

Whessoe Parish Council

MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting of Whessoe Parish held at Whessoe Parish Hall on Monday 22nd May 2023, at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor S Goldfinch (Chairman) Councillor C Stewart
Councillor F Minay Councillor I Thomas

Three members of the public.

Parish Clerk – B Goldfinch

Apologies: Apologies were received from Councillors D Woodley and T Musson

Welcome

Councillor S Goldfinch welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting.

I've been proud to have chaired Whessoe Parish Council for another year and am pleased to be able to bring you this report, confirming that we've continued to build on our community engagement through the year.

I'd like to formally record my thanks to my vice-Chair, Dave Woodley who sadly can't be with us tonight, as well as Councillors Fiona Minay, Sharon Patterson, Caroline Stewart, Ian Thomas and Trevor Musson (who is currently holidaying in Vietnam and Cambodia). I'm delighted that they will be continuing to serve you as a Parish for the coming year.

Last year I talked about how we were recovering following the pandemic and were encouraging our regular users back to the Hall and reported that we'd been successful in obtaining a 3 year licence to take over the management of the green area on Harrowgate Farm estate - though at this point last year we'd not had the opportunity to hold any events on there.

Performance against last year's action plan

In last year's report I set out an action plan for the year ahead, and here's what we've done against each of those plans:

Encourage the community to come together for social events, both at the Hall and on the Green

During the year we ran 6 x quizzes and 1 x Race Night in the Hall which have proved to be very popular and attract a core of regular attendees. We held an event on the Green for the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee last summer, with games and a children's entertainer and then more recently a community event to celebrate King Charles' coronation, with children's games and a live band. At Christmas we held a party for the children in the Hall with a fantastic entertainer and a competition with the winner switching on the Christmas lights.

Support St Teresa's Hospice

We continued to support St Teresa's Hospice during the 2022-23 financial year by donating all proceeds from our Quiz Nights and making a donation to them for collecting and disposing of our Christmas tree. In all we donated £1270 to St Teresa's Hospice.

Continue to maintain the Hall and encourage new users

We continued to support Coderdojo by providing the Hall facility free of charge for them to run a computer coding club for children. This is a fantastic opportunity for the young people in our community to develop real skills for the future in a safe environment, and we're very pleased that it has now established itself and has obtained enough funding to cover its costs. Despite having had to increase our hire charges there is good use of the Hall and many classes being run here including Pilates, t'ai chi, karate, computer coding (as mentioned previously) and children's dance classes. Groups including the Darlington Divas WI, a long-standing embroidery group and private dance tuition also use the Hall. This year we've had numerous private parties in the Hall that have included a casino themed party, a Bollywood-themed engagement party and various birthdays and christenings, etc.

Seek opportunities to improve and increase the facilities we can offer

To assist with Coderdojo we have arranged for faster, better broadband and Wi-Fi in the Hall. This will be in place by the end of the month. We've invested in a substantial gazebo to give us more flexibility around our outside events, and also invested in better, greener Christmas lighting that will last for years to come.

Other Comments on the past year

- The Berrymead Farm development is well underway, with the second phase of development recently started. We've intervened on behalf of residents on Harrowgate Village/Beaumont Hill when noisy or dirty works were happening outside of the agreed hours, and we will continue to monitor how this work progresses.
- We have commented on numerous planning applications throughout the year, including most recently relating to the proposed Burtree Garden Village. Representing the Parish view on planning applications is one of the most important roles we have as a Parish Council, and we take it very seriously.
- We received a £600 donation from Councillor Jon Clarke, to be used to help to fund the children's events planned during the year, including the Christmas party.
- The Clerk and I met with local MP Peter Gibson and had a really useful and informative conversation with him about the Parish, the Council and the issues we face.
- Our committees have continued - the Hall Management Committee, Social Committee and Staffing Committee meet regularly and report up to the full council.
- We are delighted that the Green on Harrowgate Farm is now looking much tidier now that we are maintaining it. The grass is cut and properly edged regularly, and the hedges maintained.
- Rising costs have hit us hard, as they have everyone. We carefully monitor our expenditure and ensure that we achieve the best value possible from our various contracts. This year we also increased the Precept for the first time in many years. Nevertheless, we've reluctantly had to increase hall hire charges and will need to keep these under review.

- Budgetary pressure also means that we can no longer afford to subsidise our Quiz nights and raise funds for local charity. The money raised from these social events is now ringfenced to go towards the cost of the children's Christmas party.
- Sadly, we've not been able to move forward with the work identified in last year's Condition Survey of the Hall, and we will need to seek grant funding to help us with this.

The year ahead

Turning towards the coming year, we will

- Continue to encourage the community to come together for social events both at the Hall and on Harrowgate Farm.
- Continue to maintain the Hall and encourage new users, particularly those who can enhance and enrich the lives of local residents.
- Seek grant funding to undertake the works identified in the Condition Survey for the Hall.
- Continue to seek opportunities to improve and increase the facilities we can offer.

Open Forum

There was a general discussion about our use and maintenance of the Green.

Close of Meeting

Councillor S Goldfinch closed the meeting at 7pm