SHILLINGSTONE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

THE PORTMAN HALL - 26-05-2023

The Chairman’s Annual Report

Cllr Rachel McNamara, the Chairman of Shillingstone Parish Council welcomed all to the meeting. The Chairman thanked the Councillors and all who had assisted during the year.

**Financial Overview**

The Chairman explained the PC’s sources of income in the year:

Precept - £ 33,000

Other Income - £ 6, 899

**TOTAL - £ 41,063**

The other income received by the Parish Council relates to refunded VAT, allotment income, and interest.

**TOTAL SPENDING in 2022-2023 - £ 38,060**

Around 40% of operational costs were administration but there were major exceptional expenditures, supported by the Parish Council, concerning the objection to the planning application relating to land at the Old Ox and the subsequent attempt to support a community bid to keep the business in the community:

* **£ 500** - planning advice fees
* **£ 650 -** property survey
* **£ 1,020** - premises & business valuation

There were also noteworthy expenses in the year:

* **£ 300** for Speedwatch equipment -this activity has been reactivated in the village in support of improved road safety measures
* **£350** for War Memorial handrail drawings – the issue of the safety of the steps at the War Memorial had been raised on previous occasions and the Parish Council has now agreed to install a handrail. This is currently going through the process of a listed building planning application

The major achievements in 2022 were:

* **Relaunch of Speedwatch –** supporting improved road safety
* **Securing Public consultation on 30mph Cookswell –** after years of delay
* **Support for Ox Community Bid Group –** a major ongoing effort
* **300 Spring Bulbs planted -** which have finally bloomed! More may be required!

The main projects for 2023/2024 will be:

* **Implement 30 mph limit –** to make the Little Lane crossing safe
* **Start a pedestrian crossing at Cookswell campaign –** this is an ongoing issue which firstly requires the speed limit change to be implemented
* **Climate/environment projects –** electric vehicle charging points consieration
* **Recruit new councillors –** a most pressing concern

The Chairman explained the Council now only has 6 members and there is a real risk to its effective operation. The quorum for decision making has been temporarily reduced from 4 to 3 Councillors to maintain council operations but what is needed are new Councillors. There is a danger that the village would lose its Parish Council and an important layer of decision making if this situation persists.

The Chairman explained that being a Councillor does not take a great deal of time, meeting usually only once a month on the first Thursday of the month for around an hour and probably requires another 1-2 hours per month looking at planning applications and other correspondence. The Clerk confirmed that Councillors must either be on the Electoral Roll or have lived, worked or occupied property in the Village for at least the past 12 months in order to be eligible.

Consideration of planning applications is a significant part of Parish Council activities and more so now that Dorset Council no longer issue ‘neighbour notices’ to local residents. Some applications can be very uncontentious and straightforward, others such as that involving land at the Old Ox can be very different

‘Royal Connections’

Village Children Amber, Kara and Penny

Village children Amber & Kara related the ‘Royal Connection’ of Cllr Lesley Gasson.

Lesley had been invited to the Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in the 1960’s. She had painted a hat black in honour of the occasion. This was of course very smelly and Lesley was told that because of this she could not meet the Queen!!

Lesley recalled standing at the back of the very beautiful gardens at the Palace but remembered that she had met the Queen when in Rhodesia and distinctly recalled that she was not wearing a Crown!

Penny described how late in November 2016 Judith Crompton travelled to London by train to meet Prince Charles to receive her MBE for services to the County of Dorset. There were no photographs allowed and Judith also had to wear a hat! Judith was forbidden from making an announcement concerning the MBE until April 2017.

Bere Marsh Farm

Elaine Spencer-White provided a very informative presentation of the background and operation of the Countryside Regeneration Trust (CRT)at Bere Marsh Farm.

The CRT was founded by Robin Page (One Man & his Dog, the journalist/countryman) and the late Gordon Beningfield, the Conservationist and Artist, in 1998.

In 2020 Bere Marsh Farm was acquired – 5 years of fundraising & negotiations. It is one of 15 CRT properties, the other local ventures being at Stoke Wake and Babers Farm

It now consists of 92 acres of permanent grassland, floodplain, and native woodland; the east boundary being the River Stour, and the west boundary being the old Somerset and Dorset railway embankment. The North Dorset Trailway runs through the centre of the farm. It includes Ham Down Woodland Burial Ground, Millennium, a diverse woodland of ancient oaks, the Drove Pond and the Old Mill site, a ruined grain store, stable, cart shed. There is also a Victorian farmstead, 3 stables and 3 pig sties and 3-bay cart shed

There is a nesting pair of Barn owls, European otters, Heron, Egret, Mute Swans, Moorhens, Kingfisher, Mallard. The river is well stocked with fresh water fish. There are also:

* 87 species of birds
* 9 species of bat
* 3 species Reptile
* 22 species of Butterflies and 187 species of moths
* 81 species of Flora and 67 species of fungi

Recent work has included the renovation of the Farmhouse and Cottages. The island at Drove Pond has been reinstated and 42 fruit trees have been planted to create a new orchard containing apples, plums, damson, medlar, quince, crab apples, pear, fig and mulberry. The CRT has also planted 3,500 hedgerow plants, which is 490 m of new hedge, and has completed 340 meters traditional hedge laying. Ten May Trees were planted under the Queen’s Green Canopy.

The roof repairs required raising £30,000 in 3 months, and it was repaired in 3 weeks. The barn owls watched the whole process and returned to the nest box when the repairs were complete.

In terms of produce, Bere Marsh now has 7 Hereford cattle & small flock of Dorset Down sheep, 3 Oxford Sandy & Black gilts (pigs), eggs from 50 Sussex hens, and honeycombe from 3 top bar hives.

There are now 130 volunteers registered at Bere Marsh; the facility holds wood workshops and courses in practical conservation. There is also the Black Cat Catering café on site which is proving to be popular.

Bere Marsh Farm is meeting the key aims of the CRT – to improve habitat to increase biodiversity, to reduce carbon emissions by improving soil health and by avoiding all forms of pollution, including noise.

Village Defibrillators

Dr Geoff Sparrow explained the role of defibrillators, of which the village has 4, in saving lives during cardiac arrests. Geoff stressed though the importance of good training in life saving techniques such as CPR before a defibrillator is used, and described how the life of young child had been saved after 15 minutes of CPR. Those who are interested in receiving training in CPR and the use of defibrillators should email the Parish Clerk. The Parish Council intends to provide training sessions at the Portman Hall should there be sufficient support for this.

Coronation Weekend– Best Bunting Prize

After due consideration, and because the bunting was entirely homemade - it has been decided that the prize ‘Best Bunting’ in celebration of the Coronation week-end will be awarded to Nicky Mathison– congratulations to Nicky!

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7:50 pm

**David Green Parish Clerk 25/05/2023**