

**Minutes of the Steeple Morden Annual Parish Meeting held Remotely
on Monday 26th April 2021 at 7.00pm**

Present: Fourteen parishioners plus Mr Jeremy Clayton(Chairman) and Mrs Sally Walmesley (Clerk).

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

District Cllr Williams, Annette Traverse-Healy

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS PARISH MEETINGS ON 8th May 2019

On a proposition by Mrs Wheatley, seconded by Mr Traverse-Healy the minutes as available were taken as read and approved as a true record. The Chairman would sign the minutes when appropriate.

A meeting was not held in 2020.

MATTERS ARISING

There were no Matters Arising.

4. FINANCIAL REPORT 2020/21 and 2019/20

Copies of the Receipts and Payments account were on the Parish Council website. There were no questions raised. The Chairman added that the Parish Council was in a good position financially.

5. REPORTS:

PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN –Mr Clayton

The Chairman had provided a report for the Parish Council website. There were no questions.

THE REPORT OF THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR

Cllr Kindersley had provided a report for the website. He had nothing to add to the report apart from updating the meeting on the East West rail petition which now had over 10,000 signatures.

He referred to the upcoming County Council election on the 6th May adding that this might be his last meeting as a County Councillor. The Chairman thanked Cllr Kindersley for his work over the past four years and if he was successful with re-election the council would look forward to working with him again.

THE REPORT OF THE DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

Cllr Williams had provided a report for the website.

THE TOWNLANDS CHARITY –Mr Clayton

The Chairman had provided a report for the website.

Cllr Traverse-Healy suggested that funds available from the charity could be advertised through the website with the criteria for accessing them. Cllr Belson added that the charity could also be advertised through the newsletter and Facebook.

The Chairman would take this suggestion back to the Trustees for discussion at their next meeting. He added that several people had been helped financially during the past year.

BASSINGBOURN VILLAGE COLLEGE

An update from the last two Village College newsletter had been provided for the website. Laura Sim, a Parent Governor, was in attendance. She added that the past year had been a year of challenge for staff and students. The Spring term was entirely remote learning apart from the key worker children. The college had managed 90% of lessons live with positive feedback from parents and students. This current term there were changes for exam assessments due to the cancellation of GCSE examinations.

The Village College had received its full quota of students for the next academic year 2021/22 and staff now felt that the college was getting back to normal.

The Chairman thanked Ms Sim for her report adding that everyone had done a remarkable job considering the circumstances.

STEEPLE MORDEN PRIMARY SCHOOL

A report had been provided for the website.

SMARTIES PRE-SCHOOL

A report was not available.

MOBILE WARDEN SCHEME

A report was not available.

ST PETER & ST PAUL CHURCH

A report had been provided for the website. There were no questions raised.

ALLOTMENT COMMITTEE

A written report had been provided.

VILLAGE HALL

A report had been provided for the website. Cllr Austin confirmed that the Village Hall had received some grants which were sufficient to cover running costs while the hall was closed. The hall was now open and receiving bookings in line with Government restrictions.

MORDEN PLAYERS

A report was not available.

SCOUT GROUP

A report had been provided for the website. Cllr Austin added that the group was lucky enough to receive a grant which would cover the cost of replacing all the windows in the building.

BROWNIE GROUP

A report had been provided.

REPORTS FROM VILLAGE SPORTS CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONSCRICKET CLUB

A report was not available.

FOOTBALL CLUB

A report was not available.

MAGPIES FOOTBALL CLUB

A report was not available.

TENNIS CLUB

A report had been provided. Avril Gilbert was in attendance. She reported that tennis was one of the few sports allowed at the beginning of the release from lockdown and the club had worked hard to ensure everyone was safe with a stringent risk assessment. The club had also received a grant which had been used to provide floodlights to a third court. It also paid for some sessions of coaching and the club hoped to do the same during the Summer of 2021.

Mrs Gilbert then referred to the use of the disabled toilet adding that at the current time the light in the toilet did not work. There was to be a match on the 3rd May when access would be needed. Cllr Badger confirmed that work was in hand to repair the light which had also been reported by the cricket club.

He also suggested that photographs be taken following use by the sports clubs to ensure the toilet was left in a acceptable state. The Chairman added that there were some problems with unsociable behaviour around the toilet which had resulted in the toilet being closed. The future use would be discussed at a Parish Council meeting to ensure it was managed better.

Mrs Gilbert was thanked for her report.

BOWLS CLUB

A report was not available.

TREE PLANTING WORKING GROUP

A report had been provided. Cllr Traverse-Healy advised that a lot of people had taken on their own individual tree to look after.

LITTER PICKING WORKING GROUP

Cllr Belson reported that there had been some people individually litter picking around the village in their own time. She had provided them with equipment and was very grateful to them. It was intended

to have a village litter pick on the 8th May for the whole village including Odsey. In the Autumn it was hoped to get back to some normality with the regular litter picks resuming.

RECREATION GROUND WORKING GROUP

Cllr Badger reported that there had been a lot of discussion about the Leylandii trees around the car park and play area. Three contractors had assessed the condition of the trees and sadly they all came to the same conclusion that the trees had a fungus infection and were dying. This could be seen when looking into the tree. The only way to deal was to cut the trees down. Cllr Badger showed a plan of where the affected trees were. It was hoped that the tree work could have been staggered but in order to provide a safe environment the work had to be carried out in one tranche. Timescale for this was September 2021 with replanting being carried out in November. Cllr Badger was to see if the primary school wanted to be involved with the planting. Advice was being sought on native species which would be safe and easy to manage.

The play area now had three new picnic benches. During the past week a RoSPA safety inspection report on the play equipment had been received and apart from some small items the equipment was in very good condition. The playground was one of the best in the area. Even though the weather had been cold recently the equipment was very well used.

Cllr Belson referred to the Guilden Morden and Litlington recreation areas where there were earth mounds for bikes. She asked if there was any appetite to introduce something similar in Steeple Morden. Cllr Badger was aware through a Facebook link that this had been mentioned.

The Chairman suggested that sometime during the Summer, once all lockdown restrictions had been ended, a Parish Council meeting dedicated to recreation ground improvements be held. It was requested that once a date had been set this be advertised in the school newsletter so that input from parents and children could be made.

6. PARISH COUNCIL REQUESTS FOR VILLAGE PROJECTS

Replacement storage for litter picking equipment. Cllr Belson expressed concern over the current box used to store the equipment and suggested something more substantial. This would be discussed by the Parish Council at a meeting.

8. ANY OTHER PARISH MATTERS

Covid Volunteers

The Chairman referred to all the people in the village who had given their time to help during the pandemic. He expressed a big thank you to all of them.

9. DATE OF NEXT PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

The next Parish Council meeting would be held on Thursday 6th May 2021 (AGM)

There was no further business and the Chairman thanked everyone for coming and declared the meeting closed at 7.45pm.

Signed _____ (Chairman) _____(Date)

REPORTS 2021

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - April 2021

I am pleased that this year we are able to have a parish meeting albeit a remote one.

We have to have the meeting by the end of May but of course with the Covid rules we cannot have a meeting with people until June.

Over the last year or so all Parish council meetings have been held remotely, I understand that some people are upset by this especially in relation to planning matters, we have however tried to publicise the meetings better to allow people to take part .

Still the PC has managed to conduct its business, our finances are in a very good state, our recreation ground has been well maintained, new speed devices have been installed and more measures to restrict speed through the village are being implemented and installed by Christmas. Trees have been planted and more will be planted this year. A new website has been designed and is now in use. Litter picking has carried on, it is amazing how much litter seems to be thrown down, and quite shocking.

I am grateful to all councillors who contribute to these matters. We have a system in place where councillors take responsibility for various items which seems to work well and to speed up decision making and action. At our AGM in May we go through the process of who is leading on each area. Of course not everything goes right, we have had problems over the last year with grass cutting, including of course the conservation area. I can assure you very firm instructions have been given for this year.

Quite a lot of our time is taken up with planning and I realise not all decisions taken by the Parish Council are popular. Please remember we are governed by a set of parameters on which we can object to planning. For example, we can comment about highways issues and state we don't think there is capacity for a development but ultimately that will become a highways decision, whether we object or not on a highways issue makes no difference to the eventual outcome. We have not supported several applications based on material grounds, for example outside the village envelope. To see the parameters we have to work to look up Planning on our website.

I also realise there is some feeling about parking near the school and I have noted many suggestions. We have, as a parish council, approached highways about the junction as Highways have to approve and take any action required. They have stated very clearly no action is needed. We can continue to lobby and will do so but we cannot force action.

Covid has been a very worrying time for most people. I am enormously grateful to those who have stepped up to help others, there are many of you. The covid group has been a big success and no little work for all those involved for shopping, phoning and everything else that has seen people kept safe and fed.

There have been treasure hunts, there have been quizzes, and a sense of the whole community coming together. Our footpaths have been well used, we are very fortunate to live in a village with so many. I have personally been struck by the friendliness of people whilst walking and have like most people enjoyed the chance to chat and meet new people.

Next year is parish council election year, please consider standing. Yes there is some work that needs doing, there are normally eleven meetings per year lasting one to two hours. Then most councillors take on additional work in their own time.

This coming year promises some return to normality and from June public meetings. If you are considering becoming a parish councillor please do try to come to some meetings to see what goes on. We actually like as many people to come to our meetings as possible, and to hear your views.

Lastly I would like to thank Sally our clerk for all her help during the year.

Stay safe

My best to all

Jeremy Clayton

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT

I would like to start my report by thanking all residents for the way they have supported each other during this pandemic, it has been a very challenging time for us all but hopefully the end is nearing and we can meet together in person once more.

Via a new virtual world I have continued to represent you at South Cambs District Council and will continue to do so, the most recent of meetings being of the planning committee which lasted for over 9 hours! As parish councillors will be aware, we are due to soon return to in person meetings, a little earlier than many would have liked including myself. I have made the decision, after discussing the potential impacts of this with my family, that I will attend physical meetings at the District and Parishes but this is not an easy decision for councillors to make and I will fully respect if others do not feel able to.

Thakeham Housing proposal update

There has not, at the time of writing this report, been any official submission by Thakeham to the District Council. Thakeham have claimed a delay in their submission time due to covid but that they will be submitting proposals in the call for sites for the next Local Plan. Many people such as myself have been looking at what methods the developers have to pursue this project. My research has shown that Thakeham have no option at present but to go through the normal local planning process, I have made it clear also that this proposal should receive no special treatment. This has been supported by South Cambs Director of planning who has also stated that he is unaware of any mainstream mechanism, other than the local plan process, that would enable the delivery of these proposals. Chris Pincher, Minister for Housing, has confirmed in a response to a written question in parliament about Thakeham that "Should an application for planning permission come forward it will be dealt with in the usual way". Government have also confirmed that they have no plans for a New Town in South Cambridgeshire. As a member of the Planning Committee and a voting member of the council on the Local Plan it is crucial that I do not pass any judgement or comment on my own

personal views of this proposal if I am to not become pre-determined and thereby lose my vote. I believe that the best meaningful way I can serve residents is to ensure that I am able to vote when the time comes.

Local Plan

It has been stated that the next stage of the next local plan will be starting around the Summer/Autumn of this year. I would encourage all to respond when the consultation opens as this document really does have an impact on our villages and lives. It will state where and how development should take place. There will be many areas from policy that will be consulted on such as environmental, layout, scale, design and affordable housing provision etc, along with a special strategy that will dictate where the majority of development will be happening over future decades.

Financial position of the SCDC

The year ending March 2018 accounts were signed off just before Christmas 2020 (these accounts were due to be signed off back in the autumn of 2018). Work has begun on the audit for the 2019 year end accounts and it is likely that the council will not be on time with its accounts reporting until the 2022 year end. Though there are no financial penalties for Local Government bodies filing late accounts, there are extra external auditor costs being of 6 figure sums for the 2018 accounts and likely additional costs for the future years that are delayed. It is of deep concern for myself and many others that the District council will take so long to get on time with its audits, I continue to raise this at meetings and along with questioning the officer resources available given this and staff turnover have been sighted as the reasons for many delays along with resources issues from the external auditor. The budget for 2021-2022 was agreed in February. There were elements that I welcome for example the resources towards homelessness prevention and supporting businesses and communities through the Covid recovery. However, on balance, there were too many elements that I was uncomfortable with and therefore voted against the budget. Below are some of the reasons as to why I voted against:

- The accumulative borrowing figure on the four-year forecast is nearly £420m – this is a 95% increase in the Council's debt over the four-year forecast, a rate that I personally believe is unsustainable given the limit the council has set itself is £511m (though this can be exceeded in the short term).
- There is a budget gap of nearly £6m with over £4m intended to be filled with growth.
- The Budget pressure figures forecast were significantly lower than the actual figures that we were comparing it to, so am concerned this is not overly realistic.

The council continues to increase its commercial investment portfolio, under its £340 million investment strategy. The Council has entered into financial Limited Liability Partnerships with Hill Group and Balfour Beatty to the sum of £140 million as part of the investment strategy. As these designs are taken with the press and public excluded I am legally limited as to what I can say, however I can say that I did not support this and my main reasons are that I believe there are real issues of conflicts of interest as the partnerships will be looking to develop land and will be applying to the District Council for planning permission. While this is Legal, I fear for the perception of this given a recent report from an independent planning advisory service from the Local Government Association spoke of a "Lack of Trust" in planning at South Cambs. I do not feel that these partnerships will restore that trust and at the same time it is a lot of money, taxpayers and future loans that will be needed to fund this project to be investing.

The environment

The District Council has recently published its Doubling Nature Strategy, and I'm pleased to say that on environmental issues at South Cambs there is rarely a time where there is not cross-party support. On such an important issue it's important that we put any other differences aside and all play our part to help in solving this problem. I am looking carefully, while the next local plan is being developed, as are others at the real implications' development is having on our water. It has been an incredibly difficult year for flooding and yet there are also rivers that completely dried up last summer.

Planning

It has been another difficult year for planning at South Cambs, when writing this report 90% of my case work is in relation to planning. No one at the moment is benefitting from this situation, the residents, the parish councils, the applicants, or the officers. This year has seen an embarrassing situation with the District Council affectively having to take itself to court to quash its own decisions, and this cannot carry on.

As part of the Planning Advisory Services report a group has been formed, of which I sit on, to try and implement the recommendations, a link to which is below. I hope that we will be able to find ways to improve this service but I do believe that the key reason as to why planning is in a pickle as one council called it at a planning meeting, is a lack of planning officers. I will continue to raise this and

while I'm pleased that this year much of the previous years near £1m budget cut has been restored, we need the rest of it and more if residents are to get the service they deserve.

[Appendix A - Peer Review Final Report 2020.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

At the budget meeting I proposed an amendment that saw a reduction in councillors allowances and communications budget to enable the long term employment of an extra planning enforcement but unfortunately this was voted down as there was not considered a need for it, below are the case figures which I believe show why it is, full stats are available at [Appendix 1 - Cases received and closed 10 Feb 2021 Committee.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#).

Month – 2020	Received	Closed
2020 - YTD	473	190
2019 - YTD	615	641
2018 - YTD	670	651
2017 - YTD	602	563

As your councillor

As your district councillor I am on the following committees:

- Audit & Corporate Governance Committee
- Civic Affairs Committee
- Climate & Environment Advisory Group (Substitute)
- Full Council
- Employment & Staffing Committee
- Grants Advisory Committee (Substitute)
- Licensing Committee (Substitute)
- Planning Committee
- Scrutiny and Overview Committee (Substitute)
- Anti – Bullying Task and Finish Group (Chairman)
- Planning Committee Development Group

I also have responsibilities as the Major Opposition Group Leader, I sit on the Greater Cambridge Partnership Assembly and I am a substitute on the Combined Authority's scrutiny and overview committee.

Political Balance of South Cambs District Council

The Current Political Balance of SCDC is:

Liberal Democrats	27	
Conservative	11	
Labour	2	
Independent	1	
Vacancy	4	(Due to resignations of 3 Lib Dems & 1 Ind)

Cllr Heather Williams

TOWNLANDS TRUST

We are a trust, set up many years ago to provide a bag of coal and a bird to pensioners at Christmas. Obviously it has come a long way since then.

We have changed our charitable aims over the last few years and we can now help more people . Our main criteria is of genuine need or of village benefit .

We have funds in excess of £160,000 and we have a rule that we only spend the interest and that any interest not spent per year is added back to the fund to grow the capital.

During the past year we have made donations to the mobile warden scheme, an athletes sports equipment, some accommodation expenses and have paid to have the churchyard mowed.

This coming year, we are helping provide funds for the village party in August, which we very much hope will be a celebration of our village.

If anyone knows someone who needs help, please contact Trish Covington in the first instance. Help to individuals is always given on a totally confidential basis.

We are also prepared to provide tools needed if someone is taking up an apprenticeship.

My thanks go to my fellow trustees , Angela Drew, Trish Covington and to Teresa Smith our secretary.

Jeremy Clayton

BASSINGBOURN VILLAGE COLLEGE

Autumn Term round up

This term has certainly been like no other in Bassingbourn Village College history. But through the adversity, our students and our community continues to flourish and college life goes on.

PHSE lessons this term have ensured attention has been given to support our students and allow them to express any concerns they may have, as well as develop skills to help them cope and adapt to the current way of life. We have also looked beyond 2020 and Covid-19 to consider Black Lives Matter, modern day slavery, and the role we can all play to eradicate bullying to name but a few.

Our School Council and Heads of Houses have been elected and are looking forward to working with the Senior Leadership Team in the coming months to develop ideas to introduce more inter-house activities while following the social measures in place. And our PE team have worked hard to ensure after school clubs were able to restart and over 160 students have already taken part.

For our Year 7s, we have been delighted with how well they have all settled into life at secondary school and adapted to their new routines extremely well. They have had a vast array of exciting and engaging lessons. In English they have all been enthralled by "My Sword Hand is Singing" by Marcus Sedgewick. Other lessons have allowed them to express their creative flair; in Drama they have been creating a script on a new planet, in Music they have composed their own pop song while utilizing the Apple iMacs and professional recording software. In Geography they have been excitedly working on "The Grand Bassingbourn Car Rally" where students planned a route around the local area using the map skills they have been developing.

The Year 8s have had a tremendous start to the academic year and have collectively amassed a very impressive total of merits. In lessons, students have been building on knowledge they gained with us in year 7. In Science, year 8s have been learning photosynthesis and respiration, to climate and the carbon cycle. The Science team have even adapted some practical lessons for inside the classrooms as the Science Labs are currently not possible to access. It has also been a busy term in languages with students looking at the cultural difference between French and Spanish Schools.

For our Year 9s they started their option subjects at the start of the term and have been getting on fantastically well. In 3Design students have been working on the topic of Formal Elements which has been a great opportunity to develop basic skills and drawing in a range of different media. Our Drama students have created two very impressive choreography pieces on the culture of carnival and a whole group ensemble piece based on the current pandemic which was extremely powerful and emotive.

For the Year 10s they have started back with a bang and their Achievement Leader has been delighted with how quickly they have settled back to college life. Year 10 Mentor time has been a real joy with a multitude of enrichment activities, ranging from the weekly inter-house quiz to discussions on topical issues and sessions which aim to develop their skills required by students for their future lives.

And finally our Year 11s have started their last year with us. They have worked so hard over the last four years and we are sure that this year will bear the fruits of this hard work. At the end of November they sat their trial exams which they took with such maturity and drive given the uncertainty surrounding their exams in the summer.

A message from the Principal (Summer Term)

There is no denying the spring term presented a multitude of challenges to our community. Once again I was immensely proud of how our students responded to these and the resilience they continue to demonstrate through a time of constant uncertainty.

Our teaching staff rose exceptionally to online learning and this time we were able to offer all our students 90% of live lessons. Our wonderful student support team ensured our students who need additional support, had TAs available in these lessons. As a result, our student engagement during the latest lockdown was incredibly high.

I remain grateful for the support that our students received from you at home during this time – once again many of you were working full time while supporting more than one child with online learning which is incredibly challenging.

For those students that did come into school during lockdown, our Cover Supervisors and TAs did an amazing job of supporting students with their learning, especially as many students were engaging with different subjects simultaneously. I have no doubt that through collaboration we have all ensured our students remain in the best possible place with their education. Over the course of the next term we will be looking to revisit work that took place in lockdown to re-enforce this learning while providing those students who need it with additional support.

When we returned to school the next challenge was the massive task of testing our whole student body three times in a two week period. This presented huge pressures and we needed a high number of volunteers from the staff and our wider community to support this effort. I cannot thank enough those members of our community that stepped up and volunteered. Without you we would not have been able to run such a successful operation.

I remain saddened that once again another issue of the Heron is unable to reflect the plethora of activities we would normally be involved in during this term. Rest assured as soon as it is safe and permitted we will be offering our students an abundance of exciting extra-curricular activities.

STEEPLE MORDEN CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

Steeple Morden Primary school, like every other school, has faced many tough challenges this year, but we are very pleased to report that Mrs How, the Headteacher, has managed the situation very effectively. The school remained open throughout the lockdown for children of Key workers and only shut for one week for a deep clean, after several pupils and teachers tested positive. Staff remain positive in difficult times and we believe that the school is working hard to ensure that parents and pupils feel safe, and that the process of 'catch-up' is a priority. There is a very calm and purposeful, yet caring atmosphere in the school, with learning and support being at the heart of everyday activities.

Clearly certain aspects of the school day have had to be managed in different ways, following new guidelines, and so children are in year group 'bubbles' and do not mix with children in other bubbles. This is being managed by all staff, by using spaces in different ways, staggering both ends of the school day, and breaks, and by staff working very hard to manage the situation.

Parents have generally been very supportive of the changes and have appreciated the efforts that staff are going to, to keep their children safe, but continue to provide a 'broad and balanced' education in as 'normal' way as possible.

Mental health and filling educational gaps have been key issues for many children: as we have come out of lockdown it is clear that children have had very different experiences during their time at home, both educationally and emotionally, and teachers are continually assessing children to see where their priorities have to be.

This is all taking its toll on the staff, who are working long hours, and have reported that it is a challenging time for them, but they are a very cohesive staff who support each other and who are being led very effectively by Tracey. Governors too are trying to support as much as we can, by visiting the school where permitted, and contacting staff to show our support. We continue to meet at our normal times via Zoom.

Over the last few years the school has developed the way its Christian Ethos is incorporated into each aspect of school life, and this is playing a key role in supporting the children, and is being used to emphasise the importance of kindness, resilience and bravery at a time when these values are so important in all aspects of society.

Finances continue to be challenging, as they are for many schools, but we are continuing to work alongside the Local Authority and recently this situation is starting to improve.

ST PETER & ST PAUL CHURCH

Following national guidelines, the church was obliged to close from the end of March until July 2020. However grateful thanks to all the regular volunteers for the jobs they undertook and help they provided during the year.

The opportunity was taken to thoroughly clean the tower room enabling the storage of old church papers in plastic boxes.

During the first lockdown the electrics were brought up to date, the organ was serviced, the roof alarm was checked, and drains and gutters were cleared of debris.

There were sadly few occasions when flower arrangements were possible, but the church looked very lovely for the funeral of the husband of one of the flower arrangers, and also at Christmas when an advent candle wreath was made and a Christmas Tree decorated and lit in the church porch. We also set up the stable with the Holy Family by the north door.

For a brief few weeks we were able to reopen for services and held a successful Nativity service attended by several families with small children. This was followed by a Group service for Midnight Communion on Christmas Eve and then on Christmas Day. No collections were possible however. During this time we also managed a Christmas 'mini market' in the Church selling cakes, jams and cards displayed on well distanced tables. Entering by the main door – 4 at a time and wearing face masks - exiting via the north door. Under the circumstances, this event was well supported with people giving generously.

The church has suffered particular financial hardship during the pandemic, so our special thanks to the church treasurer Peter Garner and helpers for organising an appeal for funds to all those living in the village. This was well supported with 'one off' donations and achieved a number of new monthly donors signing up to the Parish Giving Scheme. All being well we will be able to pay a larger proportion of our 'Parish Share' to Ely than we have managed in the last two years.

James & Katie Styles organised the 'Advent Windows' displayed around the village during December. This proved to be a wonderfully uplifting event during difficult times.

The permitted number of 6 went carol singing – suitably socially distanced raising £90 for church funds.

During the 3rd Lockdown the church has been opened every day for private prayer and contemplation, and throughout the year the churchyard and Garden of Rest have been maintained.

STEEPLE MORDEN ALLOTMENT SOCIETY

Overall, there were many positives among the difficulties of last year. Chief among them was that tending your allotment was one of the activities allowed to do during lockdowns.

Participation

Although we had a high level of overall occupancy (with only one plot vacant) a larger number of plots were untended than usual, as some ploholders experienced a variety of difficulties during the year. Towards the end of 2020 there was a marked upswing in interest in allotments, and as of today we are full with nine new ploholders on site this year so far. We also have a waiting list for the first time since the site opened in 2011!

Our Facebook group has grown to 63 active members of both ploholders and other interested local people who share information and offer free plants and other items from time to time.

Site maintenance

Despite having to cancel three out of four annual 'Muck in Mornings' due to Covid restrictions, the site was still maintained to a high standard thanks to the effort of many individual ploholders who mowed, trimmed and tidied. Thanks to Paul Redd for mending the broken standpipe, and Chris Roope for replacing the rotten gatepost. We also would like to thank Martin Osborne for help with rabbit control in early 2020.

On our one permitted Muck in Morning we erected a secondhand polytunnel and cleared and covered one untended plot. Thank you to the Parish Council for permission to erect the tunnel and to Roger Huffer for helping us to dismantle and move it for us.

Local tree surgeons provided free woodchip supplies for use as mulch and paths, and Keith Austin, Bridget Chatwell and Anthony Fison kindly donated manure from horses and alpacas!

Finances

Our finances are on a sound footing with high occupancy rental income allowing us to cover site rent, water costs as well as insurance and other modest costs such as the AGM, our annual bean slicer award and hawthorn whips to fill gaps in the boundary hedge. We were able to purchase a secondhand polytunnel with surplus funds last year.

Look ahead

We still have a rabbit problem and our neighbour has yet to cull large numbers on the adjacent paddock. We hope this will happen this coming winter along with additional control on the allotment site. We've continued to carry out minor repairs on the perimeter fence but after ten years the wire needs replacing. We hired a skip for a week and tidied the site of any unwanted waste that we were unable to recycle. Our final 2020 accounts will be available to view once we have had our delayed AGM in May.

Committee

Chair	Nettie Traverse-Healy
Treasurer	Sarah Davies
Secretary	Gill Cooper
Site Manager	Bob Cooper

VILLAGE HALL

The hall was closed to bookings for much of the 2020-21 financial year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was only open for a few months, with limits on numbers attending and activities held. Advice from Cambridgeshire ACRE has been used to ensure Government guidance and legislation is complied with at each stage.

Financial support has been received from the Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant Fund. Un-audited accounts show the hall is in a secure position as restrictions are gradually lifted and it can begin to re-open in a limited, controlled way.

There were no maintenance works carried out during this year.

It was not possible to hold fund-raising events during the year, which was a great shame as the previous Open Gardens afternoon and Artisan Fair had both been successful, well-supported events. There are eight trustees on the committee. We are still without a treasurer, but the Chairman is covering that role for the time being.

Mike Smith (Secretary)

TENNIS CLUB

In the absence of two AGMs events are summarised: The 2020/21 tennis season was intermittently disrupted due to COVID 19 restrictions and three lockdowns. When accessible, the courts were enjoyed by many.

Membership and Fees:

Fees remained unchanged during 2019/ 2020 and 2020/21. However, since the latter season was significantly impacted by COVID 19 restrictions we plan to offer **ALL EXISTING** members a significantly reduced fee for the 2021/22 season. (Family members reduced to £30, Adults and Seniors £15, Juniors and Students £10). The full fee will apply to any new members.

Membership remains healthy with some new additions. Total 128 members of which 18 members (**14%**) are juniors (under 16 years). Members are reminded that guests must pay a fee of £2 per person, payable to a committee member or to post office (tennis coin box). After 3 sessions guests are encouraged to join.

Court Booking: A new online booking system 'Clubspark' was launched in Aug'20 and is very popular. This is now the only booking system in operation. You have to be registered with ClubSpark in order to use the system. If you have not yet registered and wish to do so, please email kate.alsop@btinternet.com. Members can still turn up and play if courts are free but must relinquish them if players arrive for a pre-booked session.

LTA Activity: Wimbledon (hence the ballot) was cancelled in 2020 and we await confirmation for 2021.

External tennis leagues: Cancelled throughout 2020 due to COVID 19. However, activity now planned for 2021. New match players always needed and welcome, please email debbiehall7017@gmail.com

Social: All commitments, including family fun day and annual quiz cancelled.

Coaching (adult and juniors): In **2019**, Overandin provided coaching for children in the summer term. Tony Cook, our head coach, attended and organised our Wed adult club night sessions. Sixteen sessions were funded by the club. In **2020**, only a small number of adult club sessions with the coach were possible due to COVID restrictions.

In the summer holiday, free tennis coaching sessions for local children (members and non-members) were funded from grant* money. This was well attended, with four groups of children, ranging from Year 1 to Year 13, over five weeks. Overandin provided coaching for children in the first half of the autumn term.

Safeguarding: Members completed an LTA safeguarding survey in March'20 and the club completed an audit. The LTA inspection/ audit review day was delayed until Oct'20 but we are pleased to report that we passed. A reminder to all members: our Welfare Officer is **Debbie Shepherd** (see photo in club hut) and all our policies are on the website. Safeguarding and diversity policies are also on the tennis hut notice board with contact numbers.

Risk Assessment: Necessary for our LTA insurance and for the safety of our members.

An incident on court reported early 2020 involved the ambulance service. An issue with 'stretcher access/ exit' was noted and action later taken (concrete stump and tree branches removed) to prevent any future issues.

Frequent audits were conducted to check compliance with new Government and LTA COVID 19 guidance. This included posting updated notices at the courts and sanitising all locks/ door handles. Hand sanitiser was also provided on court. PC tree planting close to the tennis courts was discussed and action agreed to ensure appropriate distances were kept to avoid any root or fallen leaf issues.

Maintenance: In 2019 all three tennis courts were cleaned, resurfaced and painted. An electrical PAT test was completed in the hut and the 1st aid kit updated. In 2020 the floodlights on court 1&2 were upgraded and new lights installed on court 3.

COVID 19 Grant*: We were grateful to receive a grant of £10k from South Cambs District Council. Some of this money was used to fund free coaching and upgrade the floodlights (50% of latter costs taken from club funds). We also offered to help any struggling families with membership costs. We commit to using the remainder of the grant for members' benefit eg free children's summer holiday coaching during 2021.

BIG THANK YOU to our members for supporting the club & our dedicated committee members and volunteers for their valuable contributions

THE MORDENS 6TH ROYSTON AIR SCOUT GROUP.

It has been a challenging year for the Scout Group as it has for everyone. The leaders have done a great job of keeping the group active in line with Covid restrictions. The Beaver Section have met in person when restrictions allowed, and the Cub and Scout sections have been running a combination of online and face to face meetings throughout the last 12 months.

BROWNIES

The Group are looking forward to getting back to regular face-to-face scouting as restrictions ease. I'm sure it comes as no surprise that we have had an unusual year.

Face to face meetings were suspended with the coronavirus lockdown. Then we tried to work out how we could support guiding another way and like so many resorted to virtual meetings. These had only partial success and we were relieved to be able to return to face to face meetings in the autumn term. lots of extra measures were put in place to reduce any risk of infection transmission and attendance fluctuated due to personal isolation in families. One challenge was the reduction in numbers allowed at meetings so we had two sessions running with different leaders at each.

We had waved goodbye to our lovely Snowy Owl (Caromy) and welcomed Fern Owl (Jill Towner) with open arms, as a warranted leader we were able to share the responsibilities along with our unit helpers.

We had to abandon our annual pack holiday but enjoyed a campfire and other outdoor activities up until the November lockdown. The release of that allowed us to have a Christmas fling making cards and lots of games.

Spring term we decided to do "delivered" brownies and an activity was delivered to the girls each week. This proved more successful for the girls as they were spending plenty of time on screen for school work.

Summer term and hoorah we are meeting outdoors together again. With 25 girls we continue to have fun and develop new skills together.

Deborah Fisher (Brown Owl)

TREE PLANTING

What was the project about?

On 8 March 2020 the Parish Council adopted a project proposed by a parishioner Nettie Traverse-Healy to increase native tree cover in the parish of Steeple Morden to help wildlife, people and climate change. Cllr Sacha Wheatley offered to work with her on the project, and District Cllr Heather Williams offered to help.

All options for planting sites were agreed to be in scope including: verges, roadsides and open spaces within and beyond the village curtilage, Parish and District Council owned land and private gardens, paddocks and farmland. The chance for everyone to contribute ideas and be involved in some way was agreed as key.

What happened?

Despite the unforeseen pandemic and lockdown weeks later, online and paper publicity and response forms were produced, including flyers, posters, posts on the village Facebook group and items in local newsletters. Parishioners were invited to: host a native tree/s, help to plant trees, look after newly-planted trees, and also say where they would like to see trees planted.

Suitable native tree species for our locality were identified with advice from the Woodland Trust.

Summer site visits were undertaken once lockdown ended to identify sites and species. Maps of planting sites were produced for Parish Council approval, following which orders were placed with two suppliers, Thorpe Trees (bare-rooted) and Herts Native Trees (pot grown). Some home-grown trees were also provided by parishioners.

The numbers

- 94 trees of 16 different native species were planted. 30 on the conservation area and recreation ground.
- 51 households (at least 100 individuals) responded and have got involved in one way or another.
- 22 volunteers planted trees on the rec/conservation area. 15 households planted trees on their own land. 20 people/families have adopted a newly-planted tree to look after in its early years.
- The PC expenditure on the project was £986.51.

What next for 2021/2022?

With further support from the Parish Council we will:

1. Explore more sites on the conservation area/rec suitable for native tree planting, including looking at the feasibility of planting a mini community orchard.

2. Agree more tree planting with the District Council on land they own in the village. Cllr Williams has organised a site visit by Council officers in May.
 3. Invite more parishioners to plant native trees on their own land.
 4. Attempt to involve larger landowners and farmers in the Parish –especially given the expressed desire of many parishioners to see more trees on verges on the approaches to the village. Any input and advice from local farmers and landowners would be most welcome to nettieth@outlook.com
- Nettie Traverse-Healy and Sacha Wheatley April 2021