ASHAMPSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in The Jubilee Hall On Monday 19th May 2025 at 6.30pm

Present: Councillors R Fisken, A Dick, and G Light

In attendance: Jean Lindsell (Clerk) and Cllr Laura Coyle (WBC)

Apologies: Cllr Goodman

Cllr Roger Fisken chaired the meeting.

Minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting:
The Minutes of the meeting held on 20th May 2024 were approved and signed by the Chair.

Chairman's Report:
The year 2024-25 has been a fairly quiet one so far as the Parish Council is concerned. This is partly because our clerk, Jean Lindsell, has been astute in anticipating concerns or issues that might arise and has seen to it that either she or the council deals with any problems expeditiously. We are also fortunate that Cllr Laura Coyle, who represents us on West Berkshire Council, is very well acquainted with how local government functions and is willing to advise us on significant issues both by attending Parish Council meetings and by email where necessary. There has been a good deal of discussion regarding the road closure in Bradfield for the purpose of carrying out restoration work on one of the buildings of Bradfield College. Cllr Coyle kept us informed of the discussions that had been held between the college and West Berkshire Council and the concessions that had been made following concerns raised by many local residents and businesses. We are grateful to Cllr Coyle for her help and support.

The number of Parish Councillors remains at four: we were successful in recruiting a fifth councillor, Joshua Goodman, several months ago but the total has dropped back to four following the decision of Cllr Rita Butler to retire from the council in order to concentrate on her developing career as a playwright and theatre director! Rita confirmed that she would continue to administer the village website. We will continue with our efforts to increase the size of the council back to six. Regarding the remaining councillors, Graham Light is our representative on ART and has taken on responsibility for footpaths. Councillor Alex Dick continues to update us on police matters, both at meetings and also through his WhatsApp messaging service which provides speedy information about possible criminal activity in the area. One can join by contacting Alex at alex.dick@ashampsteadpc.org.uk. I continue to manage the defibrillator which, I am pleased to report, remains 'rescue ready' and which has just been supplied with a new battery. It is checked regularly to ensure that it is fully operational.

The Council was asked to make observations on a small number of planning applications this year, most of which were not especially controversial. As a council we have continued to scrutinise applications carefully as regards their possible impact on surrounding properties - we try to make sure that developments do not become too massive - their likely effects on infrastructure such as sewage and the possibility that they may adversely affect the darkness of our skies. The Council has continued its policy of delegating the decision regarding observations on planning applications to the Clerk, after consultation with all Councillors. In the event of more controversial proposals, the Chair or Councillors may decide that an extraordinary meeting should be called. No such meetings were considered necessary over the last year. Councillors will endeavour to seek the views of residents thought to be affected by any proposals but such residents will be advised to submit their own observations to WBC if they object to, or indeed, support a planning application.

The Clerk continues to report potholes and other highway issues to West Berkshire Council on a regular basis.
The Council is also responsible for providing salt bins and maintaining the level of salt. Consequently I must ask residents to ensure that the salt is only used on the hills for which the bins are provided. If you believe that they are too low, please report the matter to her at clerk@ashampsteadpc.org.uk.
Overflowing of the village litter bin should also be reported to the Clerk at clerk@ashampsteadpc.org.uk.
Fly tipping can be reported directly to WBC on https://www.westberks.gov.uk/report-litter-and-fly-tipping.

I am sorry to report that the Council has still not been able to arrange for speed monitoring to be carried out in the village, despite having identified a volunteer and having nominated the sites where we wish to monitor. This delay was initially due to the prolonged unavailability of the speed detection (SID) equipment which is borrowed from West Berkshire Council. This has been resolved and our volunteer is now looking at his availability and will then book the equipment and carry out the monitoring.

The Council continues to look after the Green and its lay-by in Chapel Lane; the Green itself is owned by Yattendon Estates but leased to the Parish Council for a nominal sum. After much debate and some delay we were finally able to arrange for contractors to install rustic fencing along the edge of the Green in September 2024. The fence seems in keeping with its surroundings and has survived the winter without incident. We continue to pay for the cutting of the grass on the recreation ground and the Green. We had also allowed sums in the budget to meet the cost of tree surgery and essential playground repairs on behalf of ART. More recently, at the end of April, our contractors applied weedkiller to the recreation field in order to protect the long-term health of the grass. We are grateful to Cllr Light for erecting and then dismantling the poles and barrier tape used to keep people and dogs off the field while the work was being done.

I would like to thank those residents who took part in the annual litter pick in mid-April. We had fine weather, as usual, and a willing and efficient team of volunteers. We are, as always, grateful to West Berkshire Council for supplying the litter-picking equipment and removing the collected waste so quickly.

As regards finances, the Council received a precept of £9,000 for 2024/25. Income was spent on the following recurring items: Clerk's salary; grass cutting; maintenance; dog and other waste collection; donations to local charities; a donation to Ashampstead PCC re the upkeep of the churchyard. The council decided not to continue with financial support for West Berkshire libraries because of the planned withdrawal of the mobile library service. We also received a request from Vicars Game to assist them with the provision of a new dog waste bin at the end of the footpath that borders their property. We agreed with them that, after the start of the new financial year, we would pay for the cost of purchasing the bin but that they would bear the costs of its installation and would pay the ongoing charges for the bin to be emptied. No payments have been made towards H.M.S. Ashampstead this year but we continue to discuss its future with ART via Cllr Graham Light. The precept for the current year (2025/26) is £10,080. It was resolved that for 2025/26 General Reserves would be £7,014. The increase in precept is related to various cost pressures, including an increase in the cost of grass cutting, an appropriate increase in the clerk's remuneration based on changes to national pay scales and an increase in the charges levied on us for waste collection.

In January the council received a request for assistance from Ashampstead Recreational Trust - they asked us if we would consider making a donation of £550 towards the upkeep and development of the Jubilee Hall. We were advised that the number of people using the hall has increased and there is a need for suitable storage space for equipment, notably for the gymnastics group and the art club. We were also informed that new trustees had joined ART who were actively looking at how to attract more income into the village and, as Ashampstead's local charity, ART hoped the Council would look favourably on their request. The council acknowledged the importance of ART as a village charity and decided to make the requested donation of £550. £250 was paid in 2024/25 and the remaining £300 will be funded from the 2025/26 budget.

If you have any questions regarding the above or other matters concerning the parish please contact the Clerk.

Parishioners Questions: No parishioners present.

Cllr Fisken asked for thoughts on ways to recruit new councillors.
Cllr Dick and Cllr Fisken suggested potential parishioners who they will approach.
Clerk to ask Vicars Game to display a recruitment poster.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 6.45p.m.