

# SHERSTON PARISH COUNCIL

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## Annual Parish Meeting of Sherston Parish Minutes of the meeting held

Monday 14th April 2022 at 8.00pm  
Held at Sherston Village Hall

11 members of the Public Present.

Welcome and housekeeping from the Chairman, Councillor Tanya Burgess (TB)

1. Apologies received from Councillors Mike Tarrant and Harry Andrews
2. Minutes of Sherston Annual Parish Meeting held on 22nd April 2021
  - ◆ Distributed for consideration.
  - ◆ **Resolved** to adopt and sign as a true record.
3. Council Report for 2021/22 presented to the Parish – Appendix A
4. Representations from organisations
  - ◆ Wiltshire Councillor Martin Smith – Report - Appendix B
5. Questions / Representation from parishioners

Members of the public raised questions and raised points, which included.

- ◆ Comments raised in relation to any future lease of the Pre-School building. Chair confirmed that any future lease would be between the Recreational Trust and any future tenant - not the Parish Council.
  - ◆ Concerns relation to the loss of informal parking along Sopworth Road, and impacts on surrounding areas as a result of the proposed road widening in support of the New Development. Concerns related specifically to peak school pickup/drop off times
6. Close of Meeting – 8.55pm

Signed as a True Record.....  
Date.....

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## Appendix A

### SHERSTON PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL PARISH REPORT – 14<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2022

Author:- Tanya Burgess (Chair)

I would like start by taking the opportunity of thanking all current and past Councillors for their efforts in the last year to support the Parish Council to service the local community. It has been a challenging year having lost a number of long term councillors who were a mindful of information at the start of the year. Thankfully they have remained available to us to call on and have been invaluable in doing so.

## LOWLIGHTS

### **Precept/North Legacy**

Following a protracted debate, the Parish Council increased the precept for this financial year by in excess of 50%. Whilst we appreciate that this was disappointing to some residents and seemed to be a rather excessive, it should be noted that increases in recent years have been significantly less. We are now wishing to future proof our budget and protect residents moving forwards from such large jumps by smoothing the budget, thereby ensuring that we have funds available for predicted large expenditure moving forwards in years to come.

We have been sheltered somewhat from this in recent years having been in the fortunate position of having been left a large legacy by a local couple with the stipulation that it should be used 'for the young of the village'. Much of this legacy was spent on replacing, and adding to the aged and deteriorating equipment on the Recreation Ground as well as building the new Pre-School facility.

### **Recreation Ground – Charitable Trust Status**

We continue to progress a complaint raised by a resident this year in relation to the status of the Trust and how it has been managed – the Parish Council having adopted the role of 'trustees' some years ago. The Council have written to the Charity Commission explain the background to the complaint and ask for advice and guidance on how best to address and more importantly manage moving forwards. We await their response and remain in close contact with the resident who raised the original concerns.

### **Neighbourhood Plan**

Regrettably the progress of the development on Sopworth Road has been slower than expected. Whilst it may have appeared to have been quiet, the Parish Council, Wiltshire Council and the Developers have been trying to push forward with a viable plan which ensures that we attain our goal of a new GP Surgery Build and land set aside for educational purposes, all of which will be funded by the development itself. The progression of the last planning application suffered as a result of Covid enforced absences as well as a shortage of planning resource generally. It was latterly withdrawn by the developers on the basis that the application was to be rejected by Wiltshire Council due to a number of concerns not having been adequately addressed. The developers, thanks to the efforts of Martin Smith now have direct access to the

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various planning officers to ensure that any future planning application has the highest chances of being approved. No timescale has been shared for the conclusion of this exercise, however we have the commitment of Wiltshire Council that this will be prioritised as and when it is submitted.

**Pre-School Closure** - The big disappointment of the year was the closure of the Pre-School on the 8<sup>th</sup> April some 2 years after it having first opened. The Parish Council made a significant investment, funding the build of the pre-school following the earlier closure of the Busy Hands Pre-School in the hope that this would help future proof an offering in the village, as well as providing a continual feed of students into Sherston Primary School. The reasoning behind the closure was not clear, however seemed to be a combination of an inadequate Ofsted report, staffing issues and the owner considering retirement.

Parents have struggled to place their children in other facilities in the short term owing to very limited availability elsewhere. Our local Wiltshire Councillor is working with Wiltshire Council Early Learning in an attempt to see if another provider can be found to run the facility within the village, ideally for the start of the Autumn term. The building itself was leased to Pumpkins Nursery as such, the Parish Council have engaged solicitors to work with Pumpkins representatives to secure the surrender of the building to ensure it is available to support a new Pre-School provision.

**Councillor Vacancies** - We have again struggled this year to attract new councillors to the Council following the resignation of several councillors during the course of the year. I think there was only a 2-3 month period during which we were running with our full complement of 13.

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

### **Grove Wood**

The latter part of 2021 saw the Footpath Group focussing on revitalising Grove Wood after a period of I think it's fair to say dormancy. The footpath along the river at the Luckington end of was re-surfaced with the steps at the far end of the wood being replaced. I am sure you will agree, both look amazing, not to mention are much safer. The group followed this up early in 2022, starting an 8 year rotation of coppicing the wood itself. This has allowed light to flood in and the underlying trees, fauna and flora to flourish.

This could not have been achieved without the hard work of a small number of volunteers who provided guidance and equipment, as well as giving up their valuable time to undertake the works.

### **Tennis Courts**

We were approached midway through the year asking if we would consider granting funding to the Tennis Club to contribute to the re-surfacing of the tennis courts. Due to the excessive cost to resurface, it was concluded that the most economical approach would be to fell the large fir trees surrounding the courts to prevent any further damage and that a grant of £5000 would be set aside in the 2022 budget to help with the refurbishment of the existing surface.

### **Footpaths**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank one of our residents, Richard Morgan who during the course of the year has fronted an initiative to walk all Public Rights of Way

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within the Parish identifying various issues ranging from lack of signage, broken signage, broken stiles, overgrowth, obstructions, surfacing etc. As a result of his efforts we now have a comprehensive spreadsheet of works which we plan to undertake in the coming months to ensure that our footpaths are safe, adequately maintained and accessible.

I would also welcome our new Cotswold Warden, Deborah Ackerley to the team. Deborah has already started working with the Footpath Group having attended her first meeting in February. It is hoped that with Deborah onboard, we will be able to make use of the Cotswold Warden resources again in this and future years, who in the past have helped support building steps, fixing and installing kissing gates and stiles as well as repairing waymarkers.

## **PLANS FOR 2022-23**

### **Parish Council Areas of Focus**

- Increase transparency and flow of information to residents
- Re-establish formal approach to Recreation Ground (Pennymead) Trust
- Refurbish steps into the Recreation Ground
- Re-development of the Sportsfield
- Sighting of Boules pitches on the Recreation Ground
- Grove Wood Coppicing
- Footpath improvements
- Highways improvements
- Volunteers - establish a bank of volunteers to help with various initiatives around the village

### **Parish Council Supporting**

- Pre-School Provision
- Village Hall Development
- Refurbishment of Tennis Courts
- Boules Weekend
- Jubilee Celebrations

I would like to finish by offering our sincere condolences to the family of Phil Cutcher who sadly passed away this month. Phil was a highly respected and

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dedicated, long term member of the Parish Council who contributed significantly to many of the small and large scale projects which have taken place in the village in recent years. He was a key contributor to the Neighbourhood Plan Scheme as well as the driving force behind the building of the Pre-School. He will be sorely missed.

## Appendix B

Report to Sherston Annual Parish Meeting on 14th April 2022 by Martin Smith - Wiltshire Councillor for the Sherston Division. Since May 2021, when I was elected to represent the wider Sherston area at Wiltshire Council, I have spent much of my time on case work, which is where residents seek help with accessing various services from Wiltshire Council or seek advice and/or lobby their local councillor on planning matters. Planning: Unfortunately, the planning team,

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particularly in the north of the county, have been struggling with turning around planning applications within the timescales they should be meeting. The initial problems started with a surge in applications during and after the Covid pandemic, the implementation of a new IT system early in 2021, lots of vacancies in the planning team, the changes in planning regulations by Government in undermining Neighbourhood Plans over two years old and the lack of a 5 year development land supply at Wiltshire Council. The latter two issues have meant an increase in speculative applications on green-field sites from large developers, which have further added to the planning workload, as developers go straight to appeal due to non-determination of their application by Wiltshire Council in the regulated timescales. I have asked numerous questions of the Cabinet at Wiltshire Council about the above issues (as reported in the local press) but have only received assurances that all is well, when plainly it is not. There are still major delays in getting applications determined (42% of applications are not determined within the 13 week service level). We are still losing planning staff to the private sector and other authorities. I will keep reminding the cabinet that all is not well.

GP Surgery plans: As I'm sure the Chair of the Parish Council will report, a great deal of time has been spent on ensuring the various stakeholders in this project keep talking in a bid to make progress. At the start of the year, it felt like we were getting close to a Heads of Agreement, although it then transpired that the Parish Council needed to get independent advice from valuers and solicitors, before this could proceed. The GPs also need to get their business model signed off by the NHS. Although outline planning permission for a GP Surgery was approved a few months ago, the detailed planning permission was withdrawn by Acorn as the planning officers were recommending it be refused on a number of grounds. I've been informed that Acorn plan to revise their application and resubmit in the near future.

School support: In my role as Vice-Chair of School Governors, I have also been involved in supporting Sherston Primary School through the problems caused by the Omicron wave of Covid and in getting a 'Good' report from the latest Ofsted inspection.

Pre-school/nursery: As soon as we knew that the Pumpkins Pre-school was closing down, Tanya Burgess and I convened a number of meetings with Pumpkins, parents, Wiltshire Council and another possible supplier, YMCA. Whilst the Parish Council focus on the building and lease arrangements, I am focussing on getting Wiltshire Council officers to sound out other potential suppliers of a preschool facility, with the aim of getting something in place for September 2022.

Highways and Speeding: The issue that I have had most complaints about after planning, are highways and speeding through the village. The state of the highways are in general not good. Since 2010, local authority support from central Government has been cut. The Local Government Association, in a study, says that this support has been reduced by 16% even over the last 4 years, whilst having their council tax increases capped at 2%. This accounts for the pressure on budgets and the reason for the number of potholes. However I continue to press for potholes to be fixed where I am aware of them. Please continue to use the MyWilts app to report issues and alert me if there are related safety issues. With the support of the Parish Council, I have submitted a plan to Wiltshire for 20 mph zones in some of the central streets in Sherston and asked for the views of Wiltshire Highways as to traffic calming measures on the approaches to the village and along Easton Town and through Pinkney. I hope to be able to progress this with Wiltshire Highways in the next year. I am also trying to reinstate a Community Speed Watch group in Sherston as this scheme is being relaunched across Wiltshire on 1st June, by the new Police and Crime Commissioner, following pressure from myself and other

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councillors (see the May Cliffhanger for details). I am also hoping to set up a Lorry Watch group in Sherston that monitors the movements of HGVs trying to use the lanes in Sherston, with existing weight limits (see the May Cliffhanger for details). Electric Vehicle Public Charging Points: As the lead councillor on the Malmesbury Area Board for Climate Change, I set up a survey for the Town and Parish Councils in the Malmesbury Area to assess the need for public EV charging points, aimed at those residents who have no off-street parking. Following that I am working with officers at Wiltshire Council and as soon as they have set up a framework and process, I will be applying to get charging points installed around the wider community area. Sherston Village Hall: In order to help the village hall renovation project, I was very happy to support a grant of £5,000 in total from the Malmesbury Area Board, towards this exciting venture. Platinum Jubilee Celebrations in Sherston: I was very happy to support the Jubilee committee's request of £928 from the Malmesbury Area Board as starter funding for the Jubilee celebrations. This was on the condition that any surplus made by the committee will be donated to the Village Hall project. Climate Change and Biodiversity: My work on the steering committee of Sustainable Sherston, the School and the Parish Council, all overlap in this area. I have been involved in repairing the steps at Grove Wood, planting wildflowers in the Village Hall field, working on a plan for planting more trees at the school, better treatment of food waste at the school, continuing with the recycling of soft plastics, pill blister packs, crisp packets and printer cartridges. I am also progressing better signage to encourage more cycling on the Foxley Road as an alternative and sustainable route to Malmesbury. Also looking to open up more footpaths and cycle routes in the wider Malmesbury Area to join up the town with the surrounding villages. I also supported the grant from the Area Board for a thermal imaging camera to enable residents to check on the insulation in their homes. This has been very popular given the increase in the cost of energy. Please contact Sustainable Sherston if you wish to hire it out. I'm sure I've missed a number of items in this report as it's been a busy year. Feedback from residents is always welcome.

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