

CHILMARK ANNUAL ASSEMBLY Minutes
as held in the Reading Room on Wednesday 8 May 2024 at 7pm

Parish Councillors present: Sir Richard Packer, Sir Raymond Jack, Carl Jacobs, Morag Phillpot and Peter Young.

Wiltshire Councillor present: Bridget Wayman

Parish Clerk: Sofya Samokhina

Public present:

Patrick Nixon – Chair , Village Voice Newsletter

Grant Philpott - Lay Chair of the Parochial Church Council

Olivia von Halle – Chair, Claybush Playground Management Committee

Brand King – Chair, Chilmark Cricket Club

Elizabeth Nixon, Gill Hibberd, Neil Pattenden, Felicity Pattenden, Sally Butcher, Lynn Menzies, Colin Diaper, Sarah Miller, Glen Miller, Adam Bolton

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: Vice-Chair Cllr Bev Small and Cllr Johan Denekamp (Treasurer of FFMG)

2. Minutes of the Annual Assembly held on 3 May 2023

The Chm proposed the approval, Cllrs agreed unanimously. The Chm signed and dated them. They are available to view on the Parish Council website.

3. Annual Reports 2023/2024:

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

We will be hearing about activities in the past year from the various village clubs and interests in a minute and I don't want to repeat what they say. I will just mention 5 points of importance.

First, the **Black Dog**. The end is not yet clear. The BDWP, which of course has broad support from the PC, though that support does not include financial support, has made an offer for the whole site to the owner which has not been accepted. Meanwhile, the premises are underutilised. Many consider that retaining a working pub in the village is very important. So far as I know nothing has happened for a little while; if there have been developments, I expect we will hear about them.

Second, the **Playing Field** and the **Claybush Playground**. To describe this subject as convoluted would not do justice to the labyrinthine nature of the discussions. The PC's objective is to secure the future of the Playground at little or no cost to PC funds. Currently the ball is in the hands of the school and the SDBE, which is the formal owner of the land. We await the next move from them.

Third, **Forbes Field**. What a wonderful transformation. I am sure I speak for many when I congratulate Mungo Melvin for the concept, and the FFMG and many other helpers for all their physical, financial and administrative work. I believe the most strenuous part of the proceedings are over, but we need to be sure we maintain the field to its present standard for the future enjoyment of the village.

Fourth, **Finance**. Chilmark Parish Council is a small entity. Our precept only passed £10,000 this year. Recent developments mean we need to be specifically careful to reflect before we enter into new commitments. Forbes Field has been a great success and has been self-funding, but it increases our potential liabilities. We have other potential costs relating to the Frickers Paddock Playground and conceivably the Playing Field. We need to be even more vigilant financially in the future.

Fifth. Finally, I want to praise the **litter pickers** for their efforts which contribute so much to making Chilmark the beautiful and pleasant place it is.

b) From the **Chair of the Forbes Field Management Group**, Mungo Melvin: Over the past year we have continued with our work to make the Field an attractive community asset in accordance with the plan submitted to the Parish Council in September 2022. Our diverse activities have included: field days that have involved the planting of trees and hedging; the erection and repair of fencing and gates; the construction of a new water supply point and of a new water outflow; a series of ‘watering sessions’ to ensure that our young trees survived a very dry period of weather in May-June 2023; and not least regular topping of the Field. We have been assisted throughout by fellow villagers from the Friends of Forbes Field, and, on one occasion each, by personnel from the Chilmark-based charity RE:ACT and from the Seeds4Success charity for young people. Notably, schoolchildren of Chilmark and Fonthill Bishop School planted on Monday, 7 December 2023 seven Whitebeams in a small plot to commemorate the coronation of King Charles III. We also provided the venue for the village commemoration of the coronation held on Sunday, 7 May 2023, in which Forbes Field Management Group members took on the lead in organisation and administration.

We have already erected three timber frame supports for information panels that will be mounted over the coming weeks: a large one near the entrance to the Field and two others that describe the Community Orchard and the Western Grove of trees, listing the names of those who have pledged trees. In close liaison with the Forbes family we are planning to build a cairn at the top, southwestern, corner of the Field to mark the gift of Diana Forbes to the village.

On completion of his excellent work liaising with the Cranborne Chase National Landscape (formerly the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), Simon Butcher has retired from the Management Group. We thank him for his advice and support over the last couple of years. We are now seeking a new member of the Management Group.

We intend to hold an informal ‘open day’ in the Field on Saturday, 7 September 2024 to show villagers what we have achieved and to encourage people to visit the Field for their recreation and wellbeing. Further details to follow.

With scores of budding trees and many of these coming into blossom, Forbes Field is already beginning to show its potential as a pleasant green oasis in Chilmark. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in supporting our activities over the past year for their assistance and trust we will be able to sustain this great effort to wonderful effect. See our website at <https://www.forbesfield.org> for further information.

c) From the **Treasurer of the Forbes Field Management Group** – In Cllr JD’s absence, Cllr CJ read out the report.

We have now submitted and have been paid National Landscape (NL/formerly AONB) claims in the amount of £11,620. We raised £10,930 from villagers and

inherited £4,988 at the beginning of the project. Since inception we have planted 108 trees costing £7,029. Things have gone to plan and our finances are looking robust. MM added that they are looking to do another fundraising round but it is premature to start right now. FFMG are looking ahead to next year.

d) From the **Chair of Chilmark Reading Room Committee**, Morag Philpott:
In the last year the Reading Room Management Committee has welcomed two new Trustees, Mr Angus Small and Mrs Sally Butcher. We are very grateful for their support and encouragement. I am pleased to report that the Reading Room continues to be well used by groups, committees and private individuals in the village, and is the venue for the Black Dog Working Group's lively pop-up pub evenings. Our own fundraising events have been successful and a lot of fun but the maintenance of the hall remains a challenge. The felt covering on the flat roof above the entrance area has split and needs to be repaired before water starts to trickle into the building. The coping stones there are also damaged and crumbling. Repointing work is necessary on the chimney stack and the chimney pot has to be replaced. Some sections of fencing around the patio need to be renewed. Inside the hall a dado rail will neaten the line between the plaster on the walls and the exposed stonework, but the re-plastering and painting work has dropped down the list of priorities until we are able to raise more funds. The committee is seeking new members at the moment, especially someone who could take on some of the secretarial duties, and also a new chairperson as my five-year term will come to an end in November. Many thanks go to all the current and recently retired committee members for the huge amount of effort they put into keeping the Reading Room running.

e) From the **Chair of The Village Voice** newsletter, Patrick Nixon:
I have recently been asked to be Chair of the Village Voice. The hard copy of the magazine is delivered by an invaluable team of volunteers to 205 homes in Chilmark and Ridge. Spare copies are left in St Margaret's church for visitors. In addition 360 readers – including 130 non-villagers - are emailed with the link to the Village Voice website. Traffic to the website has increased sharply in the past year; on average visits are received from 300-400 individual IP addresses each month, with a peak of nearly 500 at the end of 2023. The editor Sarah Miller has recently started sending a weekly email from the website about forthcoming activities of interest to villagers. This is a valuable service which we hope to maintain. In the next year the Committee will face the task of finding how best to replace the talents of Sarah and Glen Miller in producing the magazine so brilliantly for 10 years. They have made an important and lasting contribution to the village. In the autumn we will send out flyers to the village asking for thoughts on the future shape of the newsletter. All residents will be invited to the Village Voice AGM on 16 October. We are grateful to Mike Scott who has retired as Treasurer after 8 years. We welcome Susan Lewis as his replacement.

f) From the **Chair of the Chilmark Cricket Club**, Brand King:
Now in its 22 year, Chilmark Cricket Club continues to provide a valuable social and sporting resource for the village. Last season 35 different players turned out for the club across 17 games. The youngest was just 12, while the oldest has asked that I don't share that detail. There were a number of new players, including relative newcomers to the village in Tony Lewis and Jonny Sanderson, while one of the stalwarts, in Reg Allen, became the first player to reach 200 games for the club. At

the other end of the scale, two youngsters made big strides last season - Mac and George Stevenson both got their names on the honours boards for bowling and batting achievements. But the cricket, of course, is just the excuse. The main attraction of the club remains the cricket tea. Last season Claire Allen took the reins and curated a culinary feast, lovingly made by kitchens from Ridgeway to Frickers Paddock, every weekend. It is far from hyperbole to say that Chilmark Cricket Club's teas are considered by many as the best in the county. While the playing numbers and the teas were a positive from the last season, there was also sad news. Four long term supporters of the club passed away during the year. John Eden, Shealagh Fowler, Margaret Wood and Bryan Cross were familiar faces, helpers, committee members, cake makers, umpires and all round Chilmark fans, and will be sorely missed by the club and its players. Looking ahead the club is excited by the return, after a ten year absence, of Chilmark Cricket Club Juniors. With the expert help of Hannah Trent, Jez Howell, Sam Moss and Carl Jacobs, CCC Juniors will feature hour-long coaching sessions on Sundays beginning in June. It's open to boys and girls aged 8 to 11 and will run for 10 weeks. Dovetailing nicely with this, Chilmark and Fonthill Bishop School has also begun an after school cricket program, which takes place at Cleeves Farm on Monday afternoons. The school's sessions have been popular and a number of youngsters from that are expected to join the club's program in due course. Junior cricket is a vital resource for the club, and can help secure its future for years to come. As such its important that we support the program, and that of the school's, as much as possible. Speaking of the future, I'm happy to advise that the club is in the process of finalising details on a new lease with Henry and Elizabeth Pelham, which will secure use of the Cleeves Farm ground for the next 40 years. The new agreement will clarify which parts of the farm the club is responsible for, its parking facilities, use of amenities, maintenance requirements, and other ancillary issues. We thank the Pelhams for taking the initiative to lock the lease down and ensure there are no loose ends. They, as much as the club itself, are keen to ensure that no matter what the future holds, the village will continue to have a cricket club as long as it wants one. Chilmark Cricket Club recognises that it has a role in the village beyond that of a simple sports team. It is a place for friends to catch up, for sharing of stories, and sometimes for a little exercise too. With the demise of the Black Dog, it's position is as important as ever. With this in mind we're planning on holding more social occasions and event days at the ground. In June we are hosting a three team mini tournament. Playing against Chilmark will be club alumni Sam Packer's Old Somervillians team, along with an assortment of bankers and finance types cobbled together by Angus Small, which will go by the name of the Fulham Pigeons. The tournament promises to be a festive affair and locals will be encouraged to come along and enjoy the ground, the game, and refreshments. Additionally, in July we intend to host an afternoon tea on the green. This will likely take place on a nongame day so that tables can be placed on the ground and everyone can enjoy the (hopefully) good weather. An upscale drinks menu is planned along with some classic Chilmark sandwiches and cakes. Tickets will be sold to the event which will hopefully introduce a few new faces to the club and the village as a whole. With the return of junior cricket, a renewed relationship with the school, and the support of the local community, the future for the club looks promising. But we're always conscious at CCC that coming from such a small village means we're only ever a few key departures away from rocky waters, which is why we're keen to continue to nurture these existing relationships, and to foster new ones wherever they may crop up.

g) From the **Chair of the Chilmark Playground Committee**, Olivia von Halle: It's been a frustrating year for the Chilmark village playground committee. Negotiations with the Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE) have been glacial but not without moments of high excitement and drama. Frustratingly, these issues remain unresolved. We are, as a committee, more dedicated than ever to having a high quality playground in Claybush, that can be used by the children of the village with unfettered access and will continue to strive for this.

1. The Lease:

We began with a protracted and difficult negotiation of an old lease with the SDBE, which ended after many months in an offer of a 'licence to occupy' which the committee decided not to accept. The licence gave us no security as tenants of the land, an unreasonably short notice period, and meant that future fundraising would be very difficult, and investment, precarious. With this in mind, we sought independent legal advice and had a number of meetings with the Parish Council of Chilmark and The Ridge, Chilmark and Fonthill Bishop Primary School and the SDBE - some separate, some with all three groups in attendance. A few months ago and in an unexpected turn of events, the SDBE and school offered the Parish Council **the opportunity** to buy the land. In principle only, this route has been received as agreeable and we are now awaiting an official premium valuation from an independent surveyor acting on behalf of the SDBE. Discussions have been had (hypothetically) as to where responsibilities for the land as a whole, would lie, and the playground on that land as a consequence.

2. The Accounts:

We have maintained a very healthy bank balance of £5,622.56. The big expenditure of the last year was the play-grade wood chip which needed replacing at a cost of £1,991.04. We have continued fundraising and made £60.85 running the stocks at the church fete, and on Easter Monday ran the Duck Race, a historic Chilmark tradition. It was very well attended and raised £970.25.

3. Maintenance/Health and Safety:

In July 2023 we had 32 cubic metres of play-grade wood chip delivered. Mr and Mrs Pelham very kindly lent us their tractor with brilliant operator Giles, and the committee and some other volunteers came and spent a full day spreading the wood chip around the playground. It was much heavier than it looked! In September 2023 the playground was inspected with generally good results. We attended the inspection, and it was interesting and informative to hear the inspector's professional view on how much longer the equipment had in its lifespan; some pieces 2-3 more years while some could be ok for between 5-10 years. We also undertook ad-hoc repairs to some of the equipment, replaced caps etc. When the SDBE removed the fence along the back of Claybush this really impacted the playground which no longer has a back fence. We put a sign on the fence to warn parents to be careful with their children. We hope this will be resolved very soon.

4. 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 ongoing negotiations with the SDBE have moved forwards, we feel there is little point planning this in earnest but rather maintaining the current equipment to the best of our ability. The support of Chilmark Parish Council has been invaluable. The Parish Council grant 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.

h) From the **Lay Chair of the Parochial Church Council**, Grant Philpott:

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 home to a large number of species of flowering plants, adapted to a chalk grassland. The current mowing regime 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 again evident throughout 2023 and this spring, with a far greater variety of plants being noted than in previous years before the current mowing plan. Flowers appear in succession at various times of the year. Notably, in spring, snowdrops, cyclamen and primroses, followed by sweet woodruff and meadow saxifrage. Pyramidal orchids appear in the late spring. In the early summer: Bird's-foot trefoil (an important food plant for several butterflies) appear 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 wild flowers. As a graveyard, its tranquil character is a fitting resting place for past and future villagers. A recent investment in a churchyard entrance information board now assists 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. The memorial is unfortunately in poor repair and the PCC and PC are together exploring restoration options, to which the church will undoubtedly commit some of its limited funds. In recent years the parishioners have struggled to meet the costs of maintaining both a medieval building and churchyard. As you will be aware, in the last few years, we have had to carry out extensive work to our west window, church spire, heating and to the church electrical wiring and lighting. Further repairs, all of which involve safety aspects, have been revealed during inspections, and major repairs of the roof are planned for 2024. These costs are in addition to the regular outgoings such as heating oil, electricity, water, insurance and so on. To reduce churchyard maintenance costs we have re-instigated the churchyard tidy mornings, the first one in 2024 being keenly supported by 19 villagers. To reduce costs further, we also now file our own planning requests for tree pruning and, where it is within our competence, carry out this work ourselves. Your previous help to maintain the churchyards has therefore been very much appreciated.

i) From the **Wiltshire Councillor for Nadder Valley Division**, Bridget

Wayman: Extreme heat, flooding and severe weather have caused significant damage to some of Wiltshire's roads in 2023, with the number of potholes reports increasing

dramatically. However, the overall condition of Wiltshire's classified road network is similar to, or better than, the average road conditions in other south-west authorities, and is better than the national average.

WC is investing an additional £1m to support preventative drainage programmes and have confirmed an additional £1.5m revenue funding from 25/26 onwards to help with gully cleaning and potholes.

BW also talked about septic tank grants to revamp the old tanks. So far 88 applications have been submitted. She also talked about being on the board of Cranborne Chase and that she was very impressed by the number of schemes in the Cranborne Chase area. She noted that we should not forget about the importance of farming the land to produce food.

j) The Chilmark Horticultural Society will not be making a presentation this year.

4. **Statement of Accounts for the year 2023/2024** - Report from the Clerk, Sofya Samokhina:

Including Forbes Field and Millennium Cross:

The Parish Council's year-end balance on 31 March 2024 was £14,316.43 (with Millennium Cross standing at £1,290, and Forbes Field at £8,168.60). Total Receipts for the year amounted to £26,218.37 with the expenditure of £27,016.06, resulting in a deficit of £-797.69.

The Receipts for the year included the Precept of £9,600, £5,341.00 for SSEN Resilience Grant, £9,841.11 for AONB grants for Forbes Field, VAT returns of £315.70 and £936.42 and a refund for Frickers Paddock Training of £99.

Expenses were higher than in previous years owing to a very busy and productive year for Forbes Field, the purchase of new Flood Prevention equipment and Grants to the local committees. The biggest expense went on:

FF Tree Purchase (£3,426.25), FF Tree planting, pruning & fencing (£4,452.95), Grants to local Committees (£1,850.00), FF Ramp access/materials/digger (£1,638.00), FF New access/gates (£1,233.60), FF benches, signage, bat boxes, storage, tools & equipment (£809.49), FF Marshalls bill for relocation of water trough and replacement of water supply (£833.46), Flood Barriers (£3,685.66), Floodgate Door Barriers (£920.00) and the Water Pump (£413.00).

It should be noted that the expenses on Forbes Field and Flood prevention have given great results and will be much lower in the next year.

Not Including Forbes Field and Millennium Cross:

If we look at the accounts for Parish Council without Forbes Field and Millennium Cross, The Year-End Balance on 31st March 2024 was £4,857.83. Total receipts for the year amounted to £15,355.70 with Expenditure of £13,251.81, resulting in surplus of £2,103.89. It should be noted that this figure does not include the expected costs for Highways signage of approx. £1,198.

The Receipts for the year consisted of £9,600 for Precept, £5,341.00 for Flood Emergency prevention Grant, £315.70 for VAT return and £99 for Frickers Paddock training refund from Wiltshire Council.

The expenses included the purchase of Flood Prevention equipment (£5,369.90), Clerk's salary (2,686.40), Grasscutting at Frickers Paddock and footpaths (£1,340), Village maintenance (701.44), Grants to Committees (£1,850). Smaller amounts were paid for Insurance, subscriptions (CPRE, ICO and WALC), defibrillator pads, Reading Room hire both for PC and BDWP meetings, PC admin expenses and Frickers Paddock Playground Training (refund of £99 was received).

The Receipts and Expenses figures look higher than in previous years due to the one-off SSEN Resilience Grant. Actuals without Flood money would come to:

Receipts - £10,014.70

Expenses - £7,910.81

As in previous years, PKF Littlejohn are the National External Auditors, and the internal audit has been done by James Lock. As the Parish Council's income and expenditure totals are over £25,000, we cannot certify as exempt for a limited assurance review under Section 9 of the Local Audit Regulation 2015 and will have to undergo an external audit.

5. **Date of the next Annual Assembly:** Wednesday 7th May 2025 at 7pm.

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.