

CHILMARK ANNUAL ASSEMBLY Minutes
as held in the Reading Room on Wednesday 3 May 2023 at 7pm

Public present: 9 (including Mungo Melvin as Chair of Forbes Field Management Group)

Parish Councillors present: Sir Richard Packer, Bev Small, Sir Raymond Jack, Carl Jacobs, Johan Denekamp, Morag Phillpot, Peter Young.

Wiltshire Councillor present: Bridget Wayman
In attendance: Parish Clerk Sarah Miller

PUBLIC FORUM – No comment

1. Welcome & Apologies for Absence

Sir Richard Packer chaired the meeting as per the normal protocol that states the chair of the Parish Council, if present, should chair the Annual Assembly. He welcomed all those present and noted questions would be welcomed about any of the forthcoming village reports.

Apologies were accepted from:

Mrs Olivia von Halle (Playground Ctte Chair)
Mrs Catherine Potts (Playground Ctte member)
Mr Richard Eaton (Chair of the Village Voice)
Mr Todd Jex (Chair of the Chilmark Horticultural Society)
Mrs Heidi McCormack

2. Minutes of the Annual Assembly held on 4 May 2022

The Chm proposed the approval, Cllr Jacobs seconded and they were agreed and signed. They are available to view on the Parish Council website.

3. Annual Reports 2022/23

a) From the Chair of Chilmark Parish Council, Sir Richard Packer:

I propose this year to revert to the pre pandemic tradition of summarising the past year's events from the PC's perspective. It was only when putting this note together that I realised what an active year it has been.

Like the nation the PC has survived, though in our case with having had 3 parish clerks rather than three Prime Ministers. With clerks leaving and significant time when the post was vacant there were some bumpy patches, but thankfully Sarah Miller is now well established in the role. We also welcomed Johan Denekamp onto the Council.

Perhaps the most significant development in the village has been the successful pushing forward of the Forbes Field initiative, demonstrating both vision and organisational competence. Instead of a rather run down, horse-sick field we have an attractive and appealing asset. Praise and thanks are due to many – one of the scheme's strengths is that so many are involved - but perhaps above all to Mungo Melvin whose concept it was. The need now is to sustain this good start in the longer term.

From many villagers' point of view the January floods along Hindon Lane and the Street were a major worry. Pumping sewage into the Winterbourne for several days was hardly ideal but we got through and colleagues on the PC, notably Carl Jacobs, helped a lot. We are seeking to identify measures that will minimize future problems. But geography dictates that the risk of flooding will always be with us.

The provision of Wessex Internet throughout the village proceeded. This was certainly not without problems, but over the year progress has been made.

Other developments worth mentioning are the forthcoming move of EHD from the village hopefully greatly reducing problems with heavy lorries; the move by a group of mothers to 'save the playground'; the resurrection of the duck race; and the first moves towards defining the 'Black Dog' as an asset of Community value.

A possible development outside the village, but one with the prospect of affecting us is the proposed work at Tisbury station. Chilmark PC, with other local PCs are trying to ensure the potential (adverse) effect on local traffic is fully taken into account. The rules, apparently, make this difficult.

I will finish by mentioning the continuation of the 'Litter Pick', an excellent practical way to improve the environment for all of us; and that we increased the precept, though by marginally less than the 10% at which inflation seems to have been stuck for some months.

b) From the Wiltshire Councillor for Nadder Valley Division, Bridget Wayman:

It has been a relatively quiet year. I continue as Chairman of the Chase & Chalke Landscape Partnership and as a member of the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership Panel. I urge everyone to visit the AONB / Chase & Chalke website as there are some very interesting activities & opportunities – I have just been on an Earthworm Sampling Day!

Since being appointed to the Southern Area Planning Committee, I have endeavoured to raise awareness of the importance of the AONB with committee members as there still seems to be a lack of understanding of the importance of the national designation and the need to conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty, which includes the International Dark Sky Reserve status. For the AONB to retain this status, light pollution must continue to be reduced year on year. There is a requirement to achieve 67% compliance on business and domestic lighting. It is currently only 12%. I urge anyone and everyone to consider the impact of their external lighting in particular. Does it need to be on? Is it pointing downwards. Could it be better?

The biggest bone of contention at the moment is the condition of our roads. Having had a dry summer, many minor roads have suffered from heave and with the subsequent wintry wet and cold temperatures, the cracks and potholes have multiplied. The Department of Transport awards capital funding to local authorities for major maintenance at a rate fixed for four years. Wiltshire Council's block funding is £20m, but an additional amount of £3m has been awarded by government, aware of the effects of the weather over the past year, and one would assume, the devastating effects on inflation that have significantly reduced the mileage of roads that can be repaired.

If I tell you that Wiltshire has 4830km of road and last year 17km were resurfaced (0.352%), 70km were surface dressed (1.45%) and 27km were retextured (0.56%), perhaps you can appreciate the scale of the problem. The road from Hindon to Tisbury is high on the programme and should be dealt with in the near future.

Wiltshire Council's budget was increased by 4.99% on 5 April to £465. The adult and children's services budgets take the biggest slice of the budget at £242m. The environment budget of 48m includes the costs of waste and recycling. You may be aware of the push to try to reduce the amount of wrong products that some people put in their recycling bin. Dirty nappies and car engines have been found in them. These have to be removed from the recycling at the Materials Recovery Facility and add to costs. Obviously, dirty nappies should go in your black lidded bin and car engines should be taken to the HRCs for proper disposal. The cost of the garden waste collection is increasing from £60 to £66 for the year and a Van & Trailer permit for the HRCs is now to be charged – at £20 – as from October.

c) From the Chair of the Forbes Field Management Group, Mungo Melvin:

Overview - This report summarises the vision, organisation, planning and major activities of the FFMG since its formation; on 7 September 2022, authorized by Chilmark Parish Council (CPC) on that date, to 31 March 2023. This document should be read in conjunction with the FFMG's Financial Report.

Vision - Our vision for the Field is to fulfil the wishes of its benefactor, the late Diana Forbes, in providing Chilmark with an attractive open space for all to enjoy, incorporating a community orchard and other amenity tree planting; and to encourage and conserve natural habitats of flora and fauna.

Organisation - The FFMG currently consists of seven members: Simon Butcher (Cranborne Chase AONB Liaison Officer); Carl Jacobs (CPC Representative and Wildlife Officer) (Johan Denekamp (Treasurer and Field Steward); Lesley Denekamp (Secretary); Heidi McCormack (Wildflowers Officer); Mungo Melvin (Chair and Plans Officer); and Neil Pattenden (Community Engagement Officer). The FFMG is supported by the Friends of Forbes Field, a volunteer group run by Johan and Lesley Denekamp, which advises and assists in Field activities.

Planning - Planning for the Field is based on the submission made by the Forbes Field Working Group, the precursor to the FFMG, to the CPC on 7 September 2022, updated as necessary since then. Funding is based on pledges by villagers and grants from the Farming in Protected Landscapes Scheme, administered by the AONB. On current plans, the project will be completed by the summer of 2024. Regular maintenance will be required thereafter.

Major Activities - The FFMG has run four Field Days (12 November and 3 December 2022; 11 February and 11 March 2023) involving up to 20 plus local volunteers. During the first three, we were ably assisted by up to 10 volunteers from the Chilmark-based RE:ACT disaster relief charity. To date, we have cleared extensive areas of invasive blackthorn and bramble; repaired boundary fencing; and planted 63 trees, including 41 fruit trees in the orchard.

Future Plans - In consultation with the AONB and other agencies, we intend to establish a winter wet area contributing to the village's flood protection; install new fencing and gates at Hops Close; plant, in co-operation with Chilmark School, a Coronation Grove of trees; and plant other trees and hedges. On Sunday, 7 May 2023, we will host the village's Coronation commemoration. During the summer and autumn we plan to run a series of events to highlight the Field's flora and fauna, followed by a winter night sky talk.

d) From the Treasurer of the Forbes Field Management Group, Johan Denekamp:

Overview - This report summarises the FF financial activity in the period to 31 March 2023. We inherited some funds brought forward and the FFMG was conceived in 2022. This report should be read in conjunction with the FFMG Annual Report (as above).

Brought forward position - Diana Forbes left £2,000 along with the field to the Parish Council in her will some 15 years ago. Since 2009 the field had been periodically let for horse grazing but had sadly become somewhat neglected. That £2,000 had grown to £4,562 when the FFWG/FFMG was established in 2022. Against that horse grazing income there had of course been expenses over that period.

Fund raising – In order to radically transform the neglected field into an attractive and useable community asset, leadership and a significant fund-raising effort was sorely needed. Mungo Melvin provided that leadership and the breakthrough fund-raising idea was to invite individual villagers to sponsor a tree and/or to contribute more generally. This concept was a resounding success and £10,930 has been raised to date: 71 individual trees have been sponsored and over £5,000 has been raised in general donations. In addition, the Cranborne Chase AONB was contacted and a grant was obtained. We expect that grant to be in the region of £15,000 over the next few years.

Expenditure - As has been detailed in our annual report, we have organised four Field Days and during three of those days, 63 trees have been planted. That has been the largest item of expenditure to date – some £4,090. In addition, we have professionally pruned and rejuvenated the neglected veteran crab apple trees, bought two 8-seater benches and repaired and improved the fencing on all sides. Finally, we have installed almost a dozen bird and bat boxes and several wildlife cameras. The AONB grant has funded much of this activity.

Cash balances held - We now have £11,070 in hand and an expectation of another £14,000 to come from the AONB. Clearly, we are well funded and we meet very regularly to agree how we will marshal these resources. The FFMG team has met on seven occasions since its establishment in September 2022.

Future Plans - In consultation with the AONB and other agencies, we intend to establish a winter wet area contributing to the village's flood protection; install new fencing and gates at Hops Close; plant, in co-operation with Chilmark School, a Coronation Grove of trees; and plant other trees and hedges. All this has been carefully budgeted, together with sufficient funds available for the erection of interpretation panels and for maintenance of the field.

Question from the floor, relating to above Forbes Field Reports:

Cllr Sir Raymond Jack asked about progress on the transfer of the Ransom Strip from the heirs of the Forbes Field Estate to the Parish Council, as originally agreed. Mungo Merlin said he was still hopeful this would proceed as planned; however, for now, the FFMG had received permission from the Heirs to carry out work on the Ransom Strip land.

Cllr RJ added that he had planned to query what ideas there were for establishing a cash float for future maintenance of the Forbes Field project. However, on the basis of the FFMG Treasurer's Report, it seemed the operation was quite cash rich and therefore he was withdrawing that question.

e) From the Chair of Chilmark Reading Room. Morag Philpott:

The Reading Room is now fully back to normal after the long period of Covid ripple effects. There have been regular group gatherings, committee meetings and private parties happening in the hall. In the last year some of the highlights have been live music from a talented folk duo from the USA, a lively family Halloween Drop-In evening, and the popular Christmas Bazaar. Recently we were delighted to welcome 8 teams to the Reading Room Quiz and Fish Supper.

Looking forward, the Reading Room committee will be manning the bar and barbecue tents at the village event on Forbes Field to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles. Other proposed events are a summer barbecue at the Reading Room, the return of the folk duo Hungrytown, a cheese and wine evening as well as the annual Halloween Trick or Treat drop-in and the Christmas Bazaar.

The improvement works to the hall continue. The fireplace has recently been uncovered and cleaned but is intended to be a feature and not to be lit. The electrical sockets and trunking next to the exposed walls will be replaced, the plaster work tidied up and finally the walls in the hall will be painted. When this is finished the committee will address the next cycle of maintenance work, in order keep the Reading Room in a good state of repair. More details on this can be found in the Reading Room Treasurer's grant application letter to the Parish Council.

One of our three Trustees, Mr Patrick Middleton, is to retire from the role after eleven years. Patrick has been a huge support to the Reading Room for which we are extremely grateful. We will miss his guidance but wish him all the very best. The process to appoint a successor is underway. The Reading Room is fortunate to have an excellent team of committee members. Organising and running events as well as carrying out maintenance tasks takes up a lot of time so I would like to thank them for their service and commitment to the Reading Room.

f) From the Chair of The Village Voice. Richard Eaton:

The Village Voice (VV) is a newsletter that is distributed in Chilmark and Ridge. It is a monthly publication apart from two issues which cover two months: July-August and December-January are joint issues = a total of 10 issues per year. The newsletter is 16 pages each month, with the Goods and Services directory issues that were previously run 4 times per year having been discontinued. The Village Voice is compiled, edited and distributed by a team of volunteers from Chilmark and Ridge.

The print run has recently been reduced to 215 copies, ten issues a year, with an average of 10 households having chosen to opt out of receiving hard copies (this fluctuates slightly owing to arrivals/departures in the village). The VV is emailed each month (via the VV website) to 131 individuals; this figure includes those who have opted not to receive hard copies, as well to all our advertisers, some former Chilmark & Ridge residents and many others in the wider area who've asked to be on the VV mailing list. In addition, it is emailed each month to the 240 'villagers' on the VV *email* list which includes many of those who also receive the VV in hard copy format. Analytics demonstrate that online usage has increased over the last year. In March 2023 the VV website received 556 separate visitors.

We are most grateful to our volunteer/distributors for all their help in ensuring the hard copies are delivered each month, and also owe thanks to our wonderful team of proof-readers, namely Bev & Angus Small & Bryan Cross. We are also indebted to Spectrum Print for always providing a fast and efficient print turn around. Overall, we get positive feedback from both readers and advertisers.

We are operating a waiting list for would-be advertisers; this is based on the fact we have a maximum limit of advertisers in order to guarantee a good balance space-wise between editorial content and adverts. On the financial side, income from advertisements and the grant we have received each year from the Parish Council has enabled us to match the printing costs which have risen in the past year in line with inflation. We maintain only a small reserve.

In conclusion the VV is important to the cohesion of the village and it continues to play an important role in village life. I cannot close without thanking Sarah and Glen Miller, supported by Mike Scott and the team for all they do in bringing the VV into so many homes.

Question from the floor, relating to above Village Voice report:

Cllr Peter Young asked why the quarterly Goods & Services Directory had been discontinued whilst The Village Voice was simultaneously running a wait list for would be advertisers?

Sarah Miller explained that as part of an historic arrangement (pre-dating the VV) all revenue from the Goods & Services directory had been split between Hindon & Chilmark Parochial Church Councils; the cost of printing the 4 extra pages four times a year in order to make space for the G&S directory had however been carried by The Village Voice. With the inflation linked increase in printing costs, this financial model was no longer considered sustainable.

g) From the Chair of Chilmark Cricket Club, Carl Jacobs:

Chilmark Cricket Club continued to flourish last season with a total of nineteen games of cricket played at both home and away venues. The club continued to serve the village community as both a sporting and social hub enjoyed by many. Off the field the club celebrated its 20-year anniversary through a fantastic dinner held at Cleeves Farm - huge thanks to Bev Small for the catering - and the production of a splendid anniversary book.

We would publicly like to thank the numerous people who have continued to support us whether it be through giving us a field to play on, playing cricket, providing or serving teas or financially through subs (which are now due for 2023, Vice Presidents £50, social members £10, players £35). The club raised £1500 last year for the charity Wiltshire Mind. The Club was sad to learn of the recent loss of stalwart CCC supporters Shealagh Fowler and John Eden.

Finance – our closing balance at the end of December 2022 was £1666. This represents a loss £1100 during the year mainly due to the purchase of much needed second-hand outfield mowers. This year we will seek to build back up our financial reserves. We were very grateful of the £250 grant from the Parish Council that was used to purchase several new chairs for use by spectators at the ground.

h) From the Chair of the Chilmark Horticultural Society, Todd Jex:

With the support of an enthusiastic committee, and experience of Treasurer Mike, the society has had an active year after remaining dormant during the pandemic. Being new to the society I am of course unable to draw comparison between this year and previous years.

As a committee we regard the year as a successful first step towards something more valuable to the people of the village. Despite the best efforts of the record-breaking temperatures and prolonged drought the society ran a plant stall and competition at the church fete and launched two new fund-raising competitions in the sunflower growing for Ukraine and the pumpkin growing and carving.

The committee have planned to reinstate the previously popular annual CHS flower and plant show this September. I think this will be an excellent opportunity to engage and encourage villagers of all ages. We have agreed that knowledge sharing, and transfer should form part of the strategy of the society moving forwards. With that in mind the society organised an evening seminar on soils and how to get the best out of those local to the village. We hope it will be the first in a series of similar evenings.

i) From the Chair of the Chilmark Playground Committee. Olivia von Halle:

Following the news that the Chilmark Playground Management Committee (under Sally Butcher) had decided to dismantle the playground, a group of Chilmark parents came together to save it. Five new members were co-opted onto the committee; two members chose to remain whilst the rest of the committee resigned on 21 March 2023. It's early days but we feel optimistic and excited! We all have young children; rely on the playground and value it as a community asset. We believe that with fresh energy and enthusiasm we will be able to solve the current issues, maintain and improve the playground and nurture this village resource for years to come.

The Lease: The lease renewal – from the School Governors to the Playground Committee – has been ongoing with little progress to date. This is now being tackled by Eloise Rees and Catherine Potts, the latter of whom is a Governor at Chilmark School.

The Accounts: The last committee handed over a healthy bank balance, mainly resulting from the dissolution of the George Young Trust (a trust fund administered by the Parochial Church Council). However, knowing that associated costs can be high, we have begun fundraising efforts and on Easter Saturday ran the Duck Race, an historic Chilmark tradition. It was very well attended and raised £570.25.

Maintenance/Health and Safety: On Sunday 16 April 2023 we had a playground clean up session. The playground has become so overgrown with weeds that it was impossible to make any headway. The woodchip surface has become compromised and needs to be replaced. We also went through the last safety inspection report undertaken in November 2022. Nothing has been actioned since and there are a few areas which require investment including: replacement of the woodchip surface, various maintenance to the fence/gate/posts, and pieces of play equipment which we are currently in the process of getting quotes for.

Long Term Plans: We understand that the playground equipment is reaching the end of its life and are keen to put plans in place for a new playground. Our preliminary research shows that new playground equipment will cost tens of thousands of pounds and requires a huge fundraising effort. Until the lease has been resolved we feel there is no point planning this in earnest but rather maintaining the current equipment to the best of our ability.

We understand that in the past, the support of Chilmark Parish Council has been invaluable. It enables us to pay for our annual safety inspection, the insurance premium and should also cover the lease when in place. We are hopeful that the members of the council will continue to support us.

j) From the Lay Chair of the Parochial Church Council. Grant Philpott:

I am writing on behalf of the PCC of St Margaret of Antioch Chilmark to thank the Parish Council for their support in recent years by way of a generous grant to offset the cost of our churchyard maintenance.

The Churchyards (old and new) are permanently accessible to members of the public and have a public footpath running through the old churchyard. They are an important haven for wildlife, being framed by a drystone wall and large trees, particularly yews. There are records of bats including common and soprano pipistrelles, brown long-eared bats and also hedgehogs and reptiles. The churchyard is also home to a large number of species of flowering plants, adapted to a chalk grassland. The current mowing regime (7 mowing visits per year, each with a designated mowing plan) and the adoption of a re-wilding policy for part of the churchyard area around some of the more elderly sections of the graveyard, aims to optimise wildflower variety and abundance. This approach also has the advantage of limiting disturbance during key periods to specific wildlife habitats.

The benefits of this were evident throughout 2022, in particular with a far greater variety of plants being noted than in previous years. The flowers appeared in succession at various times of the year. Notably, in spring: snowdrops, cyclamen and primroses, followed by sweet woodruff and meadow saxifrage. Pyramidal orchids appeared in the late spring. In the early summer, Bird's-foot trefoil (an important food plant for several butterflies) appeared and in late summer, harebells. As well as the trees, the masonry and gravestones support many species of lichens, some may be as old as the stones themselves. The oldest gravestones date back to the 17th century.

The description above serves to remind us that the Churchyard is a very precious resource of wildlife in the centre of the village, accessible to all. Villagers have enjoyed walking along the grass paths that have been created among the drifts of wildflowers. As a graveyard, its tranquil character is a fitting resting place for past and future villagers. In 2022 the PCC, supplementing a substantial private donation from a villager, invested in a churchyard entrance information board to assist visitors in their appreciation of both churchyard and church.

The Chilmark Village War Memorial is also located in the churchyard and the church is, in effect, the physical guardian of this community-owned structure. Maintaining a fitting setting and providing access for visitors to the memorial is therefore also ensured through appropriate care of the churchyard.

In recent years the parishioners have struggled to meet the costs of maintaining both a medieval building and churchyard. As you may be aware, in the last few years, we have had to carry out extensive work to our west window and church spire. Further repairs, all of which involve safety aspects, have been revealed during inspections, and the PCC has very recently authorised major expenditure on restoration of the historic Lychgate (particularly the failing roof), further church roof repairs, and necessary improvements to the church electrical wiring and lighting. The church's non-pressurised heating system, parts of which are nearly 200 years old, is also frequently failing and will soon require a major investment. These costs are in addition to the regular outgoings such as heating oil, electricity, water, insurance and so on. The Parish Council's previous help to maintain the churchyards has therefore been very much appreciated.

k) From the Chair of the Coronation Celebration Committee. Johan Denekamp:

This event on Sunday 7 May, 12-3pm, is being organised by the Coro Comm and we have been lucky enough to have had broad village engagement. The nine Coro Comm members are Lesley Denekamp, Carl Jacobs, Morag Philpott, Felicity Pattenden, Neil Pattenden, Catherine Potts, Hannah Trent, Peter Young, and me. We have met 3 times and will meet one more time before the event. The event has been mentioned in the last three Village Voice Newsletters and a poster has been created. We envisage the following entertainment.

Circus Wessex will provide three entertainers to demonstrate circus tricks and to encourage audience participation. BBQ and refreshments will be provided by the Reading Room team, supported by the Cricket Club. Beers, wine, soft drinks will be available. They will handle the financials for this. We expect on site representation from RE:ACT, Forbest Field Management Group (FFMG), Wessex Internet and the Woodland Trust. There will be a nature trail – which is being organised by the school and Neil Pattenden – and numerous other activities for children including a penalty shoot-out, face painting and 'best crown'. St John's Ambulance will attend and hopefully the local Police will attend as a community engagement activity.

Financially - entry is free which was considered very important. We were given a grant of £200 from the Parish Council, and £200 from FFMG, and a further £560 was generously donated by Parish Council members. This allowed financial resources of £960. We have committed to spend £600 on the Circus acts, First Aid presence £127, one portaloos £84, face painting £100, and an allowance for prizes for children of £50. For those of you who are good with a calculator this comes to expenditure of £961. 'Luckily' we expect to break even. We are organising a card machine for cashless payment as the food and drinks are obviously those things cannot be free.

Weather permitting, and we will have a great many tents to provide cover, we can hopefully look forward to a well-attended and fun event. We have estimated and catered for about 100 to 150 attendees. Tables and chairs and bins and volunteers have all been organised. Although it is late in the day, all comments and suggestions are very welcome.

From the floor, relating to the Coronation event:

Cllr Sir Raymond Jack noted that Ridge was holding a BYO drinks party, in a village garden, on the Saturday evening of the Coronation weekend, at which everyone would be very welcome.

4. Statement of Accounts for the year 2022/2023 - Report from the Clerk, Sarah Miller (copies the year end accounts were circulated to those present):

Overview - The Parish Council's consolidated year-end balance of £15,114 on 31 March 2023 is somewhat misleading. Leaving the Forbes Field project aside, the Parish Council ended the year with a balance of £4044 in its current account, after a deficit for the year of £291. A separate deposit account had been set up in 2022 to receive the ring-fenced Forbes Fields funds of £4563. This Forbes Field account held £11,070 on 31 March 2023.

Total Parish Council receipts for the year were an impressive £21,560 but, as you've heard from Forbes Field Treasurer Johan Denekamp, nearly £11,000 of that sum came in generous donations from Chilmark residents towards the Forbes Field project, plus a further £930 in grants so far from Cranborne Chase AONB.

In contrast, the Parish Council's non-Forbes Field income was modest, at less than £9000.

- £8750 from the Precept
 - £80 as a Grant from Wiltshire towards the Platinum Jubilee celebrations
 - £137 as a VAT refund
- A total of £8967 total

Meanwhile, the Council's non-Forbes Field expenditure of £9058 was higher than for 2021-22 when the pandemic effect resulted in no grant to the Reading Room and no playground inspection. Other factors in the increased spend was the number of additional grants made to village organisations (including for Jubilee and Coronation celebrations), the purchase of new rubbish & dog poo bins and, of course, inflation.

It should be noted that the PC current account balance of £4044 at 31 March 2023 included a ring-fenced sum of £1290 for future maintenance of the Millennium Cross. Hence, in reality, the Parish Council had just £2754 left in its reserves at the end of the financial year. It is generally considered prudent for a parish council to maintain a balance (not including ring fenced sums) of at least half the annual precept. It is against this background, plus the knowledge that the PC will be facing bills for new Highways signage in coming months, that parish councillors agreed in January to raise the precept by just under 10% to £9600 for the coming year.

As in previous years, PKF Littlejohn are the National External Auditors and the accounts have been reviewed by James Lock. In accordance with regulations, the electorate will be able to inspect the accounts from 5 June to 14 July and the forms will be posted on the Parish Council website before 5 June. The Parish Council qualifies as a smaller authority as both its gross income and/or expenditure did not exceed £25,000. This means that we can certify as exempt for a limited assurance review under Section 9 of the Local Audit Regulation 2015.

5. Date of the next Annual Assembly: Wednesday 8 May 2024

The Chairman thanked members of the public for attending and closed the Assembly part of the meeting. Everyone was welcome to stay on for the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council, to follow immediately afterwards.