

MARTIN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a video conferencing Annual Assembly of the Parish of Martin held on Wednesday 5th May 2021 at 7pm.

Present: Cllr M King (Chairman, Martin Parish Council), Cllr Richards (Vice Chair), Cllrs Sampson, Batten, Hapke and Hooper, Becca Stobie (Parish Clerk) and three members of the public.

1. An explanation re why there are no minutes for the 2020 Annual Assembly.
There were no minutes as there was no assembly in 2020.
2. Minutes of the last Annual Village Meeting held on 20th May 2019, signing as accurate and matters arising.
The minutes of the meeting of 20th May 2019, having been previously circulated, were approved and signed.
3. Report of the Chairman covering the activities of the Parish Council (2020/21).

It is customary at this meeting for the existing Chair of the PC to give an overview of events and decisions for the last year, that are in the Council's remit concerning parish matters. The Parish Council asks NFDC for an amount of public funds - called a precept - which adds on average under a pound per week per household to the Council Tax Bill. So this is the annual meeting for the Council to explain how that money has been spent - as well as for people in the village to ask questions of the Parish Council. It is also an opportunity to ask the Parish Council, as it is able, to engage in issues of particular interest to parishioners.

The first thing to say is the rather obvious point that this has been an extremely difficult year for many people on a personal level in Martin, East Martin, Tidpit and outlying farms. On behalf of the Parish Council, I would want to extend condolences to a number of parishioners and acknowledge the difficulties that many people have faced in many different ways because of the pandemic.

Secondly, to also acknowledge the huge community effort and neighbourliness that has been so visible and tangible - not least because of social media - in this parish. People getting on and being helpful to one another is always better (and usually quicker) than waiting for more organised groups, like a Parish Council, to organise things!

Third introductory point concerns the virtual Parish Council meetings:

- Initially learning how to operate by Zoom and not being able to meet in person felt like a huge issue.
- AND one of our first decisions was to take the advice (or indeed instruction) of the National Association of Local Councils and NOT hold the annual meeting last year, as it could not go ahead face-to-face. (As things stand at present, next year's annual meeting - and future 2021 Parish Council meetings - will be "in person").

So this report will try to cover 2 years. It will concentrate on 2020/21, with just a few details from 2019/20.

One of the Parish Council's biggest difficulties this past year has been operating with 3 different Clerks:

- Lucy Pope said in the early autumn that she would be leaving but would be willing to carry on until Christmas if we needed her to.
- All the files were handed over in mid-December to our newly appointed Clerk who was then head-hunted for another job and decided that she could not do both jobs at the same time so resigned as Martin Parish Clerk on February 3rd.
- We re-advertised, but in the meantime, knowing that Becca Stobie had shown interest in the post previously, Becca was asked to take the minutes for our next meeting on March 8th.
- With no new applications, the Parish Council then agreed after a special meeting on March 8th to invite Becca to be the new Clerk. On behalf of the Council, I want to say how grateful we are to Becca for what gifts she has already brought to the Council.

So - What have we done? Following the village-wide consultations we had during January 2020, we have concentrated on three main projects:

- Improving footpath access
 - Improving access for push chairs on the footpath joining Sillen Lane to Townsend
 - Enabling more of a footpath to join the main village to Tidpit (more work is still needed beyond the 30mph signs, and we are totally reliant on landowner permissions- basically Longford Estate)
- Improving the recreation area/Martin Park:
 - Wildflowers, some tree planting, benches
 - Two new goalpost that meet safety standards
 - Still planning to extend the hard area for basketball and other sports
 - Purchased a Speed Indicator Device which is in use alternately between the north and south entrances to the village. Janet Richards has some data from the SID. From 1st-28th March when the SID was near Townsend 8 cars went over 70 miles per hour. The average speed was 34 miles per hour.

If we want official police help with speeding vehicles through the village, we will need a team of volunteers for the Speedwatch programme - please give your names to Sandra Allman if you are interested. The police will help, but only if there is a willingness for local people to be involved first.

ROADS.

Staying with the road theme: the new road surface from the A354 to Damerham through the village of Martin has caused considerable comment! The Parish Council is in regular contact with Hampshire Highways about the problems of the road surfaces and it is good that a few other people are now in touch with the County Council as well. To be honest the new road surface, the first time for such a measure for many decades, came as a surprise to the Parish Council.

Our main issues over the last few years have been:

- improving the safety and road surface at the A354/Drove End crossing (surface now much improved, better signage - but "sensible" suggestions for long-term safety measures are considered too expensive)
- drainage issues on Drove End especially at the Middle Lane corner, which have been improved by digging out ditches, but the underlying issues remain which actually cause the break-up of the road surface.

It was this ongoing problem that, a week before the road surfacing began, a County engineer was on the phone to me about - but they still went ahead and put a new layer over the existing problem without any remedial work on the underlying problem itself. Very frustrating!

The other ongoing issue, and one that remains, is potholes:

If we, as a society expect better roads, wider roads, faster roads, (and let's be careful what we wish for!) then a lot more money will be needed - which means much higher taxes.

Other matters

- The Parish Council has also got the Defibrillator in use, after a lot of set-up delays, outside the Blandford Hall.
- The Parish Council, in event of an "unforeseen" emergency, has things in place for anyone needing shelter, warmth and water. This is all part of a long-term Resilience plan.
- The Parish Council is responsible for cutting grass on public areas - the village green, the Bustard Pond area, the community orchard, Martin Park - and keeping those areas tidy and safe. Maintaining the public areas, along with paying the Clerk, constitutes the bulk of our ongoing budget.
- There have been a number of planning applications again this year. As you probably all know, all planning decisions are taken by the New Forest District Council. The role of the Parish Council is to inform NFDC about any local views, concerns or indeed support, especially of those who will be most affected by any developments - before any planning decision is made by the District Council.

So, in a nutshell, the Parish Council works with NFDC concerning statutory planning requirements; at the same time, our overriding principle is about being good neighbours for each other. It is fair to say, that getting this balance right: a. statutory regulations; b. the rights of house or landowners; c. the effects on neighbours can take up a lot of time on any Parish Council. The decisions need to be seen to be fair, but it is not easy for everyone to be pleased with the decisions that have to be made by NFDC.

Vacancy.

There is a vacancy for a new Councillor to be co-opted. If anyone is willing to attend 10 meetings in the year, with skills and time that you are willing to offer to the community please let the Clerk know. None of the councillors are paid, but it is a lovely group of people to work with - and all for the benefit of this parish.

Final comments.

If you wish the Parish Council to do more, to be more pro-active in doing things, then the result of this will inevitably be a bigger rise in what the PC asks NFDC to give us ie a rise in the Council Tax.

I finish by saying that, without everyone's co-operation, very little is possible.

4. To invite residents of Martin to raise matters of interest for discussion.
Future Parish projects - any suggestions?

Cllr Richards encouraged people to investigate the Cranborne Chase Walking Festival.

Cllr Richards also mentioned that Martin Club are still planning to build an affordable flat as part of the Club's new development. Working with NFDC on a community led housing project is proving to be a very good learning experience.

The Chairman also mentioned the East Martin Road. The road surface of the main road now makes the 'pot-holed' road through East Martin something of a priority! The PC will do its best to keep this on Hampshire CC's agenda.

Attendees were invited to raise any matters for discussion, but none were suggested. Therefore, with no further business, the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 7.45pm.