

Sydenham Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 26th May 2023 at 7.00pm in the Old School Room

Michael May welcomed everyone and outlined the format of the evening. Thanks and recognition were given to Alison Isherwood and Cheryl Belson who have stepped down from the Parish Council.

Report from the Cricket Club – Mark Jones:

The team are in rude health and had a successful last season, winning 11 out of 15 matches. There is a fantastic camaraderie in the team, which has an increasing core membership of villagers. There is a great relationship with Aston Rowant, and Sydenham play on their ground. Training is held on a Wednesday at the nets in Sydenham play area. In June there was the annual bike ride which took in several local pubs – a non-strenuous and enjoyable event. The Cricket Club will be doing the BBQ at Sydenham Fayre this year and are looking forward to it. They appreciate the continued support of the village.

Report from the Old School Room – Mark Kermack:

The 2022 accounts show income of £6,500, which consists of 40% hire income, 20% from fundraising and 40% from the SODC covid grant. Expenditure of £4,000 includes utilities, cleaning, insurance and maintenance, but having a surplus is the result of a non-typical year!

The current account has £13,000, with a redecoration due in two years' time. At the November meeting of the OSR committee it was decided to keep hire charges at their current level to stay competitive. There are occasional party lets, together with regular art and fitness classes.

The sliding door between the large and small hall has been eased, the boiler and heating control have been replaced, as has the maintenance ladder.

New Terms and Conditions for hirers have been introduced in line with other local halls.

Report from the WI – Adele Stancliffe:

The membership is 22, with three new members and others having moved away. The average attendance is 16-20. Meeting speakers have included a very amusing taxi driver, the Rector's account of life and careers, and lively Scottish dancing. In May there was a Bavarian recital in church and a talk on growing up in Bavaria. During the August break there was a village walk, and a bluebell walk in April. A visit to the Calendar Girls musical in Oxford was another highlight, and various parties must also be added! The WI is happy and thriving.

A report from the Church and choir – Fiona Kermack, Church Warden:

The church is a wonderful focal point of our village. The visitor book highlights the number of researchers looking up their ancestors, where June Cray's wonderful research is a helpful resource, and Rachel has documented the graves in the churchyard.

The spire refurbishment boarding is weathering nicely, and the next project is to replace spotlights with LED lighting which will look nicer and save money.

Thanks go to Ken for always lending a hand, to all those who support the fundraising efforts, to Nick and the volunteers working in the churchyard, to Gilly for looking after the designated wildlife sanctuary areas and keeping the Queen's garden looking beautiful, and to Ann and Madeleine and the dedicated cleaning team. Thanks too to Adele and Rosemary and helpers for flowers, to the Church family for winding the bells and Ken for ringing them. Services include Evensong and Communion, with a pet service taking place in August, and a Remembrance service. The Christmas Services were very popular, with the Crib Service having a record-breaking attendance of 120. Shrove Tuesday was celebrated with pancake races, and there was an Easter Egg hunt in the family service. St Mary's took part in the annual Ride and Stride. The Christmas Fayre was supported with wonderful village spirit and will take place on 2nd December this year. It is a busy church, and thanks go to the ministry team. New faces are always encouraged to keep St Mary's alive and vibrant. Churches are threatened with increasing charges and closure so please come along!

Signed Date

The choir – the Sydenham Singers – is led by Chris Hood and is not just a church choir. It meets every Tuesday and is thriving with growing numbers. There is the annual choir outing, and the choir performs at other venues. Over 70 others joined for the Coronation celebrations in the church.

Sydenham Newsletter – Rachel Blake:

The newsletter team includes Fiona who deals with all the advertising and Heather for the accounts. The Newsletter costs around £300 per edition and is issued roughly every six weeks. The team would love more contributions, points of view and pictures. Pieces on village events are welcomed and it is nice to get other people involved. The newsletter can be shared electronically if readers prefer this to a hard copy, just let us know.

Report from Munday's Charity – Paul Stancliffe:

The Charity known as Munday's Gift was established after "a house and three and twenty acres of arable land in the common fields of Kingston Blount" were left in his 1660 Will by Robert Munday to the "poor of Sydenham for ever". It is interesting that 1660 was the year of the Coronation of King Charles II and here we are celebrating King Charles III's Coronation in 2023. Robert Munday died two years later in 1662. The Charity's original purpose was also to support the Church, and to provide a fund for any "village emergency", but in 2010 the Charity Commission approved the following addition to paragraph 17 (General Benefit of Poor) in the rules of the Charity: "Subject to the payments aforesaid, the yearly income of the Charity shall be applied by the Trustees in making payments to any group/organisation or amenity operating within the Parish of Sydenham, whose purposes are charitable. After the Enclosure award in 1823/26 the Charity became owner of the 10 acre "Upper Field" at the top of Sewell's Lane close to Crowell Brook, and 6 acre "Bounty Holly" accessed from the footpath beside the Old Chapel, where the remaining allotments are sited. Last year the 'Platinum Thicket' was planted in the north-west corner of "Bounty Holly", to mark Queen Elizabeth II's 70th Jubilee, as part of the Queen's Green Canopy. The aim of the Queen's Green Canopy was to encourage the planting of trees to create a legacy in honour of Her Majesty's leadership of the Nation, and to benefit future generations.

The remaining village allotments are in "Bounty Holly" closest to the village, and opposite them is $\frac{3}{8}$ of an acre, close to Crowell brook, which was sown as a wild flower area. The rest of the six acres is let to William Browning. The Parish's Footpath 5 runs through the middle of "Bounty Holly" towards Chalford and Footpath 4 runs along the southern boundary and then diagonally across the Archers land to the Kingston Stert T junction. "The Upper Field" is let to Peter Quanton.

Again last year William Browning's plans were thwarted, this time by a crop of sow thistles which must have been dormant in the soil and grew amazingly after the ground had been disturbed. As the sow thistles are an annual they have not reappeared again this year and there is a thick growth of grass as well as some Sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*). Sainfoin (known as 'Holy Hay') is an attractive plant, producing large spikes of pink flowers in early summer which are a magnet for insects. It is drought resistant and its many attributes include being very good for cattle as well as invaluable to pollinators, attracting a wide range of bumble and honey bees, butterflies and many other invertebrates.

The Trustees would welcome any suggestions for encouraging more villagers to make use of the allotments. The charity contributed £400 towards the cost of the new gateway by the Old Chapel last July, and paid £336 for hedge trimming of "Bounty Holly" in '20, '21 and '22. At the end of 2022/23 the Charity's reserves are £2,247. The present rent of allotments is £10 per plot, or £5.00 per half plot per year. The Trustees of the Charity are appointed by the Parish Council, and during 2022/23 they were Paul Stancliffe, Richard Cooper and Gordon McLeod.

Report from Sydenham Fayre – Cheryl Belson:

This is an exciting event after three years off. Credit goes to the committee, who were pleased to welcome new members. Thank you to the villagers on behalf of the committee, it is a real village affair – please bring friends and dogs and let's celebrate!

Signed Date

Report from the Chair of the Parish Council – Michael May:

Sadly both Alison and Cheryl have stepped down from the PC. In particular, Alison has served for 20 years and has been the backbone of the PC ever since I joined some 8 years ago, we will miss her greatly. We have two new Parish Councillors, Vicki Roe and Tara Glen and are looking forward to working together for the next few years. Vicki has already taken up the role of Vice Chair, and Tara and Vicki are going to look the social media side of things.

There have been a number of achievements in the village over the last year:

Openreach

It has taken a couple of years and a lot of badgering but Openreach delivered the fibre network for the remainder of the village and so everyone has the option to sign up for highspeed internet, irrespective of whether they signed up originally for a voucher.

Footpaths

Sewells Lane has been transformed with the clearance of lots of vegetation – it had not been done for many years and hardcore has been put down in the wettest section and seemed to survive the winter pretty well. The bottom end of Sewells Lane by the bridge is going to be regraded in the next few weeks to address the flooding issues. Thanks to Paul Grafham and Chris Cooper for all your help. Thanks also to Paul for the extra hardcore put down at the top end of The Jays footpath to address the muddy areas.

A new gate has been installed at entrance to the field accessing the allotments, which was funded by a combination of TOE grant and Munday's Charity.

The standby generator now has a connection at the OSR which can be used in village emergencies.

Playing field and village maintenance

Huge thanks to Dave for all the work he does to keep the playing field and verges and greens in such lovely condition, I hope everyone appreciates how much time he devotes to all these activities, we would be lost without him!! He also has a new yellow speed machine to cut the grass which he is very proud of.

You will also have noticed the flower tubs around the village in various locations, huge thanks to Hayley for organising them, they look great.

A plea for the Working Group: occasionally we need help for working parties to undertake various maintenance works etc and Nick Potts has had great success in bringing this together but volunteers have started to drop off with only the same few people attending. Please see if you can help next time the call goes out.

B4445 chicane

After much effort from Sydenham PC, Chinnor Parish Council has agreed to deliver the chicane on the B4445 on the Chinnor side of the Emmington Inn junction. We are providing £22,000 of funding for the project through OCC CIL monies which we applied for a couple of years ago and our Councillors Priority fund. Hopefully the chicane will be installed in the next few months.

Village 20mph limit

The village 20mph limit project was approved earlier this year by OCC and has been partly implemented. Final bits such as roundels on the road will be applied in the next few weeks.

Munday's Charity

Paul has given the report on the Munday Charity and just to say that John Church has agreed to join the Trustees of the Charity and help the transition over the next few years as Paul, Richard and Gordon might wish to step down after many years of service.

OSR Trustees

With Alison stepping down from the PC we needed another PC representative on the OSR Committee and Dave Wilkins has agreed to step up to the plate.

Nett zero village idea

As a final topic, I would just like to test the reaction to an idea which we have had which could be a major change for the village.

With all the energy issues over the last year or so and number of rural villages have been investigating and a few have delivered nett zero projects (Swaffham Priory in Cambridgeshire) and we want to gauge if this is something the

Signed Date

village would be interested in. Bear in mind that no work has been done yet so we don't have any answers just questions but if the view is it is worth investigation, we would look into getting a feasibility study undertaken to see what might or might not be possible – no guarantee there is a viable project.

What might be the objectives of a nett zero project?

- Village wide zero carbon energy network to future proof and provide resilience into the future
- Decarbonise the village
- Consistent long term charges, little affected by global factors etc and comparable with gas/electricity
- Investment opportunity

What might the project consist of:

- Most appropriate solution(s) not know yet but could be:
 - Ground source heat pump network
 - Ground source heat pump nodes
 - Solar
 - Wind
 - Hydrogen

This would be a very large project, much bigger than anything the village has done before so would need some significant commitment from a number of villagers over a few years. Initially a feasibility study will cost in the region of £40k-£50k and we would need to get grant funding for this, although a villager who works for Centrica Nett Zero has offered to help initially and it may be possible that Centrica would get the funding and undertake the initial feasibility study. Others who have shown interest might also have a bit of time but will need volunteers with finance and setting up companies as well if this is to progress.

There followed an interesting discussion of the nett zero idea, and the meeting concluded with a light-hearted quiz all about the village, which was hosted by David Wilkins.

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