

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly
held on Monday 9 March 2026 at 7.00 pm
in St Alban's Church Hall, 96 Oak Hill, Guildford**

Present

Parish Councillors:

Cllr B Ahier, Cllr G Burch, Cllr N Crampin, Cllr B McShee, Cllr N Mitchell (Chairman of the meeting), Cllr B Nagle, Cllr J Snowball, Cllr C Riley, Cllr R Watson, Cllr T Wright

Staff:

Clerk to the Council – Mrs G White

Assistant Clerk – Mrs V Fear

Also present were:

Borough Councillor Bill Akhtar, Mr J Lord, Mr R Trinick (Wood Street Village Cricket Club), Mr D Grey (Sime Gallery), Mr A Waugh (Chairman of the WSV), Mrs L Bassett-Cross (Deputy Head Teacher – Wood Street Infant School), Mrs D Lucas-Brown (Rector of St Alban's and St Mary's), Mr D Willis (Fairwood Helpers), Mr P Rijbroek (Whitmoor Common Association), Mr and Mrs Clark (Canine Partners), Ms D Abbott (British Red Cross – virtual attendance), one member of the public, and County Councillor Keith Witham.

Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Parish Councillors Cllr S Busby, Cllr S Ellahi, Cllr M Price, Borough Councillors Cllr Honor Brooker, and Philip Brooker.

Introduction

Cllr N Mitchell (Chairman of the meeting) welcomed those present to the Annual Parish Assembly and reminded attendees that the Assembly is a meeting of the parish electorate and not a meeting of the Parish Council. The Assembly provides an opportunity for residents to hear about the activities of the Parish Council and matters affecting the parish during the past year.

The Chairman then invited Ms Danielle Abbott to give her presentation.

Presentations from Local Organisations

Presentation – British Red Cross

Speaker: Ms Danielle Abbott

Ms Danielle Abbott gave a presentation outlining the work of the British Red Cross in supporting communities during emergencies and crisis situations.

The British Red Cross provides practical and emotional support following incidents such as fires, stabbings, shootings, and other major emergencies. This support can include the provision of essential items such as clothing, blankets, toiletries, baby supplies, pet food, and refreshments for individuals who have been displaced or affected by an incident.

Trained volunteer teams and vehicles equipped with emergency supplies can be deployed rapidly to support local authorities and emergency services. Volunteers receive training in crisis communication and health

and safety procedures and participate in emergency response exercises to ensure readiness and effective coordination with statutory services.

Recent examples of support included assistance provided to thirty-four people following a fire at the Angel Pub, where clothing, hats and baby items were distributed. Support was also provided to residents displaced following a fire affecting nine flats within a former hospital building, with blankets, clothing, refreshments, and emotional support provided to those affected.

The British Red Cross has also supported evacuees, including Ukrainian refugees, providing assistance until alternative accommodation arrangements were secured.

The organisation is currently seeking additional volunteers to support its emergency response work.

The information provided was noted.

The Chairman thanked Ms Abbott for attending and for her informative and engaging presentation, and for the valuable work undertaken by the British Red Cross in supporting communities during times of crisis.

Presentation – Canine Partners

Speaker: Mrs Penny Clark

Mrs Penny Clark gave a presentation on the work of Canine Partners, a charity that trains assistance dogs to support adults with physical disabilities, helping to improve independence and quality of life.

Canine Partners forms part of the Assistance Dogs UK umbrella organisation, alongside organisations such as Guide Dogs for the Blind, Hearing Dogs for Deaf People and Medical Detection Dogs. The charity has been operating for over 25 years and recently celebrated the placement of its 1,000th assistance dog.

The charity trains primarily Labrador and Labradoodle dogs to assist individuals with a range of physical conditions including multiple sclerosis, spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy, and cerebral palsy. Assistance dogs are trained to carry out a wide range of practical tasks including retrieving dropped items, assisting with laundry, removing shoes and clothing, retrieving items from appliances, and assisting with payment transactions.

In addition to practical assistance, the dogs provide increased confidence, security, and independence.

Puppies are placed with volunteer puppy trainers from approximately eight weeks of age until around 14–15 months before undertaking advanced training and being matched with a suitable partner.

The charity currently has approximately ninety people on its waiting list. The cost of training and supporting an assistance dog from puppyhood to retirement is approximately £50,000. The charity receives no government funding and relies entirely on voluntary donations and fundraising activities.

Volunteers are always needed, including puppy trainers and foster carers.

Questions from Members

Mr David Willis asked how the charity ensures that assistance dogs do not become overweight given the use of food rewards during training.

Mrs Clark advised that the dogs' daily food allowance is used as part of their training reward system.

Mr Richard Watson asked about the requirements for becoming a volunteer puppy trainer.

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Mrs Clark advised that volunteers require time, energy, and a willingness to undertake the training provided by the charity.

Cllr G Burch asked whether puppy trainers are able to see the dogs again once they have been partnered.

Mrs Clark explained that once a partnership is well established, partners may invite the original puppy trainer to visit.

The information provided was noted.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Clark for attending and for her informative and engaging presentation.

Mrs V Fear arrived during the meeting.

Presentation – Wood Street Infant School

Speaker: Mrs Laura Bassett-Cross

Mrs Laura Bassett-Cross gave a presentation outlining recent developments at Wood Street Infant School and highlighting the importance of community support in sustaining a small local school.

The school joined the South Farnham Educational Trust Multi-Academy Trust following approximately 18 months of research by the Governing Body.

Mrs Bassett-Cross explained that sustainability can be challenging for small schools and that the Trust provides support while enabling the school to retain its ethos and strong community links.

She expressed appreciation for the support provided by Worplesdon Parish Council through its community grant scheme. Funding had supported books for the school and class libraries, playground equipment, gardening equipment, and outdoor learning opportunities within the Forest School area.

Playground equipment purchased with grant funding had been particularly well received by pupils.

Mrs Bassett-Cross also advised that the school intends to open a nursery provision in September 2026, offering thirty places for children aged two to four.

Mrs Bassett-Cross concluded by thanking the Parish Council for its continued support.

The information provided was noted.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Bassett-Cross for attending and for her informative and engaging presentation.

Report of the Chairman

The Chairman presented his report on the activities of Worplesdon Parish Council over the past municipal year and outlined priorities for the coming year.

The Chairman reported that it had been a challenging year for the Parish Council. The Council had suffered the loss of two longstanding councillors whose passing was deeply felt and who are greatly missed for their service to the community.

Two councillors also resigned during the year. Four new councillors have since been co-opted onto the Council.

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Cllr Geoff Burch is currently reviewing historical records held at the Parish Council office and providing information to assist the Clerk in updating the history pages on the Parish Council website.

There are currently three vacancies on the Parish Council.

Horse Field – Salt Box Road

In September 2025, the Parish Council became aware that Guildford Borough Council intended to sell the land known locally as the horse field beside Salt Box Road. Worplesdon Parish Council requested that Guildford Borough Council consider a Community Asset Transfer so that the approximately 20-acre site could be retained for community use.

To gauge public opinion, the Parish Council delivered approximately 4,000 flyers across the parish and surrounding areas inviting residents to respond to a survey outlining a vision for the land as a community space for walking, outdoor learning, and biodiversity enhancement. Approximately 640 responses were received, representing an 18% response rate, with 96% of respondents supporting the proposal for community use.

Guildford Borough Council did not accept the survey results as justification for a Community Asset Transfer.

The Parish Council had initially estimated a potential purchase cost in the region of £200,000 based on comparable land values. It was later established that Guildford Borough Council purchased the land in 2021 for £600,000. A Freedom of Information request has been submitted seeking further information relating to the valuation and purchase.

For comparison, land within Jacobs Well has recently sold for approximately £14,000 per acre, suggesting a potential value in the region of £280,000. The Parish Council is awaiting confirmation of how the site will be marketed.

Precept 2026/27

The Chairman explained that the parish **precept** remains the Council's primary source of income for delivering services to residents. The only other income received is from interest on savings accounts.

Residents will shortly receive their council tax bills from Guildford Borough Council and will note that the parish precept has increased by more than 20%. This increase reflects legislative changes to financial reporting requirements, the need to maintain appropriate reserves and the cost of upgrading the Parish Council's IT systems and telecommunications infrastructure.

A new financial reporting requirement, Assertion 10, has also required improvements to the Council's IT and data management systems. Work to migrate the Council's IT systems to a new platform commenced on 23 March.

Under legislation, the Parish Council must hold general reserves of between 30% and 50% of the annual precept. The Council also maintains earmarked reserves for future projects including pond maintenance, tree works, playground repairs, vehicle replacement, election costs, bus shelters, and ward grants.

Hesters Yard

The Parish Council is awaiting Guildford Borough Council's decision on the Bewley Homes planning application for Hesters Yard. If approved, the development would provide the Parish Council with a bespoke

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office and council chamber on a freehold basis for £1 in perpetuity. The Council currently pays approximately £28,000 per year in rent for Unit 2 Saxton.

Officers and Staffing

In April 2025 the Parish Council's Head Groundsman, Peter Trevena, retired after many years of service. Andy Connor was duly promoted to Senior Groundsman and Neil Smart was appointed as Groundsman.

Ground staff working arrangements have been extended so that between Andy Connor and Neil Smart services are now delivered across six days per week.

An interim internal audit undertaken by Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd identified that officers were working excessive overtime due to increasing workloads and new reporting requirements. The Parish Council therefore intends to recruit a part-time Communications Officer later this year.

Parish Improvements

During the past year upgrades were completed to playground facilities at Fairlands Community Centre and Worplesdon Memorial Hall.

For the second year the Parish Council arranged Christmas lights installations in all four parish wards – Jacobs Well, Fairlands, Perry Hill and Wood Street Village – through contractor JDS Decorations Ltd. Numerous messages of appreciation were received from residents.

Flooding and Environmental Work

Although the Parish Council has no statutory responsibility for flood alleviation, aside from its riparian responsibilities where applicable, it continues to work collaboratively with other organisations to help reduce flooding risks.

Ground staff regularly clear stream grilles in Jacobs Well and Wood Street Village, and the Parish Council has developed a positive working relationship with the new owners of Merrist Wood Golf Club, who have undertaken ditch clearance works.

Speed Monitoring

The Parish Council works with Surrey County Council to facilitate Speed Data Recording across the parish.

The Chairman also paid tribute to Peter Harris, whose sudden death came as a shock to the Parish Council. A minute's silence was held in his memory at the General Purposes meeting on 5 February, and condolences were sent to his widow.

Community Speed Watch deployments continue to take place at eight locations across the parish, supported by volunteers, councillors, and officers.

Wood Street Village Pond

The Parish Council intends to seek consent from Surrey County Council to desilt Wood Street Village Pond, subject to the results of a Great Crested Newt DNA survey. The Wood Street Village Association will be kept informed as the project progresses.

Anti-Social Behaviour and Fly Tipping

Instances of anti-social behaviour and fly tipping continue to occur across the parish. Residents are encouraged to report incidents directly to Surrey Police or Guildford Borough Council to ensure appropriate action can be taken.

Local Government Review

The Chairman concluded by referring to the ongoing Local Government Review and the proposed creation of a West Surrey Unitary Authority. Significant uncertainty remains regarding future responsibilities and financial implications for parish councils.

The Parish Council has been advised that parish election costs may increase to between £20,000 and £50,000 if financial contributions from the principal authority cease. Potential changes may also include the delegation of services such as playground maintenance or verge cutting to parish councils without associated funding.

The proposed West Surrey Unitary Authority is expected to inherit debt estimated at approximately £4.5 billion.

Open Forum – Question and Answer Session

Address by Cllr Keith Witham (Surrey County Council)

Cllr Keith Witham addressed the meeting regarding the proposed Local Government Review and anticipated changes to local government structures within Surrey.

He explained that the reorganisation represents a significant change to local government arrangements within Surrey and noted the historical development of local government structures from the Local Government Act 1894 and the Local Government Act 1972.

Under the proposed reforms, the eleven borough and district councils together with Surrey County Council are expected to be replaced by new unitary authorities.

Elections to the new authority are expected to take place in May 2026, followed by a shadow authority, with the new arrangements coming into effect on 1 April 2027.

Cllr Witham also outlined recent grant funding supporting local organisations within the parish including:

- £41,000 towards a proposed Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) at Fairlands/Worplesdon Primary School.
- £5,300 from Your Fund Surrey towards pitch covers at Wood Street Village Cricket Club.
- Funding towards a sound system at Fairlands Community Centre.
- £250 towards the Wood Street Village Jazz Festival.
- £250 towards a bell tent for the Scouts.
- £250 for Fairlands Walking Group for high-visibility jackets and insurance.

Information leaflets regarding the Local Government Review had been placed on chairs for attendees.

Questions and Comments

Mr Trinick asked about the position of Wood Street Village Cricket Club, whose 25-year lease expires in 2028.

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Cllr Witham suggested that discussions with the current authority may be beneficial.

Mr Lord referred to the financial position associated with the proposed unitary authority, noting estimated combined debt of approximately £4.5 billion, together with significant assets.

Mr Alex Waugh left the meeting at 8.30 pm.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Keith Witham for his presentation and thanked all those present for attending.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

Signed

Chairman of the Meeting

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