



**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Stoke Hammond Parish Council
held by video conference on
Tuesday 20th April 2021 at 7.30pm**

Present: Cllr Greg Noble (Chair), Cllr Karl Johnson, Cllr Geoff Lane, Cllr Malcolm Newing, Cllr Mike Robinson, Cllr David Venn, Joanna Simonds, Clerk and RFO, and 8 members of the public.

1. To receive apologies for absence

Stephen McNally

2. To receive reports and matters arising

**Chairman's report covering the activities of the Parish Council
presented by Chairman, Cllr Greg Noble**

I am sure like all the organisations when reading their reports tonight, they will make mention of how the Covid Pandemic has had an impact on their operations, and the Parish Council has not been immune, but to a lesser extent than to some others. We have learnt how to conduct all our meetings via the Zoom video portal, which has I believe actually increased the number of people who have joined in with our meetings, as it is far more convenient to be sitting at home with your laptop or mobile in front of you with a beverage in hand, than having to leave home and make your way along to the Community Centre. Interaction on Zoom is not quite the same as a physical public meeting, but generally I think it has worked quite well.

Sadly, last year we lost our much-loved Councillor Mavis Berrow, who had been unwell for some time, but continued to attend meetings. Mavis had served on the Parish Council for many years, and when the right opportunity comes along, the Parish Council will dedicate something fitting in her memory.

We also last year welcomed last April our new Clerk, Joanna Simonds and I think all the Council will agree that Joanna, has settled in well and is doing a sterling job.

Joanna is not the only new person to join the Parish Council as in November of last year three new Councillors were co-opted onto the Council, namely Councillor Stephen McNally, Councillor Malcolm Newing and Councillor David Venn. Malcolm and David both reside in Stoke Hammond Village, whilst Stephen hails from Newton Leys South, which is most fitting as the Parish Council has for some time been trying to engage more with Newton Leys South and having this representation can only help move this forward. Indeed, to help recognise that Newton Leys South is part of the Parish of Stoke Hammond, the parish journal the SH News which is financially supported by this council, was last month renamed the SH & NLS News, and also now contains a regular feature on News from Newton Leys South.

However, the faces you see on the council will be changing, some are leaving, and others are standing for the elections to be held on the 6th May, and for the first time in many years we have more candidates than the seven councillor positions, therefore you the public will vote for their new council. So, when you go along to the Community Centre polling station on May 6th you will be given a ballot paper containing the names of 12 candidates, and you can cast your vote in favour of up to 7 of the listed names.

Normally, Parish Councillors are elected every 4 years, but it has this time been 6 years since the last elections. They were deferred for one year in 2019 because of the formation of the new single unitary authority that is Buckinghamshire Council, and then postponed last year because of Covid.

Covid, also meant that we did not have an Annual Parish Meeting in 2020, so what are the main talking points that have occurred over the last two years? Well as already mentioned, we are no longer covered by Aylesbury Vale District Council and Buckinghamshire County Council, but one single unitary authority which is Buckinghamshire Council, where we fall within the Aylesbury ward. Thus, for most people and indeed this Parish Council, generally little at this time seems to be any different to before, but I suspect as the country opens up again with less imposed constraints, we may see more obvious changes being introduced by the new unitary authority.

The Dolphin despite undergoing a full refurbishment and extension, has not reopened its doors since closing some two years ago. It went up for auction in December last year but received no bids and is now up for sale with a guide price of £850K. We would love to have our pub back, but it is not exactly the right climate at the moment for anyone unless very bold to take on such a venture.

The Methodist Chapel sadly closed its doors for the last time in 2019. The Parish Council did investigate the possibility of purchasing the building for the benefit of the community, but financially the figures did simply not stack up. But, when the new owners submitted a planning application for conversion into a Day Nursery, we in line with many residents objected to the plan, because of grave concerns about issues of parking and no pavement to the front of the building. We invited planning and highways to meet with us on site, but they declined and subsequently gave approval. However, the conversion has yet to start, as indeed have any of the new home developments already approved in Stoke Hammond, such as Fenny Road and The Mellows, but I do not think it will be too long before we see some movement on these sites.

We also took part with Newton Longville Parish Council in preliminary discussions for the possible development that will be Newton Leys West, which would be an extension of Newton Leys which would encompass both of our Parishes. We raised many concerns and are trying to arrange a further public meeting with the developers.

Still on Newton Leys, we have supported them in their efforts to get the 15 years extension for the operation of the Landfill site overruled. Milton Keynes council agreed and refused the application, but the Landfill owners are now going through the appeal process.

We recently learnt that the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway project has effectively been scrapped, which is good news for Stoke Hammond and other close by communities, as the preferred route corridor was destined to pass through the northern part of our Parish.

To make sure as many of you as possible are aware at the earliest opportunity of planning applications within or that might impact our parish, we will be posting details of all applications as soon as received on both our website and the Stoke Hammond and Newton Leys Facebook sites. We will also continue to include updates within the SH & NLS News.

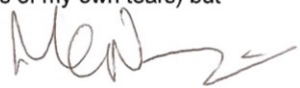
In closing, we must recognise all those residents who during the first few months of the Covid Pandemic, got together to tirelessly and without reward, help those less fortunate and vulnerable within our community, by way of the Village Volunteer Program. They did shopping, collected medication and provided a friendly voice on the telephone for those who were at home alone. Fantastic community spirit and a massive thank you to all those that were involved in this scheme.

Report from Community Organisations

Buttons Nursery – read out by the Clerk on behalf of Tracie Bailey

Buttons at Stoke Hammond opened in September 2015, and over the 6 years we have watched as our numbers have grown year on year. 2021 has been our busiest year to date and we are currently nurturing and supporting over 40 children.

Our Buttons come not only from the village of Stoke Hammond but from neighbouring Newton Leys, Bletchley and as far away as Stony Stratford. Given the beautiful setting we have here in the village this is no surprise. When the school year finishes in July 2021 we will wave goodbye to 23 children as they begin their next journey to "big school", this will be the most children to leave us in one go, and it is always a bittersweet day for me (one with lots of my own tears) but with an immense sense of pride.



Preschool life in a village is just fabulous. Our children have access to so many wonderful experiences, from walking to post their mail, visiting the alpacas and sheep, hunting for hidden treasure, counting the cars, and even hunting for dinosaurs. You cannot miss our little Buttons, with their hi viz jackets and singing voices, and we so love it when villagers give us a wave or stop to say hello.

Christmas 2020 (in lockdown conditions) meant that we had to cancel our usual concert in the church, but we did not let a little thing like Covid stop us, no, we wrapped up warm and sang around the Christmas tree on the green, it was lovely to see so many of the villagers there, and the hot chocolate was certainly a hit.

There are 10 staff based in the community centre now, a huge increase on the 4 of us that started in 2015. Taz our manager is just the bubbliest, happiest and funniest member of staff. She leads an amazing team who in turn give their all to our Buttons, no two days are ever the same, life is never dull.

Buttons is about one thing and one thing only, the joy, education and love that children need and deserve, delivered in a warm, safe, and beautifully resourced preschool. Buttons at Stoke Hammond is the jewel in our crown, we could not be prouder of it. Please do come and visit us, you are always welcome, we love to meet new people and cannot wait to offer many more years of preschool life.

Community Associate report – presented by Ann Payne

Whilst the first lockdown of last year was big change to all of our lives, it suddenly meant for the Community Centre, that from having almost non-stop occupation with the likes of Buttons Preschool, Innovations, Pilates, Joyful Tots, Slimming World, the Scouts and an Art Group using the centre each week. We suddenly went to nothing at all, and our pretty full calendar for weekend parties and other special events all had to be cancelled. Luckily, we were able to secure a grant from the local authorities to help see us through and we were able to welcome Buttons back after a short while, and just today Innovations have returned to the centre. But I think it will be a long time before we enjoy the level of use that the centre once enjoyed, we are however reopening the centre for private bookings from the 1st July.

Before the pandemic hit, we had undertaken some improvements at the Centre, and thanks to a New Homes Bonus grant we were able to instal a new mobility entrance into the centre complete with a ramp, handrails and new door. With the assistance of the Parish Council, we were able to secure a much larger grant from the then AVDC which enabled us to undertake a full interior redecoration of the centre and complete completely renew the large flat roof area above the main hall. Updates continue, and just this month we have replaced the last of the old single glazed aluminium windows to the toilets, storage cupboards and utility room, with new white upvc double glazed units. We are also currently seeking quotations to replace the poor road surface and uneven paving that leads up to the Centre, but we will probably need to seek out some grants to help cover what will likely to be a substantial, well for us, cost.

Our planned Eurovision Song Contest party for 2020 did obviously not go ahead and likewise last December we were not able to hold our popular Senior Citizen's Xmas Lunch but we do have scheduled for this Summer on Saturday 24th July our equally popular Senior Citizen's Afternoon Tea event. But before that event, we have our Annual General Meeting to be held on the evening of Tuesday May 18th. Full details of the AGM are contained within the April/May edition of the SH & NLS News. We are particularly in need of a Treasurer, as we have been without one for some two years now. Our Chair has been filling in for the role but would dearly love to pass the reigns on to someone new!

In closing we would ask if residents could assist us and keep an eye out for any suspicious activities occurring around the Centre. Unfortunately, in recent weeks the Buttons children's garden has been vandalised and play items strewn across the field, and only yesterday, our Chair had cause to chase three youths he caught unbelievably playing and striding across the centre's flat roof.



Gardening Club – presented by Eileen Curry

Obviously, the Gardening Club has been unable to hold any events or trips this year, but our many members have kept in touch and are anxious to get going again. We managed to hold our 2020 AGM just before lockdown and had booked various events and trips including the Woburn Flower Show in late June but, of course, everything had to be cancelled.

We have missed our outings and gatherings and really thought that we would be able to hold our Afternoon tea and plant swap at the end of May. However, this is not going to be possible although we will be distributing any plants we have grown among our members.

We must continue to be patient but as soon as things are relaxed enough to allow a large gathering, we will be holding a get-together and the Committee will then leap in to action and start arranging some fun events - hopefully in the autumn and onwards.

Book Club – presented by Eileen Curry

Again, we have been unable to collect books or meet up this year, but we are all keen to continue as soon as possible and Blechley Library have been in touch to let us know that they are ready when we are. We therefore hope to hold our first official meeting on 24th June and then back to our regular get-togethers and discussions. "ALL BEING WELL !!!!!!!!!!!!"

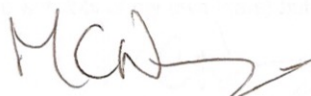
St Luke's Church – presented by Diane Webber

Parish Council Report Apr 19 – Mar 21

St Luke's church would like to thank the Parish Council for contributing for the past 2 years towards the cost of maintaining the public footpath that runs through the churchyard. We would also like to thank the Parish Council for allowing us the use of the Village Green (sometimes including a power source) to hold our Plant Sale, Cake Sale, Church Gift Day and the Nativity dramatisation and carol service.

St Luke's Church Report: Apr 19 – Mar 20

- Prayer walks and prayer meetings were held throughout the year.
- A Lent course with the theme of the letters to Colossians and Philemon was held.
- Valerie Kerr continued to organise "Open the book": an introduction to the Bible through dramatised stories, (with actors including members of St Luke's church) in the catchment primary school at Great Brickhill, High Ash.
- Community Breakfasts were held monthly through the year until Feb 20, and afternoon teas during the summer months.
- The church provided a bimonthly report to the SH News village magazine.
- Special services included Cafe church, Harvest Festival, Easter and Christmas. Toby Pollington a local teenager baked us a harvest loaf and Harvest lunch was celebrated in the Community Centre with a good number of attendees who thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon.
- The Church held a popular Remembrance Day service which was led at St Luke's by Licensed Lay Minister Valerie Kerr.
- At Christmas, the dramatised Nativity with carols on the Village Green was well attended as was the Crib service. Mulled wine and mince pies proved popular yet again!
- Fundraising events included the Plant Sale, Summer Fete, Barn Dance with live band and Pig roast, Christmas Fayre and Christmas Tree festival.
- The annual gift day (at which refreshments are offered) invited anyone who wished to, to make a donation towards the church restoration and repair fund. These donations are ring fenced solely for the church building and churchyard.
- Profits from the May Community Breakfast went to Christian Aid; the collection from the Remembrance Day service went to the Royal British Legion; the collection from the Christingle service went to The Children's Society and money raised by the sponsored Ride and Stride was shared equally with Bucks Historic Churches Trust.
- Financially the church had a good year with a good surplus on the general fund going to the restoration and repair fund.
- Towards the end of March 2020, the pandemic took effect in the UK and most church activities were curtailed by the lockdown. On Saturday 21st March, the church held a socially distanced prayer walk around the village - our last event before the full lockdown.



St Luke's Church Report: Apr 20 – Mar 21

- Many church services were cancelled during 2020 and it was agreed when we were allowed to begin running services again to hold only one service a week over the benefice (our group of local churches in nearby villages including Brickhills Bow, Little and Great). This meant only one service a month at St Luke's church.
- Instead, the Rector produced a weekly written reflection shared on Facebook and by email to anyone interested to join the church email group.
- We have had to learn new technology to access online Zoom meetings and services as well as a Zoom Lent course but were allowed to hold our Easter service live (albeit without singing!)
- Services are now risk assessed and appropriate precautions taken in regard to the Covid situation and following Government guidelines.
- We have been fortunate to be able to hold a sale of plants through the summer at John Bowler's gate and a cake sale and our Gift Day on the Village Green. Sadly, we were unable to hold our usual Christmas Nativity service on the Green as we felt it would be impossible to control social distancing.
- In terms of special services, we held our Harvest Festival and an outdoor socially distanced Remembrance service attended by very few owing to the introduction of a tiered Government restriction system. Luckily, we were able to hold a pared down Carol service (at which only the Benefice choir were permitted to sing), the week before the Government introduced the second lockdown. The Christmas hamper raffle was drawn at the service. A midnight Christmas Eve service was also allowed to take place. Places at all church services at St Luke's had to be booked with the churchwarden to ensure we remained within the Government guidelines for social distancing.
- In July we set up a Food Bank as it became clear that some people were struggling financially. The following month we began a children's toy swap shop to help entertain children through the summer.
- We have not been able to make much progress with work identified in the 2018 quinquennial inspection report owing to the pandemic. The repair bill identified costs of £36K.
- Donations were made to: Christian Aid; the collection from the Remembrance Day service went to the Royal British Legion; and the Bucks Historic Churches Trust via the Ride and Stride sponsored event
- Profits from a sale of Neal's Yard products were also donated to the church.
- The church provided a bimonthly report to the SH News village magazine.
- Financially the church scraped through this year thanks to a little fundraising and an increase in donations from regular givers.
- Unfortunately, this year an accounting error identified that we have been underpaying our Parish share for a few years at the expense of another parish in the benefice. This has now been remedied but has wiped out the profits of the last few years of fundraising!
- Thank you to everyone who supported the church in the last year

Sports Club – presented by David Tooth

We were only open half of the year, but over the past two years we've managed to renovate inside the sports club, decorating, with new carpet and new furniture to make it feel more homely for our members.

Although Membership has gone up over the last two years, mainly due to the Dolphin closing, Covid has meant that unfortunately we have been unable to increase membership further.

The Sports Club has suffered quite a lot of vandalism on the outside of the building in the form of glasses smashed, chairs thrown everywhere, vans and cars on the field driving around. Right now, there is little we can do about it, but it is very sad to see this type of behaviour.

Committee members have stayed the same this last year, but we would welcome new members of the committee if they would like to contribute in any way.

Finally, just to add that we hope to hold more functions next year.



The Village Show – presented by Chris Page

The Village Show Committee started in 2015. We currently have 5 committee members, but would always welcome more. Alan Humphries is joining this year and his daughter, Katie, will also join to help with some younger generation input. Although we have been quite successful with the middle and older generations, we don't quite hit the mark with the younger generation and hope with Katie on board to encourage that age bracket.

There was no show in 2020 but this year we plan to hold a show on Saturday 7th August which is a month earlier than usual. We have enough cash in the bank to fund the show so this year there will be no entrance fee, and we will not ask our sponsors, who have been so reliable over the years, to contribute. So, we will have stalls as usual, but will focus predominantly on trying to get the local SH and NLS residents to have a stall. We also plan to reduce the amount of stall from around 36 to approx. 20. There will be the usual live music, bar and BBQ, and we are currently in discussion on how to organise best the competition tent this year. So, because we are not charging entrance fees, we really hope it will be more of a joyous affair.

With previous years proceeds, we have tried to make investments that would make the show more self-sufficient in the coming years. In 2016, we purchased the village beacon, in 2017 an 8x12 marquee, in 2018 a new BBQ and accessories, and in 2019 another smaller marquee. We have also built a new bar which can be used year after year and all these purchase will enable us to hold the show every year, regardless of who the committee is or who takes it forward.

In the past the show has been very successful with over 500 attendees; the exact figure is unknown as we do not charge people under the age of 16. What we do know is that in 2019 we have 476 people who each paid a £1 entrance fee.

We hope that in previous years, the show will be supported by the whole parish and we are looking for more volunteers, not just to join the committee, but to assist in the days leading up to the show and after with the erecting and taking down of the marquees. We received a good response following our request for help on the Village Facebook page and will continue to use this as our method of communication leading up to the show.

The Chairman thank Chris and everyone else for their contributions and asked whether there were any final points or question before declaring the meeting closed.

Clr Newing asked whether we have an active Scouts/Guides Group still in existence. David Tooth confirmed that he was the Scout Leader but that over the last year, they have only met three times, and each of these were via Zoom. He mentioned that the numbers have dwindled dramatically, the scout group only now being 2 members from an original group of 15. The Cubs are going well but the Beavers group is no longer running.

Clr Robinson touched briefly on the Community Transport Scheme, commenting that it has been in existence since 2015 and was funded by Community Impact Bucks who supplied a mobile phone and £100 credit. At present we only have two drivers, one of whom is currently not available because of the Covid situation. Mike went on to say that it is also true to say that the scheme has not been used since July 2019 so the new Council might like to consider whether this is something they continue with going forward.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions and declared the meeting closed at 20:33

Chair: _____

Date: _____