

MINUTES of the ASPENDEN PARISH COUNCIL MEETING held on Tuesday 27th FEBRUARY 2024 at 7.00pm in THE FOX ASPENDEN.

Present Cllr Richard Blackburn (Chair) Cllr Tracy Devonshire Cllr Stuart Chambers.
 Cllr Tom Poulton Cllr Joe Murphy
 County Councillor Jeff Jones District Councillor Sue Nicholls
 PCSO Paul Dearman
 0 members of the public

Officer attending Denise Anderson (Clerk)

APOLOGIES

24.01 Apologies were received from Cllr Andrew Huggins due to work commitments.

It was resolved to approve Cllr Huggins's absence

Apologies were received from District Councillor Vicky Burt who had another meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

24.02 Cllr Poulton declared an interest in the Vistry Homes Development. It was agreed Cllr Poulton could remain in attendance at this Agenda item but would not participate in any discussions.

VACANCY ON PARISH COUNCIL

24.03 The Council had received an application from Joe Murphy for co-option onto the Parish Council. His application had been circulated to Councillors and Mr Murphy had been invited to the meeting.

It was resolved to co-opt Joe Murphy onto Aspenden Parish Council. Proposed by Cllr Blackburn and seconded by Cllr Chambers.

Mr Murphy signed his Declaration of Acceptance of Office and joined the Council at this point.

STANDARDS COMPLAINT AGAINST MEMBER OF ASPENDEN PARISH COUNCIL

24.04 The Clerk reported that Cllr Blackburn had received a decision from the Monitoring Officer at East Herts Council regarding the complaint made against him on 11th December 2023.

The Clerk reported the decision and quoted directly from the communication to Mr Blackburn:

'The decision is that you may have breached paragraph 7.1 of the Councillor Code of Conduct, misuse of council resources, and it should be resolved informally, namely by way of training, as set out at paragraph 5.2.2.2 of the Complaints Handling Procedure.

I do not agree that you breached paragraph 2.1 bullying, harassment and discrimination, 4.1(b) Confidentiality and access to information or 5.1 Disrepute, as had been alleged.'

Cllr Blackburn has completed the necessary training and this will be formally reported to the Monitoring Officer and recorded in these Minutes.

The Police Report was moved up the Agenda to enable PCSO Paul Dearman to return to his duties.

24.05 Police Report

PCSO Dearman had provided a report for February 2024 which had been circulated to Councillors.

Aspenden

0 recorded crimes in January 2024

Buckland and Chipping

0 crimes recorded in January 2024

Wyddial

0 recorded crimes in January 2024

Vehicle crime (thefts from vans etc) increased in January.

Local Priority activity update (from 6th Dec 2023 – 31st Jan 2024).

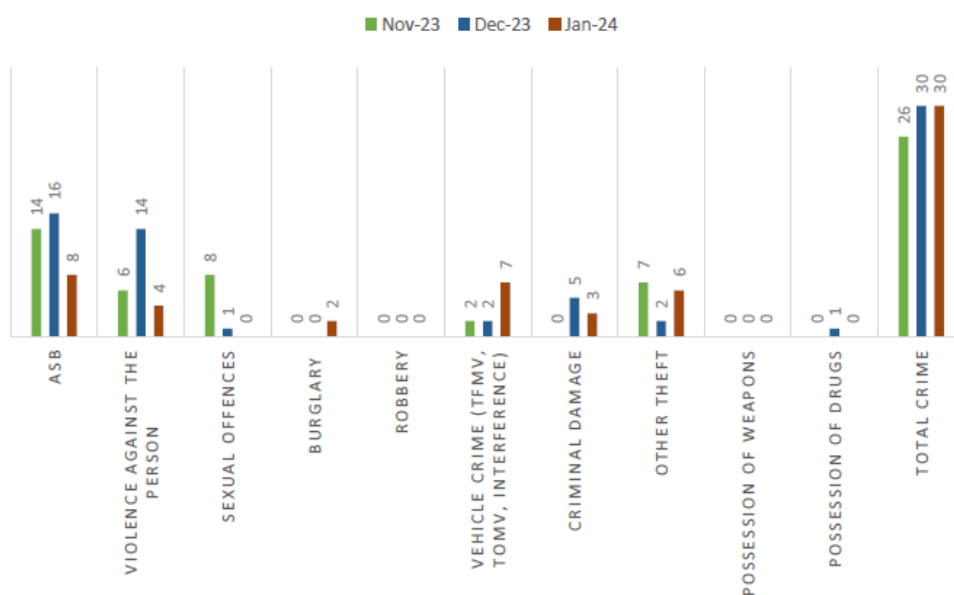
Reduce Anti-Social Vehicle usage in Buntingford Town. Activities included: 2 drivers arrested for drug driving, 1 arrested for drink driving, 2 vehicles seized for being driven without insurance, 2 e-scooter riders warned.

OWL:

Local specific messages:

- 41/751/24 Thefts from vehicles Buntingford
- 41/4748/24 Burglary Layston Meadow
- 41/6424/24 and 41/6765/24 Vehicle interferences (break ins)
- 41/7390/24 Shed Burglary

BUNTINGFORD ASB & CRIME



Cllr Poulton reported the amount of Nitus Oxide gas bottles being dumped on the Village Green and in bins around the green. He reported he had been collecting them up and disposing of them safely.

Cllr Poulton also reported the fly tipping on the track to Tannis. District Councillor Sue Nicholls suggested reporting this to East Herts Council as there was funding available to assist with removing fly tipping.

PCSO Dearman reported on the head on collision on the A10 bypass on 10th February which resulted in the death of one driver at the scene and a drunk driver being prosecuted. Councillors expressed their concern about the recent accidents on this stretch of road.

Cllr Blackburn thanked PCSO Dearman for attending the meeting and he left at this point.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

24.06 There being no members of the public District Councillor Sue Nicholls and County Councillor Jeff Jones gave their reports.

District Councillor's Report

Update from John Dove, East Herts Enforcement Officer.

The approval of the S278 is still in progress. As at 19th February 2024 The Road Safety Audit 2 (RSA2) had been completed and the report shared by HCC and Dandara.,17 issues were identified which need to be agreed between HCC Highways and Dandara to satisfy the RSA2 findings.

Then the legal agreements can be completed and the works carried out. It is fair to say that the S278 process is entering the final phase but frustratingly we still cannot put an end date on the process. Once the S278 is complete it is expected that the works themselves may take about 10 weeks. I will of course continue to monitor the situation.

Swimming Pool Update

Herts County Councillors and Officers met on 7 February to discuss whether they would consider further funding of the Ward Freman pool. They decided against this, partly in light of the Department for Education decision to cease funding for school swimming pools from August 2025. They did, however, agree to support any proposals that might come forward for a community-run pool and as the building's owners requested that the Buntingford Pool Group submit a business plan to Herts County Council by the end of March.

The Buntingford Pool Group is made up of local residents (including swimming teachers, former pool users and those with relevant business experience) local Ward District Councillors and Cllr Sarah Hopewell (EH Executive Member for Wellbeing). There is a strong desire amongst residents to explore the feasibility of sourcing funds (through available grants and fund-raising efforts) to enable the replacement of plant room equipment and repairs and upgrade needed to the pool which would be required before opening and running it again as a community asset (by forming a Community Interest Company or charity run enterprise). The pool group is holding regular meetings to discuss plans and also speaking to individuals and groups from across the country who have been in a similar position and successfully rescued their community pool.

Home Upgrade Grants

The Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2) is open to home-owners and private tenants in:

Homes not heated by mains gas which includes oil, coal, LPG or only electric heating.

and

Households with a combined annual income of less than £36,000 gross OR receiving certain income-related means-tested benefits such as Universal Credit OR you live in an area of Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). We can check this once you enter your postcode.

and

Hard to heat homes – this is based on your home Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). You will be helped with this part of the assessment and receive a free EPC assessment if you do not have one already.

More information on the website or phone number on the poster that I shared.

[Home Upgrade Grant – Free energy-saving improvements for your home \(hugapply.co.uk\)](https://hugapply.co.uk)

County Councillor's Report

Hertfordshire County Council Budget 2024/25

The Council is boosting spending by £98million to £1.1 billion but due to an estimated £57million shortfall in funding to pay for it the Council will use £11million of reserves in the next year while commencing an ambitious programme of efficiencies and service transformation totaling £46million to deliver a balanced budget. To help bridge the funding gap Council tax will be increased by 4.99%.

Nort East Herts MP Sir Oliver Heald

Sir Oliver Heald has announced he will not be standing as a candidate in the next general election and applications are open to replace him. The Green Party candidate Vicky Burt has been declared.

Aspenden Road works

The s278 works to the road are in discussion between Highways and the developer Dandara and it's very difficult to give a timescale.

The road will be resurfaced from the bridge to London Road with two zebra crossing points; one at the Dandara site and another at Fairfield and a three-way traffic lighted chicane at the White House. The Vegetation will be cut back along the river side.

Cllr Blackburn sought clarification on a possible road closure whilst the works were carried out. Cllr Jones confirmed the works would require a road closure. Councillors voiced their concerns as the only diversion route is through Westmill which is totally unsuitable for such a volume of traffic which would include HGVs, farm vehicles etc. Cllr Jones said the only other alternative would be to do the works at night which would take longer and be inconvenient. Councillors felt this was a better alternative to a day time closure. He added he had put forward the Westmill to Aspenden road, as an undesignated road, for extra allocated funding for repairs.

Flooding on the Aspenden Road

Ringways replaced a broken drainage pipe at the Dandara entrance and cleared the flood – they also cleaned the gully into the river and also cleared the flood outside Railway Cottages. Cllr Blackburn stated that all the gullies on the Aspenden Road needed clearing and expressed frustration about the lack of maintenance. Cllr Jones said the gully map on the EHC website will indicate when the works have been carried out.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

24.07 The minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 21st November 2023 having been circulated previously, were before the meeting and signed as a correct record.

CHAIR'S REPORT**24.08 Aspenden Parish Council Chair's Report****Trees**

The Parish Council commissioned a survey of the trees surrounding the village green in November 2023. The subsequent report identified a number of recommended works and quotes are currently being sourced from three contractors – it is hoped the works will be carried out in the Spring.

You will have noticed that a fallen tree on the Village Green has been made in to a seat, and our thanks go to Murray Cheetham for his expertise with a chain saw.

Highways

We are well aware of the poor state of the roads around Aspenden and in particular the continuous flooding just beyond the bridge. We along with a number of local residents have been actively pursuing East Herts and County Highways for a solution to these issues.

We are advised the highway works associated with the Dandara development will not take place until a legal agreement has been reached with the developer – these discussions are on-going and it is hoped our local Buntingford Councillors will have an update for the Parish Council at the next meeting on the 27th February 2024.

Similarly, we hope to have a general update on the roads from County Councillor, Jeff Jones.

We are continually advised by both East Herts and County Highways to log all faults on their website as the more reported faults the higher priority they become – link to both below:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/highways-roads-and-pavements/report-a-problem/report-a-highway-fault/what-type-of-fault-are-you-reporting.aspx>

<https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/highways-parking/report-street-light-or-pothole>

Playground

We are aware of the flooding of the village green play area and are liaising with Broadmead Leisure (who installed the equipment) on finding a solution.

Neighbourhood Plan Review

The Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan (BCANP) is currently being reviewed and we have been asked to update the section on Aspenden.

80th Anniversary of D Day – 6th June 2024

Throughout the Country celebrations will be held to mark the 80th Anniversary of D Day - the Parish Council in conjunction with St Mary's Church will be organising a commemorative event for the evening of 6th June 2024 and further details will be made available over the coming weeks.

Village Fete

I am pleased to advise the Village Fete will return to Aspenden on the 4th August 2024. Any volunteers wishing to help are advised to contact Sara Walker: avfcommittee@outlook.com

Andrew Huggins

Andrew is sadly stepping down from the Parish Council and will be relocating abroad as part of a new job. May I take this opportunity to thank him for his commitment, dedication and hard work on behalf of the Parish and we wish him well in his new role. He will be missed.

PARISH COUNCIL DOCUMENTATION

24.09 None for this meeting

FINANCE**24.10 Finance report and payments authorised**

To receive the finance report. The report is an appendix to the minutes.

24.11 New Lloyds Bank Account

The Clerk reported that a new account had been set up and the paperwork for online access had been signed and would be submitted for approval.

PLANNING**24.12 Planning Report**

To receive the updated Planning Report. The report is an appendix to these minutes.

3/23/1640/HH RECONSULTATION	Manor Cottage The Street Aspenden Buntingford Hertfordshire SG9 9PB	Approved
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24.13 Planning Applications since the Parish Council meeting on Tuesday 21st November 2023

None

24.14 Planning Applications

3/24/0194/FUL	How Green Farm Baldock Road Buntingford Hertfordshire SG9 9RH	No comment
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24.15 Land West of Buntingford

Cllr Blackburn and Cllr Poulton attended a consultation along with Buntingford Town Council specifically for Councillors. This was followed by a public consultation at The Bury. Aspenden Parish Council will be formally consulted when a planning application is submitted.

24.16 Land East of A10 (Vistry Homes)

It was reported this planning application has been turned down and that the developers intend to appeal.

HIGHWAYS

24.17 Highways matters were addressed in Cllr Jones's report in Public Participation.

PARISH MATTERS**24.18 Village Green and Pavilion Committee**

The Temporary Interim Pavilion Committee had met twice and are taking care of the pavilion.

24.19 Pavilion Project Working Group

Cllr Poulton to ask his wife on the progress of the village questionnaires. Cllr Murphy volunteered to pick up the work of the Pavilion Project Working Group.

24.20 Tree Survey

The Clerk presented 3 quotes for the identified works.

It was resolved that the Clerk should ask JD Tree Care to go ahead with the required works as their quote offered a significant discount if all the works were carried out together.

24.21 Annual Playground Inspection Report

The Clerk received a quote from Broadmead Leisure for the identified works on the Annual Playground Inspection Report.

Resolved that the Clerk would ask Broadmead Leisure to undertake the repair works once the flooding had gone.

Cllr Murphy offered to look into drainage solutions for the flooding.

24.22 Dog Bins

The Clerk presented two options for a dog bin for the Village Green area.

Resolved to purchase a Heavy Duty Metal Floor Standing Dog Waste Bin in green at a cost of £339.58.

24.23 General Village Matters**I. D-Day Anniversary Commemoration 6th June 2024**

The Clerk was asked to purchase, for the event, an official Lamp Light of Peace.

Village Green Verges

II. Cllr Poulton stated he would be cutting the verges again after 'no mow May'

Aspenden Millenium sign

III. Cllr Chambers will seek proposals and quotes for the refurbishment of the Aspenden Millenium wooden sign.

CLERKS REPORT AND CORRESPONDANCE**24.25 Clerks Report and Correspondence**

The Clerk had nothing further to report.

DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

24.24 The following schedule of dates was agreed.

Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 21 st May 2024	Annual Parish Meeting 7.00pm to be followed by Annual Meeting of the Parish Council	To be confirmed
Tuesday 23 rd July 2024	Parish Council meeting 7.00pm	To be confirmed
Tuesday 24 th September 2024	Parish Council meeting 7.00pm	To be confirmed
Tuesday 19 th November 2024	Parish Council meeting 7.00pm	To be confirmed
Tuesday 25 th February 2025	Parish Council meeting 7.00pm	To be confirmed

Agendas will be put on the Parish Council website www.aspendenpc.org.uk and the village noticeboard.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.

Signed _____

Date _____