**Annual Parish Meeting 24th May 2023 - Annual Report**

Welcome to this Annual Parish Meeting or Annual Assembly of Electors.

I would first like to introduce my new fellow Parish Councillors, Jenna Ho-Marris, Kamala Das who is our new vice chair, and Ros Delany, who have joined Martin Walker who has been on the Parish Council for quite a few years now. Especial thanks also go to our Parish Clerk, Julie Smart, who is also the Parish Clerk for Pill and Easton in Gordano. These last few weeks with all the changes in Abbots Leigh Parish Council and also in Pill and Easton in Gordano has been challenging for her. Julie’s extensive experience is extremely valuable to us and also providing a strong connection between the two parishes that she brings.

I would like to take this opportunity to give a very big thank you to the three Parish Councillors who have stepped down after so many years. **Robert Narracott** who has done a great deal in providing a strong critique in deciphering the many planning application we have been looking at. **Murray Stewart** who has done a phenomenal amount in developing the joint Neighbourhood Plan for both parishes and providing advice on the North Somerset Local Plan. **John Butler** who came back from St Michael’s Hospital to Home Farm Road and has since lived in the village longer than anyone else. He first joined the Parish Council in 1967 and was chair in 1970. Thankfully for John he has not served continuously, but over the decades has done a huge amount for the Village Hall and the village.

We have not yet allocated the specific duties of the five volunteer councillors. The details of the individual roles/responsibilities on the Parish Council will be included in the Link every month and will be on the village website. In common with all local authorities the Chair is elected for a year and I am flattered that my colleagues have asked me to be chair for the coming year.

Thanks to our former District Councillor Don Davies who has stood down after several years of having strongly represented Abbots Leigh and Pill within North Somerset for many years. He deserves a break. We are delighted to welcome Jenna as our new District Councillor whilst she and Dunstan create a stronger foothold in our community as they create their new home on Church Road. I have no doubt that Jenna will do a phenomenal job representing our causes. Having been in post for only a couple, of weeks she has already secured her position on North Somerset’s Executive being responsible for Homes and Health. Congratulations.

**Review of the year**

**Finance.** The Parish finances are in good shape under the careful management of Julie Smart our Parish Clerk. Martin Walker who leads on finance on the Council will update you on that separately.

**Neighbourhood Plan.** The joint Neighbourhood Plan with Pill and Easton in Gordano has completed its journey. Murray Stewart lead on this for both Parish Councils and we are sorry that he won’t be quite so readily available when we need advice in the future, but we will try! Murray has kindly agreed to update you on where we are with all of this a little later this evening.

An application has been made to renew the status of the George as an Asset of Community value as it is only valid for 5 years. Thanks to Murray who sorted that out.

**Planning.** The council have commented on a number of Planning Applications through the last year and we were fortunate that we had Robert Narracott, a very experienced architect, on the council. Unfortunately he is currently away in France and also sadly he is no longer a Parish Councillor. I will therefore quickly update you about some of the key issues

House off Church Road. The Parish council were very disappointed by the fact that planning permission was granted for a 4 bedroom house, which would be too large, on the infill site down the lane opposite the Village Hall which will overshadow the adjacent bungalow and adjacent house. We are now hoping that legal restrictions in place on that site will be able to intervene.

Clifton College Sport Ground. Plans for a replacement to the tennis bubble for Clifton College Sports Ground were submitted in October. The parish council had a consultation meeting with Clifton College last July for a permanent building to replace the bubble as it is nearing the end of its life and cost a huge amount to keep it inflated. The proposed building is on the same footprint and no larger. We have requested that whilst the works are planned, Clifton College should make changes at the exit from the site to make it safer for pedestrians and cyclists using the cycle path. The decision still hasn’t been made.

Glen Farm. There have been regular varying applications for the former agricultural buildings at Glen Farm which are trying to maximise their proposed developments which were originally refused by North Somerset but got through on appeal.

Enforcement. The council are disappointed at the lack of Planning Enforcement where the perpetrator had been advised to apply for planning permission for the conversion of a former stable into an airBnB, they did nothing and then eventually North Somerset gave up because they said that it would probably have got planning anyway. This sets a dangerous precedent and the Parish Council have expressed their concerns about it.

Solar Farm. There are plans for a solar farm in the fields behind Haberfield Farm. A well publicised full day public consultation was held in the Village Hall which was attended by about 35 people. A full planning application is expected in the next few months

Proposed allotments. The application to North Somerset for a certificate of Lawful Permitted Development is still waiting for its decision, which is excepted imminently. At the meeting of North Somerset Council last night, Sophy Gretten gave an impassioned address to the council with our concerns and in a later answer to a question by a member the response from the Executive member for planning he replied saying that a good legal case had been submitted by Abbots Leigh and that the application for shipping containers had been turned down. The local residents with the full support of the Parish Council have submitted legal objections as to why the application has insufficient information and also why the car parking can not be considered agricultural use. The position is that the developers should submit a full planning application so that all the issues can be properly scrutinized.

**Village Hall** This last year has seen a complete refurbishment of the caretakers flat to bring it up to reasonable modern standards. I am pleased that Mick and Naomi are now fully resident and the hall can benefit from Mick’s more immediate attention.

As concerns had been raised during the year about the way that the refurbishment of the caretaker’s flat was being carried out, The parish held a public meeting in October to discuss the issues, which was attended by about 45 people. There were a lot of contributions and views expressed. The view of the significant majority of those attending was that, whilst it was unfortunate that the costs had turned out to be higher than originally anticipated, the council had got good value for money given the current state of the building market, and also considering the difficulties in repairing and upgrading of old buildings.

Whilst doing the works we established that the central chimney stack was in a very poor state of repair. The full extent was only discovered when the scaffold had been put up. All should be sound there beyond most of our lifetimes.

There is still a continuing problem with a leak around big window which needs resolving.

A new lectern and microphones have been provided through a, grant from WERN facilitated by Di Stewart following successful Tea and Tech training sessions. There have also been minor upgrades to the sound system at around the same time.

Car park, The new owners of adjacent field will be happy to let the adjacent field be used for parking by arrangement.

The income from bookings this year are the highest that we have seen. Martin will talk through the financial aspects of the hall when he talks through the finances and budgets later

Thanks very much to John Butler who has done a huge amount for the Village Hall over all the years as a Parish Council, and he has kindly volunteered to continue to help us out as and when the need arises.

**Skittle Alley.** The Fit Tank Personal Fitness and Gym are continuing to thrive. The rent has been increased after five years, in accordance with their lease.

**Maintenance works for the Parish Council.** Kevin Weeks carries out most of the maintenance works around the Parish, grass cutting, hedge cutting dog bin emptying, repairs to equipment in the school field, small painting works etc. These are done when required and as instructed by the Parish Clerk. Kevin also works for Pill & Easton in Gordano Parish Council and other parishes. The verge outside Poundbatch Farm, opposite Sandy Lane, is currently being looked after by the Abbots Leigh Wildlife Group as part of a rewilding scheme.

**Litter Pick.** Thanks to the 26 volunteers with an age range of more than 90 years, who came and cleared rubbish from around the Village on the last Sunday in March as the clocks went forward. It looks much better as a result. It was good to find that there wasn't as much as sometimes but still a good haul. Thanks also to The George for kindly providing everyone with sandwiches afterwards which were very much appreciated.

**Highway Matters.** We liaise regularly with North Somerset Council, who are the Highway Authority, alerting them to maintenance issues that are in need of attention on the roads.

The one issue that dominates discussion is the volume and speed of the traffic on the A369 through the village.

In March last year, through North Somerset Council and with the support of the Civic Society, we commissioned traffic speed and count surveys at six locations through the village in order to be able to identify whether there were specific problem locations or variance through the village. Murray Stewart took the findings of the surveys and did a comprehensive analysis and report on them. That is available on the website.

The design and maintenance of the highway is the responsibility of the Highway Authority which is North Somerset. Any changes have to be done in conjunction with them.

There are no records of injury accidents so as far as the highway team are concerned there is no evidence that there is a problem. As a result there are no budgets for improvements in Abbots Leigh as the priority is to reduce injury accidents. In the experience of the highway engineers the traffic speeds identified in the surveys are what they would expect, given the overall environment and the width of the road. The environment is such that for drivers it does not feel like a typical village with only a few houses fronting onto the road, all being set well back. The main streets of the village are Church road and Manor Road, with the cross roads on the A369. The 85th percentile speed (the speed below which 85% of the traffic is travelling which is normally used to set speed limits) is generally between 35 and 40 MPH through the village, except at the George where there is natural traffic calming as the road is narrow where the 85th percentile speed is 28MPH.

The road is major road and a strategic heavy goods route and predominantly commuter traffic with drivers who know the road well.

In discussion with the engineers, from their experience, a number of the perceived good ideas of reducing the traffic speeds such as village gateways (typically used on minor roads in rural villages), increased signing, changing speed limits, Speed Interactive Signs (SID) etc make little impact on the speed of the traffic. Speed bumps would never be used on a major road. There is one low cost option that we have asked North Somerset Council to consider which is to alter the white lining when it is due for renewal, which could alter driver behaviour. Any traffic calming measures that we might want to be introduced would have to be paid for by the parish, and agreed with North Somerset.

One initiative that is likely to make a difference is a volunteer led Community Speedwatc, and I am very grateful to Oliver Delany who has offered to coordinate that. 18 people have signed up so far and we are awaiting training. Working in teams of 3 we will measure the speeds and report those that exceed the limit to the Police, who will follow it up. Those that repeatedly are reported speeding will get special attention. We are waiting to receive our training in the next few weeks and then we can get going. A bonus of this way of monitoring the speeds is that we will be able to identify which lorries are speeding and which companies are involved so that we can follow it with the relevant companies.

One of the other issues that we regularly take up with the Highway team is to more frequently maintain the road gulleys as we have a particular problem in Abbots Leigh with no surface water sewers or streams so they have to rely on soakaways which need more regular maintenance.

**Old School Field.** New equipment in school field half funded by Improving Play Spaces grant from North Somerset and 25% each from PC and CS. This has proved popular with our youngest residents. We have had to replace a number of benches as they reach the end of their useful life, and there are still more to do.

There has been a suggestion of a graded path from the top area to the lower grassed area as the direct route of the public footpath is about 1in 5 at its steepest. We could achieve a path at about 1 in 15 going around the pétanque pitch past the new equipment and diagonally across the bank. There is a debate as to whether it should be surfaced or left as grass like the rest of the field.

**Abbots Pool.** The Parish Council have continued to work with Jason Cox of North Somerset Council in order to keep Abbots Pool in good condition for the local community. The monthly volunteer working parties organised by Jo Chiverton have continued and our thanks are to her for the hard work that she and the volunteers put in.

There was a plan to try to make an improvement by installing a handrail down the irregular stone steps leading down from the cinder track. A number of options were considered with the most practical being to install a rope handrail fixed to the boundary stone wall. A handrail the other side would be intrusive and too far from the edge of the steps to be of value and remove the opportunity for people to walk down the slope rather than the steps. As the site is owned and managed by North Somerset Council and the ownership of boundary wall is not clear, the lack of agreement on the best way forward for an idea that could not get agreement on its merit has meant that this idea has been dropped.

**The website** is a very valuable asset to the village. Thanks go to Paul Whitehouse who acts as the webmaster and has done this for many years. Paul has many commitments and will be looking to ease back from being the webmaster. So if you have the ability and any inclination to assist here, please do let me know. If you haven't already signed up for occasional emails letting you know what is going on in the village , please do so on the website. You can always unsubscribe at any time if you don't want to continue to receive them.

**Climate Emergency**. I have been asked remind the village that the parish council did declare and a biodiversity emergency a couple of years ago following the lead from North Somerset Council. This should be reflected in all of our decisions. Sadly I could say that most of our work is commenting and encouraging people to do other things. We did change all our street lights to low energy light a few years ago. Otherwise we do have this at the back of our minds when making decisions

**The Link**

The Link is a very useful tool for communication delivered to every household in Abbots Leigh and Leigh Woods. It is published by the Church Parish, and the Parish council contributes to the costs of production. The editor David Davies stood down during the year after very many years and the editing role is currently carried out by the printer from Nailsea who does not have an oversight on duplication or accuracy in the different articles submitted for publication, so if you know anyone who would like to take on the editor role, maybe in partnership with another, please do let me know.

Simon Talbot-Ponsonby, Chair

ALPC – Finance presentation 22/23 - 24 May 2023

Good Evening

I am pleased to be able to present the financial statements to you for 2022-23.

Full accounts on screen and handout

A word of explanation first of all. Our accounts are prepared on a cash basis which means that the figures you see would not be the same if they were prepared on an accruals basis and with a balance sheet.

The budget for 2022-23 anticipated a cash deficit of just over £18k principally due to the costs of the Village Hall flat being refurbished. In fact the deficit was just under £9k – the reduction arising from a number of factors including being in receipt of grants from the Civic Society towards playground equipment and road safety, Hall bookings being up by over £5k and because we received a sum of over £11k as a community infrastructure levy.

The CIL is an amount the PC receives when new houses are built in the Parish. The majority of this sum was received as a result of the building of the new house on Valley road where the owner has fenced off part of the field in order, I believ,e to farm Alpacas. We anticipate receiving further sums in the current year, but amounts are currently unknown. The conditions attaching to the CIL monies are that they are ringfenced as they must be spent on Parish improvements and must be spent within 5 years. The PC would be happy to hear any suggestions Parishioners might have on suitable projects.

I do not propose to dwell at length on the refurbishment costs for the Village Hall as this topic was covered fully at a village meeting in October last year. At that time I anticipated a total figure for the refurbishment of about £36k. In fact the final total was about £38k – the extra being as a result of a number of items increasing in price – such as floor coverings where the contractor let us down and we were faced with having to find a further quote – and because, as is typical on such projects, there were a number of issues that hadn’t been anticipated or which proved more expensive than estimates at that time.

Hand out copies of VH account – also on screen

I will briefly explain the numbers on the account.

When someone wishes to hire the Hall they pay a deposit to book it which is not returnable if cancellation is at short notice or may be reduced if the caretaker has to clear up a mess. The full fee is paid and the appropriate amount of deposit refunded. Hence the 12513 and 1018 numbers leading to net bookings of 11495.

There are a number of shared services with the FitTank who operate in the old Skittle Alley. The ex VAT cash account reflects the full amount and the amounts recharged to the FitTank are in the Adjustments column.

As I mentioned earlier, our accounts do not have a balance sheet, so if assets are bought or enhanced they simply appear as a cash debit. However to achieve a truer reflection of the costs of running of the hall, such capital amounts need to be removed. This lectern and a firesafe - for which the heritage society paid - totalled 1912.

The insurance covers both the Hall and former skittle alley as well as public liability of the PC – which means that when the Fireworks happen on 5 November these are under the auspices of the PC as they are then covered by our insurance. There is no breakdown of the Public Liability figure so this account includes what I believe to be a reasonable estimate.

Concerns have been raised over the deficit that the village hall generates. I understand that the great majority of village halls around the country operate at a deficit and the deficit figure of 4532 shown here only equates to 28p a week per household in the village which I do not consider unreasonable for the facility we offer. Indeed the 4532 would have been a surplus if we had not had to spend over 5k on fixing the VH chimney which was in a dangerous condition.

Show letting income slide

Finally I want to draw your attention to the level of letting income this year compared to previous years. This was 2500 more than any preceding year and we are hoping with the caretaker now in residence we can drive these bookings still higher.

Looking at 23-24 we are pleased that we have been able to increase our precept by just 1.3% and still expect to reflect a healthy balance of more than 1 years precept income by this time next year.

Any Questions?

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| **Village Hall 2022/23 - Income and Expenditure** | | |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Ex VAT Cash Accounts | Adjustments |  | Adjusted account |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Income | 12513 | 1018 | \* | 11495 |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Caretaker | 3915 |  |  | 3915 |  |  |
| Phone & Internet | 754 |  |  | 754 |  |  |
| Council Tax | 1734 |  |  | 1734 |  |  |
| Water | 329 | 114 | \*\* | 215 |  |  |
| Performing Rights | 215 |  |  | 215 |  |  |
| Fire Prevention | 290 |  |  | 290 |  |  |
| Heat and Light | 2166 | 1226 | \*\* | 940 |  |  |
| Maintenance | 8021 | 1912 | \*\*\* | 6109 |  |  |
| Supplies | 88 |  |  | 88 |  |  |
| Buildings & Public Liability | 3048 | 1281 | \*\*\*\*\* | 1767 |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **20560** |  |  | **16027** | **-4532** | **deficit** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| \* | Lettings deposits refunded | |  |  |  |  |
| \*\* | Fit tank reimbursement | |  |  |  |  |
| \*\*\* | Small capital items - Firesafe (paid for by Heritage group) and Lectern | | | | | |
| \*\*\*\* | includes 5350 repair of chimney | | |  |  |  |
| \*\*\*\*\* | 3048 for Hall and FitTank Buildings plus Public Liability | | | | |  |
|  | 781 is sum refunded by FitTank. 500 estimate of non VH Public Liability | | | | | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Deficit of 4532 equates to 28p a week per household in the village.** | | | | |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| VH Flat refurbishment | 26742 | 285 | \*\*\*\*\*\* | 26457 |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| \*\*\*\*\*\* | late refund of tiles not used in refurbishment | | | |  |  |