



BARLEY
Annual Village Meeting
WEDNESDAY 15TH MAY 2024 at 8PM
Town House, Church End, Barley

Minutes

1. In Attendance:

30 members of the public, 4 Parish Councillors, the RFO and the Parish Clerk.

2. Apologies:

Representatives from Barley School, The Tennis Club and The Community Group sent their apologies for their absence but submitted written reports.

3. Barley Parish Council Chairman's welcome and report:

Welcome to the Annual Village Meeting. For those who don't know, I am Jerry Carlisle the Chairman of Barley Parish Council and the lady to my side is Alice Robertson the Clerk to Barley Parish Council.

To remind everyone this is not a Parish Council meeting although most if not all Parish Councillors are present. It is a meeting which is required to be held by law and at which the Parishioners can raise any matters they choose.

Unfortunately, the Parish Council have been a bit careless over the last week or so and have somehow managed to lose a couple of Councillors, including last year's Chairman Brian Haughey. As of Monday this week I have been re-elected as Chairman of the Parish Council for the coming year hence me chairing this meeting again. Before moving on I would like to thank Brian and Dave King on behalf of the whole village for their service to the village as Councillors over the last few years.

Whilst talking about losses and apart from the loss of the two Councillors about which I will come back to later I need to refer to the closure of the village Post Office last month which I am sure the whole village regrets. This was not something that we, the Parish Council, were aware of beforehand and which we understand arose following changes made by the Post Office themselves to the funding arrangements for that service with Barley Stores.

In most other respects the year has been relatively uneventful from the Parish Council point of view with no major problems or issues occurring.

- We continue to deal with planning applications as they arise
- We administer the Plaistow and Children's Play Area and Tennis Courts. One major cost item that we had to deal with was the replacement fence along the whole of one side which was an expensive undertaking.
- We have appointed Peninsula as our new Health and Safety Consultants to provide the necessary advice to the PC to ensure the Council's Health and Safety Policy and accompanying documentation is up to date. This follows the retirement of our previous consultant Drew and Barltrop.
- We have ongoing discussions with the Scouts about their proposals for a new Scout Hut coupled with Parish Council facilities related to the use of the Plaistow
- Highway Cleaning remains problematic and where we have a continuing dialogue with North Herts Council to get this up to an acceptable standard.
- Highway Surface Water Drainage also remains a concern generally although HCC Highways have carried out quite a lot of work cleaning and repairing the system which has helped.
- We have managed to get Anglia Water to accept responsibility for the ditch alongside the concrete road leading to the Sewage Works and they cleared this late last year which also helped to alleviate the flooding problems experienced in Picknag Road.
- Speeding remains a problem in the village, as elsewhere, the arrangement with the Hertfordshire Police Commissioner for the Speed Cameras is due to be reviewed this year. We will no doubt hear more on this and the effectiveness of the measure later in the meeting.
- Village footpaths particularly those in and around the heart of the village are of some concern due to overgrown hedges which have been exacerbated this year by the very wet winter and spring. Whilst the maintenance of these footpaths is strictly the responsibility of the County Council the Parish Council does voluntarily pay a contractor to cut some of these back three or four times a year.
- Precept. There have been some comments that the increase in this year's Precept was excessive. However, I should inform you that this was as it always is the subject of much debate by the PC and I can assure everybody that we would not have increased the Precept unless it was necessary. In the event there was little alternative but to increase the Precept as a result of increased costs to be incurred by the Parish Council during the coming financial year. We do need to be financially responsible and to be able to cover our expenses and where our ability to increase revenue other than through the annual precept is limited. This review process is undertaken in November and December and finalised in January each year.
- Parish Councillors. As I mentioned before two vacancies need to be filled and if it is something that you think you would be interested in and feel able to actively contribute towards then please contact our Clerk Alice Robertson. There are some formalities that the Parish Council have to observe, and these will be made known to everybody as soon as possible.

I've probably missed something but if so, you will have the opportunity to raise it and anything else as we go through the rest of the meeting or at the end.

So to move on I will now ask our County Councillor Fiona Hill for her report on County Council matters over the last year and then ask Lynn Brett who is the Parish Council Responsible Financial Officer to take us through the accounts for the Parish Council, Town House and Village Charities.

4. **Report from County Councillor Fiona Hill**

Thank you for, again, giving me the opportunity to update you on Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) issues. Since last year's meeting, we have seen the Coronation of King Charles and are still in the middle of the war in Ukraine and now the Israel-Gaza conflict, both having tragic consequences and an impact around the world.

The County Council is facing financial challenges but has managed to deliver a balanced budget for the next budget year, whilst maintaining front line services. There will be an increase of 4.99% in Council Tax, of which 2% is, again, ringfenced for Adult Social Care. We expect to spend over £1 billion delivering essential services and this does not include the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Adult Care and Health and Children's Services remain the highest spend within HCC (excluding DSG).

Schools again rose to the challenges including, locally, the storm damage (that I saw for myself) to King James Academy. HCC has been working with the school, DfE and insurance professionals to find solutions and I am delighted that all children are now back on site. Over 90% of maintained schools in Hertfordshire have been judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted and I am delighted we have such wonderful schools in my division. It was lovely to visit Barley/Barkway Federated Schools with our MP recently and discuss with the Eco Council the issue of sewage into our chalk streams. A letter has been sent to the Secretary of State highlighting the issues and requesting action be taken.

The additional funding, last year, with a further amount this year, that HCC has put into Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), has funded many new employees, who are now going through induction and ensured that existing staff receive ongoing training to enable them to resolve delays for families awaiting support.

Step2Skills continued to reach out to a wide range of residents (19+) and helped them gain the qualifications, skills, and confidence to enable them to move into employment. Integration of Health and Social Care has been a key priority and the ringfenced 2% was invaluable in supporting our residents and reducing the number of people having to access the acute hospitals. This was assisted by the huge amount of prevention work by Public Health. Our ambition and support for a health facility for the benefit of Royston and the surrounding villages, worked on for so many years, continues and we are working with the NHS and other stakeholders to try and bring this to fruition, with helpful links between council officers in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire County Councils. I have continued to lobby for greater recognition of Mental Health issues, which has increased in young people, since Covid, Carers' issues and the impact of Dementia.

HCC has also been actively working on the impacts of Domestic Abuse/Violence and the importance of vaccinations to lessen the impact of certain diseases which are increasing.

Libraries are busy hubs with slipper swaps (which prevent falls), drop-in sessions for Barclays Bank and the Police, plus new clubs and initiatives in addition to their regular activities.

The work of the Armed Forces Covenant has remained strong with GPs, District and Borough Councils signing up and the intention for more Town and Parish Councils to participate. I am delighted that Barley Parish Council is committed to participating. The Covenant is invaluable in supporting veterans of the Armed Forces in accessing local services.

The Council (CYP), together with stakeholders such as the Police, Schools and Royston First, have been working in partnership on a number of projects for young people. We continue our ongoing work to resolve speeding issues in Barley, including Speed Indicator Devices, Speed and Volume surveys, to incorporate Picknag Road and Police checks. Barley is also in the next phase of 20 mph schemes and HCC will soon start the process for traffic data collection.

The Highways Locality Budget (HLB) has again ensured that numerous roads, footpaths and other projects, which would not receive attention quickly, have been implemented in Barley and I continue to lobby Government regarding more accountability for utility companies and developers, where Highways has often had to step in and resolve problems. The HLB and community Locality Budget have remained in the budget and a full list of grants given is available on the HCC website.

I have participated in consultations such as the NHS Let's Talk survey, the proposed Banking Hub, the proposal for a congestion charge in Cambridge, currently halted, speed limit consultations, the proposed weight limit on the A507, safety on the A505, the Waste proposals, car parking and various planning applications in Barley.

I have spoken with the manager of the shop in Barley regarding challenges which have led to the recent closure of the Post Office and I have passed this feedback on to Sir Oliver Heald.

The work with Cambridgeshire for a safer crossing over the A505 has seen positive progress during the year which will contribute to an increase in Active Travel and link the two counties.

I will end by thanking the Clerk and Councillors at Barley Parish Council for welcoming me to their meetings and all the great organisations for their invaluable work in Barley. Thank you also to Sir Oliver Heald KC MP and Gerald Morris, who stood down as the District Councillor for Ermine Ward in the recent elections, both of whom have worked with me so effectively, for many years, to support the community in Barley.

5. **Presentation of Annual Accounts**

BARLEY PARISH COUNCIL ye 31/3/24

Banks

- Opening balances £43098, Closing balances £39826. Excess expenditure over income £3272. Bank balances have therefore reduced accordingly.

Incomes

- Total incomes were £48,343, compared to £46,587 in the previous year, £1,756 increase.
- Notable increases were the Club Room rent and costs recovery (+£2,428). Precept was £29,400 compared to £27,471 (+£1,929) and Grants £4,100 (£3,500 for the marquee, also reflected in costs, £400 NDC salt bins and £200 Margaret House defib) compared to £1,310, + £2,790.
- VAT recovery was down to £2,049 from £8,689 reflecting the lower VAT recoverable costs incurred. VAT costs were £3,448 compared to £2,946 but there was £2,523 refund due from HMRC which will be reflected in the following year's accounts. VAT is largely a timing issue as recovery follows at least a quarter after the costs are incurred.
- Other incomes from Allotments, bank interest, donations etc were increased by £1,249
- Compared to budget incomes were £3,662 over budget, notably from the unbudgeted grants and donations.

Expenditure

Total expenditure amounted to £51,615 compared to £35,811 previous year, an increase of £15,804.

Increased Costs

- Salaries increased to £13,632 from £5,917. This was largely due to the Clerk's vacancy during the previous year. It does also reflect an increase in line with local government pay scales.
- Health and Safety increased to £2,580 from £1,398 (+ £1,183). We now use a new company to manage compliance with H&S requirements. Also there have been some costs associated with the defibrillators.
- Insurance premiums combined increased to £9,126 from £6,651, up £2,475. Some of this increase was recovered from the Club Room. It reflects general increases in insurances and also the reinstatement valuations which were reviewed in the year.
- Plaistow maintenance and grass cutting combined increased to £8,589 from £3,142. This included essential fencing replacement of nearly £6,000.
- Professional fees were increased to £5,182 from £3,327, due to the cost of PC elections which have not been incurred for some years prior.
- Other costs, such as IT, training, VAT and village maintenance increased by £1,540.

Decreased Costs

- Donations were reduced to £1,050 from £2,035, notably the cost of the Coronation donation in the previous year £1,135.
- General maintenance and repairs were down to £3,677 from £6,851, as previous year had included some works to Town House, not repeated.
- Postage and stationery costs reduced to £638 from £1,102.

Budget set for 2024/25:

- Precept was £29.4k for year 23/24 and is £32k for year 24/25.

- Costs allowed for Changing Rooms, Containers, Drainage etc. have not been reflected in the budget but are noted as special projects that may need to be reviewed and incurred if approved, in the future. The transfer to a special reserve towards for the Town House roof has been delayed until the end of the financial year.

BARLEY TOWN HOUSE ye 31/3/24

Banks

- Opening bank balances £29,843, closing balances £38,746, leaving income over expenditure £8,903.

Incomes

Total incomes increased to £23,792 from £20,430.

- Lettings continued to improve, £23,121 compared to £20,417, giving a 13% increase.

Expenditure

Expenditure decreased on previous year by £2,611 in total (£14,889 v £17,500)

- Increases were incurred in advertising, caretaking, electrical work and other costs such as software, Hallmaster fees etc.
- Electricity decreased to £2,169 compared to £3,962. However, the previous year included a correction for undercharges in year 21/22.
- Most other costs showed reductions and include maintenance, cleaning, equipment and materials, emergency lighting.
- Support continues from the Parish Council -paying the insurance and putting aside money for a roof fund.

A question was raised by a member of the public regarding the increase in insurance costs and whether the excess charges had been increased in line with the increased policy costs. The RFO explained there had been no revision in the amount of the excess and confirmed the policy costs increase are as a result of the building cost reinstatement revaluation of assets as well as the cost of insurance generally.

6. Reports from local Organisations

- **The Town House: Nick Shaw - Chairman of the Townhouse Committee.**

It has been a good year for The Town House mostly because there has been a decrease in major works. Currently have 8 weddings booked so far this year. 11 last year. We do have 5 booked in 2025 and 2026 so people are booking further in advance.

We do have a number of major projects on the horizon:

- Updating the audio system.
- Had a few issues with electricity which has been found to be rodents in the roof over the toilets which are now being dealt with and plans to put the wiring in some trunking to avoid further costs down the line
- Potential changes to an electronic entry system.

- The Windows need replacing. They have been mended over many years and now they need to be replaced. Planning Consent/Listed Building Consent needs to be obtained and grants will be explored to help with costs.
- I would like to pay tribute to all the people that make it happen. The 7 person management committee and The Parish Council. There are lots of other people too: Sam Brinkley who is responsible for all the cleaning. Kevin Starling who several times a year clears all the outside of the building. Fran Bowman looks after the flower beds, Darren Partt every other year re-waxes and cleans all the floors at his own cost. Alan Cayford looks after the refuse and ensuring they are taken out at the right time and is also the Health and Safety man. Alison Grey who looks after the lights and reads all the meters, Lynn our accountant who is extremely efficient. Nick White looks after the boiler, Ella who does all the bookings and viewings which all take a lot of time and who does the inspection of the building.
- It was explained that the roof will need replacing in the future which is why we have the Sinking Fund.
- At some point the building will need to be re-wired.

Questions from the public:

- Does the carpark actually influence the number of bookings you get. Nick Shaw confirmed that it does not and advised we have an arrangement with the school if necessary.
- The light from the corner of the car park has been flashing. Nick shaw advised that the trees often trigger the sensor but that he would look into this.

Cllr Carlisle thanked Nick Shaw and the rest of the Management Committee for their continuing hard work in keeping the Town House in such great condition for the benefit of the whole village.

- **Barley School (read by Cllr Fiona Hill)**

Rolls from September have fluctuated, due to mobility of some families, but remains at around 65 across both schools. It has also been pleasing to see the steady applications for Nursery places for next September.

Towards the end of 2023, we had an Ofsted inspection in Barkway, meaning that both schools were inspected in that year. The reports individually capture the strengths of our schools and overriding judgement of 'Good' for both. The federation between schools is now firmly embedded and we continue to draw on the advantages it offers. As I write we are already into the summer term and thoughts are naturally drifting to consider the next academic year. As a school I am excited to share our vision for the future and we are in the process of consultation with both the Diocese of St Albans and Herts County Council to apply for primary school status. We know that some families, and certainly families new to the area, question the 3-tier system that is peculiar to this part of the county, and instead of

choosing the local school, will educate their children in a different county. If we were to be successful it would benefit both villages. I recently discussed this with our local MP, Sir Oliver Heald, on a recent visit to Barley and he wholly endorsed our plan.

We are constantly looking to meet the ever changing needs of families and have listened to parents views regarding wraparound care. I am pleased to say that after careful costing it has been reinstated, before and after school on both sites. In Barkway, this operates in tandem with the Preschool. The after-school care in Barley runs up until 6.00pm if required and places can be booked online.

As church schools we celebrate the different seasons of the ecclesiastical calendar and special events within our school community with services at both churches for Harvest, Christmas and Easter. Our Leavers service is always well attended by families and gives those pupils moving on such a happy event and day. We also seek to support key events during the community and we laid wreaths at the Remembrance Day ceremony in Barley, once again allowing our pupils to reflect on the past and look to the future.

Having such close community links has enabled us to continue to visit Margaret House on a weekly basis, with pupils from Barley school to read with the residents. We even shared in the 100th Birthday celebrations of one resident. The pupils have been paired up with residents and both parties look forward to the session each week. Throughout the year we have various joint activities planned with Maragret House. This term we have started attending lunches there every month with a member of staff and a small group of year 3 and 4 children. This has been very successful, and it is delightful to see the children enjoying the company of the elderly residents - and vice versa!

It is also lovely to have parents join us in increasing numbers every week for reading in class, on a Friday morning, followed by Achievement Assembly, which is streamed - online between both schools. Each week we celebrate Stars of the Week, share our Kindness Book entries and learn Makaton amongst other things. This is also captured in our weekly newsletter.

We are fortunate in recently having some strong interest and support in reestablishing our rejuvenated PTA - FOBBS. This new collection of parents has stepped up to support fundraising for our schools and have already made a direct impact to the life of the school. All classes have benefited from trips and resources to embellish and extend learning opportunities and the curriculum. These have included a visit to the Arts Theatre to see the pantomime, "Mother Goose", Tate Modern to see the Yayoi Kusama exhibition, Hitchin Toy Museum and of course our regular visits to our Forest School on land between the villages which is loaned to us by the Newsells Estate.

It is always astounding how young minds can come up with solutions and it was incredible when our pupils embraced our new Courageous Advocacy project supporting the protection of our local chalk streams. Our Eco Councillors shared PowerPoints in classes we were also visited by Mark Wilkinson from the Friends of the Rib and Quin - two local rivers - who came to talk with us in great depth about the issues we are trying to overcome to ensure the healthy future of the streams and their animal habitat and natural vegetation. Pupils wrote to Thames Water to complain about the state of the rivers which suffer hugely from sewage overspill and received a rather lukewarm reply. When Sir Oliver Heald came to visit us recently - he too is a champion of the cause - we gave him a letter we have written for Steve Barclay the Minister for the Environment. The councillors had an excellent discussion with Sir Oliver about the chalk streams and we presented him with a piece of framed

artwork created by the year 4 children celebrating the project. We are aiming to have tanks in Barley in which trout eggs will hatch out and be released into the streams. The project will also impact our geography curriculum.

We continue to work closely with the Barkway Preschool and there are many shared activities throughout the year. As summer approaches, the transition for the youngsters coming up to our schools will begin. The gates between school and Preschool are often open allowing for the children from the two settings to mingle as they play.

The buildings which are so much of our past, will continue to be adapted to meet the new demands. In Barkway over the summer several mini projects will continue to be completed to enhance the building before the final extension of the school is executed.

We are looking forward to the rest of the summer term.

- **Barley Cricket Club: Matt Doggett – Chairman**

The cricket club has a new grass net for training which is up and ready to use. Alan Cayford has come on board to help look after the grounds. The Club is always in need of volunteers for maintenance work but also need players so please do get in touch if you would like to join or help out.

- **Doggett's Farm**

Matt Doggett also extended an invitation to the community to join him on his annual farm walk-around on 14th June at 6pm where he would explain the work going on at the farm.

- **The Scouts: James Wild**

The Scouts currently have 120 children who take part in all groups. Ranges of activity from cooking craft skills, camping. Etc. Lots of camps coming up. All funded through the subscriptions from the children who take part. Scout leaders are all volunteers and we are looking for more people to volunteer with us as a Leader or assistant of any kind, please get in touch! There are plans for a new and improved Scout hut in the pipeline, and we will need a substantial amount to be raised if anyone would like to contribute or help!

- **Barley Social Hub: Alison White**

The Barley Social Hub as a committee of 4 people. We help to facilitate other people's events and have put on our own concerts and talks in the Church, having helped to raise £22K with the Flower Tower for the Barley Church Facilities fund. Our next event will be Graham Smith Bernal of Newsells Park Stud who will be coming to do talk about the Stud and the winery. Tickets and more information will be released for this soon!

- **Gardening Club; Alison White**

Barley gardening club has been going for many years. We have over 100 people who receive the monthly newsletter and have about 30 regular visitors to the club. We always have a speaker at the events which are £3 per visit, £10 for the year. Often supported by a raffle each month too. We are affiliated with RHS and we have a card that we can share with the members.

- **Knitting Group – Alison White**

We meet at the chequers on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month unless otherwise notified, and everyone is very welcome.

- **Barley Show – Alison White**

This year Barley Flower and Village Show will be on the 13th July. It is the 134th Year that the show has been running and we really encourage people to enter the flower show competition! It's not just Flowers but many different baking and making categories. Anyone can enter. After the success of last year there will be a Dog Show again year - just enter on the day and we have 32 stalls booked in for this year.

- **Bell Ringers – Ian White**

The bell ringers are the oldest club in the village. We meet from 8-9pm on Tuesdays and head to the pub after. We ring the bells on Sundays once or twice a month for the Church service. We also look after the Church clock ensuring it remains on time. If anyone would like a tour to the top please do get in touch and we can make that happen!

- **The Tennis Club – Carol Turner**

Barley Tennis Club is thriving. Currently we have 140 families who are members using the Courts. We are completely self-funded with some of the cheapest membership prices around. We always welcome new members (£40 for new family membership with a £35 renewal price). The Courts themselves were resurfaced only a couple of years ago. Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings we have club sessions, and we have coaching sessions on offer throughout the summer. There will be a free BBQ coming soon for anyone to who would like to attend/would like to find out more about joining the club.

- **The Barley Charities – Geoffrey Wilkerson**

The Barley Parish Charities is an organisation that dates possibly earlier than the bellringers! With the primary objective to donate monies to those in need. There is a committee of trustees who manage the income. It was set up in the days where there was no national health service and is to help people of reduced needs. Recently we have about 12 parishioners who benefit from the charity. We also support the school, the community group, the scouts, and individuals looking to do any particular voluntary work who need assistance with travelling costs. Income is about £4,000 a year, on investments from approx £60K. If anyone becomes aware of anyone who needs help, please do get in touch with Geoffrey Wilkerson, all enquiries of course are confidential.

- **The Church – Geoffrey Wilkerson**

It has been a year without a Rector so it's been difficult to keep momentum going in the Churches. With the help of other ministers and retired clergy they have managed to hold many services though. And now we welcome a new Rector, who has a family who want to get involved with the school and be a big part of the community and we are looking forward to that.

The Wall between Margaret house and the Church is being rebuilt following the loss of two trees, however there will be shrubbery to be planted once the wall is finished to help keep the landscaping green.

The Church fete is on the 8th June 12-4pm and we hope many of you will come. If anyone can help on the the Wednesday before please get in touch – there will be lots of stalls and fun games.

On behalf of Barley Church we would like to thank The Barley Social Hub for their support in raising funds for new, much needed toilet and kitchen facilities in the Church . We've had many fantastic nights in the Church as a result of their efforts and alongside the Flower Tower installation, have raised over £22,000. Architects have now been approached and plans are being created. More information to come on that soon.

- **Royal British Legion – Sue Williams**

We are the Barley, Barkway, Nuthampstead, Reed and Anstey branch. We are fairly large in area but small in the amount of people - but we managed to raise a lot of money. Last year we raised just over £7.5K for the Poppy Appeal, and the money raised goes to the Central Office and then into a grant fund.

This year we will be having a stall at Barley Show with a treasure map for the children. There will also be a Cheese and Wine supper in the autumn which last year raised £1,500.

- **The Community Choir**

The Community Choir sings in Barley on Tuesday between 6-7pm at The Town House. We have an excellent and supportive teacher who runs the choir, and we do a number of local events which you can be a part of too. We welcome anyone who would like to join.

7. **AOB**

It was suggested that more village events should feature in the local publication The Diary to help spread the word.

Reg Cording thanked the Council and community for his nomination in last years New Years Honors list. Reg was awarded the British Empire Medal for this services to Barley. He goes to Buckingham Palace on the 21st May.

End

Cllr Jerry Carlisle, Chairman of Barley Parish Council thanked all contributors and attendees for coming. The meeting closed at 9.37pm.