

WESTCOTT PARISH COUNCIL

Barry Malki – Clerk

clerk@[westcottparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@westcottparishcouncil.gov.uk)

www.westcottparishcouncil.gov.uk

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 14th May 2024 at 7:30pm at Westcott Cricket Club

Attendees

Cllr Sue Pusey (Chairman) (SP), Cllr Grahame Pusey (GP), Cllr Sue Lacey (SL), Cllr Kevin Ready (KR), Cllr Jo Hooper (JH), Cllr Tony Wilkinson (TW).
Ward Councillor – Cllr Ashley Waite

Part One

1. Welcome from the Chairman.

SP welcomed attendees to the meeting.

2. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 9th May 2023

It was resolved that the minutes were a true and accurate record.

3. Guest Speaker – Nigel Mackenzie(NM), Westcott Venture Park.

NM gave a presentation on the management and future plans for Westcott Venture Park, noting the following items:

- There were 80 different organisations based at the park, with around 900 staff..
- That the Parks history of Rocket Propulsion innovation was continuing to this day.
- There was a historical archive being collated about the site.
- That one third of the energy used was garnered from waste and solar power.
- That the site is looking to expand, but not as a distribution hub, but focusing on science and engineering.
- That there needed to be more smaller, start-up units.
- That security is the priority for the management.
- That there was to be a new catering facility supported by the UK Space Agency, in 2025.
- That mobile reception has been improved by the installation of a new Vodaphone tower.
- That the site is now being managed by Savills.

SL asked how the lighting of the site could be improved. NM that the best way to reduce light pollution was to engage with tenants, and this will be a priority for the new manager. Some lights have been removed from Wellington Drive.

SL asked if the lights required specific planning permission. NM said he didn't believe that they were covered by the planning regulations.

JH asked if the lighting was part of the site's environmental strategy. NM confirmed that the lighting was referred to in the strategy due to its increased energy usage, and the effect on wildlife.

TW asked how the management will enforce a reduction on lighting. NM said that reducing energy bills should be a driver, and that has started to be included on leases.

One Member of the Public noted that a significant number of delivery lorries miss the turn into the site, and use Burnham Road to turn, which has deteriorated the road surface. NM asked if the situation had been improved since the satnav information had been updated on the website. Several

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members of the public confirmed that it was still an issue.

One member of the Public highlighted that the signage as you approach from Bicester is not clear as to which exit is the WVP. SP noted that the new Freight Strategy by Bucks Council should improve the situation. NM asked when the Strategy would be finalised. Cllr Waite confirmed that it just needed to be ratified by the Cabinet.

SP asked if there was a plan to remove the concrete blocks near the entrance. NM confirmed that it was unattractive and that they had suggested installing a hedge and that it would likely take place in conjunction with additional landscaping.

SP asked if the site owners would be interested in helping the village with some of the grounds maintenance on the verges. NM noted that he hadn't met with the new contractors yet but would raise it.

4. Chairmans Annual Report.

SP gave the following report.

When I come to write the Chairmans report it often feels a little like groundhog day and this year is no different. The work of the Council is often very tedious and extremely slow. It feels like one step forward and two steps back a lot of the time.

There has been no progress with the plan to purchase the land on Lower Green and very little progress with the Greenway Cycle route extension. We have however made some progress with the plan for the village green. Tenders are out for the tree planting and posts to prevent vehicle access. We haven't resolved the issue of what to do with the play surface but we are looking at it.

We have had a tree survey of the green and churchyard. There are some trees which require a little work but generally they are in good health. Work will be done to remove one from the corner of the churchyard and one or two other dead ash trees from the perimeter. This work is also out for tender. We have agreed to increase the frequency of grass cuts on the green and churchyard. It looked quite scruffy in the early part of last year and we hope to improve that this season. Unfortunately, that doesn't apply to the verges through the village. Bucks Council are apparently taking part in no mow May. I imagine our first cut will be sometime in June. As we only get two cuts a year now, we can expect the village to look scruffy right through the season.

We were extremely disappointed to hear of the plans to close the school and I would like to thank my fellow councillor Jo Hooper for organising our discussion with our MP Greg Smith and with the time she spent investigating whether there were any avenues we could take to fight it. It seems very likely it will close.

We have a vacancy on the council now due to the resignation of Cllr Hilary Vitkus. I would like to thank her for her service. So, step up people. If you would like to be part of looking after the village submit your application in writing to our clerk.

Finally thank you to my fellow councillors for their input this year. We are a small village and because of that a lot of the small jobs fall to the councillors particularly Councillor Grahame Pusey who deserves special thanks for his handyman skills and bus shelter scrubbing skills! Thank you to all my fellow Councillors. It is often a thankless task, and we only get noticed when something goes wrong!

5. Finance

BM gave an update on the finances for 23-24 noting the following.

Cash at 1 st April 2023	£34,525
Income	£67,488
Expenditure	£59,364
Cash at 31 st March 2024	£42,649

BM explained that there had been an overpayment by Bucks Council of £45,698, which was returned, and that this had artificially skewed the figures for 23-24. TW explained that the council tried to run in a neutral way by only raising as much precept as it felt necessary to cover expenditure.

6. Bucks Council Report – Cllr Ashely Waite

Cllr Waite gave the following report.

Budget

- *The budget has been one of the toughest on record with escalating costs*
- *There are 4 key areas*
 - *Children's social care*
 - *Adult social care*
 - *Home-to-school transport*
 - *Temporary accommodation*
- *These account for 71% of a total budget of around £920 million These are all regulatory items which means regardless of the cost or volume of users we have to provide the service.*
- *We now have a balanced budget that takes us through to 2027*
- *But difficult choices have had to be made which will not please every resident.*

Roads

- *One of the wettest winters on record (wettest Feb in 248 years)*
- *More teams are fixing the roads than ever before (Now at 29 Gangs)*
- *Nationally, potholes across the country, not county, are at an 8-year high at close to 8 million.*
- *The cancellation of part of hs2 will release £8 billion back into roads, but as a council, we are unsure what share we will get; this will be a long-term discussion*
- *At the last budget, however, we did release an extra £5 million for road repairs which should help recover from the winter.*
- *The street works permit team has also doubled the fines for overstaying so we will have to see what impact this has moving forward.*
- *As always, Fix My Street is the key component in reporting issues*

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Community Board

- *The 16 boards have delivered in the last year of 230 community projects across the county*
- *The board in this area as part of its priorities has delivered several projects including*
 - *School parking*
 - *Board game clubs*
 - *I'd like to borrow*
 - *I'd like a bike*
- *Particularly please that our board has the highest level of contributory funding which is a measure of quality and sustainability of the projects delivered in this area.*

Environment

- *Six additional parks have received the Green Flag Award, (the nearest is in Aylesbury)*
- *Over 200,000 extra pieces of litter have been collected with the Litter Lotto partnership*
- *The energy doctor scheme has secured £1.9m in government funding which to date has made improvements to around 100 properties in low-income housing.*
- *Five cycleway projects have been delivered with two in the immediate area.*

Helping hands

- *25 Afghan families and 1800 ukraine residents are still here and we continue to offer them support*
- *We have continued the welcome spaces across the libraries in the county*
- *The Helping Hands scheme has supported over 7500 financially vulnerable residents in the last year with emergency food and support.*
- *We have also received £400k in support from the Department of Work and Pensions to support local initiatives in several areas in Aylesbury and High Wycombe*

Bernie

- *Two 16-seater minibuses and a 13-seater with tailift and low-level step*
- *Active locally for a range of trips including old people groups, wi, sports clubs and a few local schools*
- *We have a new product which is "Bernie's runabout" which offers a self-drive option subject to licence checks*
- *But we have achieved a long-term sustainable product*

I'd like to Borrow

- *Since the launch in Feb, we have been very successful in having a full container of donations which include power tools, garden tools, baby items, and a range of other household and DIY items ready to hire.*

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- *We are keen to increase the level of donations and are happy to collect from anyone who believes they have anything to contribute.*
- *We are also keen to increase our volunteers if you have the time to help*

I'd like a Bike

- *One of the positives of the id like to borrow campaign is the establishment of the cycle recycling project, "I'd Like a Bike "*
- *We are accepting donations of bikes for all ages and renovating and recycling for a range of end users such as*
 - *Kids leaving care*
 - *Afghan and ukraine team*
 - *Low-income families through the helping hands team*

TW asked about the process of quality control on road repairs. Cllr Waite confirmed that there were no checks on patching, but large works are inspected. TW suggested that the system needs to be improved as many repairs are failing. Cllr Waite noted that the teams are still playing catch-up following the damage over the two previous winters.

JH asked if a cycleway route had been confirmed and had that had an impact on the time-limited funding. Cllr Waite stated that it hadn't been confirmed, but he wasn't sure of the status of the funding.

7. Thames Valley Police Report

No report received.

8. St Mary the Virgin Church Update – Revd. Caroline Wainman

Revd. Wainman gave the following report.

The village church of St. Mary the Virgin, Westcott has rather been in the wars in the last year. Last summer, we experienced increasing amounts of flaking plaster, then larger chunks falling from the ceiling. Eventually, it was considered to be a potential hazard so areas towards the back of the nave were cordoned off. When the situation worsened, we had to make the difficult decision last summer to temporarily close the building whilst we investigated the issue with the ceiling and made it safe.

As the parish does not have funds to repair or replace the ceiling, we opted for a temporary solution, in order to at least get the building open again for Sunday worship and use by Westcott C of E primary school for regular collective worship. We managed to install discreet white netting to the nave ceiling, in order to prevent any issues with further falling plaster. The building was then able to be re-opened in time for Advent Sunday 2023. We were delighted to be able to hold as planned our annual Carols by Candlelight Service on Saturday 16th December. The service was really well-received and well-attended- the building was atmospherically decorated with flowers and candles, there were readings by local invited guests and congregation members, a sermon,

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there were hymns accompanied by the organ and we had a reflective piece of music with singers and guitar. The service was followed by mulled wine and mince pies as usual.

St. Mary's, Westcott forms part of the wider parish of Waddesdon in which there are three churches, Waddesdon, Westcott and Upper Winchendon. There are services every week across the three churches. Westcott is currently open every first Sunday of the month at 9.30am for a Family Communion service. Happily, we have seen some growth in interest and numbers at Westcott, including a baptism of two children this last Sunday – although we remain a small but faithful congregation led by a small group of people, including a new assistant churchwarden, committed to keeping the church open and there for the village for years to come.

We are acutely aware that St. Mary's will receive its Quinquennial inspection later this year and we know that the fabric of the building is showing signs of needing some serious TLC – not only the ceiling, but also the roof and the floor. This will not be able to be undertaken without a major Fundraising campaign to restore our village church. The future of a small church in a small village always depends on how much it is valued and wanted by the village it serves. I know how much St Mary's means to so many people- the special place it has in the memories, hearts and minds of many parishioners. It is a beautiful building, with some beautiful Victorian features and it has been a place for family weddings, Christenings and funerals throughout since 1867.

We will be appealing to the village for assistance and support once we know the state of play with the buildings but in the meantime, I would like to encourage villagers of Westcott and all those who have a connection to the church to support its monthly service – 9.30am every 1st Sunday where a warm welcome and cuppa always guaranteed.

One member of the Public asked what the effect the school closure would have on the church. Revd. Wainman noted that the closure will have a significant impact on the church due to the potential growth of the congregation and reported that links with the school had been affected by other factors such as covid, staff-changes etc.

One member of the Public asked if the Diocese would support the church. Revd. Wainman noted that it would depend on the views of the other churches in the area, as they may look to consolidate. Revd. Wainman stated that the Diocese had a priority to keep churches open, but that they would need support from the village, noting that the church is funded by the congregation.

9. To receive reports from Charities.

- Faith Beaumont – TW reported that the charity is now operating after 10 years of dormancy. The finances have now been updated with the Charities Commission. TW thanked Revd. Wainman for help getting the charity back on track.
- William Turner – TW reported that the charity had not given any grants in the proceeding year, and that the trustees were looking to change the archaic wording of the objectives.
- Beck and Fetto – BM reported that the charity had made 4 grants in 2023 and 2 in 2024, and had a new clerk in place.

10. Questions.

One member of the public asked if there was an update on the school. SP noted that the consultation had finished, but suspected that the decision had already been predetermined.

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TW noted that the rationale for closing was falling numbers, but that there was a widely reported shortage of nursery age provision in the area.

One member of the Public asked about the future use of the site. JH noted that the future of the buildings is in question and can't even be discussed until the consultation is complete. Revd. Wainman noted that the ownership of the buildings was extremely complex, with multiple caveats and conditions on their use.

One member of the Pubic asked if there had been any consultation conducted with the Venture Park workforce. SP noted that this was unlikely due to the history of the school. .

Part 1 of the meeting closed at 20:37

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Date Agreed:

Signed:

Position: – Chair/Vice Chair/Councillor

DRAFT