire group of regular volunteers of the Book Swap will be the 'management committee' and everyone is responsible for the group's affairs. We will however have members responsible for long term tasks such as managing the money and making the decisions necessary to keep the Book Swap running.

A report will be made to NMPC at least once per annum with a note of the names and contact details of the regular volunteers with particular responsibilities.

5. Parish Council Chairman's report and introduction of the Committee Chairmen

The Parish Council includes different committees. Planning, Amenities and Finance. Each committee has its own chairman. They are Planning: Councillor Mia Americanos-Molinaro, Finance, Councillor Stephen Boulton and Amenities, myself Councillor Teresa Travell.

The Clerk, Mrs Christine Wootton, has completed the FILCA (financial training course) which ensures that the Parish Council is fully compliant in all aspects relating to the management of public funds.

Councillors are grateful to the Clerk for maintaining the smooth running of the Parish office, for her assistance, efficiency, support and the fact that she is always optimistic even when dealing with difficult issues.

The Clerk is assisted by the Assistant Clerk/Bookkeeper, Mrs Linsey Steele, who ensures that the books are kept in order, prepares financial papers for finance and Parish Council meetings, together with audits and any other financial updates that are required. Linsey also reviews the policies that the Parish Council adhere to and ensures that these are updated accordingly. We are grateful to Linsey for her competence, calm demeanour and the efficient way she maintains the finances.

We are extremely fortunate to have such a strong team working with us.

	<p>The Groundsmen continue to work diligently and no matter what the task, they do it with enthusiasm and without complaint. They continue to maintain all the open spaces and play areas within the Parish and ensure that everything is done to a high standard. The Groundsmen have again had to deal with instances of vandalism over the last year which takes them away from other work they should be doing. This affects the community and costs the Parish, which in turn costs the community, who support the parish via their Council tax, in order to put right the damage that is being done.</p> <p>Councillors recognise the hard work and effort that the Groundsman put in throughout the Parish and are grateful to them for all that they do.</p> <p>The Remembrance Day Service was held on 12th November 2023 and the Chairman and members of other organisations laid a wreath at the War Memorial. Various youth groups and a marching band were able to join us on the day which made the day even more poignant.</p> <p>North Mymms Parish Councils Civic Service was held on Sunday 25th February 2024 and the Mayors of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield together members from a number of voluntary organisations and societies were able to join us for the service and refreshments afterwards.</p> <p>A Coronation Tea Dance, to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III, was held in North Mymms Memorial Hall on Monday 8th May 2023. It was very well attended with the music being provided by “Heads Up” band. Councillors and other volunteers served afternoon tea to all those who attended, which was very well received by the mainly adult attendees. Councillors also enjoyed the food and festivities.</p> <p>Due to the success of these celebration Tea Dances, the Parish Council will be holding a D-Day Tea Dance on Sunday 26th May 2024. We hope that this will encourage all ages to get involved in this community event.</p> <p>The Parish Council have once again participated in the “Winter Warmer”. This project provided a bowl of homemade soup, (two choices), a slice of bread and butter for £1.00 and tea/coffee and two biscuits for 50p. The project ran every Thursday from 7th November 2023 to Thursday 21st March 2024. Approximately 30/40 attended each week and not only did they appreciate the soup but they enjoyed the company of others. The money raised from the sale of soup and tea/coffee was £800. This will be used to buy food for the Hatfield Food Bank, at Gracemead House, which is in need of supplies as they are currently feeding 100 families each week.</p> <p>Although Councillors Jacqui and Stephen Boulton resigned from the Parish Council in May last year, I am pleased to confirm that due to an insufficient number of people coming forward to stand as Parish Councillors in the elections in May 2023, both Jacqui and Stephen agreed to be co-opted onto the Council. I would therefore like to thank them both for their commitment and support over the last year. I hope that we can persuade others within the community to volunteer to become Parish Councillors and add their talents to those of the Councillors who currently make up the Parish Council. It is not an arduous role and can be an enjoyable and fulfilling experience.</p> <p>I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Councillors for their encouragement and dedication over the last year.</p> <p>I will now invite the Chairmen of the various committees to read their reports.</p>
6.	<p>To receive the reports of the Committee Chairmen</p> <p>a. Finance Committee – Councillor Stephen Boulton</p>

This is the report of the finance committee of the council for the year 2023 to 2024. The figures are taken from the draft, unaudited accounts.

The precept increased to £209,130 which was an increase of 5% on the previous year's precept. Overall, however income rose to £272,912 from £254,614 an increase of 7.2%.

Apart from the precept, other main sources of income include the rent on the estate office, the bungalow rent and the hire of the bowling green. Additional income was received from bank interest, football pitch hires and the rent on Gobions lake.

Expenditure however increased to £272,753 which is a significant increase of 11% and has necessitated careful budgeting for the year 2024-2025. The main element of expenditure is salaries which accounts for £159,334 or 58% of total expenditure. Other significant costs included running the Burns Pavilion, including upgrading of services, at £24,705.23. There was also considerable expenditure on the open spaces' trees including a tree survey and work on trees totalling £13,960.

Fuel costs were significant during the year at £4,232 and the bowling green maintenance cost was £2835.

Maintenance, repairs, and other costs to the bungalows totalled £12,166.

The cost of running the office and general administrative costs amount to £27,277.

As usual we made grants to worthy causes and these totalled £5,182.

There was an exceedingly small surplus of £161,84 for the year.

Reserves stand at £62,117 in general reserves and £152,071 in earmarked reserves.

This amount is considered low given the expenditure requirements expected in the future and it will be necessary to build up earmarked reserves for future anticipated costs.

The tax base for North Mymms is 4451 at 99.4% of 4478 homes giving a cost of the precept per property of just £46.98 per annum or ninety pence per week. It remains excellent value for all residents and reflects the diligent work of the clerk, assistant clerk and bookkeeper and groundsmen.

I therefore want to thank our clerk Christine Wootton and our assistant clerk and bookkeeper Linsey Steell for their excellent work in maintaining and running the finances of the parish and our groundsmen who maintain the outdoor facilities and grounds. Finally, my thanks to my fellow councillors, who once again have claimed no expenses for their council work.

b. Planning Committee – Report prepared by Councillor Mia Americanos-Molinaro and read by Councillor Paul Thomson

I am pleased to report that the Planning Committee this year has consisted of six Councillors with at least three meeting twice every month.

This has been a busy year for Councillors Teresa Travell, Paul Thomson, Jacqui Boulton, Tony Green and Isabel Moritz and Clerk Christine Wootton with her analysis showing an increase of about 11% in terms of number of applications and those approved by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC). The statistics for the year's planning applications are as follows:

171 Applications considered at committee (154 in 2023)

Of those, 10 applications were withdrawn (2 in 2023)

45 remain undecided (47 in 2023)

18 were refused (20 in 2023)

2 were Prior Approval

1 Prior Approval was required and was given (2 in 2023)
2 Prior Approval applications were required and were refused
2 were Part Approvals or Partially Discharged
91 were Approved by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (80 in 2023)

This year saw the long-awaited outcome of the Inspector's decision regarding the Local Plan which was finally adopted in October 2023. As a result, we noted the withdrawal of legal challenge of developer Aurora Properties Ltd in respect of their permission to appeal against the Inspector's decision to refuse development of the Land North of Bradmore Way.

It was noted that whilst applications throughout the year were mainly for further development of individuals' properties, NMPC has continued to receive presentations from Developers, keen on encouraging applications for larger developments.

Although a consultee, able to make "Major objections, Objections, Comments or No Comments" NMPC's contributions are considered by WHBC who make the ultimate decision as to the planning application's success. Likewise, if NMPC submit a Major Objection based on serious matters of concern, the application has to be determined by the Development Management Committee consisting of Borough Ward Councillors. They decide at their meeting as to whether to approve or refuse the application after considering the concerns brought to their attention. On these occasions, an NMPC Councillor will attend the meeting to put forward reasons for the objection.

We note in the Parish this year steady levels of concern regarding the treatment of Green Belt land, this in part made possible through the increased use of social media. Concerns have included those regarding use of Parish agricultural land for events purposes which may impact the Parish as a whole. The NMPC acknowledges concerns of Parishioners and welcomes increased engagement in the community on planning matters.

This year we have sought additional training and guidance from WHBC for the purpose of raising our standard of analysis of the planning applications and we are pleased to note some assistance from Chris Carter and his team at WHBC, we hope to seek more training this year to understand the Planning Officers approach better.

We were greatly encouraged to note the government's revised NPPF guidelines which should in theory help strengthen protections of the Green Belt land. We welcome the approach for consideration of more Brownfield land, but at the same time we recognize the need to stay vigilant as housing targets throughout the country remain unmet. We continue to maintain the wishes of the community in consideration of the Green Belt land in our Parish in the face of continued Developer interests.

It remains for me to thank all the Councillors and the Clerk for their dedicated and on-going commitment to the work of the Planning Committee, in particular Cllr Jacqui Boulton who has continued to assist us on technical aspects in planning matters. The numbers of applications continue to increase but the Planning Committee have been steadfast in their processing all of them throughout the year.

c. Amenities Committee – Councillor Teresa Travell

It has been a very productive year as far as Amenities is concerned.

The Groundsmen continue to keep the Parish looking bright with the array of flowers in the containers scattered around the Parish, although a number of plants were stolen early in the season. They have done a great job maintaining the play equipment, making sure it is safe for children to use. They have kept the grass cut, even though the amount

of rainfall has been a real issue this year. The bowling green has once again received many compliments for its appearance and this is again down to the Groundsmen's commitment to ensuring that everything they do is done to the highest standard. I would like to thank them for their continued hard work and dedication.

The Puttocks Drive project has still not progressed any further and, due to the communication delays experienced with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, discussions are taking place within the Parish Council to determine whether or not to continue with this project.

North Mymms Parish Councillors held a meeting with representatives from Hertfordshire Football Association and the Hatfield Community Sports Fund Board in May 2023. The meeting was to outline the plans for extending the Burns Pavilion and to identify sources of grants and funding. North Mymms Parish Council has now applied for a grant of £10,000 to pay for a Strategic Facilities Plan co-ordinator to assist us with taking this project forward.

Two local children presented a request for a zip wire to be installed at the Welham Green Recreation Ground. Although Councillors were pleased to receive this request concern was expressed at the likely vandalism of the equipment, based on recent experience, and it was decided to refuse the request.

North Mymms Angling Club, with the permission of the Parish Council, has installed solar panels at Gobions Lake. The water is now running into the lake in the way that it should. All lights in the Burns Pavilion have been upgraded to LED's. This has enhanced the lighting and will cut electricity costs.

The Clerk and Ground Staff together with Councillor Paul Thomson inspected the trees at Gobions Wood in July 2023. Due to the number of Ash trees within the wood and Ash Die Back disease it was agreed to have a survey done. The survey was completed and a number of trees were shown to be in need of urgent removal. A tree removal company has now been selected and the relevant trees will be removed in the near future.

Hertfordshire Fire Protection Department carried out a safety inspection in August 2023 and all items in the report passed inspection.

Vandalism has once again been an issue with children's play equipment being damaged and the tree planted at Little Heath Open Space as part of the Queen's Green Canopy initiative being dug up and stolen.

The Japanese knotweed has now been brought under control and the Grounds Staff will now be able to monitor the area and if further growth is noted, treatment can be professionally controlled and managed.

Free hedging plants from the Woodland Trust were planted along the edge of the football field at Welham Green. A number of new saplings from Hertfordshire County Council have been "potted on" until they are large enough to plant out.

North Mymms Green Belt Society donated a tree in memory of member Clive Bennett. This was planted at the Recreation Ground, Welham Green.

A new boiler has been installed in the Burns Pavilion as the old boiler had stopped providing heating and hot water. The exterior wood cladding of the Pavilion needs to be weather proofed and quotations are currently being sought for this project. The water tank, used for irrigating the bowling green, had been leaking for some time and despite trying to repair it, the leak persisted. We were able to obtain a grant from Welwyn Hatfield Council/UKSPF and the tank has now been replaced.

	<p>The surface of the car park at Gobions was in need of repair so road planings were used to repair it. The Groundsmen spent three days spreading the planings over the carpark, working in extremely difficult conditions and I would like to thank them for all their hard work and commitment to this project.</p> <p>The allotments as well managed by our Clerk and Assistant Clerk/Bookkeeper and as soon as one becomes vacant the vacancy is immediately filled. We still have a small waiting list so it appears that allotments are still popular. The allotment holders have experienced very diverse weather conditions over the last year but consistently produce bumper crops of vegetables, fruit and flowers. They are a hardy bunch.</p> <p>The book swap continues to be very successful and runs on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of each month and attracts between 50 and 60 people each session.</p> <p>I would like to thank the Clerk and Assistant Clerk/Bookkeeper for all their support over the last year. They continue to ensure that everything runs smoothly and efficiently which is essential in a busy Parish office.</p>
7.	<p>Public Open Forum</p> <p>North Mymms Green Belt Society had submitted a question ahead of the Meeting:</p> <p><i>“The Local Plan has removed significant areas of the Green Belt from the parish by designating them as development sites. What is the Parish Council’s approach to the implementation of the Local Plan and to protecting the Green Belt going forward?”</i></p> <p>The Parish Council recognises that the parish had to accept its share of new development as part of the Local Plan and accepts that the country, and especially the South-East, has not been building sufficient houses for the population growth and demographic changes which have resulted in artificially high housing costs and lack of housing.</p> <p>The Parish Council also accepts that most of the new housing in the borough will be built on brownfield sites and that green belt removal was necessary to achieve the remainder of housing numbers.</p> <p>The implementation of the Local Plan will result in sites within the parish being built upon and whilst the Parish Council will look at each development proposal individually, when each application comes to the council for comment, the council accepts that wholesale refusal will not be appropriate, but rather the council will seek to ensure that density, design, amenity space and infrastructure are all suitable and reflect the character of the parish.</p> <p>The Parish Council shall also continue to object to any proposals in the green belt as it has always done previously.</p>

The meeting closed at 20.06 hours.

Signed _____

Date _____