

**MINUTES of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**  
**Held on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2022 in the Essendon Village Hall**

**PRESENT:**

Councillors: Mike Brown (Chair), Ian Venables, Keith Venables, Rex Jones, Tracey Willetts, Fran Christensen and Clerk Nerine Chalmers and 3 members of the public

Apologies for absence were received from Reverend Theresa Musiwacho.

- 1 The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 2021 were approved
- 2 Annual Reports were presented as follows:

**a. Chairman's report (Cllr Mike Brown)**

Welcome everybody to this Annual Parish Meeting. For those who don't know me, I am Mike Brown and Chairman of the Parish Council. This is our regular opportunity to hear from the Borough Councillors and many of the local institutions, community groups and businesses that are at the heart of this wonderful village.

I say regular but, of course, due to the on-going Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown, there was no APM in 2020 and the 2021 APM was held virtually. So welcome back!

The various lockdowns have had a severe impact on many aspects of village life with many societies only now getting back to some semblance of normality. Sadly, the regular August Bank Holiday Village Day has had to be postponed for the third year in a row. This is a major source of funding for the various village societies and groups and has had a consequential impact on their finances. Where needed the Parish Council has stepped in to provide such help as we can. We have also provided support for the organising committee for the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations and I'm sure we all look forward to a fun weekend and letting our hair down.

We have also supported the Friday morning coffee mornings, here in the village hall. The Parish Council is open to suggestions from residents and societies as to how we can speedily restore the rich fabric of social life in Essendon and help ease any loneliness or isolation some may still be suffering.

Over the last year we have kept a watchful eye on Birchall Garden Suburb, the proposed development north of the A414. This will be a major suburb of Welwyn Garden City of over a thousand new homes built within our parish. This is a significant cause for concern for many of us. However, it has yet to be adopted in the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan and it appears to be many years off yet.

The Parish Council has also fought in the last year to restore the status of the Rose and Crown PH as an Asset of Community Value. Regrettably, Welwyn Hatfield Council, who had overturned the AVC, did not support us in this matter, which rather makes a nonsense of the legislation. However, we note with pleasure that the Rose and Crown is now open again and, for those of you not still barred by the owners, we trust you are enjoying the facilities.

I trust that many of you will have noted that we have purchased and had installed a second Speed Indicator Device along the High Road and we hope that this will play some part in reducing speeding through the village. We have also carried out repairs to the equipment and the fencing to the playground.

I would like to take the opportunity on behalf of the PC to thank the members of the Village Hall Committee for their hard work and success in getting the hall open again and looking in such good shape. I understand that bookings are again busy, which bodes well for the future.

The Parish Council is now able, indeed is required by law, to meet in the flesh, so to speak, and we extend a welcome to all to attend our meetings and witness the many thrilling ways we try to keep and maintain our village as a wonderful place to live. We meet each month (except August) on a Monday evening in the village hall at 7pm, so watch out for the notices of meetings on our website or the Notice Board. We very much look forward to seeing more of you at our meetings, so if you have any matter you wish to discuss do, please, come along.

May I thank my fellow councillors for their energy and commitment to support the Parish Council and the village during what has been a very difficult last three years. I should also thank our clerk Nerine Chalmers for all her efforts to support, inform us as to our duties and keep us in line.

Finally, I should let you all know that this will be my last annual statement as Chair of the Parish Council. As part of 'succession planning' for the Parish Council I have informed my colleagues that I will be standing down as Chair at the end of this municipal year and retiring to the 'green benches'. There will be a new Chair elected at our meeting on the 9 May who will then have a year to establish themselves prior to the parish elections in 2023. I wish him or her all the best. It's been an honour and a privilege to serve this community as Chairman and I now look forward to a quieter life as a simple Parish Councillor.

Cllr Mike Brown

#### **b) Essendon Village Hall (Christos Papalexandrakos)**

Since the end of covid restrictions the village hall has continued to grow in use by new groups visiting the village as well as local events and use by the residents of Essendon. We have held various events to try and bring the community together and share information about the various village groups and societies that run as well as other opportunities from regular hirers that use the hall.

A part of this has resulted the 'Essendon Connect' group forming which has been very popular with residents of the village since the restrictions have been lifted.

During the past year we had one incident where the hall was despicably vandalised, but thanks to the efforts of locals and the managing committee, we have successfully repaired all the damages and bounced back from this within a very short period; restoring the flooring and cleaning internally to bring the hall back to its best. As a result of this hire, we have reviewed the bookings process and we have made improvements to hiring rules, ID forms and deposits etc. to be able to deter such bookings being made and have stricter controls on the use of the hall.

Other improvements made to the hall include the replacement of the old boiler for an efficient Combi-boiler and the installation of a new smart Thermostat control to improve the comfort and efficiency of the hall. In addition, the tall trees to the rear of the hall have been taken down to help avoid damage to the new flat roof with debris and blocking of gutters.

At our AGM in November, Chris Papalexandrakos was re-elected as Chair. Paul Plail was elected Secretary and Rupert Priestnall Treasurer. They continue to be supported by Alexa Papalexandrakou, Keith Venables, Rex Jones, Paul Wombwell and Cas Blackman. New members will also be welcome to join the committee to further the support of our village hall.

We continue to operate and serve the community with provision of the hall for local events and to our continued regular hirers throughout the year.

Some future planned improvements for the year to come are noted below: -

- Renewal of the toilet flooring
- Replacement of the doors
- Continued upkeep and maintenance of the building as and when necessary.

Thanks to all Committee members and all those who have given their time and efforts in support of our Hall. Also a special thanks to the Essendon Parish Council who provide assistance and support whenever it is needed.

### **c) St Mary's Church, Essendon (Beresford Thompson)**

The pandemic has had its effect upon the Church over the last year but Remembrance Day, Harvest, and Christingle, special days in the church and village calendar, took place in inventive ways and Christmas and Easter saw normality return.

A complete communion service re-started at Easter and the service pattern has stabilised. Sadly our congregation numbers have decreased, partly, perhaps, because people are still cautious about group meetings. Getting people back in the pews is our most important goal. The focus is at present on Family Services which are on the 3rd Sunday of each month. We hope to see a lively mixture of humans and animals in church on Sunday the 15<sup>th</sup> May.

One aspect of the Church's life that has remained unaffected by the pandemic is the churchyard. At the moment we are revelling in the annual carpet of wildflowers. We are, as ever, grateful to the parish council for its grant towards the upkeep of the churchyard. This partly enables us to employ Andrew Robinson in the challenging task of keeping the grass cut. We are grateful to Andrew for the real pride he takes in keeping the churchyard looking splendid throughout the growing season. We recognise, too, how fortunate we are to have villagers regularly tending family graves.

It is intended to plant one or more trees as part of the national green canopy campaign and, given diocesan permission, as part of the queen's jubilee celebrations in June. A new piece of churchyard furniture is the bench in the lych gate, a lovely, simple memorial to Jean Innocenti, Sue Roger's mother, who was a member of our congregation and of the Essendon W.I. The injunction on it - to "Rest awhile" - not only recognises the needs of walkers, but of the more elderly as they wait for someone to fetch the car. Parking close to the church gets steadily worse, not helped by the yellow lines.

Villagers will be well aware of the collapsed section of the church wall. Its re-building is in hand; it will be very expensive because of the nature of the materials needed. Rain leaking into the church has also been a problem. The leakage has been dealt with short-term but expensive roof re-tiling will face the PCC at some time in the future.

A simple Food Bank has been kept going in the church porch for those in our community in need and the church is now involved in the support of Ukraine.

The complex question of keeping the church open in daylight hours for private prayer has been discussed at length. There is an unanimous wish it could be so and a recognition that the church does not belong to

the congregation but to the whole community. The problem, as yet unresolved, is how to protect it from theft and vandalism and meet the demands and advice of the insurers, when we have such a limited number of people to act as guardians. A lot of research has gone into this situation and options are still being researched.

In the meantime the church is open for private prayer from 10 am till 12 on Wednesdays until the end of August. This has been advertised in the parish magazine and a signboard is put out on the morning, but it does need to be broadcast more widely. Tonight is a useful moment. Two members of the Church serve on the school governing body with Pauline being its chairman. Revd Theresa attends its collective worship and other members of our congregation listen to the children read.

The Friends of St Mary's, having been forced into non-action by Covid regulations, is springing back into action as an important source of village activity. Who knows but this time next year we will be readying ourselves for "Gardens Open Day"!

Finally, I can announce that following a meeting in church last night, our churchwardens for the next 12 months are Paul Wombwell and Colin Rees, our Treasurer is Nick Pickard and our Secretary is Cas Blackman.

#### **d) Tennis Club**

Essendon Tennis Club has had a good year. We had another large membership and managed a social dinner at the Cowper Arms in March and to run a tournament in September which was well attended on a glorious day followed by lunch in Ian Screech's garden. The court is playing well. We hope to run a Junior event this summer and another tournament in September.

Essendon Tennis Club

3 There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 7:30 pm.