



MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF ANSTEY PARISH COUNCIL HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY, 14TH APRIL 2014 COMMENCING AT 7.30 PM

Present: Andrew Marchant (Chairman)
Mandy Parker (Vice chair) and secretary to Village Hall Committee
Simon Bagnall
Stephen Wylie

Others Present: Tony Pledger - Chairman of Village Hall Committee
Nick Kirkpatrick – Treasurer of Village Hall Committee
Tom Sealey – booking clerk Village Hall

CC Rose Cheswright
Alison Norfolk
Wendy Hilliar
Paul Abbey
Colin Smith
Alfred and Julie Engers
Ray Godfrey
Ken Emberson
PSCO Amanda Higham
5-6 other parishioners arrived

Anne Grimsdale
Neil Richards
Lyn Abbey
Sue Smith
Mary and Anthony Pearce
Tom Clark
Daphne Bailey
Adrian and Alison Cosser
PCSO Tom Clark

Officers present: Caroline Jones (Clerk)

1. Apologies for Absence Apologies were received from Cllr Pledger, Cllr Oxley and the Hamiltons

2. Declarations of Interest – none

3. Minutes of the AGM held on Monday 22rd April 2013

The Chairman read through the minutes from last year's meeting. He requested any changes or comments, none received. The Chairman duly signed the minutes from the last meeting, 22nd April 2013 as being a true record of the meeting.

4. Chairman's Report the Chairman read his Report to those present at the meeting.

Thank you for attending and welcome to our joint annual Parish Council and Village Hall meeting.

As always I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their attendance and input which implemented the smooth running of the Parish Council affairs over the last 12 months especially Clive Hall who resigned from the Parish Council, I would like to thank him for his past valued input. I take this opportunity to welcome as Clive's replacement David Oxley, whose enthusiasm is already evident and we all look forward to working with him in the future. Amanda Parker has indicated that she would be happy to move aside to allow some more new blood into the Parish Council, so if there is anyone here who would like to be put forward to stand on the Parish Council or if you have any suggestions, please let me know.

I would also like to take the time in thanking The Parish Council clerk Caroline Jones for the superb support that she gives me as Chairman and the rest of the Parish Council in the arranging of meetings, agendas and keeping us informed of all local and district council machinations. I also thank Councillor Rose Cheswright and congratulate her on her being elected a County Councillor, and whilst being aware of her extended workload, look forward to our close working relationship with her.

Thanks also to our PCSO Amanda Higham who keeps us up to date with all local policing concerns which fortunately are of a very low count at present.

ANSTEY PARISH COUNCIL



This year on the Parish Council we have experienced the expected and ongoing battle conversing and reporting with the highways. I believe we are now on top of these and repairs appear to be much quicker in being remedied. We have had a few village planning applications to consider, none which have proved to be too controversial, but none the less we have hopefully considered each one on its merit and responded in what we have thought the village's best interest. The largest application was the Anstey Quarry which although is in the Parish of Anstey only affects a handful of residents, it requested a time extension to winning and working chalk for a further 4 years, which was granted.

Again, I hope everyone appreciates that the village is kept in a respectable and tidy condition and would like to thank David Moule for his constant patrols and vigilance.

Last year I talked about the playing fields and how we could utilise the money that we received from the "new homes bonus", we are now in the process of arranging repairs of existing play equipment and adding some extra pieces, again any further suggestions would be most welcome.

St George's church still receive assistance from the Parish Councils funds to assist with the grass cutting and puts this to good use with the church yard looking much loved and especially at this time of year when it looks superb. The chapel now arranges the cutting of its own grass through volunteers and doesn't rely on contributions from the Parish Council.

There have been some concerns about the phone box in the village, I remind you that a number of years ago, the Parish Council did have the foresight to have it listed and it is therefore still the responsibility of BT to retain it and maintain it, we have requested a paint and replacement glass program and have been assured of this work later this year. If there are any ideas on what we could use the phone box for please contact us, Meesden have their defibrillator, some have suggested a book exchange, all suggestions welcome!

Again as I informed you last year I have attended many District Planning meetings, most unfortunately a complete waste of time as East Herts had put off again publishing its new District Plan, the draft plan has now been published and put out for consultation. Anstey itself is not under threat from as development it is classified as a tier 3 village, but the delay in publishing the draft plan has made it redundant in Buntingford as some large planning applications which were initially refused permission have now been passed after appeal to the planning inspectorate. Whilst as I said Anstey as a village isn't affected, our amenities are, our doctors surgeries, schools and transport infrastructure will come under great strain and will have a negative effect on our community and it is to this end I ask you all to comment on the draft district plan about your present difficulties in these fields and how you have concerns over the future with this extra uncontrolled development, the consultation closes on the 22nd May.

The village website is moving forward slowly and we require someone to correlate the information and make it an attractive asset for the present and future inhabitants, if anyone has the time, enthusiasm and skills please let us know.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the village hall committee for their efforts in managing the village hall, it is much appreciated.

As always I would like to thank the village fair committee for their hard work in planning and delivering Anstey Fair and the much needed funds to the different recipients in the village and also Adrian and Alison Cossar for allowing the village to take over their lovely grounds at Anstey Bury.

Thanks also go out to John and Patricia Hamilton for the newsletter editing, Simon and Liz Bagnall for the help with Newsletter production, Mike Thompson for his assistance in auditing the PC accounts and finally the weekly diary which is circulated by Ian Jennings one of the newest and most useful village assets, many thanks to Ian.

Chairman - Andrew Marchant



5. 2013-14 Statement of Accounts

These were explained. The New Homes Bonus is being put aside for capital expenditure towards the playing field and one off village expenditure. The bonus is payable for 3 years. The Accounts were agreed and signed off for the internal audit.

6. Village Hall AGM Report

The Village Hall chairman stated that from 1st April 2015 the festival hall will not be available to hire without new committee members joining and began his report;

Introduction

The Festival Hall's part of the meeting will comprise two parts. Firstly we'll discuss the routine business including the state of the account – this will be very much a summary because our next actions with regard to maintenance etc are strongly dependent upon the outcome of the second part, which is a discussion of the future of the Hall – a discussion we've forewarned with various e-mails, personal contact and via the village diary.

Part 1 - General

<i>The Committee:</i>	<i>Tony Pledger</i>	<i>Chairman</i>
	<i>Tom Sealy</i>	<i>Bookings & Maintenance</i>
	<i>Nick Kirkpatrick</i>	<i>Treasurer</i>
	<i>Mandy Parker</i>	<i>Secretary</i>

Special thanks to Tom who bears the brunt of the Hall's day to day running and maintenance.

Maintenance: We now have quotations for 3 maintenance projects, our approach to 2 of which will depend on the outcome of Part 2 of the meeting:

Repairs to the roof and guttering – these will be progressed anyway because they will avoid massive bills in the longer term.

Routine refurbishment of the drive and car parks – attention to pot holes, redressing, and drainage to prevent the large 'sheep dip' puddle which forms on the lower drive.

Refurbishment of the heaters which have sadly proved less reliable than anticipated.

We are considering a drawable curtain to divide the upper and lower halls to save on heating when committees etc use the lower hall only. Note the paintings in the lower Hall, by Gill Beddington, our founder's wife, who sadly passed away during the year – there are more which will be cycled through.

Pattern of usage: Use of the Hall has continued to decline. The new carpet bowls club were a welcome winter time regular user, for which we offered them a supportive introductory rate. Band rehearsals have declined and income from private functions was half that of the previous year.

Treasurers Report

A written summary account was presented to the meeting and is attached to this report.

We thank the Fair Committee for their generous donation of £1850, and the Dance Committee for donating the profit from the pre-Christmas dance to the Hall.

Part One – Open Forum

One resident asked how much electricity costs in the winter period and it was agreed that some bookings are not necessarily being charged enough – this will be monitored. She also stated that the potholes need to be kept filled and the light needs to be lit in the car park. The Chairman confirmed that the light had been fixed in the car park.



The Village Hall Chairman confirmed that the electrical maintenance is the 5 year inspection fee and standard maintenance.

Another resident asked if 2 years of figures could be provided for review in the future as a comparison. Tony confirmed that Band usage was down, private functions were double last year. Bowls are new and the Hormead Hall (now shut) bookings have been welcomed.

Part 2 – Discussion re the Future of the Hall

This discussion has been looming for some time but is now timely due to a few facts which I'll make clear.

The morale of the Committee is low. We undertook the job partly as an act of community spirit but find that the Hall seems to be of little importance to the community. The job has turned into one which is essentially that of maintaining an under used building. This might sound dramatic but think of the functions you enjoyed in the Hall during the last few months, and those you're looking forward to in the coming months. Times have changed.

The pre-school no longer use the Hall for technical reasons beyond our control. They were never a source of profit but at least their regular use made the Hall feel part of the community. It was some consolation...

A few facts:

The Hall is not financially viable and hasn't been for a long time. The revenue has halved in the last ten years. Our available funds continue to decline in real terms – and that's in spite of, during the past 5 years, our winning £6500 in grants and receiving over £1000 p.a. from the Fair proceeds, all of which has been spent on essential maintenance rather than extravagances.

Notable hirings spring to mind but these can give a false impression: In its first year the pre-Christmas dance was very successful, but in its second year the attendance reduced and the selling of tickets was such hard work that the committee are not keen to hold another – so even a once yearly dance is difficult to sustain. I mentioned the carpet bowls club as a new user but they have been on an introductory rate of £10 rather than the standard £35 per evening and it is not certain that they could bear an increase to the standard rate. They are the only frequent user of the Hall and of course have now adjourned for the summer.

So the Hall is not financially viable – that's the first fact.

Tom Sealy has been day to day maintenance man for half his life, doubling as booking secretary for many years. He deserves a massive thank you from the community and has protected us all from the day to day running of the Hall, acting in a role which most would probably only do on a salaried basis. Tom has signalled his intention to retire from his post in 1 year's time.

I offered my services 6 or 7 years ago as Chairman and now feel it is time to step aside – in similar timescales. Nick and Mandy feel similarly.

So putting that all together the Committee have little alternative to declare that as from 1 April next year the Hall will no longer take bookings – i.e. no longer be available for hire. This step is not taken lightly. A 'use it or lose it' encouragement seldom works, and something more fundamental is required.

This might provoke a reaction within the community, it might not. We have always stressed that we see our role as that of maintaining the Hall in a fit state for Anstey folk to use – but hardly anyone is using it. We are not inviting a load of suggestions on how the current Committee might stimulate village activities.

A few possibilities:

A new Committee with more of a fund raising and event organising mentality might come forward to try and invigorate usage and seek subsidy.

A new Committee who are happy to maintain a building which is for the most part surplus to requirements might step forward – in the hope that perhaps in the long term folk might feel more inclined to use it.



The 3rd option I have already mentioned – i.e. the Hall being unavailable for hire from 1 April next year. That is the current plan.

It would be easy to be glum about this but change is often for the good. Perhaps it's time to go with the flow rather than swim against a strengthening tide.

Open Forum

A resident asked if the village hall information could be put in the newsletter and requested that every parishioner be notified that new people need to come forward to join the committee. It was suggested that a Mothers Group may be interested. The Village Hall Chairman confirmed that the newsletter would be used to inform people in the village and that a flyer would be circulated with the newsletter giving information on the status of the village hall. A meeting will be arranged where residents can attend. This will expose the village to the situation. The Parish Council Chairman suggested a social meeting invitation with wine – a village meeting. Then a formal meeting can be held where suggestions can be made. Another resident asked if a questionnaire should be put out with the information in the newsletter.

The Parish Council Chairman suggested that people go further afield for a night out and that it must be demoralising to provide the hall where no-one uses it. If the usage continues to drop, the hall will disappear. It may need to be presented to the mothers at school or at the Fair – many parishioners do not realise that it is available to hire.

Another resident asked if the committee had requested support. The Village Hall Chairman confirmed he put in a newsletter article a year ago and send e-mails regarding the village hall asking for suggestions/improvements. No responses were received from the community.

A discussion followed concerning other village halls and the usage and the fact that Meesden Hall was favoured because it had a stage. Information on how the hall was bequeathed to the community by Hugh Beddington was given. Another resident stated that Barkway had a cinema club but the Festival Hall may have poor acoustics for that type of event.

One resident asked if a village get-together should be arranged, and another asked what could be done with the asset – could it be used as a shop or library. If the land was sold, the money raised could be used to provide a new hall.

Cllr Parker stated that a suggestion had been given that the church could be used if the Pews were taken up but confirmed that it would be difficult to heat the church for events.

One resident suggested that the size of kitchen was too small for catering, and another suggested that improved facilities would increase bookings. The Village Hall Chairman confirmed that Quiz Nights had food delivered and weddings were generally in garden marquees. The hall, taking 100 people, was ideal for parties but no bookings were taken for those under the age of 21. Tom has maintained the hall for 12 years and Tony has been Chairman for 6 years providing the hall for those to enjoy. One resident asked if better signage could be made available as the current signage was not prominent and the hall could easily be missed. There is a decline in usage for fitness classes. The school use the hall for their Christmas production and twice weekly for PE – any closure of the hall would be detrimental to the school. The Village Hall had three meetings per year and they needed new people to join the committee.

A meeting date of October was proposed and information be made available at The Fair.

7. Open Forum – Parish Council

Residents continued to discuss The Village Hall and the Chairman thanked all those who attended and closed the meeting at 9pm.