

Ditchingham Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Ditchingham Village Hall

Monday 12th May 2025 – 7.30 pm

Councillors: Keith Weston (Chair), Brendon Bernard (Vice Chair), Neil Humphries, Gill Oliver and Tony Swan

Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer (RFO): Sally Chapman

Also Present: Two parishioners

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions from the parishioner's attending.

MINUTES

The Chair Keith Weston of the Parish Council Chaired this meeting

1. **To Confirm the Minutes of the 20th May 2024 Annual Parish Meeting**
The Minutes from the Meetings held on 20th May 2024 were confirmed unanimously as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chair.
2. **Any Business not on the Agenda Arising from Those Minutes**
None
3. **The Retiring Chair will give a Brief Report on The Council's Activities**
The Chair gave a verbal summary of his report (attached).
4. **The Responsible Financial Officer End of Year Report**
The Responsible Financial Officer read out her report (attached).
5. **To Receive Reports Giving a Summary of The Year's Activities from Council's Committees:**
 - a) **Community Committee** – no report
 - b) **Finance & Resources Committee** – no further report
 - c) **Planning & Highways Committee**
Cllr Weston read out the main points of his report (attached).
6. **To Receive a Report from the County Councillor**
*County Councillor Barry Stone sent apologies and a report DPC's website:
<https://ditchinghampc.norfolkparishes.gov.uk/category/meetings>*
7. **To Receive a Report from the District Councillor**
*District Councillor Brendon Bernard sent a report DPC's website:
<https://ditchinghampc.norfolkparishes.gov.uk/category/meetings>*
8. **To Receive a Report from Ditchingham School Governing Body**
The Chair summarised their report (attached).
9. **To Receive a Report from Ditchingham United Charities**
The Chair summarised their report (attached).
10. **To Receive a Report from Ditchingham Village Hall**
The Chair Keith Weston read out the main points of his report (attached).

Signed _____

Date _____

Ditchingham Parish Council

11. To Receive Reports from Community Groups

None

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm

3. Chair's Report to the 2025 Annual Parish Meeting

Since the 2024 Parish Meeting, we, at last, had something to celebrate at Chicken Roundabout. After many years, all the different proposals (and refusals), and all the interventions, we now have a lectern-style information board on the grass verge between Smokey Joe's and the A143 junction. Sadly, Norfolk County Council would not allow anything on the roundabout.

The interpretation board gives a brief history of Chicken Roundabout and highlights the efforts of Gordon Knowles, "The Chicken Man," who fed the birds for many years. The installation was featured on BBC Radio Suffolk.

During the year we had a number of Councillors leave and, I thank them for their service. We also welcomed several new Councillors – thank you to them. We currently have a vacancy for two Councillors; a complete list of the present members can be found online and on our noticeboard.

Following a series of complaints about anti-social behaviour in The Dip youth shelter, the Council sold it in an online auction.

DPC continues to (financially) support the magazine delivered free to this, and to two other parishes. Council thanked the retiring editor and Treasurer of "The Parishioner" and welcomed a new team of volunteers who have taken it on and given it a slightly new look.

Your Council has also given some support to the Village Hall as part funding of the solar panels that were recently installed. Councillors see the hall as an important village asset and the solar panels will help to maintain the hall's viability.

Although not a Parish Council project we have given non-financial support to an initiative to provide a memorial to the fallen. (PCs are not permitted to provide memorials.) They are allowed, and we shall maintain it.

The Council is consulting on the future of the BMX track at the Thwaite Road Play Area. There have been very few responses and a decision will be made soon about whether to maintain it or let nature take it back.

A large amount of money was spent on repairs and improvements to the Thwaite Road Play Area following the annual, professional inspection.

A national issue that will affect all parish Councils is Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation. This will include the election of a mayor, the abolition of District Councils (with Unitary Authorities established) and, probably, greater roles and responsibilities for PCs. We await more clarity on all of this. In the meantime, I refer you to my article in the April/May issue of "The Parishioner Magazine" and to the annexe to my Chair's report to the APCM which follows this meeting. Both documents will be on the PC's website.

Potentially a significant change for the village is the proposal to build housing on the land bordered by Loddon Road and Tunneys Lane. I will cover this more fully in my P&H chairs report.

Signed _____

Date _____

Ditchingham Parish Council

I shall conclude this report with some “thankyous.” For family reasons I have been slightly less focussed on Council matters this year. I thank my Vice -Chair, Cllr. Bernard for his support. My thanks also go to my fellow Cllrs. For their contributions to the work of the Council. It must be remembered that all Cllrs. are volunteers.

I also thank the Council’s employees who do their best, and succeed, in keeping the village spick and span.

I am, however, especially grateful our Clerk and Responsible Officer, Sally Chapman. Managing the budget, our assets, contracts, insurance, compliance with ever-changing regulations – I could go on – is a very complex and time-consuming job. Our clerk does all that in a very efficient way. Without an accomplished clerk I very much doubt whether we could recruit Cllrs. I thank Sally for her important work for the parish.

Keith Weston
Chair

4. Chair's & RFO's Finance & Resources Annual Report

Key Points:

- **Precept:** Maintained at £47,000 for the last two years.
- **Allotments:** Rents unchanged for several years; all plots are fully occupied.
- **Business Accounts:** Interest increased by 271% after moving reserves to a better interest account and closing Barclays.
- **S106/Grants Received:** £600 from SNC VE Day grant for a free community event yesterday.
- **Village Upkeep:** Increased spending, including:
 - Full grass cutting in the cemetery (parishioners request).
 - Nearly £20,000 spent on new play area equipment and repairs, partly funded by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money - £10,350.
 - All 14 Village benches cleaned and re-stained.
- **Street Lights & Cemetery Repairs:** Adequate budget for upcoming repairs and LED replacements; Lychgate roof repairs planned.
- **Community Grants:** SNC Clean & Bloom Community Grant funded two new bins on Ditchingham Dam (parishioner’s request).
- **Village Hall Support:** £2,400 from Village Improvements Reserve contributed to solar panel installation.
- **Dog Waste Bins:** £1,350 annually for servicing 10 bins; well-used but could see more usage.
- **Tree Survey & Maintenance:** All trees in the play areas and cemetery are in good condition; no work required this year.

Financial Position:

Ditchingham Parish Council is in a good financial position with adequate reserves to run and maintain the village, alongside strong Internal Control and Management of Risk through effective review by the Council of internal controls and risk assessments.

5.c) Ditchingham Parish Council Planning and Highways Chair’s Report to Annual Parish Meeting 2025

Planning

The Badger Homes development in Hamilton has been completed. The dwellings are now occupied and the site is tidy. A further phase is planned; access to it can be seen through a gap in the houses of the present development. DPC has recommended the next phase for refusal **unless** the access is via an alternative to Hamilton Way.

Signed _____

Date _____

Ditchingham Parish Council

There have been few non-contentious planning applications during the year.

Our clerk and I have used our delegated powers to respond. We have not recommended any applications “for refusal”, using only “neutral” or “for approval.”

One plan, in Pound Lane, that we originally recommended for approval was turned down by SNC. It has gone to appeal.

There has been no further information on any plans for the land behind the gardens of Station Road.

During this year, the Parish Council was approached by Beaully Homes, together with Ditchingham Estates, for its opinion (at the pre-application stage) on a proposal to build housing on a site bordered by Loddon Road and Tunneys Lane. Cllr. Bernard and I met representatives from both parties on site. We reported back to full Council at a meeting well attended by parishioners. At a further meeting Cllrs. were satisfied that local concerns were dealt with in the plan; it was decided to support the plan in principle. SNC have now received a full application for this development and our response has been sought. The Parish Council will make its decision at the Annual Meeting which follows this meeting. (Item 9 on the agenda).

Highways

The lectern-style information board on the verge adjacent to Chicken Roundabout has been installed.

The pavement on the West side of Hollow Hill Road, between Woods Close and the crossroads has been resurfaced.

8. Ditchingham School Governing Body Parish Council Report 2024-2025

Within the last year we have continued to work as three schools as The Kingfisher Federation. The year has been challenging as we navigate tighter budgets and lower pupil numbers, which is a challenge across most Norfolk Schools. To help to mitigate this, our three schools work very closely together, to ensure a clearly planned curriculum and opportunities for enrichment, ultimately allowing everyone to live out our vision of ‘Shine from the Inside Out’.

We are working with our Trust, Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust to manage all three of our sites. This is again a challenge due to increasing costs, however support is being provided for larger jobs that need to be carried out, such as a new boiler at Earsham. This year saw our caretaker at Ditchingham retire after excellent service to our school. The trust has supported us to employ a shared caretaker.

As church schools, one of our schools, Earsham, was again inspected under SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools). The inspection found that we are living up to our foundation as a church school. The Inspector was very impressed with our school community.’ The full report can be found on our website.

We have been delighted to offer placements for students either on work experience or studying varying courses, such as childcare qualifications or teacher training. We also very much appreciate the number of volunteers who give time to our schools for things such as listening to readers. These opportunities are invaluable to us as the children benefit but this is also something we really value being able to offer to our community. All adults in school are subject to robust safeguarding procedures.

We have been very grateful for the support we receive from our parent associations at school. They volunteer their time and work tirelessly to raise funds and provide additional enrichment for our children. We are very proud to be part of our local communities and look for opportunities to give something back, for example, visits to the care homes and donations to the foodbank. And we are exceptionally grateful for the support our schools receive from the wider community.

Signed _____

Date _____

Ditchingham Parish Council

9. Ditchingham United Charities (Duc) Chair's Report to the Parish Council

Chair: Gillian Ogden

Clerk: Sally Thomson

For the Financial Year 2024-25

Apologies for my absence this evening but I hope you find this annual report to be informative and a true record of our activities over past financial year. For those unaware of the work of the Ditchingham United Charities, it is a long-standing local gem set up many years ago ostensibly to provide "relief in need" and for "charitable purposes for the general benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of Ditchingham". It is a charity, registered and monitored by the Charity Commission, for disbursing funds administered by a group of nine Trustees.

The Charity's constitution states that the DUC body is made up of nine Trustees: one ex-officio member (always the current Rector of the Parish), five Nominative Trustees (appointed by the Parish Council, but the person appointed need not be a member of the council), and three Co-optative Trustees. There is also a clerk who supports the work of the Trustees.

At the 2024 AGM, both the Chair (myself) and the Vice-Chair (Louise Wilkin) were re-elected for the following year and there were no other changes to the Trustee body, meaning that the 2024 membership of the DUC is as follows:

- Ex-officio member: Rev. Chris Hutton
- Nominative Trustees: Keith Weston, Reg Kirkpatrick, Alan Larkin, Simon Wilkin and Laura Myatt
- Co-opted Trustees: Gillian Ogden, Louise Wilkin, Geoffry Fairhead

Sally Thomson, our Clerk, ably supports the Trustees in a myriad of ways: maintaining the accounts, completing the annual Charity Commission return, arranging an account audit, organising meeting agenda and minutes, correspondence, liaising with the editor of the Parishioner, and dealing with requests and payments. All of this is done with absolute professionalism and quiet efficiency. The Trustees and I are most grateful to her and would like to thank her wholeheartedly in this public forum for her unwavering support, efficiency and clarity with which she fulfils these varied responsibilities.

Many thanks must also go to the Finance Committee and all the Trustees who are always prompt, caring and thoughtful in their responses to requests. Each Trustee serves with integrity, and for that, I am grateful.

Managed by CCLA Investment Management Limited, the Charity's longstanding investments continue provide steady returns so, again in for the previous year, there was a generous sum for grants. In addition to the investment funds, the DUC owns two parcels of land (grazing marshes) both of which are let to the same tenant and whose rents are included in the sum to be disbursed. At the May 2024 AGM, the Trustees had £23,766.77 to disburse. The DUC constitution decrees that 1/3 of the

"Townlands Trust" income must go to the Church, and the Clerk's fees must also be covered in the first instance, which left £18,301.35 for disbursement, remarkably over £2000 more than the prior year. Prior to each AGM, the Finance Committee meets to review requests in relation to our rules and to make recommendations to the full body of Trustees at the AGM, although grants are only confirmed with the agreement of the whole Trustee body. At our 2024 AGM, the DUC enabled the following recipients to receive grants as we felt they supported the "general benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of Ditchingham":

Signed _____

Date _____

Ditchingham Parish Council

- Broome & Ditchingham Pre-School
- Bungay Area Transport
- Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Defibrillator
- Earsham Benefice
- East of England Ambulance First Responders
- Food Bank
- Friends of Ditchingham Primary School
- Parochial Church Council
- The Parishioner
- Village Fete (for toilets)
- Village Hall
-

Each year, additional monies are reserved for students who qualify for a university place – we normally receive applications in late summer/early autumn, following pupils' acceptance on courses which is after our AGM. In 2024, two students qualified in receiving one-off grants to support their first term of study. Also at our AGM, we always signpost funds to be set aside for "relief in need" which is one of the Charity's main roles. In 2024-25, there were two families, originally identified by the primary school, as requiring our help, and both grateful families have received grants tiding them over their financial challenges in this very difficult economic climate.

As ever, I am indebted, first, to our Clerk, Sally Thomson, who skilfully manages not only our accounts, but the Trustees, too! She fulfils so many administrative responsibilities and therefore she is crucial to our ongoing success. Secondly, to the Trustees, I am grateful for their compassionate involvement in our dealings, for their measured consideration and especially for the time they give.

Gillian Ogden
Chair Ditchingham United Charities
Charity Commissions No. 207488

10. Ditchingham Village Hall Management Committee **Chair's Report to AGM and to Ditchingham Parish Council's Annual Meeting 2025**

Managed by the officers of the Committee, along with our caretaker/booking secretary, the Village Hall has been running smoothly for another year.

My time has again been constrained by family commitments and, without the help from my Vice-Chair, the Village Hall would not be as good as it is. I believe Brendon Bernard and I are a good team and between us we get things done. Brendon has continued in the role of Treasurer; we handle the day-to-day transactions between us but, he keeps the accounts in good order. I record my sincere thanks to Brendon for all the work he does on behalf of the Village Hall.

I also thank Alan Larkin for his work as Book Keeper, in liaison with Brendon.

The Village Hall's assets are on a sound footing.

I also thank Janet Loveridge who, despite some health issues, has continued in her role as Secretary. Thank you to other committee members who keep us in touch with the user groups as and when necessary.

Signed _____

Date _____

Ditchingham Parish Council

I understand the forty newest chairs have not proved popular with all users. The Committee will have to consider whether, or not, to buy more.

We erected a colourful banner advertising the Hall's facilities. It resulted in a number of new bookings. Following a complaint, we had to replace it with a smaller one to comply with planning regs. It, too, has boosted bookings.

I commend and thank Jo Garwood for her thorough and effective efforts in the roles of Care Taker and Booking Secretary. The Hall is cleaned to a high standard. The weekly usage and private hires run smoothly. She uses her initiative when little problems crop up but, knows when to call officers for help when needed.

The Committee is also indebted to Brendon for his initiatives in taking the hall's technology forward. In order to do our bit for the environment, and, potentially, to help our funds he has guided the Committee in its consideration of the installation of both, an Electric Vehicle Charging Point and, solar panels. For various reasons, the Committee decided against the former. Brendon took the solar panels project forward. He explored options, got estimates and applied, successfully, for grant aid. I am pleased to report that a solar panel system was recently installed and is working well. This new asset will reduce the cost of electricity significantly and may make an EVCP worthy of consideration again. Thank you, again, Brendon.

Signed _____

2025/7

Date _____