

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly  
held on Monday 18 March 2024 at 7.00pm**

**Present:**

**Parish Councillors:**

Cllr B Ahier, Cllr D Bird, Cllr P Cragg, Cllr N Crampin, Cllr S Ellahi, Cllr M Fance, Cllr B McShee, Cllr N Mitchell (Chairman of the meeting), Cllr B Nagle, Cllr M Price, Cllr C Riley, Cllr J Snowball, and Cllr T Wright.

**Staff:**

Clerk to the Council – Mrs G White  
Assistant Clerk – Mrs V Fear

**Also present were:**

County Councillor Keith Witham, Borough Councillors: Cllr Bill Akhtar, Cllr Honor Brooker and Cllr Philip Brooker, Fiona Stewart (Stella Hancock Driving Group – RDA), Mick Bruder (Fairlands, Liddington Hall and Gravetts Lane Community Association (FLGCA)), Rev Alex Russell, and 44 members of the public.

**Apologies**

Were received from: Parish Councillor G Adam, Sarah Norville - Rydes Hill Prep, Joy Wright - Emerge, Sarah-Jane Chimbwandira - Surrey Wildlife Trust, Adam Bolton - Surrey Wildlife Trust, Sam Pake - Worplesdon Tennis Club, and Sam Hutchison - Guildford Borough Council.

**Networking Session**

The FLGCA, Sime Gallery, Fairlands Practice Patient Participatory Group, Wood Street Village Cricket Club, the Stella Hancock Driving Group – RDA, Fairwood Helpers, St Mary's Church – Worplesdon/St Alban's Wood Street Village, Fairwood Helpers, and the Fairlands WI had stalls at the event, which commenced with a 45-minute networking session.

**Report of the Chairman**

The Chairman, Councillor Nigel Mitchell, firstly introduced the parish councillors to the meeting, and also advised there are two vacancies on the Parish Council, one for the ward of Jacobs Well, the other for the ward of Perry Hill.

Cllr Mitchell then gave the following report detailing some of the activities the Parish Council has undertaken over the last 12 months:

**Parish Precept (Council Tax)**

The 9.97% increase in the 2024/2025 precept was predominantly due to:

1. The employment of another part-time member of Groundstaff – additional land management and devolved services.
2. Having to pay Guildford Borough Council £3,000pa to empty bins on land for which Worplesdon Parish Council is directly responsible
3. Grass cutting increase – the 2023 RPI increase was 13.5%.
4. Loss of grants from Guildford Borough Council.

### **Food Waste Caddies**

Replacement food caddies can be collected from the Parish office during specified hours. This helps not only to reduce carbon emissions, it also saves residents the cost of time, fuel and parking fees.

### **Trees - Succession Planting and Biodiversity Requirements**

As a public authority, in accordance with the extended/enhanced Biodiversity Duties announced by the Government 17th May 2023, Worplesdon Parish Council must consider what it can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, agree policies and specific objectives based on those considerations, and act to deliver the requisite policies and achieve the objectives.

The Parish Council has been following its existing Land Management policies but will create a specific Biodiversity policy on receipt of Surrey County Council's template.

This year the Parish Council was in receipt of 420 free whips (slender, unbranched bare root trees) from the Woodland Trust, and 10 feathered trees from Surrey County Council - who also generously provided the tree supports and spiral tree guards.

In addition to this, the Parish Council has also obtained a grant from Guildford Borough Council towards succession planting across the Parish Council's land portfolio.

### **Commemorative Coronation Trees**

The commemorative trees which have been planted across the parish are all different species. The diversity of flora is very important to our new King, our nation, and the planet.

### **Christmas Illuminations**

In December 2023, the Parish Council undertook a survey to obtain the views of residents about the Christmas illuminations. The previous 4-year contract concluded in January 2024.

The results of the survey were that 97% of the respondents confirmed their support for Christmas illuminations to be provided at the following locations:

1. The avenue of trees Perry Hill Green
2. The illuminated Christmas tree outside St Mary's Church, Perry Hill
3. The illuminated Christmas tree Wood Street Village Green
4. Christmas illuminations at Fairlands Community Centre
5. Christmas illuminations at the Jacobs Well Village Hall
6. A Christmas tree on Pitch Place Green planted February 2024.

The Parish Council will shortly be going out to tender. An annual budget of £20,000 has been set aside for the Christmas illuminations and the Parish Council will be seeking sponsorship where possible.

Artificial lighting could be created at Fairlands Community Centre and Jacobs Well Village Hall if the power supply can be provided via both community buildings.

### **Memorial bench - Freeman of the Parish - the late John Gunner – grant of 50% received from Guildford Borough Council**

John Gunner was posthumously awarded the Freedom of the Parish in 2022 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to all the Parish communities.

In addition, the Parish Council agreed to provide a memorial bench, which has now been installed beside the pond, by Steve Gunner. We think it looks magnificent! A wonderful tribute to an incredibly hard working, and community minded man, who did so much for so many throughout his life. We hope it will be used as a friendship bench, as we are sure John would have approved of this.

### **Storm damage caused by Storm Henk**

Unexpected and costly tree surgery had to be carried out at Jacobs Well Recreation Ground as a result of storm damage caused by Storm Henk on the 4th of January 2024.

Fortunately, there were no injuries as a result of this incident.

For safety reasons the adjacent Poplar was also felled.

### **Flooding caused by Storm Henk (90 properties internally flooded across the Parish)**

Devastation caused by the storm was felt across the whole of the Parish.

Regrettably, a number of families are still unable to occupy their homes and may not be able to return for six months or more.

The Parish Council has been working closely with the principal authorities and the Environment Agency, as well as other landowners in a bid to resolve some of the problems caused by a lack of maintenance at key locations.

The severity of the damage caused has resulted in a section 19 investigation being carried out by the County Council, who are the lead authority in accordance with the Water Management Flood Act 2010.

Due to the work of our Assistant Clerk, Government funding has also been triggered to support those affected by this severe flooding incident.

### **Replacement high security gate- Jacobs Well Recreation Ground**

The high security gate that had been installed by the Parish Council over 30 years ago, had reached the end of its life expectancy and a new high security gate has been installed to prevent illegal incursions.

## **Two New Trial Wildflower Meadow areas- Harry's Meadow, Jacobs Well**

In accordance with the enhanced biodiversity duties placed upon the Parish Council, two new wildflower trial areas were installed in Harry's Meadow last September.

The native wildflower seed that was used was from a specialist UK supplier.

## **Community Speed Watch**

The Parish Council carries out Speed Watch deployments across the Parish. The Community SpeedWatch Scheme is overseen by Surrey Police.

All members of the deployment team are unpaid volunteers.

The locations are surveyed by Surrey Police to ensure that they are safe for the volunteers and visible to motorists and other road users. The SpeedWatch scheme is designed to educate motorists about the speed limits on the road on which they are travelling. Community SpeedWatch is not a revenue generating exercise.

## **Grants awarded by the Parish Council**

The Parish Council is very proud to have been able to give grants to the following organisations during the course of the last two years:

- Wood Street Village Cricket Club
- Safe Drive Stay Alive
- Fairlands, Liddington Hall and Gravetts Lane Community Association
- Crimestoppers
- Challengers
- Whitmoor Common Association
- Worplesdon Memorial Hall and Ground CIO
- Kent, Surrey, Sussex Air Ambulance
- Wood Street Infant School
- Worplesdon Primary School
- Maypole Dancing Group, Wood Street Village
- The Wood Street Village Association

Grants of up to £500, or more in exceptional circumstances, are provided by the Parish Council and local organisations are encouraged to apply. The grant aid application form is available on the Council's website.

In addition to financial grants, the Council has been pleased to support the local scout groups who have been borrowing the Parish Council's litter picking equipment.

## **Presentation by Mick Bruder - Replacement Community Centre – Fairlands**

### **Can we afford to wait?**

The hall was built in 1964. We have lots of history telling us about the FLGCA origins from old army huts to this building, we are very grateful and very lucky to have had such committed predecessors.

However, construction methods were very different then. As ever, budgets were a problem and hence prefabricated concrete panels were used. Not, we believe, Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) as that could be very serious but even so it has an uncertain lifespan.

Additionally, energy efficiency was not a consideration in 1964 but is very much so now.

We have recently installed solar panels to help with our electric but keeping the place warm in winter is a real concern with substantial costs in gas heating.

Insulating the walls is not feasible or economic, plus it could hide the visibility of any underlying structural issues.

Blocked sewers cause problems and require a regular programme of preventative rodding.

A persistent water leak was uncovered, which required extensive investigation and needs a substantial work around fix. In the meantime, our water bill is excessive, not helping with water conservation at a time of shortages, increases flood risk and damage to infrastructure.

Despite regular checks and maintenance, surprise faults due to age are becoming increasingly common, more and more expensive, and often difficult to resolve.

Ideally, if funds allowed many of the fixtures and fittings need to be upgraded or refurbished such as the Hall Ladies and Gents toilets. Minor works continue to be done, e.g. light sensors and percussion taps but is very much sticking plasters.

### **A growing community**

- The defined FLGCA area has been relatively static for some time but, as we can see just by the hall gate, new properties are being built.
- Just outside the FLGCA area there has been substantial development in recent times, 45 new homes at Carter's Yard just along the Aldershot Road, plus off Keens Lane (Montague Place) 148 residential dwellings and a 70-bed care home. There have been numerous other developments over the last 10 to 15 years.
- Clearly such growth will impact the local schools and the Medical Centre, and we can expect the demands on the community centre to grow as well.
- Globally people are living longer and generally there are a higher percentage of older people in Fairlands.
- The Fairlands, Liddington Hall and Gravetts Lane area has a high number of people who move here and stay for life. Children born on the Estate are now returning with their own young families.
- A thriving Community Centre is key to this being such a great place that people are keen to live in the locality.
- Again, increasing demands on the Medical Centre but also creating a requirement for local facilities that can meet their needs and wants.
- Just one example of recent enquiries for the ability to deliver dementia support reflect this but are problematic to support given the current design and usage of the hall/centre.
- Geographically, Fairlands is central to Worplesdon Parish and, therefore, ideally located to provide facilities that support that substantial community.

### **What the new community building could be**

- A modern, energy efficient design, including re-use of solar panels, where viable.

- A low profile, aiming to be no higher than existing structures (has an upper-level element already) whereby, like the Medical Centre, rooms can be built into the roof structure.
- Although our current hall has the ability to be divided, reality has shown this to be impractical. A suitable design would allow more than one booking at a time with smaller meetings facilitated for, enabling enhanced community useability and flexibility.
- Additionally, it may be possible to have rentable office space which there is a great need of in the area.
- A café with both indoor and outdoor seating that could be leased out and provide facilities for young families who visit the playground, visitors to the Medical Centre and generally to the community.
- The current bar, being an add on, is not well positioned to work alongside external events such as for the recent Coronation or sports matches and the like.
- Current planning rules, as well as our specification would put energy efficiency, water management and the environment as a priority.
- Getting this right now means the following generations, like recently for the Worplesdon Memorial Hall, will be celebrating the community centre in 100 years.

### To Make it Happen

- There is a once in a generation opportunity to apply for funding from Surrey County Council.
- Until we get professionals engaged, some designs drawn, and costings we don't know a cost. We are lucky that we own the land, which is not Green Belt. Whilst this helps, £2.5M seems to be a reasonable ballpark figure.
- To engage architects and get this off the ground will require some initial funding, we will work to secure any grants that may be available from any source we can identify. If there are any people out there able to support this financially or with appropriate skills, then we really could do with their support.
- Keeping the current building up and running during any build is essential! We will engage with and want to hear from all our current and prospective hall hirers.
- The current building was very much a community effort which was supported through grants but also community raised funds. People may be aware of recent community developments in Normandy and Pirbright that had substantial funding other than from Surrey County Council, either through other sponsors or the community.
- **A big thank you to WPC for a grant of £10,000 to help us in developing the idea, initial architect/professional fees. At this point, we have spent less than £100 helping with our community consultations. As we made the decision to go for the first stage of Your Fund Surrey (YFS) funding, idea submission, at minimal cost. We have done that, and now need to look at the next steps but £10,000 is unlikely to go far, and we have to balance the risk of spending scarce funds against not obtaining the funding we need.**
- We are very much aware of the current financial concerns for all of us in the UK with for many the continuing high inflation and unexpected bombshells of substantially increased mortgages and therefore raising a significant contribution towards the build costs is not a viable consideration for the people here. Nor do we currently have the funds within the Association or any external sponsorship, so this would need us to approach YFS for pretty much the entire amount.
- If we are to get any chance at such then we need your support. From purely registering that support as a minimum, to a very much needed real commitment. Do you have skills that could be used, maybe work for a company that would donate support? Architect, development company, project management, etc.
- Our preference is for a completely new build, either the pavilion/sports changing facilities, etc. incorporated in the main structure or another. Such answers on how to achieve coming from the necessary engaged skills, e.g., architect and or development company.

- Need to ensure current users do not lose facilities while building, plus the hall hire provides the essential funding to keep the Association viable.
- **As a final note - securing such high levels of funding are more than challenging and such an ambitious project could roll on for a number of years, even if successful, therefore we will also explore alternatives as to the possibilities using the existing structure.**

### **Potential Parish Office**

The Parish Council is currently considering two options for a potential parish office within the Parish boundary. The first is a purpose-built parish office/meeting room at Hesters Yard, Wood Street Village. This building would be owned by the Parish Council freehold, in perpetuity via a section 106 Agreement for the cost of £1. The planning application is currently subject to an appeal process.

The Parish Council is also in discussions with the FLGCA regarding the possibility of taking out a 25-year to 50-year lease to provide office space and meeting space at the proposed replacement community centre. This would necessitate the construction of a two-storey replacement building. Additional funding would be required to facilitate a two-storey building. Your Fund Surrey will not provide 100% grant funding, therefore, the FLGCA will be required to make up the funding shortfall (of potentially 40%) via other means. One option is for the Parish Council to consider taking out a Public Works Loan Board Loan anticipated to be in the region of £800,000 (the cost of the 25-year rent upfront (this may increase – subject to the building costs). The Fairlands, Liddington Hall and Gravetts Lane Community Association is legally required to charge commercial rent.

The Parish Council is legally bound to consult all residents within the Parish regarding the possibility of seeking a PWLBL prior to any decisions being taken.

To gain an initial view of the electorate regarding the possibility of a PWLBL being obtained to (a) provide a capital sum grant, which would enable a 25 or 50-year lease of office facilities to be secured by the Parish Council at this location and (b) to raise a significant financial contribution towards the build costs, the Chairman asked the electors present to indicate whether they would, in principle, support the Parish Council seeking a loan if the planning appeal for Hesters Yard were to be unsuccessful.

Indication of support:

19 - for  
2 - against

### **Grant award - Stella Hancock Driving Group – RDA**

Fiona Stewart gave the following presentation to the meeting:

#### **Our aims**

Mission: to provide carriage driving in a safe, happy, and friendly environment for anyone with a disability, in order to promote improved emotional well-being, self-confidence, independence and personal achievement.

Vision: to create an outdoor environment of friendship learning, fun and inclusivity alongside the therapeutic relationship with horses.

Core values: to treat everyone with respect and kindness, with high welfare standards for horses.

### **Self-funding Charity**

The Charity was founded by Stella Hancock in 1974; it moved to new premises in Merrist Wood Campus in 2003, on a peppercorn ground rent. The facilities were opened by the Late His Royal Highness, Prince Philip a keen carriage driver and friend of Stella's husband.

There are 11 trustees who run the charity including the Chairman Helen Pritchard, Treasurer Dom Evans, and Group Organiser Fiona Stewart.

### **What the members do**

There are 70 members and 25 active volunteers supporting 22 disabled "drivers".

They operate a weekly rota on Wednesday mornings. Drivers come every two weeks together with their families and visitors, so there are approximately 50+ people attending each session.

Providing carriage driving opportunities for mentally and physically disabled children, teens, and adults in Surrey.

Disabled drivers enjoy the open air, improved coordination of balance, develop self-confidence, enhanced decision making, and make friends while achieving goals and having fun.

Our disabled drivers practise and train for RDA and British Driving Association events or just go out for a carriage drive at Merrist Wood College Campus.

### **Our horses and equipment**

We own and maintain two of five horses ranging from a ten-hand high tiny pony called Jolly, to a 16-hand high heavy horse called Tooky. All are RDA certified. Three of the horses are provided by volunteers at no cost.

Horses, carriages, and equipment require transportation to the site, from Westcott and Chiddingfold, at each weekly carriage driving session as well as to events.

Our five carriages are adapted to carry wheelchair users. Larger carriages carry two helpers on the back, plus the disabled driver and coach who sit side-by-side.

Nine of the volunteers are RDA qualified coaches who teach the drivers and volunteers have to be assessed by RDA every three years. All volunteers are DBS checked and many are first aiders.

Thanks to Worplesdon Parish Council for their recently awarded grant

We have been awarded a grant from Worplesdon Parish Council to be used for the following purposes:

1. To hire the indoor/outdoor arenas at Merrist Wood Equine facility for our drivers to practise dressage and obstacle driving.
2. To hold training sessions conducted by our own coaches.

At present, we use an old car park with a very rough surface which is not ideal.



We would be pleased to have you join us for one of our Wednesday morning sessions to meet the group and see what we do.

### **Open Forum - Question and Answer session**

A number of questions were raised by residents who were deeply concerned about the recent planning application by Merrist Wood Golf Course to Surrey County Council for the importation and deposit of inert materials and soils on 55 hectares of land to construct and remodel the existing golf course, with associated water features and the creation of heathland and wetland habitat.

Their concerns included the traffic implications (number of lorry movements over a two-year period), potential pollution issues as a result of the perceived dumping of unrestricted landfill materials, and the negative impact on residents during the construction phase.

A number of residents were angry that they had not been consulted about this application prior to the Parish Council submitting its response to Surrey County Council.

Charlie Wooldridge of Merrist Wood Golf Course was invited to respond to the residents' concerns, following which he agreed to hold a Drop-in Event in the Fairlands Community Centre at which the various consultants used by the owners of the Golf Club would be available for members of the public to raise their concerns. This event to be arranged at the earliest opportunity and before the planning application deadline of the 15th of April.

No other matters were raised.

Cllr Mitchell thanked all those who had presented at the assembly for their time and interesting presentations, those from volunteer organisations who had attended to promote their causes, and also the councillors and officers who had helped set-up for the event to take place.

Meeting finished 8.48pm

Signed:

Chairman of the Council

4.4.2024