

Ditchingham Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Monday 20th May 2024 – 7.30 pm

Ditchingham Village Hall

Councillors: Keith Weston (Chair), Brendon Bernard (Vice Chair), Angela Gifford, Fred Hartwell, Georgina Simmonds

Clerk/RFO: Sally Chapman

Also Present: Two members of the public

Minutes

The Chair of the Parish Council Chaired this meeting and welcomed everyone

1. **To Confirm the Minutes of the 15th May 2023 Annual Parish Meeting**
The Minutes from the Meetings held on 15th May 2023 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 a summary of her report (*attached*).
5. **To Receive Reports Giving A Summary of The Year's Activities from Council's Committees:**
 - a) **Community Committee**
Cllr Gifford read out the main points of her report (*attached*).
 - b) **Finance & Resources Committee**
No report
 - c) **Planning & Highways Committee**
Cllr Weston read out the main points of her report (*attached*).
6. **To Receive a Report from the County Councillor**
County Councillor Barry Stone sent apologies and a report on DPC's website:
<https://ditchinghampc.norfolkparishes.gov.uk/category/meetings>
7. **To Receive a Report from the District Councillor**
District Councillors' Brendon Bernard and Chris Brown sent a report on 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*).

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11. To Receive Reports from Community Groups

None

12. Public Questions

None

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm

3. The Chair's Report

DITCHINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIR'S REPORT TO ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Introduction

For many years the Council has struggled to recruit its full complement of councillors. Some years ago, the District Council agreed to reduce our substantive number from 11 to 9. This year we welcomed Cllrs. Georgina Simmonds and Andrew Evan-Hendrick to the Council and we welcomed back Cllr. Fred Hartwell. Despite being small in (Cllr.) numbers Ditchingham Parish Council is hard-working and effective. It carries out its responsibilities, to provide and maintain services and assets for the community, to the best of its ability.

In a bid to ensure that residents appreciate the efforts of our volunteer councillors I recently wrote an article in, "The Parishioner," outlining our work.

Staff Changes

We employ staff to do the following:

Employee one - litter-picking, visual inspection of the two play areas, moving the SAM and small maintenance jobs. The couple filling this role left us but, I am pleased to report that we have recruited a new colleague.

Employee two – cleaning bus shelters, lychgate and book exchange. Sadly Ann Mulley, who did this work, died recently. The Council was represented at her funeral. Richard Mulley has agreed to take over the work. We are very grateful to this public-spirited couple.

There are professional inspections of the play areas, the trees, for which we are responsible, and other assets.

Items From the Year:

Thwaite Road Play Area

Much of the play equipment was refurbished this year to brighten it up and to keep it safe.

Speed Awareness Machine

We continue to try to influence irresponsible motorists with this machine. Two new sites have been set up – an additional one in Pirnough Street and one near the primary school.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Plaque

The Commission has now installed a plaque on the Lychgate near St. Mary's Church at Ditchingham to let the public know there are 3 war graves situated there.

Green Lane (GL)

A meeting we pledged to convene, to deal with residents' issues, proved difficult to arrange but was, eventually, held on 9th October. This will be covered in my P&H Chair's report.

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Street Lamps

At the request of residents, two lamps were reinstated – one in Beevors Gardens and one in Green Lane.

War Memorial

There is a memorial to the fallen in St. Mary's Church but there are folk who think there should be one in the village centre. The Council has made some progress in achieving this. Cllr. Evan-Hendrick, in particular, is moving this forward.

Planning and Highways (P&H)

The District Council and The Broads Authority are the decision makers. As consultees we continue to monitor planning applications in the parish and respond appropriately. There is more on this in my P&H Chairs's report.

Chicken Roundabout

After years of campaigning, for a memorial to recognise the significance of the "world-famous" Chicken Roundabout, by many organisations (including DPC), I can report some good news. The PC is providing a lectern style information board to be sited beside the roundabout. It features colourful pictures and interesting text about the roundabout's history.

Thank Yous

I conclude by thanking my fellow Cllrs. For volunteering to give up their time to help to keep Ditchingham a safe and attractive place for its residents. I also thank our employees for their important work.

I am extremely grateful to our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Sally Chapman. Budgeting, financial management, compliance with ever changing rules and regulations and carrying out the decisions of the Council is complex and often frustrating. Without good clerks. I am sure it would be very difficult to continue with the parish council tier of local government. I am, personally, very grateful to ours.

Keith Weston

Chair to Ditchingham Parish Council

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4. The Responsible Financial Officer End of Year Balance Sheet

Ditchingham Parish Council			
Year End - 31st March 2024			
	Receipts		
2022/23		2023/24	
£	Receipts	£	
38,100.00	Precept	40,000.00	
3,925.00	Cemetery	3,275.00	
245.00	Allotments Rents	322.00	
546.46	Business Account Interest	1,984.68	
6,574.63	VAT Reclaim	3,765.86	
0.00	Wayleave Payment	51.75	
15,065.09	Community Infrastructure Levy	549.56	
2,200.00	Section 106/Grants	1,500.00	
66,656.18		51,448.85	
	Expenditure		
12,239.45	Staff Costs	14,446.81	
396.00	Clerk's Office Costs	504.00	
1,609.80	General Expenses	1,893.84	
100.00	Allotments Rent to Land Owner	100.00	
1,106.00	Dog Waste Bin Servicing	1,238.70	
780.25	Insurance	849.38	
0.00	Miscellaneous	200.50	
750.00	Parishioner Magazine & Website	750.00	
1,318.31	Cemetery Maintenance	1,981.61	
1,262.13	The Dip Maintenance/grass cut/litter picker	2,194.55	
2,017.11	Thwaite Road Play Area Maintenance/grass cut/litter picker	2,174.56	
2,676.84	Village Maintenance	2,413.92	
3,272.00	Tree Survey & Maintenance	456.00	
1,051.16	Street Light's Energy & Maintenance Contract	2,037.97	
16.00	Local Project Grants - S137	2,720.00	
5,396.41	VAT Expenditure	4,483.42	
2,170.00	General Maintenance (Handyman)	3,341.25	
905.31	Community Projects (Jubilee/Coronation)	356.81	
0.00	Play Area New Equipment & Repairs	5,570.18	
15,745.00	Street Lights Repairs/LEDs/Removal	3,590.00	
1,570.50	S137/Community Infrastructure Levy Expenditure	549.56	
0.00	Chicken Roundabout Lectern	910.25	
54,382.27		52,763.31	
12,273.91	Surplus Income over Expenditure	-1,314.46	
122,007.22	Balance b/f	134,281.13	
134,281.13	Balance c/f	132,966.67	
	Balance Sheet		
	Cash at Bank	£	
12,930.25	Current Account	3,846.99	
121,350.88	Business Saving Accounts	128,335.56	
0.00	Uncleared Receipts	670.00	
0.00	Uncleared Payments	(114.12)	
134,281.13		132,966.67	
19,065.40	General Reserves	20,000.38	
115,215.73	Earmarked Reserves	112,966.29	
134,281.13		132,966.67	
The above statement represents fairly the financial position of the Authority as at 31st March 2024 and reflects its receipts and payments during the year.			
Signed	Keith Weston - Chair		
Signed	Sally Chapman - Responsible Financial Officer		

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5. a) Community Committee Report 2023/24

- The cemetery – the access to the graves was improved and the wildflowers which blossom, are lovely. However, the unusual amount of rainfall that we have had this Winter, may mean that another cut could be needed if the coming Winter has a higher than average rainfall.
- The run off from the hill slope on Hollow Hill was beginning to have a negative impact on the path down the hill. Richard Mulley very kindly removed this debris, but again, probably due to the increased run off, the path is beginning to soil up again.
- The public footpath sign on Thwaite Rd had fallen or was knocked over, but was replaced.
- A regular walker round the Bakers Lane, Thwaite Rd and Belsey Bridge Rd, picked up 61 empty vodka bottles which at varying points had been thrown on to the verges and in the hedges. This is still continuing.
- A couple of trees in Bakers Lane look as though they may constitute a danger as the upper, middle part of the trees, look as though they are dying. A report was made to Norfolk County Council and was acknowledged.
- Currently the public foot paths connecting Bakers Lane and the Thwaite Rd and back, are very overgrown with nettles and other grasses. Two weeks ago, difficult to get through. The sign is Bakers Lane, completely covered.
- The bus shelter, the library phone box, the notice boards, the playground are all in good order and our thanks should go to those who keep them this way.

Angela Gifford Community Chair

5. c) Planning & Highways Committee Report

DITCHINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL PLANNING AND HIGHWAYS

Chair's Report to Annual Parish Meeting 2024

Planning

Despite the Council's objections, the Badger Homes development accessed via Hamilton Way went ahead. The majority of the dwellings are now occupied. 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.

There have been few other contentious planning applications during the year. I have commented on a small number of non-contentious plans.

The exception is a plan to significantly enlarge a house in Tunney's Lane. Several parishioners attended a PC meeting to raise their concerns. The Council recommended the application for refusal.

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

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Having gained NCC's permission to install a lectern-style information board on the verge adjacent to the roundabout the Council has found funding and produced a design using illustrations and text. Several people contributed to this process. The board has been produced and delivered. At the time of writing its installation is imminent.

Despite our previous efforts to improve local pavements – especially those between our village and Bungay no improvements have been made. Some stretches are good, as a consequence of earlier work by NCC, but others are very bad.

We have had to admit defeat in trying to improve sight lines at the crossing point at the Ditchingham Dam/Pirnough Street junction. We have been unsuccessful.

At the request of parishioners one street lamp in Green Lane and one in Beevors Gardens have been replaced. We have changed our policy so that more people are involved when lamps are considered for removal in future.

Two grit bins have been moved to new locations as they were on bus routes which are gritted by NCC.

Although the Council has no responsibilities regarding Green Lane residents had raised concerns. I convened, and chaired a meeting attended by residents' reps, NCC's local highways engineer and Cllr Bernard. (Ditchingham Estates were not represented due to diary difficulties.) A lengthy discussion took place about the status of Green Lane (whether its designation should be changed from a Byway Open to All Traffic [BOAT]), parking, the reinstatement of a fence separating the BOAT from the rest and other matters. The pros and cons of redesignation were shared and (after the meeting) Ditchingham Estates told the residents there could be a fence if the residents funded it and maintained it. I am not aware of any further developments.

8. Ditchingham School Governing Body Report

Annual report from Ditchingham Primary Academy

Within the last year we have added to our Federation and are now federated with Gillingham and Earsham Primary Academies. This has been a real success story adding to our team. The three schools work very closely together which when you are small schools this has many and varied advantages, ultimately allowing everyone to shine, as is our vision of Let your Light shine.

As a church school we are inspected under SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools). Ditchingham had their inspection in November 2023. The inspection found that we are living up to our foundation as a church school. The Inspector was very impressed with our school community and said that relationships are good within our school because everyone is valued and unique, as per our vision. It said Pupils correctly appreciate the respectful, calm atmosphere provided and as a result behave well in a focused learning environment. Parents said they feel supported and care for the individual needs is valued and that staff 'go the extra mile.'

The full report can be found on our website.

We have been very pleased with our new shelter that the Ditchingham Friends fund-raised for, so we now have some much valued shade for the summer and shelter for the winter!

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9. Ditchingham United Charities Report

DITCHINGHAM UNITED CHARITIES (DUC)

Clerk: Sally Thomson

Chair: Gillian Ogden

CHAIR'S REPORT TO THE PARISH COUNCIL – 2023-24

Over the years, the people of Ditchingham have benefited either directly or indirectly from the Ditchingham United Charities (DUC), a charity registered by the Charity Commission to disburse funds for “relief in need” and for “charitable purposes for the general benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of Ditchingham”.

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 2023 AGM, two new Nominative Trustees, Simon Wilkin and Laura Myatt, were elected to fill the vacancies left by Eric Earl and Frank James. Membership of the other Trustees remained unchanged from the previous year, so at the 2023 AGM the complete Trustee body was as follows:

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

We were ably supported by our Clerk, Sally Thomson, for whom we are most grateful and would like to thank wholeheartedly for her efficiency and clarity with which she fulfils her varied responsibilities, not least: 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. Thanks again to Sally.

I must also thank the Finance Committee and all the Trustees who are always prompt in their responses to requests and who serve with integrity.

The Charity's longstanding investments continue to be holding up well and there was a generous sum for grants in the 2022-23 period. As well as 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 2023 AGM, the Trustees had £21,336.70 to disburse. The 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 £16,067.91 for disbursement.

The Finance Committee meets prior to each AGM to review requests in relation to our rules and to make recommendations to the full body of Trustees at the AGM who, in summary, enabled the following recipients to receive grants in the 2022-23 year:

- Bungay Area Transport
- Bungay Library
- Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Earsham Benefice

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- East of England Ambulance First Responders
- Food Bank
- Friends of Ditchingham Primary School
- Parochial Church Council
- Pre-School
- The Parishioner
- Village Hall

Additional monies are always reserved for any students who qualify for a university place (conditions apply). In 2023, only one pupil applied and was successful in receiving this grant. At the AGM, funds were also reserved for one of the Charity's main roles, "relief in need". There was one such hardship case in 2023 for which the recipient was truly grateful.

I am always indebted to the Trustees for their time, consideration and compassion and this year, a special thanks must also go to our Clerk to the Trustees, Sally Thomson, for skilfully managing the accounts and fulfilling the many administrative responsibilities of the DUC.

Gillian Ogden –
18/05/2024

10. Ditchingham Village Hall Management Committee Report

DITCHINGHAM VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE CHAIR'S REPORT TO AGM and to DITCHINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL'S ANNUAL MEETING

It is over a year since the Management Committee last met. The Village Hall has been running smoothly managed by the officers of the Committee, along with our caretaker/booking secretary. These same people have been working hard to carry out the decisions made at the last meeting. Although no members have requested a meeting, I apologise to any members who think there should have been more. In any case the Committee comprises of representatives of the main users and they will have seen for themselves that much progress has been made.

A new booking and invoice form was devised and is in use.

I believe Brendon Bernard and I are a good team and between us we get things done. My time is constrained by other commitments and without the help from my Vice-Chair the Village Hall would not be as good as it is. Members of the Committee should not under estimate the amount of time and effort we give to achieve progress. For example, we have probably made about ten visits to Lloyd's bank (plus numerous lengthy 'phone calls) just to get the accounts sorted out.

Brendon has also taken on 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.

Lloyd's bank accounts have been merged into one account as there was no longer any need for a separate annexe account. As of 14th May we now have a Treasurer's Account with Lloyds; this is fee free.

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I also thank Janet Loveridge who, despite poor health, has continued in her role as Secretary. Her knowledge and experience are very useful at times. Thank you to other committee members who keep us in touch with the user groups as and when necessary.

The interior redecoration of the hall was accomplished at a cost of £5,000.00. I thank Barbara Bernard for her advice on colour schemes. We probably don't have typical village hall colours but most people agree, with me, that it looks really good.

Forty new chairs have been procured for the main hall. If they prove popular, we should consider buying more before designs change, preventing us from getting matching ones.

After much consideration of options, the kitchen has been refurbished with new units, worktops and appliances. We are very grateful to Paul Garwood (and Jo and other family members) who helped with the procurement and then carried out the installation. Because of this help the work was done with considerable economy.

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.

Last Summer Brendon and I attended the first hearing in the Small Claims Court to defend the claim against us by Gilbert's Builders. The judge clearly found our preparation and our case very strong and urged the claimant to settle without a second hearing. Mr. Gilbert refused. However, before the date of the second hearing we made another approach (offer) to him which he accepted. We paid more than we believe was fair (but less than the full claim) and we avoided another court appearance.

The Village Hall annexe is proving very successful; Broome & Ditchingham Preschool is thriving in the new facilities which are sometimes hired by other users. The main hall and Committee Room have greater availability and usage has increased. Attached to this report is a schedule of hall usage. In order to do our bit for the environment, and (potentially) to help our funds) the Committee will be considering the installation of both, an Electric Vehicle Charging Point and, solar panels.