

## ABBOTS MORTON PARISH.

### Draft minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held Abbots Morton Village Hall, Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2014 at 7.30 p.m.

**Present:** Mr. W. Clapton (Chairman), Mrs. N. Holland, Clerk to the Parish Council, and 13 parishioners.

**Welcome:** – the Chairman of the Parish Council welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Apologies:** County Cllr. Mr. Holt, Dist. Cllrs. Mrs. Steel and Mr. Lee, PC Tony Carter, PCSO Keeley Hawkes, Mel Clarke, Geoff Barker, and Jill Barker.

**Minutes:** The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2013 were agreed to be an accurate record, signed by the Chairman.

**Matters Arising:** Nil.

**Chairman of the Parish Council, Mr. Clapton:**

The new chairman of the Abbots Morton Parish Council welcomed all for attending which in doing so you are showing support both for your village and your Parish Council. Those who attended last years' meeting will be aware that David Ernest advised us of his intention to 'stand – down' from his position as Chairman, I am sure that those of us that have worked with him on the Parish Council will join with me in thanking him for his energy and his commitment whilst serving in that post. I am pleased to say he is still a member of the Parish Council where his experience is invaluable.

I would also like to thank all the other members who make up the Council. We are, I feel, extremely lucky in Abbots Morton because although the village is small in numbers, the Council is diverse in their knowledge and this enables us to take on many of the complex issues that crop up from time to time within Abbots Morton.

Therefore I personally would like to thank Nick Humphries who has taken on the post of Vice Chairman, Colin Pemberton, David Smith, Pat Ansell, and Clive Holt, and of course as previously mentioned David Ernest, all of whom have made my job as Chairman much easier than it might have been.

Last but certainly not least there is another person to whom I owe a great deal for her help, for the way she has kept all our feet firmly on the ground and the professional way in which she has carried out her duties as Parish Clerk, and that is of course, Nicky Holland.

Planning

There has been a healthy movement in planning applications during the last 12 months, some 9 in total, ranging from small and straightforward, to the larger and more complex. I can, and will say that as always all applications have been dealt with in an impartial and professional manner.

As you may be aware the Parish Council has no powers as to the eventual outcome of any planning application but works with the planning officer by flagging up its observations and/or concerns from its vantage point as a local representative body.

Sadly this year has seen the use of hard copy plans being withdrawn by Wychavon District Council as from 1st April 2014, in favour of utilising those that are posted on the Wychavon District Council website. This was strongly opposed by many of the parish councils in the area including Abbots Morton. The Council compiled a letter which pointed out that in our opinion the new proposals would seriously undermine the ability of the parish council to both individually and collectively examine, analyse and effectively comment on plans and planning applications. We believed the proposal to remove the hard copies in respect of planning applications was anti – democratic and could lead to inaccurate decisions thus compromising the Planners decision making. Unfortunately this was to no avail; however, I would like to take this opportunity to thank District Councillor Audrey Steel for all of her hard work and support over the last 12 months in trying to resist this move.

Audrey is now trying to obtain a projector for the Parish Council in order to help overcome some of the foreseen problems that we feel will occur as a result of that decision.

Abbots Morton Parish Plan

Although there is no intention to pursue any form of development in Abbots Morton at the present time, the Parish Council felt that the Parish Plan although not a legal document never the less could be of significant importance in resisting any future unforeseen attempts for unnecessary development within Abbots Morton as well as continuing to be an invaluable social record of village life.

The Parish Plan is some 8 years old having first been produced in 2006. It is as it stands considered to be a

comprehensive and well written document, and during these last 8 years of the Parish Plan there has been little outward sign of change to the village, but the movement of residents both into and out of the village has been small in number but constant, thereby changing the social aspect of the village. With this in mind the Parish Council asked Nick Humphries and Colin Pemberton to formulate a way forward in regards to updating and restructuring the existing Parish Plan.

I have been advised by Nick that the task of updating the Plan would be, in his opinion, straightforward and that it could take the form of an electronic document which in turn would form a supplement to the existing plan. Although the project can be led by the Parish Council it cannot be wholly a Parish Council undertaking and would require input from the wider community.

A steering group would need to be formed with members of the Parish Council and other residents of the village, at this time we have both Nick Humphries and Colin Pemberton representing the Parish Council and Julie Washington who expressed an interest whilst attending the AMRA AGM, therefore there is a need of 2 or 3 more residents in order to form a working committee and I urge anyone who might consider taking part to contact either Nick Humphries or Colin Pemberton

At this point I am sure that the Parish Council would join with me, together with all the other residents of Abbots Morton, in expressing our thanks to the members of the AMRA committee for their proactive stance in the matter of helping to bring to the notice of all residents of Abbots Morton the importance of the Parish Plan.

#### Superfast Worcestershire Broadband Programme

We are all increasingly aware of the importance of the Internet and all it provides, and with the ever greater demand especially for those many small businesses which now work from home an upgrade of the network has become paramount.

There was great anticipation when the Superfast Worcestershire Broadband Programme was announced. This was a £20 million High Speed Broadband infrastructure programme funded by Worcestershire County Council, BT, and the Governments Broadband Delivery UK, designed to extend to more than 90% of Worcester Businesses and homes over the next 3 years, thereby giving some 55,000 Businesses and homes the advantage of High Speed Broadband and giving them a wide range of internet services by enabling them to access download speeds of up to 80 megabits per second and upload speeds of up to 20 megabits per second.

This was immediately taken up on behalf of the Parish Council by David Ernest but it was quickly established that Abbots Morton along with a number of other villages in this area was not earmarked in the forthcoming rollout, which of course could have profound consequences for us and many of the surrounding villages.

David is continuing to work diligently on this, by attending meetings and organising others.

#### Traffic Speed

For many years there has been a constant struggle by the Parish Council to have the speed limit from Morton Spiert to Gooms Hill reduced from its present speed of 60MPH, however, although Worcestershire County Council have been receptive in the area as regards to improving road markings, our efforts regarding the reduction of the speed limit has always been met with resistance.

Our latest correspondence continues to meet with the same resistance, we are informed that they consider that any changes to the speed limit would not alter driver's behavior and the current situation is not considered dangerous.

#### Ditches

This year has seen the rewards of the hard work carried out by the Parish Lengthsman on the verges and ditches, this is alongside the concentrated efforts by local landowners to minimise the run-off from the surrounding fields.

Despite an appalling year for flooding around most of the country, due to the concerted efforts of those persons involved the residents of Abbots Morton have found no such impedance coming and going through the village, therefore the Parish Council would very much like to thank all of those involved in this matter.

#### Tree Wardens Report

The Parish Tree Warden, Colin Pemberton, took advantage, on our behalf, of an offer of 30 free trees from the Woodland Trust.

The saplings were planted during the autumn alongside the public footpath which runs from The Low to Iron Cross.

A varied mix of trees, they form part of the hedgerow owned by Richard Francis and the parish is grateful to Richard for planting them. Many thanks to the Woodland Trust who stipulated that they be accessible to the general public and we hope as many of you as possible will give them at least a glance as you pass by.

Its blossom time for the Diamond Jubilee Commemorative Tree on the verge at the eastern approach to the village. The wild cherry has survived its second winter; although blown a little off vertical by some strong winds it will be righted soon and a commemorative plaque will be installed alongside the tree this year now that it is becoming well established.

The Tree Warden asks you to please keep an eye out for any signs of ash die back. If you do think you've seen any diseased trees, please contact Colin on 01386 792549

Two tall spruces were felled last month (April) in Viv Oddy's grounds by Tree Surgeon Roger Small from Harvington. Colin still has plans to make a tree survey of the parish. So if you have a photograph you can send him of any of the trees in your garden, please get in touch with him.

#### General Finance Report

The Parish Council is always mindful of its need to balance its ability to function as a representative body and its responsibility to manage its finances.

This year the parish council has decided not to increase the Parish Precept although a small increase of 0.9% has come about through the adjustments of the House Bands by Wychavon District Council. The Parish Council continues to be prudent and its finances remain healthy.

**West Mercia Police** - email report received:

Please be aware of a black Mercedes van (registration not known) attending rural areas selling chainsaws.

**County Cllr.** – no report.

**District Cllrs.** – no report.

#### **Residents' Association (Cyril Burton).**

Firstly, I made a full report at our AGM in March which was well attended, and, secondly, a summary of my report appeared in our April Bulletin Board which has recently been circulated to all households.

However, there are three items which are not yet in the public domain and I would like to report on them.

Firstly, I am delighted to announce that we have at last filled the long standing vacancy on our Committee. This has been filled by Sue Bunce, our newest resident who attended our recent Committee meeting and settled in immediately, making positive contributions to our discussions. Secondly, a planning application has been submitted to build a tennis court and fit it with lights within the Parish. Neither the Parish Council nor we objected to the tennis court but we both objected to it being lit. Being members of CPRE and aware of their aversion to light pollution in the countryside, the Chairman of the Worcestershire Branch was contacted. He duly wrote to Wychavon District Council with his comments, particularly with regard to lighting.

In AMRA's report I pointed out that light pollution in the countryside is a breach of the Clean Neighborhoods and Environment Act 2005 which makes it liable, and subject to, the criminal law of statutory nuisance. The application has recently been approved with the exception of lighting for which the District Council has asked for further details. In our November Bulletin we announced that as preservation of the past is one of our main objectives we felt that we had an obligation to make a donation to the Bell Tower Appeal fund. At our April Committee meeting we agreed AMRA would contribute £500, cheque presented to Mr. Pemberton.

#### **Public Paths Warden (David Smith).**

Through-out the year the paths have been inspected and issues such as under growth and fallen trees corrected by the land owners and the Path Warden. Overall the paths remain in a good usable condition.

A replacement footbridge was installed by a County Council volunteer work party at The Low. Additionally a new 'finger post' was installed near The Old Shop during the spring by the Path Warden, replacing a similar sign that had rotted through.

Currently outstanding is the loss of access to another footbridge at the bottom of The Low. This is due to deeper, wider drainage ditches being constructed. Assurances have been received from the land owner that corrective measures will be in hand shortly and the County Council is fully aware of the situation. It's possible to offer a short diversion so walkers should not be affected.

There are a total of nine long term issues around the parish, these concern unofficial stiles instead of gates, poor drainage on the Morton Spiert bridleway and large fallen timbers. None of these issues is considered a high priority or dangerous and all paths and bridleways remain accessible. The number of issues is favourably low when compared to similar sized parishes.

The whole parish network is due for its spring strimming; this will be carried out over the next few weeks, with a

similar exercise being conducted in the late autumn.

**Parochial Church Council (Lynne Pemberton), and Bell Tower Appeal (Colin Pemberton).**

We have eight members of the PCC, chaired by the Rector, Rev Richard Thorniley.

Members are Kevin Clarke (churchwarden), Terry Brewster (Treasurer), Colin Pemberton (Secretary), Peggy Clarke, Lynda Payne, Audrey Dunstone, Patrick Brooke and Lynne Pemberton. There are 16 people on the church electoral roll.

It's been another very busy year for the PCC, members undertaking their role as trustees of a charity responsible for the financial affairs of the church, the care and maintenance of the church fabric and its contents, and expressing their views on the forms of services used at St Peter's.

The PCC also concerns itself with the welfare and pastoral care of the parish and discusses issues of wider interest in the Church of England.

We've had a wide range of services and associated community occasions throughout the year. In general terms congregations are not high but there are an encouraging number of people who come to what you might call the special services, Remembrance, Mothering Sunday, Christingle, Pet Service, Carol and Gift Service and Christmas Eve. Pro rata, for the size of our parish, we're doing pretty well.

Our two principal fund raising events both had record attendances last year: the Flower Festival Lunch (58) and the Harvest Supper (86). We rely hugely on the success of these events to successfully meet the routine running costs of our church which are around £10,000 every year. We hope you come and enjoy these two events again this year. Flower Festival lunch is June 29th.

Speaking of the Flower Festival, we are blessed with a number of people, not necessarily churchgoers, who are happy to decorate the church florally throughout the year and similarly we are grateful to those volunteers who unlock and lock the church to maintain a record of being open every day so that everyone. Local residents or visitors from around the world, have access to it.

Regarding access, the question of a disability Access Plan for the church has always been on our agenda since the Equality Act 2010 became law. A Working Group was set up and has been meeting to consider a number of options to improve things for people of any disability whether it's mobility, hearing or visual impairment or a dementia difficulty. Recommendations from that Working Group are being considered at our PCC meeting next week. We aim to do what we viably can to maximise the accessibility of the churchyard, the church itself and its services of worship.

The PCC has considered some substantial matters during the year. In response to the Bishop Of Worcester's request for grass roots opinion on Same Sex Marriage the PCC agreed that it wanted to "maintain the status quo of civil partnership being offered but not same sex marriage, with the possible option of a blessing in church afterwards, where the incumbent gives permission".

Members of the parish contributed towards the development of the ARCH Benefice's Mission Statement: "To Show our Love for God and You"

Sadly we didn't win the Best Kept Churchyard competition last year. Nonetheless, we are grateful to the Parish Council for their grant aid towards the maintenance of the churchyard and to Margaret Brewster for her generous donation towards the upkeep of the church grounds.

Work has been commissioned to refurbish the church notice board.

The St Peter's page on the Abbots Morton village website [www.abbotsmortoninfo.co.uk](http://www.abbotsmortoninfo.co.uk) is continually updated and kept fresh, as are the Abbots Morton pages on the ARCH benefice website [www.archbenefice.org.uk](http://www.archbenefice.org.uk)

We encourage as many as possible to visit these two sites and bookmark them.

Finally, we're pleased to say there continue to be celebratory occasions such as weddings and christenings held here, as well, of course, as the more sombre occasions. It's right to say that your church, St Peter's, remains an important focal point of our community.

**The Bell Tower Appeal**

Having been granted permission on February 1st 2013 to go ahead with masonry repairs to the outside of the Bell Tower, the PCC launched, on August 9th last year, a public Appeal for £40,000.

The appeal has been hugely successful, better than any of us imagined and the fund now stands at £33,179.

Principal elements of that total are £10,000 from the PCC, £9,300 in grants from charitable trusts, £ 8,000 in private donations, and £3,000 from events which have been a pleasure to put on and been enjoyed by many people. Jean

Leng's Bring and Buy and coffee morning and associated sales raised more than £1,000, Imo Dykes staged an excellent quiz which she plans to repeat this November and images of David Smith's "Bell Bottoms" 70's night in the village hall will live long in the memory.

In two months time we are staging our most ambitious event. A classical music concert in the 250-seat St Peter's Church, Inkberrow by The Grier Trio. Francis Grier, who now lives in London, is the brother of Lynda Payne; He's an award winning composer and pianist who'll be accompanied by his daughters on cello and violin. We hope you'll all want to come. It's on Saturday July 19th, tickets are £15 and on sale tonight. May I say that Francis and his daughters, professional musicians who perform at prestigious venues in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, are giving their services free to raise money for the appeal. Francis's parents used to live in Mulberry House, Francis was married in our church here and he clearly regards the church with great affection.

Tickets for what we call Margaret Brewster's BIG RAFFLE are also available tonight. The first prize is £750 in cash and there are many other superb prizes. The raffle runs until February next year and the winning tickets will be drawn at a special event in the village hall next March 6th. The celebrity guest drawing the winning tickets will be Mary Rhodes; presenter of the BBC 1 programme Midlands Today and Inside out.

The Bell Tower repair work has to start before February 1st 2016 but it now seems we should be well within that deadline. We are now re-consulting the church architect to get an update on the original price estimate. We hope that our £40,000 target will be sufficient to cover the costs but from the beginning there was advice that when the scaffolding is erected, enabling a close inspection of the parapet part of the tower, we could find that additional work might be needed.

I would like to thank members of our Bell Tower Committee, churchwarden Kevin Clarke, Lynne Pemberton, Terry and Margaret Brewster, Sarah Dykes and especially our Treasurer, Tim Jones, for all the enthusiasm and effort they've put in. And I'd also like to thank those outside the committee who've been happy to do whatever we've asked of them, often at the drop of a hat.

Indeed, we thank everyone who has contributed in any way to the success of this appeal. We have gained considerable publicity in the local media, whether it is for Barry Oddy's scale model of the church used as a collection box, Viv Oddy's "Thermometer" by the church steps or fishmonger Harry Dyke's Guess the Weight of the Halibut competition at Hillers Fish Shop. Our profile is also worldwide on the Internet, thanks to an excellent website created for us by Jonathan Brooke, also of the aforementioned Mulberry House.

At the end of the Appeal, whenever that may be, we do intend to put up a Thank You list of names on our display boards in church and on the website. Those who've requested anonymity will, of course, have their wishes respected and no individual monetary donation figures will be revealed.

The success of the appeal has shown what a tremendous fund of goodwill there is towards St Peter's church. It plays a vital part in the heritage and in the current life of this community and we are immensely grateful for the affection being shown for it.

**Neighbourhood Watch** – hard copy of report available to all present at the meeting.

Email reports from West Mercia police have been circulated during the past year as were reports received from our local coordinators and residents. If you wish to receive these, please provide me with your email address (which will remain confidential). The NW circulation covers 94% of active households in the parish plus some households in Radford.

Your Neighbourhood Watch coordinators are:-

Gooms Hill – Pat Ansell 792643

Morton Speart – Vacant

The Low – David Smith 793107 (NW Webpage updates)

Top Road - Tina Hill 792006

Village - Geoff Barker 792562 (Link Coordinator)

Village – Sarah Dykes 792214 (Deputy Link Coordinator)

A vacancy is open for a volunteer at Morton Spirt to take up the role. Please call or email to 'ggbarker3@gmail.com' for details.

Most Home Insurers offer generous discounts off their premiums to members of "Active Neighbourhood watch areas". They consider areas 'Active' where there is a named local coordinator.

Contact me for free door-stickers and SmartWater kits to purchase.

Smartwater property marking liquid is still available including enhanced outdoor and farmers (larger property) packs. Window and property stickers are included in the packs. Orders can still be placed. Under West Mercia's existing Safe & Secure home security campaign, residents are being encouraged to property mark their valuables and then to register them on the national Immobilise website ([www.immobilise.com](http://www.immobilise.com)). If their property is lost or stolen, the police can check the database to identify the true owners.

If you find yourself and/or family in any circumstances of an emergency or dangerous nature, then you must dial 999 for emergency services. The usual contact number for West Mercia Police is 08457 444 888.

Please note the NEW national number to call for reporting non emergency incidents directly to West Mercia Police is "101". You can still contact Crimestoppers anomalously on 0800 555 111.

#### **Village Hall (Mel Clarke, read by Ruby Clapton).**

The Village Hall past Committee worked hard through the previous year to ensure that the hall was maintained to an excellent standard. Thanks must go to those who attend the meetings and the work done on behalf of all villagers to keep the building an asset to the community. At the AGM in February a cohort of this committee stood down, calling for an EGM to scope for new members to take up said roles.

The committee meeting on 14/04/14 saw the appointment of new Chairman, Melanie Clarke. Further positions:

- Vice Chair: Rev. Richard Thorniley
- Secretary: David Smith
- Treasurer: Carol Humphries
- Booking Officer: Ruby Clapton.

Thank you to Angela, Nicky, Angie and Clive who resigned from the Committee for all their past contributions.

The current financial position of the Hall is viable due to monies raised through events, grants and insurance cover. The current committee plan to continue with event management but also wish to explore/encourage further rental of the Hall to 3rd parties for private functions.

#### **Activities and events.**

The Hall continued to host successful fundraising events last year. Thanks to everyone involved for their hard work. The Art group continues to support the hall, the gardening club ceased. The Parish Council uses the hall for meetings and also supports the hall financially and again we are grateful. In addition, the hall is used for local elections, Residents Association AGM and occasional private hires.

The Hall has been used by the Parochial Church Council for a number of events, some of them in support of the Bell Tower Fund. The Village Hall Committee continued to support the PCC by offering the venue free of charge, last year. During the period of fund raising for the Bell Tower Fund the Village Hall Committee have agreed to limit events in support of the village hall so that PCC events gain as much support as possible.

#### **Maintenance and improvements.**

The hall continues to be regularly checked for maintenance issues. The main issue with the Hall is the fire/emergency doors. Work to replace these doors has now been sanctioned and is due to begin at the end of May. Grants have carried over (£784), which have to be used for repairs to the floor and doors; along with some insurance cover.

#### **Legal obligations.**

Appropriate checks on Fire alarms and Fire extinguishers are carried out. A health and safety check has been conducted and issues arising have been addressed. Where required, Music licenses for events in the village hall will be source and purchased by the hirer. Disability access remains a concern, but finances and ongoing commitments to alterations make action on this prohibitive at this time. The committee plan to review this accordingly.

#### **Superfast broadband (Cllr. Mr. Ernest).**

Worcester County Council together with BT are using local and Government funding to roll out a new Broadband Fibre based network to Worcestershire. This should provide fast Broadband speeds for 90 to 95% of the population and businesses. The basic information re Broadband super fast roll out is contained on the Super fast Broad Band web site hosted by the team at County. Please refer to the website <http://www.superfastworcestershire.com>

There are several major issues relating to this situation.

Whilst the map on the website showing the deployment of the new network is only for indicative purposes and is not particularly detailed, it is clear that there is a large area of the County that will not be covered by the new Fibre network. Basically the County Council has striven to meet its objective of 90-95% coverage by focussing on dense

population clusters thus rural areas have less priority. This has been confirmed in various conversations with County Council officers and BT. There is a large area stretching from (approximately)south of Cookhill in the north to the Lenches in the South and towards the M5 at Peopleton that will not be covered by the rollout e.g. they will not be upgraded. Within that area there are a few pockets that will be upgraded (e.g. some parts of Inkberrow, Bishampton).

There are no current plans to reach the 5%-10% properties that are currently excluded from the rollout plan. My efforts to include these areas have been resisted. It seems that everyone is hoping that this gap will be plugged by future additional Government funding but there are no guarantees. This 5- 10% figure represents thousands of people and hundreds of businesses in Worcestershire. I have contacted Airband who provided a County funded project for satellite type broadband in the Feckenham/ Hanbury area. At this time they are not interested in a feasibility study in our area. In any case I personally believe that the solution may not be cost effective and is not necessarily appropriate for businesses and heavy users of broadband.

There are profound implications for properties that will not be upgraded, analysts have mentioned a devaluation in property values; also without any substantial upgrade to a house or business it is likely that the existing Broadband service will become increasingly unreliable, lower speeds and unusable over the next few years as websites are optimised for faster broadband. The government promises a minimum speed of 2 mbps (Abbots Morton is currently 1.5mps), however that will not support Internet and other streaming services such as i Player.

I suspect that there will an increasing number of disgruntled people and businesses within the next year as they find that they are excluded from the rollout plans. For example my current broadband service is unreliable and I can see it getting only worse, hence i will have to relocate my office. My concern is that there are no plans to assist the thousands of people and many businesses who will not be included in the plan and who in a couple of years will have an increasingly unusable internet service.

As a Parish Councillor and resident I am lobbying the County Council and BT. In reality the only way forward for a resilient long term fix is for all households to be connected on a Fibre Optic cable. Oxfordshire County Council has recently announced a partnership with a company for such a cabling project to the 10% disenfranchised. I am currently urging County to talk to this company about a solution for Worcestershire.

**Matters raised by parishioners:**

a) Morton Spirt – two highway posts on the Warwickshire side have notices missing to warn motorists to slow down as they approach the hill. Request that they are replaced.

Vote of thanks was made to the Chair of the meeting.

**All organisations in the Parish submitted a report, copies available from the Clerk.**

**Meeting closed at 8.30 pm.**