

EAST HARPTREE PARISH

Minutes of the Annual Village Meeting held on Sunday 14th April 2024 at 10am in The Theatre, East Harptree

The minutes from meeting held on Sunday 16th April 2023 were signed by the Chair and returned to the Clerk.

1) Reports from groups within the village:

- i) Village Hall and Playing Fields - May Day Cricket - will be at Harptree Court. All family members welcome, it will be a fun event. Refreshments being provided by the PTA, all welcome. There are 3 Trustees for the Village Hall and Playing Field committee, the AGM will be held on the 25th June, all welcome. The Village Hall currently has 4 tenants, - Solo hairdressers, the Pre-school, the Community Shop and the Arts Hub. There is a maintenance programme ongoing, scaffolding is up at present, and there are plans to put solar panels up subject to planning permission being granted. At the Playing fields there are plans to install a new storage unit and repair the zip wire. The Fete will be on 13th July, and the Flower and Craft Show on 14th September. Valentines Coffee will be at the Playing Fields Fridays and Saturdays.
- ii) Save the Waldy – East Harptree Community Benefit Society entity has been set up to try to save the village pub. The project is doing fairly well. A government grant for £250k has been received to help buy the pub, of which £48.2k will be allocated to maintenance. Hoping to be in a position to buy the pub in May, and open asap after that. Still need to raise £79K, residents are asked to advertise the opportunity to buy shares widely. A pop-up pub will be held next Friday 19th.
- iii) Arts Hub – has now been set up since January and is utilising the old Pre-school room. The aim is to bring more art to the village, to support local artists. Two resident artists now in situ, an illustrator and wood turner. A new administrator, Ruth Knox has been appointed, and is looking for funding for next year, including setting up social prescribing. All feedback about the Arts Hub welcome.
- iv) Bus services – a member of the Chew Valley Sustainable Transport group updated the meeting about the new bus services. They had applied for funding for the Westlocal services, a service designed by locals suitable for the Chew Valley. This includes an on-demand service and a commuter service to Bristol. The service will be assessed every 3 months, needs to prove effective, increasing numbers, please try to use the service. They are also bidding for another route, the X91 to run later in the day to and from Bristol. Advised there are bike racks in situ now in Bishop Sutton and Chew Stoke, encouraged residents to try to commute to bus stops in Chew Magna, West Harptree and Bishop Sutton. The Westlink is available to get to the main routes (eg A37 to Wells).
- v) Green Homes – a new house in the High Street has been renovated and is now an eco-home. Owner invited people to have a look. An Open Homes event is being held in East Harptree on June 15th, 6 homes available for people to visit to see air source

heat pumps, solar, insulation etc. Grants are available from Bright Green Homes for lower income houses, please also visit the Energy at Home website.

- vi) East Harptree Environment Group – various events have been organised ‘Bats, Bubbles and Beer’, also ‘Swift Walks’ and a ‘Village Ramble’.

In the Churchyard there are plans to restore the hedge along the footpath.

Also involved in hedgerow regeneration, involved in the Nature Recovery Network, looking at the loss of ponds and the need for restoration.

EHEG are working with the Parish Council with the Nature Recovery Plan.

Please sign up to the EHEG mailing list.

Aiming to find out if the Hazel Dormouse is still in the fields.

This work is important for the community, our children and the next generations.

EHEG are working on the Countryside Stewardship Plan.

- vii) Village Community Shop – the shop is always looking for more volunteers to help in the shop, it is a fantastic way to meet people, just 1 hr a month would be a great help. The more help, the more the shop can be open.

2. Chairs report –

EHPC 2023/24 Chair Report

2023 was our local council election year. Six councillors were elected and Richard Davis was subsequently co-opted to fill a casual vacancy following Mick Underhill stepping down last Spring. I would like to extend my thanks to Mick for all his valuable input during his time as a councillor and a big welcome to Richard for filling his shoes.

My thanks also to our wonderful Clerk, Sarah-Jane, who ensures EHPC runs smoothly and efficiently making being a Councillor so much more enjoyable. In particular I would like to congratulate her on achieving the professional CiLCA qualification. This means EHPC now qualifies for the ‘General Power of Competence’ giving it more flexibility to support our community. There is no better time to try your hand at being a Parish Councillor.

My condolences go to Pam Carver on the loss of her beloved husband, John, during the year. Her strength and continued commitment during his illness was remarkable and I look forward to welcoming her back full time as a councillor as soon as she feels able.

After 8 years of service, Richard Coombs has just announced that he will be stepping down after our April meeting which will create a casual vacancy for someone else to join.

Again, my heartfelt thanks go to Richard for all his dedicated service over those years.

A massive thank you as well to all current councillors for their hard work this year and for making the Chair’s role so easy.

So, what has EHPC been doing in 2023/24?

Road Safety

A big thank you as always to our road-sweeper, Paul Sperring, for diligently keeping our roads, gullies & paths clear of leaves, moss and rubbish. He is rightly considered an essential service.

During April 2023 the very welcome resurfacing of the High Street was completed.

Unfortunately B&NES have concluded that it will not be feasible to install a pedestrian crossing at the Townsend crossroads. Other work scheduled includes more prominent signage on the B3114 to be erected this spring to encourage compliance with the lower

speed limits. Finally, councillors decided not to proceed with more coloured frictionless tarmac around the central Conservation Area crossroads to limit the “urbanisation” look. Following the car accident at the top of Smitham’s Hill where the road regularly floods in heavy rain, EHPC have been working closely with Priddy PC, local farmers and Somerset Council to try to remedy this black spot which adversely affects our community.

Creating, maintaining & improving village assets

The Village Theatre building is a much-loved and well used building in the centre of our community. EHPC provided financial support for essential maintenance work on this building and endorsed a grant application for it to install PV panels. It also helped fund the creation of our new EH Arts Hub at this site.

Following the news that the Waldegrave Arms was up for sale, EHPC successfully re-listed the pub as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) to try to help protect this important social asset from being lost to the parish. It supported the 'Save the Waldy' community group with some start-up funding and confirmed them as a bidder for the asset when the owner decided to trigger the ACV process. I am delighted to hear that they were successful in their bid for substantial government funding and fingers crossed that this project proceeds to a successful conclusion.

EHPC continues to maintain our essential defibrillators. Thanks to Chris Head and Sarah-Jane for their ongoing monitoring of these. I would also like to thank our “clock watcher”, Paul Waldron, for his regular care of the EH Clock Tower, Mike Jennings for looking after our parish footpaths, and every diligent volunteer who does their bit in adverse weather to keep the drains and gullies clear of debris.

I would also like to extend a special thanks to Jackie Head for her tireless work with other colleagues across the Chew Vally to try to retain options for our parishioners to continue to access bus services. The recent improvements announced to the “on-demand” WestLink service, coupled with the new X91 WestLocal services and nearby scheduled services, will I hope continue to keep some bus options open for all.

Communication

We are continually trying to improve communication with all of you:

- For those residents who are offline, there is a parish noticeboard opposite the Clock Tower. Also, our monthly PC meetings are open to all in the Theatre, and you can always just talk to any of our councillors and clerk in person.
- For those who wish to receive relevant information by email, please email Sarah-Jane at parish.clerk@eastharpstreeparish.org to let her know that she can include you on our email distribution list.
- For those on Facebook, Sarah-Jane now posts some information on the EH Village Facebook site.
- For those with access to the internet, do take a look at our website if you have not already done so.

Planning matters

EHPC responded to 14 planning applications last year. Six were technical applications such as tree works, variations or PV panels. Four were for extensions to existing houses. Four were to build new houses on infill sites within the EH housing development boundary. In total these sought to build 8 new houses, of which 3 have since been

withdrawn, and the other 5 remain pending a decision as of writing. EHPC invests time, not only in reviewing planning applications, but also in monitoring and trying to influence changes to planning rules and responding to statutory consultations. Thanks in particular to Pam Carver and Richard Davis for their vigilance on such matters. Of particular note this year was the launch of the New Local Plan Options public consultation in February. This proposes many changes to our local planning policies. If you have not already had a look at these I would encourage you to do so and let your voice be heard. The deadline for responses is 16 April 2024.

Probably the most significant change is proposals for deciding where to build new housing. Currently, EH is assessed in the draft plan as “not relatively sustainable” due to lack of sustainable transport and facilities and therefore designated as a “Community-Led Growth” village. Broadly this means that, except for small infill sites, there would no allocation of new houses to be built in EH unless the community decided it wanted further houses. It would then be up to the community to approach B&NES with a community-led scheme.

There are also changes proposed to Nature & Ecosystems policies and my thanks to the East Harptree Environment Group (EHEG) for their help in putting together responses to these. Following a request from B&NES, EHPC will partner with EHEG to help put together an East Harptree Nature Action Plan. The intent is to build on the great work that EHEG has already done for our existing parish green infrastructure and help to encourage further ideas and input from the community for actions over the next 3-5 years. If you have views and ideas on such matters please make sure you let us know.

Precept and value for money

Councillors are always aware that we are spending your precept monies and always aim to secure value for money. EHPC constantly strives to keep costs down and find cost savings wherever possible especially in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis.

The precept for 2024/25 was set at £16,000. This is a below-inflation increase after adjusting to account for extra houses occupied this year.

Spending our parish Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding

During this year a number of investments have been made from CIL funds. This funding arises when new dwellings are built in our parish. Funds must be spent within 5 years of receipt or returned to B&NES. Full details of what qualifies and how to make an application for funding are set out on our website. A big thank you to all those who have submitted applications for funding projects.

During this year £25k supported maintenance and improvements of the Village Hall building; £5k was invested to fund start-up costs for the “Save the Waldy” campaign to help secure essential central parking capacity; £9k was invested to fund the creation of the EH Arts Hub and £7k for a new storage facility for the EH Playing Field. More details can be found on our website. Decisions on supporting CIL applications are taken at our monthly meetings. Please come along and let us know your views on which you wish to support. Finally, I cannot end without congratulating Hazel Rider on her Chelwood Rotary Club Community Award for services to the youth and older members of the community. Very well deserved.

That is it for another year. Fingers crossed that we’ll all be meeting up again soon in the Waldy.

Andrew Jones - April 2024