

NEEN SAVAGE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 31st May 2023 at Neen Savage Parish Hall commencing at 7.30pm.

Chairman: Cllr Arthur Ratcliff.

Clerk: Mrs D McBride.

There were twelve people present.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Cllr A Ratcliff welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr J Cleford, Mr & Mrs Haywood, Mr C Whitworth and Mr J Sales.

3. Minutes of last Annual Parish Meeting held on 18th May 2022

The Minutes were approved as being a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.

4. Neen Savage Parish Council Report

Cllr Ratcliff read the Parish Council's Annual Report (full copy attached with these Minutes).

Many of the problems and concerns within the parish remain the same - but hopefully some progress has been made in many areas. The state of the roads remains the topic that seems to be at the top of most people's list of concerns, and takes up time at every Parish Council Meeting. Our smaller road system was never designed to cope with the type of traffic it gets nowadays, both in terms of the number and size of modern vehicles - not to mention speed. Combine that with the lack of maintenance and investment, you get the state of affairs that we currently enjoy in all rural parishes. Trying to keep the water off the roads by cleaning ditches, gullies and culverts is realistically our only route to helping the situation - that, and repeatedly reporting road defects to County. Michael will be dealing with this in the next report, so I will leave that to him.

I think that we have seen a reduction in the amount of litter on our roads recently, and I am sure that this is more due to the fact that many of you are picking it up when you are out and about, rather than the fact that people are dropping less litter. Our regular litter picking days have changed to litter picking weeks, and this change has been successful, proving more workable and encouraging more people to join in.

The bench to replace the one that was stolen from Six Ashes last year is still in the design stage. James Barret and I have a few ideas to make it less attractive to thieves, but we have been struggling a bit with the way that costs of steel and wood have shot up in the last couple of years. I think this is a bullet we need to bite now and get on with it. So I have asked for new quotes for materials in the last couple of weeks.

Meanwhile, we have installed two new litter bins by the car park at Six Ashes, in the hope that will help to keep the area a bit tidier. The other litter bin, which was refurbished last year, will be moved down to be next to the bench at the Ford, as the one that is currently there has lost its lid, which leads to litter being blown about by the wind.

The improvements to drainage in the Ford area is one project where little progress has been made in the last 12 months, but Cllr Harris is constantly trying to chase that up for us.

The review of the Community Led Parish Plan which was talked about at last year's meeting has now been formally adopted by the Parish Council and copies sent to all the relevant interested parties. You can see the review on the Parish Council Website, but it basically concluded that the original Plan, made in 2014 was still relevant because most of the aspirations and concerns of parishioners remain the same. Again, thanks go to Julian, Michael, Chris and Mike Hurley for getting this done.

The Parish Council still has funds earmarked for the installation of a large Smart TV screen, here in the Parish Hall. This was originally intended, mainly, to help with complying with Transparency Code Regulation, but the Covid Pandemic made us aware that it could be used to allow people to attend meetings on Zoom, and reduce the amount of paper used, as well as providing a useful resource for future users of the Hall. This project has again been put on temporary hold as it did not seem sensible to put it up before the extension work to the Parish Hall has been carried out.

This has not been a complete summary of the work your Parish Council has been doing over the last year. We have, among other things, considered a number of planning applications, as you would expect. For the details, have a look at the Parish Council's website, where all Agendas, Minutes and financial documents are published. I have to thank Olwen and Dot for keeping on top of that job.

I will finish by thanking all my fellow councillors, who all put in many hours of work, apart from turning up to "most" of the meetings, "mostly" on time! But, again, I would especially like to thank Dot for all her work over the last 12 months and for deciding to remain as our Clerk despite the increased workload she has taken on with her duties in Cleobury.

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5. Highways Report

Cllr Michael Tomkinson stated that the roads remain a concern. Although there have been more repairs in the past year, the roads were of such a poor standard at the beginning of last year that even with more repairs they still do not look great. The poor-quality repairs, sometimes, only half filling holes and the unpredictable Fix My Street app is not good enough. Fix My Street is the preferred place to report highway issues but it is not being managed properly as some issues are marked as fixed and closed when they have not been actioned or only partly completed. There is no timescale given for repairs and some old reports have not been cleared off the system. Thanks to Cllr Harris, some repairs of the Nash to Detton Road have been carried out but there is much to be done. Lots of white paint to mark the issues has now faded and repairs remain outstanding.

Members of the public have been reporting more issues which is good. Cllr Tomkinson stated he reported 25 issues last week alone and has more to do. Please contact him with any highway issues as he will be happy to report them and monitor progress or report them directly onto Fix My Street.

Using the Environmental Maintenance Grant, the Parish Council has undertaken work on the ditch at Picklebatch bank, the ditches between Stonehouse and Stepple, cleaned out the culvert near the Old School House and replaced some setts in the Ford. There will be more work undertaken this year.

Thank you to everyone who helps with litter-picking during the year which all helps keep our parish tidy.

6. Neen Savage Parochial Church Council Report

Mrs S Del Mar read the PCC's Report (full copy attached with these Minutes).

St Mary's Neen Savage has two services a month; Evensong on the first Sunday and Holy Communion on the third. We are grateful to the clergy, especially the non-stipendiary vicars for enabling this to happen.

In 2022 special services included a celebration of the life of Queen Elizabeth the Second. Another was the Harvest Festival after which we were able to send some produce to the Cleobury Food Bank. Remembrance Sunday, as usual, took place by the War memorial with wreaths laid by the Parish Council, the Parochial Church Council and the Women's Institute. The Parochial Church Council is grateful to the Parish Council for supplying their wreath. The Crib Service, as usual was very well attended and has become a staple in the Christmas Festivities.

This year, 2023, we had a special evensong to celebrate the coronation with the church resplendent in red, white and blue flowers. The service ended with a Champagne Toast.

The electrics have been repaired at a cost of over £6,000 and there is a list of repairs that we will undertake when time and money permit.

Many thanks to Peter Plant for keeping the churchyard in such good order. We are grateful to the Parish Council for giving us a grant towards the costs which now amount to £1,500 per year.

Thanks to the flower arrangers and also the organists, Chris Kippen and Philip Engleheart and also Emma Haywood who raised £318 with her sunflower competition. Pumpkins are threatened for next year!

Finally, a plea for support - St Mary's is such a pretty church and the PCC does its best to keep it so, especially for Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals. Costs, such as Insurance and heating seem to be for ever rising and we are so grateful for those parishioners who donate by standing order. If you would like to contribute, please do get in touch.

7. Neen Savage Parish Hall Committee Report

Mrs C Ratcliff read the Parish Hall's Report (full copy attached with these Minutes).

2022/23 has seen a few changes and improvements to the Hall.

The committee has changed a little this year. Committee members are now Clare Ratcliff, Carol Link, Ros Haines, Jenny Bedford, Mike Hurley, Guy Haywood, Olwen Law, Tina Bate, Catherine Evans and John Haywood.

Jen Pearce has stepped down as Bookings Secretary, and the role has now been taken by Jenny Bedford. Details for contacting Jenny can be found in this month's Vital Link and will also be added to the new website. Great thanks to Jen Pearce for her many years of help. This year we also welcomed Guy Haywood to the committee. It is particularly encouraging to have a younger parishioner volunteering and we still have a vacancy if anyone would like to join this small friendly committee.

Since the last APM we have held two significant events linked to National celebrations. The late Queen's Platinum Jubilee in July 2022 and King Charles' Coronation in May 2023. Both events took the form of a Bring and Share lunch, and were well attended by many parishioners, young and old. They were both great community events and happily brought together our rural parish.

We also held our annual Scarecrow Convention and Garden Party in July. Once again we were able to book Cleobury Brass Band, who add so much to the day. It was lovely weather and the stalls were located round the back of the hall with the Scarecrows displayed along the front to good effect. The scarecrows were on a Royal theme and included several Queens, corgis, Prince Andrew and a Beefeater.

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This year's theme is Sport, to tie in with the Vital Link's focus on Sport in the next issue. The date is Saturday July 15th and everyone is very welcome. The band will again be playing and there will be the usual sideshows and attractions including, for the first time, 'Guess the weight of the Donkey'. We are always reliant on generous donations of prizes and help, so if you would like to contribute, please let me (or any committee member) know.

We had a visit from Father Christmas in December and it was great to welcome so many children (and adults) from the parish to join us for an early evening festive gathering, which was held outside. A good time was had by all and a donation to the charity, Crisis at Christmas was made, of over £100.

Other main activities this year:

1. Road side boundary - We have concentrated our efforts this year on the gate area. In January the conifers were removed (many thanks to Martin Tomanek, Ben Griffiths and Guy Haywood). The area has been planted with whips of mixed native species, which will be managed as a hedge. The post and rail fence has been replaced and the Hall sign has been renovated. The Gates have been shot blasted, galvanized and painted. The rest of the boundary will be improved during the next two years.
2. Planning permission has been obtained to extend the hall, adding a modest space to the rear, for storing tables and chairs. We have applied to the Lottery for help with grant funding and are awaiting a response. A builder will then be approached, but it is likely that the work will be done in 2024.
3. The hall has been fitted with a Smart Meter.
4. An Elm tree has been planted at the rear of the hall grounds, in memory of Andy Vanderhook. The tree was kindly donated by Jenny Vanderhook and the memorial plaque was unveiled after the Coronation Celebration on May 7th.
5. There will be Outside Work Party at 6pm on Tuesday July 4th. Anyone is very welcome to lend a hand but please bring your own tools if possible.
6. There will be longer term strategic planning to include looking at efforts to increase hirings and plan for a sustainable financial future for the Hall.

Many thanks to all the committee members, and their families, for all their hard work and contributions. A particular mention to Arthur Ratcliff for cutting the grass all season and offering his help as general handyman. He has employed a "No Mow May" strategy this year, to boost the flowers available to pollinating insects and allow spring flowers to set seed and the plants to establish themselves in advance of the summer. Also, thanks to George Haywood for cutting the hedge.

8. Neen Savage Women's Institute Report

Mrs C Evans read the WI's Annual Report (full copy attached with these Minutes).

It has been another busy year for Neen Savage WI, with an interesting variety of speakers and visits. Fortunately, after the uncertainty of last year we have been able to welcome the speakers as published in the programme with a wide range of subject matter from Glass Art to a trek to Everest Base Camp. James and Sue Barrett welcomed us to Little Detton for a tour of the small holding and their off-grid Airbnb in the dingle.

Fundraising was once again the Advent Soup lunches, raising money for the Nightingale Nursing Fund and Severn Hospice.

We finally completed the commemorative tablecloth and used it at our celebration of the Platinum Jubilee.

Coming up we have visits planned to local businesses Heath Farm Meats and Mawley Milk and are also organizing a Vintage Afternoon Tea with a WI from the Black Country who reenact a WI from the 1940's. We will have our usual Cake and Produce stall at the Scarecrow Convention and have been asked to help again at the Little Hearts Matter Fun Day at the Pioneer Centre. The Children's Clothes project continues in the Market Hall in collaboration with Cleobury WI.

We also continue to meet informally locally on the last Thursday of every month for coffee. Membership stands at around 17 members so we would love to welcome more, especially if you live in Neen Savage. You are welcome to come along and try before you buy. We meet on the 2nd Wednesday of the month, 7.30pm here at the Parish Hall.

9. Edwards & Hinckesman's Foundation Charity Report

The Clerk read Mr Whitworth's Edwards & Hinckesman's Foundation Report (full copy attached with these Minutes).

Over the past 70 years, the Foundation has supported 110 young people with grants totalling more than £250,000 (at 2023 prices). The Trustees met in August 2022 to interview applicants for awards and review the business of the charity. Grants totaling £2,600 were made to five young people of the Parish. Over the last ten years £13,000 has been raised in donations or gifted to the Foundation from members of the parish. The Trustees are keen to maintain a proactive approach to fund-raising and to engage with former beneficiaries and their families to raise awareness of the Foundation and to encourage giving, both one-off and regular.

This year's deadline for the receipt of applications is Monday 1st August with interviews taking place on Wednesday 30th August 2023.

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10. Unitary Councillors' Reports

Unitary Cllr Gwilym Butler and Cllr Simon Harris have issued a joint annual report (full copy attached with these Minutes). Cllr Harris introduced himself to those present and thanked the Parish Council for their invitation to this and all their regular monthly meetings. He stated that he sees himself as a bridge between the parish and Shirehall. He is also a Trustee of the Edwards and Hinckesman's Foundation and confirmed that the charity is being ran according to the constitution.

In the past year there had been a few changes of unitary councillors at Shirehall but there is still a Conservative majority. The finances are carefully scrutinized and there is a current drive to save £50m this year. The Council Tax is as high as it can be without going to a Referendum. There are moves to increase the grants for the Lengthsman Scheme as Parish Councils can use this money very effectively. Cllr Harris shares Cllr Tomkinson's frustration with Fix My Street and has escalated the inaction of the Ford CIL project to the CEO Andy Begley.

The Boundary Commission is recommending that Neen Savage be grouped with other rural parishes and separate from Cleobury Mortimer. He encouraged everyone to have their say on the consultation. Cllr Harris is on the Audit and Pensions Committee and is keen to challenge Shropshire Council to become net zero before their target date of 2050. Cllr Harris has joined a Task and Finish Group to ensure our waterways are cleaner. There is a lot of interesting information available from Rivers Trust. There have been 38 outflows of sewage into the River Rea from the Cleobury Mortimer Treatment plant last year and Cllr Harris is working with Philip Dunne MP to see what can be done to improve this. A new sewage plant is being proposed on land near Newbridge and should have capacity for up to 300 more houses in its lifetime.

Cllr Harris took questions and comments regarding the poor quality of road repairs, poor management of highway maintenance work and noted the Parish Council's frustration with having to invoice for volunteer work for the Environmental Maintenance Grant. The Parish Council would be happy to undertake minor pot hole repairs again, if permitted. Mrs Ratcliff stated that there is a large base of practical skills in our parish and we would be happy to do more. Following a comment that the River Rea is browner and smellier this year below the Cleobury sewage plant, Cllr Harris confirmed that he has requested more monitoring of the river before and after discharges from the current treatment plant.

11. Parish Matters

Mrs Evans asked if a rope swing at the Ford could be checked as it may pose a danger.

Cllr Ratcliff thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.39pm.

It was agreed at the Parish Meeting (Minute Ref 2024/03) that these minutes are a true record of the meeting.

Arthur Ratcliff

29th May 2024

Signed.....Chairman Date.....