



BRAMLEY PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of Annual Assembly meeting 21st April 2022

Apologies were received from Mr Patrick Molineux and Mr Tom Hughes. 4 members of the public attended the meeting as well as Waverley Councillor Martin d'Arcy.

Although representatives of the Community Policing team were planning to attend the meeting to deliver their report, they were called out to an emergency, so were unable to attend.

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 25th April 2019 were approved and signed by Mr Seaborne.
2. There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting of 25th April 2019.
3. Mr Seaborne, Chairman of Bramley Parish Council, then presented his report for the year as follows:

April 2022 Chairman's Report

Good evening, everybody.

Let me start by thanking Kathy and Jean Ball for organising the hoisting of the flags outside the Library, in celebration of the Queen's 96th birthday. Happy birthday your majesty, from Bramley.

Courtesy of Covid, this will be my first and only summary of the activities of Bramley Parish Council since I succeeded Francesca as Chair a little under three years ago. Consequently, I will mention just a couple of things that pre-date the council year that started in April 2021 before moving on to the highlights of the past 12 months.

Let me start by thanking the members and officers of the council for all their contributions over the past three challenging years. Since the May 2019 election we have had only one change of council personnel, with Martin Foley resigning due to work commitments in January 2020. He was duly replaced by Alison Burrows, who was co-opted to the council in September 2020.

In April 2020 the council started conducting its meetings using conference calls and then migrating to the use of zoom while face-to-face meetings were prohibited. During the first lockdown a community support network was established with councillors taking turns on a rota to receive requests for support from our residents and to allocate tasks to one of the large number of volunteers to carry out. Multiple deliveries of shopping and collections of prescriptions were carried out and I sense that Bramley got through this first phase of Covid as well as anywhere. Both the large numbers of volunteers and the businesses that adapted and soldiered on should be proud of their contributions to the Bramley community.

Meetings of the Planning Committee, ably chaired by Patrick Molineux, continued throughout the various phases of lockdown. As a council we took stock of the need to hold two separate planning meetings each month and reached the conclusion that it would be more efficient to incorporate one of the meetings into the monthly full council meeting, which is what we are now doing.

The council year which ended at the end of March 2022 got off to a difficult start when our excellent clerk, Kathy, had health issues. It rapidly emerged that she would require surgery, so we sought the help of the Surrey Association of Local Councils to identify a locum clerk to support Kathy for several months. Julie Flenley, who clerks at Hambledon and Alfold, stepped into the breach and provided valuable support between April and June enabling business to continue, if not quite as normal, then at least to a perfectly acceptable level.



Having already recognised that the clerk's workload had increased over time the decision was made last Spring, to advertise for a part time assistant clerk and we were successful in recruiting Debbie Ersser from a good pool of applicants in May 2021. Debbie immediately got stuck into the operational side of keeping the parish orderly and has also seamlessly taken over the compilation and distribution of our monthly Bramley Update email.

The first major project that Debbie organised was the refurbishment of the level crossing gates and the Bramley Station shelter. Following a thorough procurement exercise contractors carried out the work to a good standard finishing the work in mid-Autumn.

The council has a liability to keep the walls of the closed graveyard at Holy Trinity Church in safe order. There is quite a bit of remedial work required though no immediate safety issues have been identified. The cost of a campaign to fully restore the entire wall would be painfully high so the council has taken the decision to carry out a small amount of work each year, tackling the most urgent work at the time. Part of the internal wall to the garden of remembrance was in danger of collapse and Debbie has organised for this to be repaired, the work on which was carried out to a high standard during the Autumn.

To wrap up the summary of our significant grounds works, part of the fencing at the Eastwood Road play area has just been replaced following damage during Storm Eunice and is now looking a lot smarter and sturdier.

I'm hoping that everybody is appreciating the work carried out by our new Grounds contractor, Grasstex. Our previous contractor was generally effective when we could mobilise him but on occasions responses were not at the pace we would have liked so the decision was made to seek quotations from other proven contractors. After a careful selection process Grasstex was brought onboard at the start of November. So far both the quality of their work and their speed of response has fully supported our decision.

The highlight of the Autumn was the referendum held on November 18th to seek approval for the Bramley Neighbourhood Plan. The work on the plan started in 2017 and a team led by Bob Stern, including members of the council and Bramley Village Society, ably supported by our Clerk, completed the plan in early 2021. It was externally examined during the Summer and some relatively minor, and fully justified modifications were suggested. These were accepted in full by the Council, enabling the referendum to be held. The 20% turnout was disappointingly low though not out of line with that for other neighbourhood plan referenda in Waverley but the 90% vote in support of the plan was unambiguous. The plan was formerly made by Waverley's Head of Planning on January 13th this year, and is now being actively used to support the council's comments on each application that it reviews.

I'd like to thank all the members of the team that contributed to the preparation of the plan, but the team leader, Bob Stern deserves particular recognition for his tenacity and the depth of understanding that he developed in order to get the plan over the finishing line. The whole process is far more complicated than it ought to be, and Waverley is under-resourced to support parish councils adequately, so it is to Bob's credit that Bramley is one of the first Waverley parishes to have a plan adopted. I'm confident that Bramley will benefit from having the plan in place over the next ten years for which it is valid.

On the planning front, residents have had to suffer a sub-optimum performance from Waverley's planning team courtesy of the combination of the painful implementation of a new software system and challenges in retaining senior staff, coupled with a large increase in applications for house alterations in response to the need for homeworking space. There remains a long backlog of cases. The only consolation for Bramley residents is that the Parish Council reviews all applications in the parish in good time and submits its views, which the Waverley officers usually take notice of.



Moving on to the council's finances, although Kathy is not back to feeling 100% we have continued to pay our bills in a timely manner throughout the year and the most recent audit of the books demonstrated what a good job Kathy does of managing the accounts.

The big challenge over the last couple of years has been separating out the accounting for the village hall, which an auditor had identified should be managed separately by a management committee appointed by the council which acts as trustee for the hall. This separation is now complete and big thanks have to go to Kathy and Tony Coleman who chairs the management committee for undertaking the task in a professional way.

For many years lettings income from the village hall has ensured a healthy cash surplus which has supplemented the annual precept and allowed the parish council to undertake a variety of projects and provide grants to deserving bodies. While the village hall management committee can fund deserving village bodies and activities this option is no longer channelled through the parish council, which has been left with fragile finances. Bramley has one of the lowest precepts in Waverley even after two well above inflation increases to the precept over the last four years, but this does mean that we will have to continue to keep a tight rein on spending particularly with levels of inflation far higher than we have experienced in recent memory.

The members of the council are also trustees of Smiths Charity, which has continued to fulfil its role of providing monetary support to financially stressed members of the parish. Fortunately, an anticipated wave of deprivation due to the impacts of covid has failed to materialise, but the trustees will be looking carefully at the impacts of inflation and allocating the available funds to deserving cases as we go forward.

I'd like to thank Tom Hughes for the diligence with which he has taken over the role of Resilience supremo for the parish, from Tony Coleman who also did a thorough and committed job. The parish got off relatively lightly in Storm Eunice but several residents have experienced problems with sewerage over the year. Tom has pursued Thames Water tenaciously, resulting in some action.

Waverley is currently in the throws of an exercise to allow parish and town councils to adjust their Governance arrangements where they see fit. This could include changing the number of councillors, but we have decided against that. We have, however, looked carefully at certain smaller communities on the southern and eastern boundaries of the parish and asked if they would be better served, in three cases by transferring them to adjacent parishes and in one case by joining Bramley from an adjacent parish. A submission has been made to Waverley suggesting that the adjacent parishes and affected residents be consulted and evaluation criteria will be discussed at next week's council meeting, followed by a further period of consultation starting in early May and lasting five weeks. So, it is possible that the parish boundaries will look a little different by this time next year.

Before finishing I must thank both Martin D'Arcy, my fellow Waverley Borough Councillor, and Kevin Deanus our Surrey County Councillor, for their regular attendance at our monthly meetings and for following up on the actions we give to them. Local government is most effective when there are good linkages between parish, borough and county and I think we can say Bramley is benefitting from the linkage our borough and county councillors provide.

I'm going to wrap up by reminding everybody that there will be elections for this council in May 2023. It is my understanding that several current councillors will be standing down but even if they weren't it is good for democracy when new faces are introduced through the ballot box from time to time. With this in mind, I think it is probably not too early to start encouraging members of our community to put their names forward as candidates so that we can have a lively contested election next year.

Thank you.



4. The Clerk then updated the meeting on Bramley Parish Council financial matters.
 - a. The balance of BPC audited accounts at 31st March 2021 stood at £81,761 which included reserves of £47,500. In the previous financial year, the internal auditor identified that the accounts and management of the Bramley Village Hall charity should be separated from those of the Parish Council. Whilst some work was done on this during the 2020/21 financial year, full separation of the accounts could not be completed due to difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The internal auditor reported that the Council did not meet the control objective for Trust Funds. All other control objectives were met and approved. The external audit accepted the Council's explanation for non-compliance in respect of Trust Funds and fully approved the Annual Governance and Accounting Return for 2020/21.
 - b. The early indication for BPC accounts to 31st March 2022 is that there is a cash balance of £65,751, which includes reserves of £47,500. The cash balance includes earmarked reserves of £6,529 received in a CIL payment and £826 received from the Surrey County Council Member's Allocation for purchase and installation of a grit bin on Chestnut Way during 2022/23.

Receipts:

The Parish Council received a Precept of £59,846 and a Compensatory Grant to help fund the maintenance of recreational facilities of £1,080. Due to the government's withdrawal of Waverley's grant funding in recent years and the significant budget shortfall facing the Borough Council, they made the decision to phase out Compensatory Grants over a number of years. Bramley Parish Council will receive no further grant of this type from the 2022/23 financial year onwards.

All income received for hiring the Village Hall and rental of barns and sheds at the Village Hall is now paid into a Bramley Village Hall charity bank account and is completely separate from the Parish Council accounts. The loss of this income for the Parish Council will present financial challenges to the Council in future, although the Village Hall Charity management committee has agreed to fund community projects from income it receives, once reserves have been built up to recover from the loss of income due to the Covid pandemic.

Due to the pandemic, no income was received from hire of the meeting room at the Library, nor for sales of Library branded bags, refreshments, printing and photocopying services.

Payments:

The Parish Council spent just over £4,000 to refurbish the station shelter on the Downs Link during 2021/22. Other significant expenditure included £2,335 for the work of a Locum Clerk who was contracted whilst the Clerk was on extended sick leave early in the financial year and £900 in the purchase of a laptop for use by the Assistant Clerk who was employed in June 2021 and the purchase of a replacement printer in the Clerk's office. A grant of £6,750 was awarded to the Bramley Village Hall charity to cover loss of income caused by the Covid pandemic.

As Mr Seaborne mentioned, the Parish Council awarded a contract to carry out grounds work in the parish to Grasstex, which commenced in November 2021. A complete schedule to cover all works has been agreed and will cost £11,860 pa, fixed for 3 years.

In 2021/22, the Parish Council invested £47,500 of its reserves in a 1-year fixed term deposit account with United Trust Bank. We received interest of £475 from this investment. The £47,500 balance was reinvested in a further 1-year deposit account for the coming year.

The Clerk asked those present to note these figures were still subject to both internal and external audit. All accounts are available to view at the Parish Council offices, by appointment.



5. There followed any other business and questions from the floor:
- a. Members were asked if a hard copy of the Bramley Neighbourhood Plan was available to read. The Clerk loaned a copy of the Plan to the resident and confirmed that she would ensure that copies were available in Bramley Library.
 - b. Members were asked what the reserves of £47,500 were being reserved for. It was confirmed that the internal auditor has reported that reserves of this level are sensible for a parish of the size of Bramley. Although the Village Hall charity is now separate from the Parish Council, should urgent repairs need to be made to the Village Hall, the Parish Council will consider awarding a grant to the charity to cover the cost of such works, until such a time that the charity has accumulated their own reserves.
 - c. Questions were raised about whether the Neighbourhood Plan covers such issues as air pollution from aircraft and the protection of wildlife. Mr Seaborne reported that air pollution from aircraft is not within the remit of Neighbourhood Plans. The protection of wildlife in the parish is covered to some extent in the Plan, through protecting wildlife corridors, but the main focus of the Plan is the allocation of sites for new housing in the Parish.
 - d. Members were asked when the changes to Governance arrangements being carried out by Waverley will come into effect. Mr Seaborne confirmed that the changes proposed in the review of constituencies, wards and parish boundaries will happen before the next General Election.

Mr Seaborne thanked those who had attended. The meeting closed at 8:05pm followed by refreshments and informal discussion.

Agreed and signed..... ** April 2023