**M I N U T E S**

**Annual Parish Meeting 2023**

**Held on 10th May 2023 at the Witham Friary Village Hall**

In attendance: WF Parish Council ( W Sheppard, F Nicholls, M Ferrari, S Coate J Knowles) J Gregory Clerk and Minute Taker for the purpose of this meeting)

Members and Community Groups: 13

1. **Apologies**

Councillor Sewell

1. **Welcome**

Introducing the meeting was Chair of the Witham Friary Parish Council W Sheppard who thanked those in attendance for coming along. It was nice to see so many faces.

1. **Approve any known Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Minutes of the APM 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by Cllr Sheppard for the purposes of this meeting.

1. **Matters Raised by Residents – open forum**

T Hyde advised that the drains by the bridge were blocked, top of the hill by Private Drive and those by the Railway Compound. The Chair stated that we had a lengthsman to address and T Hyde advised that this may be the situation with exposing the drain for Highways to clear but clearing it had been advised by Highways that they would need specialist equipment as it was very congested. This would be followed up by the Clerk with Highways initially then with specialist contractors if this proved uneventful.

Village gates and Information Board was raised and this was an ongoing project with the History Society and Sustainable Witham.

Questions were asked of the finances of which a full report would be given later in the meeting.

1. **Annual Report by Community Groups**

**Village Hall**

Received monies as part of the COVID grant that has kept them going financially. A clerk has been appointed to look at online bookings for which there was a website and to keep finance in check. Volunteers in the Hall Committee had installed wifi, and were looking at Health and Safety and a Charity Commission Constitution. It is well used by groups such as History Society, Post office, Yoga, Band practice and the Take Away Catering business. It was recently the venue for the Coronation Breakfast which the Parish Council grant aided.

There had been 2 litter picks with good support and covered areas up to Gare Hill with Truddoxhill volunteers meaning that the whole of the valley had been cleared.

Finger posts have been repaired and refurbished including the one on the B3092 of the Cheese Show ground.

**Witham Friary Churchyard**

The Churchyard remains open for mortal remains or ashes of villages or those with some connection with Witham Friary. There are several hundred recorded graves and space for several hundred more.

The PC has gratefully donated £500 in grant monies to allow a maintenance schedule to be adopted merging some cutting with designated areas of purposefully rewilding to attract wildlife.

Priorities continue with repairing the boundary wall at some stage and planning to involve a scented area for those with limited sight. Longer term, there are plans to install some bench seating for an area of peace and reflection.

The Churchwardens have provided the meeting with a schedule of maintenance for 2023/24.

**Witham Friary History Society**

This groups’ year runs from September to April. Its been a highly successful year with regulars of around 30-40. They fundraise through quizzes and competitions some of which are highly competitive. There has been a succession of speakers on various topics. Next Saturday the group will be the village focus for Frome Local History with a themed event. There will be talks, walks and much to be learned about the various historic buildings in the village culminating in a walk to the monastery in the afternoon. The day starts at 10am in the Village Hall and all are welcome.

**Sustainable Witham**

This group started in December 2019 it now has 20 members and 5 trustees, its aim is to promote sustainability and work co-operatively for the benefit of the village. In the past year they have planted 60 whips from the Woodland Trust around the recreation ground and look for more planting sites. Some members volunteer with the Heal and Selwood projects. There has been a whassailing event, nature trails for children and a family cycling event planned on the 11th with a “cycle and recycle” event for swopping bikes and they hope to have a pop up repair man available.

**Witham Friary Cricket**

The Cricket team was in good shaped. Fixtures and insurance details have been furnished to the Clerk. There will be an “allstars” and “dynamos” teams focusing on those younger members of the village. There has been no ECB budget for advertising so WFCC have provided posters that they have distributed to schools. The U13s were due to start training tonight but the weather (absolutely pouring down) may have hampered that. They have sought the use of an ECB Cricket Coach and it is envisage for the younger ones to have 2 or 3 games in the locality. This project is very much a trial to see if it is sustainable moving forward. Nets have been refurbished and there are plans for an artificial wicket of around £8k. They would also look at side screens however these would not be the permanent type. Obviously there was plans for a changing facility on the ground at some point in the future.

**Witham Friary Youth Football Club**

The football team is financially very healthy. It is still in its infancy having only been set up for 1 year however the team have had successes and are League and County Champions – the children of around 20 are talented and successful. They would like to work with the Cricket in helping to succeed with the facility required.

They are aware of some teething issues with residents and felt they needed to understand better the specific issues although were aware of the parking situation that they are addressing with monitors on the car park gate.

They advised that they had some issues with interaction on social media and their Easter Bingo was not particularly well attended by the Village.

The Chair advised that villagers aren’t seeing any give back to the community and highlighted that he is aware of the restrictions in age groups set by the FA. The football club felt they have encouraged children on match days when games are going on but no child from the village has applied to join the football club despite their efforts.

The Chair advised that the matter of usage would be decided in the Annual Council meeting following this meeting.

**Conkers Group**

Four large events have been held during the year including the Duck Race, Sports Day, Bonfire Night and the annual Conkers event attracting International acclaim! Monies raised has been split between 3 charities -Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance, FCN and Unicef. Conkers thanked villagers for their continued support of events.

1. **Annual Report of the Parish Council**

The Parish Council Chair Will Sheppard commenced his report from a personal perspective indicating that whilst he had been on the Parish Council sometime had not expected to be thrust into the Chair position quite so quickly but health concerns with Hugo had taken place and thankfully Hugo is alive and kicking and so the story begins. Thanks given to the members of the Parish Council for their support during this transition. Special mentions to Fred Nicholls for his guidance and to the Clerk Jen Gregory for keeping him in check and trying to get him organised!

The Chair paid tribute to members of the Parish who passed away in the year.

He stated on the vibrancy of the village shown tonight with the very different and indeed quite a collection of different groups with everyone kept in the loop with the WF Newsletter prepped by Mike Gorman each month. Other mentions were Mrs Jess Hyde for her postings on the Village facebook and to Pete, Lorna and Emma at the Seymour Arms who have had a difficult year themselves but continue to support the village.

There is a lot planned going forward not least with the Recreation Field, Play patch and Dovecote. The PC was currently waiting on costs and surveys before putting plans and budgets into place.

1. **Witham Friary Parish Council Financial Report**

The Clerk gave an overview of the Year Ending 2023 noting the year end figure of £29631.55. Expenditure was up 202% because of pre-covid invoices not being produced including around 6k for grass cutting dating back to 2019. Unexpectedly there was a chunk of money to be spent on replenishing the play park and this will continue piecemeal over a period of time hopefully with some grant aid. We have moved from a Village Website to a Parish Website. Jubilee costs were unbudgeted and with the tenant leaving the Dovecote there has been some extra expenditure in the interim. Whilst the balance on the accounts looks healthy we have to bear in mind ringfenced amounts of 20k for the recreation ground facility and professional fees.

Council will be reminded that the Distgen monies wont last forever and may need to consider other income streams or rises in precept if they wish to continue and not face cuts to service in the village.

1. **Vote of thanks to all participants**

The Chair recognised the fantastic community spirit in the village which has shone through over the past year. The Jubilee and Coronation events has meant the village has come together in a way that we might never see again. Thanks expressed to all involved in making “this place in the sticks” a vibrant village

Meeting closed at 8.03pm