

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

FOR RESIDENTS OF BLETSOE

Held on Tuesday, 23rd May 2023 7.30pm at Bletsoe Village Hall

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Clare Goduti (Chair), Donna Glanvill, Mark Abraham, Alison Field-Foster, Peter Margrave, Sue Binks, David Brough (Clerk) and 15 members of the public.

1. Welcome by Clare Goduti

Clare welcomed councillors and 15 members of the public to the meeting.

2. Annual Report of the parish council

Clare read out her annual report, which can be found in the appendix.

3. Other groups and individuals

- **Village Hall Committee**

The committee were represented at the meeting and their full report can be found in the appendix.

- **The Lady Smockers**

The Lady Smockers were represented at the meeting and their full report can be found in the appendix.

Appendix:

Annual Report of the Chair of the Council 2022/23

I want to start by apologising for the length of this report, but as I started to reflect on the past year. I felt there was so much that I wanted to share – so bear with me!

Election 2023

As most residents will know, May 4th saw the election of Councillors to Bletsoe Parish Council. I am very pleased to still be sitting here with all of you, having all been re-elected by the village and I'd like to take this opportunity to formally welcome Sue Binks to the Parish Council.

The reaction from residents to the Election and to those of us standing again was very positive, however it became apparent that there are a small minority of residents who feel that we are not representing them and their wishes for the village.

The village have spoken and all of us sat here have been democratically elected to represent Bletsoe.

However, if you believe the Parish Council are not acting in the best interest of the village, come along to one of our meetings and share your thoughts face to face.

We are a small community who should all be working together to protect and maintain our beautiful village, let's work together to find the solutions.

To those residents who spoke with their vote in electing us all – thank you.

On to other matters...

I would like to formally welcome David Brough as our new Clerk. David came highly recommended by other local Parishes, and we feel very lucky to have his support as we all move into the next chapter of our term as Councillors. I would also like to extend our thanks to Diane Robins, our previous Clerk and wish her well for the future.

Now to all the important Thank you's!

I would like to take this opportunity to recognise and thank the wonderful volunteers in our village who give so much of their time and effort to keep our village looking so beautiful.

Firstly, to those members of the Parish Council that I have had the pleasure to work with over the past four years. I really believe that we work well together, we are not afraid to challenge each other, or be challenged when making difficult decisions and the skills we all bring to the Parish Council, I think, are what facilitate us working well together. And to Donna, my Vice Chair thank you for being an excellent sounding board.

To Dave Dyer and the Lady Smokers, Thank you. You and your team continue to do a fantastic job of looking after the Parish Field, the grass always looks amazing, and the hedgerows look fantastic. Thank you for taking the time to come along to our meetings and share with us your plans for the village.

To Phil Greetham and Rich Holmes of H & G Landscapes thank you for the work you do to look after the Memorial Gardens, The Orchard and The Playground.

To Mike Grimes, who looks after the War Memorial, thank you. It is always immaculate and I'm sure everyone notices and is very grateful.

To the volunteers who keep the Church yard looking so beautiful. Thank you.

To the Village Hall Committee, thank you for your continued efforts to lay on entertainment for the village, it is wonderful that there are so many opportunities for such a small community to come together.

The Jubilee Celebrations last year were a highlight for the village, and we were pleased to be able to gift residents with a commemorative mug to mark the occasion.

The Parish Council recognise that without the support of all our volunteers the look and feel of our village could be quite different, and we are very grateful to you all for your continued support.

What we've been doing all year!

It's been a busy year for all of us on the Parish Council. It isn't just a case of meeting 6 times a year, there are always matters that need attending to. So, I wanted to take this opportunity to sum up the past 12 months and share with everyone the work we have been doing...

Part of our role is to monitor planning applications and their impact on the village. Over the past year we have considered everything from Car Ports, to change of use applications, Tree Preservation Orders, Agricultural Barn Erections and other domestic applications, but we have given each application the consideration it deserves, viewing them objectively and considering their impact from every possible perspective.

We have continued to liaise with Planning Enforcement, the Environment Agency, Bedford Borough Council, and the emergency services to react to matters as they arise. We are all very aware that activity at WFTS continues to impact on residents of The Avenue and we continue to put pressure on all departments involved to seek a resolution.

We have also worked closely with the Borough on Highway Maintenance, Fly Tipping, and gritting, and after much chasing they finally put in place the 30mph signage along Coplowe Lane, which residents have been requesting for many years!

We continue to ensure our village is represented in the ongoing East West Rail debate, Parish Councillors have been closely monitoring and contributing to the work of groups like BFARe

Financially it has been a challenging year, with the rising costs facing the village, at the start of the year we were forced to make some very difficult decisions to ensure that we could maintain a healthy budget and we continue to look at strategies that we can implement over the next three years to maintain our financial position and not pass on any further increases in the precept to the village.

We continue to work towards an upgrade of streetlighting around the village with a move to LED, to save the village money in the future. This has proved to be a challenging and time-consuming exercise, with little assistance from our Energy supplier, however through perseverance we hope to be able to present a strategy for improvement.

We have recently attended BBC Policy and Planning Development meetings and now feel equipped to move forward with the NDP in ensuring that it continues to work for Bletsoe as a document intended to protect our village from unwanted development and facilitate the improvements voted for by residents.

We have liaised regularly with our local PCSO to address the dangerous parking along the already busy road outside the Cazoo site, which I'm pleased to say seems to have stopped.

We have continued to monitor speeding around the village, regularly analysing the data to identify speeding hotspots. The most recent analysis shows that 93% of vehicles using The Avenue are observing the speed limit.

We have been pleased to see the Old Parish Field rented, generating income to the village and we continue to maintain a dialogue with the tenants to ensure that nearby residents and those using the public footpath are not impacted in any way.

We've been working as quickly as possible to resolve the issue with the defibrillator (a valuable resource to the village) Thank you to Shane Hughes who has been able to organise a replacement as, after being sent away for repair, the previous machine was found to be too costly to repair.

So as you can see, it's been a busy year, and I have really only scratched the surface as to what we have achieved. So, thanks again to my fellow Councillors for your efforts.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge how the community has come together to support Ukrainian families. It has been wonderful to see how residents have pulled together to support these families in their time of need and how many of you have taken them into your homes.

Thankyou.

Notes from Bletsoe Village Hall

Bletsoe Village Hall hall is an attractive empty space for band practice, dance training, yoga, martial art training and occasional hirers.

With this in mind we set out to make the following physical improvements over the past 12 months:

- 1) fit eco-friendly hand-dryers in the washrooms
- 2) fix acoustic panels to improve the sound quality
- 3) swap energy hungry fluorescent lights for LED ones
- 4) redecorate the main hall
- 5) replace curtaining
- 6) install a large TV screen and soundbar
- 7) provide a broadband connection for guest wifi

We also aim to be a social hub for the Bletsoe community getting together for daytime and evening functions.”

All hall bookings are visible on our online booking service, Hallmaster. See <https://v2.hallmaster.co.uk/Diary/ViewWeeklyDiary/10682>

Whilst we are getting slightly busier there is plenty of availability for the hall to be used during weekdays and in the next 12 months we will be actively looking out for activities that could fit in with the hall’s availability.

In addition we are enormously appreciative to all of committee members and volunteers who help us run fundraising events such as these throughout the year:

- Monthly popup pub
- Xmas family social
- New years’ eve party
- Ceilidh dinner and dance

Our plan for 2023-24 is to take care of the exterior fabric and grounds: Underway is:

- 1) Repainting the building

Up for consideration next:

- 2) Designing an outdoor level seating and table area
- 3) Sprucing up the car park

Please send your ideas and suggestions to our generic email as follows:
admin@bletsoevillagehall.org

Thank you on behalf of the BVH committee for your continuing support.

Nick James
Chair 2023

THE LADY SMOCKERS – ANNUAL REPORT TO BLETSOE PARISH COUNCIL

May 2023

Another year gone where The Lady Smockers have continued to maintain the Parish Field and hopefully improve it for the residents of Bletsoe.

At our AGM in 2022 we discussed how we could organise ourselves better to try to spread the work load amongst the group. Whilst there are tasks that may only require one or two people there are times when a larger work group is beneficial. We decided to try using a WhatsApp group to keep those interested, informed of what was planned and to try setting aside a specific day in the week for work in the field. Picking a specific day was not easy due to individual commitments. However, Thursdays and then Saturday mornings became the most popular for gathering a group of volunteers together. The lure of bacon butties, hot drinks and chocolate during the winter months may have helped with this.

Over the past twelve months we have been as busy as ever with over 560 hours being spent by volunteers in the field. This is more than in previous years and I thank all who helped.

Work such as weeding, strimming, clearing away, shredding and composting material and general maintenance of ground and equipment continues to make up the majority of work in the field.

Over the year, additional daffodil bulbs have been planted in front of the hedges. Foxgloves and bluebells have been planted in the wooded area and the wildflower beds have been extended. A maze of paths were cut around the wildflower beds and through the long grass area. This is to add more interest to the area and hopefully help the natural spread of the wildflowers.

As the newly planted trees and hedgerow plants have grown their plastic spiral guards have been removed and replaced, where needed, by more substantial guards and stakes.

We have continued to mow the grass throughout the season. As you may remember we had a long dry summer, which meant from the beginning of August to the end of the grass cutting season the amount we needed to mow the field was greatly reduced. In fact we spent 80 hours mowing last season when it is normally on average 110 hours. The figures demonstrate that mowing the field, even if it shows the field at its best, it is not the major work load of the volunteers. With 80 hours recorded for mowing a further 480 hours were recorded for all the other work.

Whilst the hot weather reduced the mowing it increased the amount of watering we needed to do to save the newly planted trees and hedgerow plants. It took 3 hours to water the 173 plants, ferrying the water around the field using the mower and trailer. We quickly used all the rain water stored in the tank by the shed and I thank the Village Hall Committee for allowing us to use the outside tap at the hall.

Several tasks were completed by groups of volunteers coming together on a Thursday or Saturday.

Firstly the 390 metres of hedge around the field were trimmed over 4 days (67 hours) with groups of 5 to 8 volunteers. The trimmings were all shredded and composted.

Next came the cutting and clearing of the long grass areas. The long grass was not cut and bailed for hay this year so an alternative method had to be found. Groups of 3 to 6 volunteers worked over 4 days (40 hours) strimming and clearing the grass. Some was shredded and composted and some was dried and burnt on the village November 5th bonfire. The whole area was finally mowed.

Following the hot dry summer it was decided to install two additional rain water tanks plumbed into the shed guttering. A group of 5 volunteers spent a Saturday morning putting the tanks in position which were then plumbed together the following day. My thanks to all the people who obtained and supplied the tanks, brick supports and plumbing supplies to make the project work.

Lastly groups of 9 and 7 volunteers spent two Saturdays (43 hours) coppicing the Willow and Hazel trees around the pond area. The majority of what was cut out was chipped and shredded to use in paths and as a mulch. Some was cut up and stacked in piles for insect habitats. We had one bonfire this year to dispose of what could not be easily cleared using the chipper or compost.

Whilst checking the facts and figures for this report I realised just how much the volunteers of the village have put into maintaining the parish field. Not only in time and effort but financially as well.

When the Lady Smockers was set up it was agreed that the Parish would provide an annual budget of £300 that could be drawn upon should items need to be purchased in order to maintain the field and equipment. A fuel bill allowance was also agreed, which was increased up to a limit of £450 per year in 2019 following the purchase and first year's use of the village mower. Annual insurance for the village mower has remained constant at about £100 for the past two years and the service of the mower has been £225 + VAT for the past two years. Therefore the expected annual budget for maintaining the field to the Parish would be in the region of £1075. However, I discovered that for the financial year 2021/2022 only £20.99 was claimed from the maintenance budget and £304.32 from the fuel budget, a saving of £429.69 from the expected costs. Also, for the financial year 2022 / 2023 nothing was claimed from the maintenance budget and £299.60 from the fuel budget, a saving of £450.40 from the expected costs.

However, over the past two years plants, bulbs and seeds have been purchased for the field and the machinery, in addition to the mower, has been serviced and maintained. I am also aware that fuel for the additional machinery has not been claimed back. All of this has been paid for by the volunteers and residents of Bletsoe.

Having been involved with the Smockers from its start in 2016 I feel it is time to take a step back from organising the group. With the majority, if not all, the major tasks we initially set out to accomplish in the field completed, I believe it is time to pass the baton on. As I see it the work is now one of continual maintenance to keep the field in its present condition. Others may have different ideas so I would encourage them to come forward and volunteer. We will be holding our AGM on the 31st May and I would encourage any interested Bletsoe resident to come along. I will be posting details of the AGM on Facebook and put posters on the notice boards.

Dave Dyer

23rd May 2023