

Letcombe Regis Parish Council

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Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at 7pm
on Monday 15th May 2023 in the Warborough Room
Letcombe Regis Village Hall

Present: J Lapsley (JL) Chairman, Cllrs David Barber (DB), Tom Griffin (T)
Gordon Lundie (GL) and Elizabeth Jenkins (EJ) Parish Clerk

Cllr Paul Barrow District Councillor and Cllr Yvonne Constance (County
Councillor) and ex Cllr Loretta Light,

There were 7 members of the public present

Item	
1.	Welcome by the Chairman Cllr Lapsley: Cllr Lapsley welcomed everyone attending the Annual Parish Meeting.
2.	Welcome and introduction to the two new Councillors: Cllr Lapsley welcomed and introduced the two new Councillors Tom Griffin and Gordon Lundie to those present.
3.	Apologies: Apologies were received from Cllrs Paul Batchelor, Doug Frewer, Kristine Hitchcock, Michelle Benton and Mr & Mrs Hodgson.
4.	Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 16th May 2022 Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 18 th May 2022 had been sent out to those attending for reference, they had been approved at the meeting held on July 18 th 2022.
5.	Police Report from our PCSO Tom Wallcott-Smith: Fraud/Scams During May 2022, we saw numerous phone scams targeting the elderly at Richmond Retirement Village. The scam consisted of claiming to be from the police and they have someone in custody linked to their family, a son/daughter/niece/nephew and have located credits cards in their possession in the elderly persons name. They would then request bank details or would attend to collect bankcards to help with the investigation. Most realised it was a scam and contacted the police and action fraud but a few unfortunately lost thousands of pounds. The economic crime unit have the investigation but the Wantage neighbourhood team spent a few days at the Retirement Village visiting victims and working with staff to educate residents and re-assure them.

Drink/drug driving

Thomas Skelton was jailed for more than 15 months for dangerous driving and driving while under the influence of drugs, driving without insurance and being uninsured after he failed to stop for officers in the Wantage on the 11th October 2022, he was arrested in Letcombe Regis.

Stolen Motor Vehicle

A BMW was reported stolen in the Manor Fields area on the 04/02/2023. This vehicle was later recovered locally.

Rural Crime

Although no reports directly linked to Letcombe Regis, we have been working closely with our Rural Crime Team to tackle rural crime. We have completed numerous day/night time rural operations to tackle rural crime and have seen a large decrease in reports related to poaching offences in your area. Of note, four males were arrested on the 13/02/2023 and vehicle recovered following hare coursing in Letcombe Bassett.

Also, we have issued a number of Section 59 Warnings to 4x4 and motorbikes owners for illegal use of the Ridgeway. This is an official written warning on the vehicle and driver/rider. If they are caught in similar circumstances within a year, we can seize their vehicle/motorbike.

Suspicious incidents and crime trends

We have had a few reports over the last year of door handles being attempted on properties and an attempt heating oil theft. This is a timely reminder to review security, CCTV, lighting, alarms, signage and target hardening your properties and outbuildings.

In surrounding areas, we have seen an increase in keyless car thefts targeting high value motor vehicles. They use devices to amplify the signal transmitted by your keys tricking the car into thinking the keys are present allowing the car to be unlocked and driven away. This can be prevented by keeping your keys away from the car and keys kept in a pouch, which blocks the signal, these can be purchased online. Alternatively, a physical measure such as a steering lock and a vehicle tracker is recommended.

As you can see from the above reports, Letcombe Regis is a low crime area and lets continue to work together to keep it that way.

PCSO Tom Walcott-Smith

6. Reports from our County and District Councillors:

Cllr Constance was at the Childrey Parish meeting and hoped to join later in the evening.

Report from District Cllr Dr Paul Barrow Ridgeway Ward: Annual report from District Councillor May 2023

In addition to my regular reports covering my and council activities below is a summary of my activities during the last year.

Work with parishes

Work for the parishes in this last year has involved frequent interaction with the parish councils and attending as many meetings as possible. Local work has involved helping individuals in different villages with their problems, dealing with Social Services, Sovereign Housing, footpath problems and planning issues, some of which have been contentious. I together with Kingston Lisle/Fawler parish council have fought against change of use of The Blowing Stone pub to a dwelling. Publicity was increased via The Wantage Herald which was not appreciated by the new more proactive manager as being too negative but footfall has increased. I opposed two further housing developments in East Challow which have now been rejected.

The Childrey School Transport issue remains unresolved but the ex-Childrey parish council chair and I involved the Wantage Herald for publicity and I took many photos of Childrey way at different times to highlight the problem which were submitted to OCC. We are still hopeful that this will be resolved sensibly and the definition of safety may be broadened.

A final scheme for managing the BOATs in some of our villages (Challows, Letcombes and Childrey) has still not been decided despite my pestering them with photos of their condition. I would still like them to explore allowing motorbike use. I have been told that a site inspection is imminent and that a decision would be made soon thereafter but we have waited a long time already.

Basic infrastructure, particularly roads and drainage, have been neglected for many years. We have made improvements in the flooding in Warborough Rd, Letcombe Regis and Gramp's Hill, Letcombe Bassett but much remains to be done, particularly a scheme for regular clearing of the sumps. The A417 at Haynes of Challow has also been improved but drainage is not perfect. Constant pestering of OCC Highways does bear fruit. It is my aim in the coming year to try to improve the drainage along Main Rd and lower Court Hill, Letcombe Regis and the appalling condition of Orchard Gardens, West Challow which is beginning to cause damage to a neighbouring property. I will also carry out a survey of surface water drainage in the villages.

In East Challow I set up a "Warm Space" which has been so popular it is being continued as a Community Space. We are also trying to save the East Challow Mission as a Community Asset and Meeting Space.

Support for Local Businesses

I have supported local businesses, including the companies on the W&G Estate and Grove Business Park. Last summer I took David Johnson around these to show him some of the cool work done by many of the companies. Succession is an issue with some of engineering companies. The interaction with the veterans charity, Mission Motorsport has resulted in them approaching the Vale for involvement in the Armed Services Covenant. I continue to press local business landlords to incorporate solar panels in new and existing build, so far without success, even though this seems to me to be a win-win no-brainer!

Health

As Deputy Chair of the county Health Overview Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), my report on infection control in care homes after the main phase of the Covid pandemic was accepted and hopefully will be submitted to the national Covid inquiry, although we are not convinced that this will happen as the LGA is making a single submission! I contributed to a primary care workshop where we were able to get the new cross-county Integrated Care Board to fund a position to liaise with the Districts to ensure Primary Care facilities go hand-in-hand with new housing development.

On HOSC we added pressure which ended with the Wantage maternity unit being reopened which is a great success. We are still arguing about the in-patient beds and timelines for engagement by Dan Leveson Oxfordshire lead on the BOB Integrated Care Board with Wantage and the wider OX12 community have been developed.

Although the OX12 project, reviewed by us was criticised heavily, this has been subsumed into a county-wide review of community health but which has been overtaken by the BOB ICS and the Integrated Improvement Plan to coordinate ambulance/emergency services with patient discharge. It is sometimes difficult for us on HOSC, residents and even health professionals to keep up with the speed of change.

We have also reviewed ambulance services, GP access and dentistry but these issues must be tackled nationally. Rural isolation for some members of our villages has been discussed at HOSC and by Oxfordshire Healthwatch and remains an issue. A discussion has begun with Wantage Town Council with OCC support to explore reinstating some form of community bus service to our villages.

I spoke at planning committee against the big Lioncourt application (East of Kingston Bagpuize) because of the lack of health services. It has now been approved but I remain very concerned about this for the same reason.

North Wessex Downs AONB

Sitting on the Council of Partners I have supported the introduction of more sustainable farming including the Farming in a Protected Landscape (FiPL) and have talked to a number of local farmers to get their views on the current changes. The farming environment is changing with the slow introduction of ELMS and replacing the Basic Payments Scheme. I have spoken to the NFU and although many farmers are signed up to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme the transition to and timeline for ELMS including the Sustainable Farming Initiative remains uncertain.

I am also a member of the Ock Catchment Area Partnership which seeks to improve water quality and biodiversity in this part of the Vale. We are jointly considering starting Childrey Brook, which runs through several of our parishes, as a project in parallel with the Letcombe Brook Project.

I and a colleague have started a cross-parish local hedge planting group to replace hedges grubbed up in the 70s and 80s.

Miscellaneous

I will continue to make regular reports to the parish councils and through village websites and newsletters. I will also continue to work closely with Yvonne, our county councillor.

Some of my activities can be seen on my Facebook page is <https://www.facebook.com/CllrDr-Paul-Barrow-104943001583284>.

I will also start again to visit the villages and knock on as many doors as possible to find out local views on pressing local issues.

Dr Paul Barrow
Ridgeway Ward

7. Parish Council Annual Report 2022-2023 - Cllr Jeanne Lapsley:

Pleasingly the recovery from Covid-19 continues and the lockdown is beginning to become a distant memory. Parish life is thriving and is a testament to everyone who contributes throughout the year, from bakers, to litter pickers, event organisers, conservation volunteers, the list goes on.

I continued as chairman for a further year and am grateful to the whole of the Parish Council, especially my Vice Chair, Loretta Light, and the Parish Clerk, Liz Jenkins, for their continuing support with all things 'Parish'.

2022-2023 has proved another busy year and you will have been able to keep up to date via the PC minutes, but here are a few highlights.

The Queens Platinum tea was a huge success enjoyed by over 170 parish residents. I must record the PC's sincere thanks to all those who contributed to a wonderful afternoon.

The Burial Ground improvements are almost complete with grass reinforcement enabling access through the new Lych Gate, where two new benches have been placed. The additional parking is also well used by those using the excellent sport and leisure facilities, which at the same time helps prevent obstructive parking on village roads.

The Register, an important means of communication to every household, continues to be compiled on a monthly basis by Francesca Engelmann and the PC thanks her sincerely for her forbearance and patience. At the last meeting the PC was asked if it were possible to return to the paper version, sadly costs of both production and distribution are prohibitive. However we can of course accommodate individual requests, so please contact the Clerk.

This year we have finalised the new arrangements for keeping the village tidy, and after significant efforts have engaged a new contractor who offers consistency, value for money and most importantly removes all debris. We are grateful to Arran Lax who until recently has worked to keep the village tidy.

Sadly another royal milestone was reached during this year with the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The PC was able to lead on implementing the official

protocols, alongside the Church, and among other things a book was placed in the Church for those wishing to leave messages of condolence. My thanks go to Cllr Loretta Light for her specific role in this.

A particular concern this year has been the continuing issue of water run off and drainage. Our District Councillor Paul Barrow and Parish Councillors Paul Batchelor and David Barber have worked tirelessly to achieve some significant results especially on Warborough Road. Working with the new owner of Warborough Farm Tony Ruane, a wildlife pond has been reinstated halfway down the hill and other works completed to help prevent flooding lower down in the village. We were fortunate to apply for, and receive, a grant for this work from our County Councillor Yvonne Constance.

Regrettably with major changes to the country's political leadership, together with economic pressures, it was necessary to raise the precept for 23-24 by 6% just to maintain our current services going forward. However within the year the PC Budget planning has meant that we remain in a positive financial position. We do however continue to seek out any grant funding that may be available to us which can support the Parish.

As ever there have been many consultations, too many to list, but you can be assured that the Parish Council responds on your behalf, ensuring we maintain a voice in the wider issues that may affect us.

My fellow councillors and myself continue to represent the Parish on a number of important local and national bodies, as reported in last years' Annual Report. These range from The Letcombe Brook Project to the Oxfordshire Association of Local Council Executive. We continue to maintain links with BBOWT and CPRE amongst others.

Cllr Batchelor has continued to address the communications infrastructure within the village including trying to ensure that Airband meet their contractual requirements and understanding what their future proposals are and addressing the issues of poor mobile signals in many parts of the village. Regrettably this is still ongoing.

A review of the PC website was undertaken earlier this year, and the responses indicated there were no major changes needed, but to continue to ensure that everything is up to date and current.

This snapshot again indicates a very busy year for the PC, and it is also a year of change. At this point I would like to thank Cllr Kristine Hitchcock, Cllr Doug Frewer and my Vice Chair Loretta Light for their unfailing support as they stand down from the Parish Council. Their efforts have helped ensure we continue to live and enjoy our wonderful environment and community. We must also extend our thanks to our District Councillor Paul Barrow and also our County Councillor Yvonne Constance for their continuing support throughout the year.

What will we be doing next year?

Well those standing down will be enjoying a well-earned break, whilst the new councillors Tom Griffin and Gordon Lundie will be joining us to continue the work of the council.

We will be seeking to get the state of our roads improved.

We will be responding to proposals that effect our community

We will continue to seek out grant funding wherever possible

We will respond to individual issues as they arise.

8. Councillors Reports for 2022-2023

Cllr Paul Batchelor

My activities for the Council in the past year have included working with District Councillor Paul Barrow to try and alleviate the worst excesses of flooding on Warborough Road and reduce the risk of future problems. The work has seen the County Council begin to address the problems due in no small part to the collaboration across Parishes and the efforts of Tony Ruane and Councillor Barber.

Other work has centred on addressing the communications infrastructure within the village included trying to ensure that Airband meet their contractual requirements and understanding what their future proposals are and addressing the issues of poor mobile signals in many parts of the village.

Finally, and on a far more positive note, leading the application for a County Council grant to improve the biodiversity of the area.

Retiring Cllr Loretta Light

Over the past year I have assisted the Chairman with the village maintenance document, burial ground project, platinum and coronation trees. Helped collate information for planning applications, represented the Parish Council on the Letcombe Brook Project and working with the Parochial Church Council on the memorial process for Queen Elizabeth II

9. Clerks Financial Report 2022-2023

Current Account £6,529.00

The current account is the working account for the Parish council, Receipts grants and the Precept are paid into it and cheques and future BACS payments will also be made from this account once the internet banking is completed. It has taken a considerable time to arrange as Parish Councils are not a business and banks do not appreciate this. However we are nearly there.

Deposit Account £64,354.17

The Deposit account holds the balance over and above the monthly needs of the current account which is normally kept at around 5K. Transferring monies between the two accounts as required.

The Deposit account also holds the remainder of the Section 106 grants for improvements to the burial ground. There are still outstanding purchases to be

made, e.g. planting round the lych gate, another bench to be installed at the Bassett Road end. Due to the extreme weather conditions last year some of the new hedging planted earlier may need replacing. Despite Cllr Barber's efforts to keep it watered. This will be ongoing as we wait to see how much we need to replace.

The Deposit account also holds the ring fenced finance for the Children's playground improvements which is being organised by the Trustees.

The Parish Council also plan to improve the entrance to the Millennium Green to make it safer for Residents at Richmond especially those needing to use mobility scooters or rollators.

The parish accounts are healthy and once all the planned improvements are completed it is expected to return to the normal balance held by Parish Councils of a backup amount equal to the current annual precept.

The Parish Council changed to a new financial package last autumn and this needs to be matched with the original DO\$H system to enable me to issue the accounts for 2022-2023.

Dr Phillips asked what the breakdown of the Deposit account was. Cllr Lapsley explained that it covered the outstanding amounts for the Burial Ground improvements and the Childrens playground also for making safe the area next to Footpath 8 and Richmond which could be in the region of £20k and once it had been done it would bring the balance down to the amount that the Parish Council were aiming for, eg, the equivalent of the Precept.

The Annual Parish Meeting finished at 7.50 with a short break before the Annual Parish Meeting at 8pm.

Elizabeth Jenkins
Parish Clerk & RFO
20th May 2023