

MIDGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

C/o 2 Old Orchard, Upper Woolhampton, RG7 5TE

Email: clerk@midghamparish.co.uk

Tel: 07896 321 058

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

18th November 2024 at 7pm in Midgham Village Hall

District Councillor: Chris Read

Councillors: Anthony Fenn (Chair), Nigel Bassford, Francis Long, Dawn Adams, Tracey Leadbeater

Clerk: Alice Owens

Members of Public: 4

This meeting was conducted strictly in accordance with Standing Orders as adopted by Council in May 2021. All Councillors are reminded to acquaint themselves with these Standing Orders.

An application for Dawn Adams to be co-opted as a councillor was circulated to councillors prior to the meeting. Cllr Fenn proposed Dawn Adams as a councillor; this was seconded by Cllr Long. It was RESOLVED that Dawn Adams should be co-opted as a councillor of Midgham Parish Council; she was invited to join the meeting and all relevant forms were witnessed and signed to be submitted to West Berks Council.

Public Session

A member of the public asked District Cllr Read if there had been any progress regarding the crossing at the bottom of Church Hill at the A4. District Cllr Read has made contact with Highways (Mr Reynolds) regarding the potential of dropping the curb.

A member of the public (Mr Holden-Crowther) attended to express an interest in being co-opted onto the council; he is already a member of Woolhampton Parish Council but wishes to offer his expertise in building a new website for Midgham. ACTION - Chair Fenn to make contact with Mr Holden-Crowther, and application form to be submitted if he wishes to progress.

1. To receive apologies

There were none

2. To receive any declarations of interest

Cllr Long declared an interest in planning application 24/01998/FULMAJ as the land owner.

3. To receive and approve the minutes of the last meeting of the council

The minutes were approved and signed.

4. To receive the District Councillors Report

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District Cllr Read discussed the upcoming budget; a link will be posted in the district council report.

There is a new CEO of West Berks Council; Mr Joseph Holmes has stepped in as an acting CEO whilst the recruitment process takes place.

On the 14th and 21st December, bus routes starting in West Berkshire will be free.

A new Mental Health fund to support voluntary and community foundations; to enable not-for-profit groups to support individuals with mental health challenges.

Free School Meals vouchers will be increased to support families over the Christmas period.

West Berks has a Giving Tree to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse; donations welcomed up until the 6th December.

Next community forum will focus on flood prevention, cost of living and ‘Welcome Spaces’.

District Cllr Read distributed a questionnaire to local residents regarding council services relating to refuse collection (scored well), speeding, potholes, and verges and gullies (scored low).

5. To receive the Clerks report

5.1 Financial update

	Payments	Receipts	Balance
Balance as at 8th September 2024			£ 20,066.06
Income			
Interest received		£ 55.44	
Precept		£9,500.00	
Payments			
Salary Sept Oct	476.20		
Norton	94.99		
Parish Council Websites	180.00		
Odin Manners	2,155.00		
Homeworkers Allowance	120.00		
Email server	46.99		
	£3,073.18	9,555.44	
Balance as at 18/11/24			£ 26,548.32

5.2 Budget

The budget was circulated to councillors and discussed at the meeting. Chair Fenn proposed a precept request of £10,000, this was seconded by Cllr Long. It was **RESOLVED** that a precept request for £10,000 would be made to West Berkshire District Council.

6. To receive/review any Planning Applications

6.1 Awaiting decision from West Berks Planning

- **23/01981/FUL**- Former Ryders Yard, Colthrop Lane - Change of use of existing truck and trailer hire fleet, maintenance and storage depot to provide flexible uses within Class E(g)(i), (ii) and (iii), B2 and B8 of the Use Classes Order. **PC Objected due to lighting levels**
- **23/02096/LBC** - Part two-storey part, single-storey replacement extension to existing dwelling. Terrace doors in existing modified window opening -**NO OBJECTIONS**
- **23/02573/FULMAJ** - Land South Of School Hill and West Of, Midgham Green, Midgham, Reading - Change of use of land to dog walking facility. *Cllr Long declared an interest in the application as the owner of the land. A business called Hounds and Bounds wish to make use of a five-acre field for off lead dog walking. There will be a maximum of three vehicles allowed on site. There will be no flood lights. Cllr Bassford asked why the application had been previously rejected - there were approx. 18 objectors, largely centered around increase in traffic. Cllr Leadbeater has used similar facilities owned by Hounds and Bounds and commented on how well maintained the facilities are, and that she feels responsible owners usually use the facility. Councillors were all in favour of supporting the application. ACTION – Clerk to respond to application supporting the change of use.*

7. NE Thatcham Development

Chair Fenn informed councillors that he attended a meeting with other parish council Chairs with Olivia Bailey MP who was made aware of the objection to the application in the local area. On Saturday 23rd November there will be a tour of the development area.

District Cllr Read informed councillors that the planning inspector has been investigating the planning application, and there is an expectation that the planning application will be supported. There is feeling that the plan has not been soundly considered; money needs to be spent to get a legal opinion from a KC in order to ascertain whether the campaign should request a judicial review. There is an expectation that the legal advice will cost approximately £8000; the group are therefore appealing to parish councils and private individuals. Chair Fenn proposed £500 as a

donation, this was seconded by Cllr Adams. ACTION – Clerk to arrange payment of donation to NE Thatcham Development Campaign Group.

8. Village Hall Matters

Communication was received from a resident in Midgham, including names from other residents ‘signed’ at the end, regarding the planning application for replacing the roof at the village hall. Chair Fenn read the following statement:

Midgham Parish Council received an email on 6th November from a member of the public with a number of concerns relating to the village hall and the planning application for the new roof.

This email has been circulated to all parish councillors. I will give a brief summary of the concerns.

The author of the email states that:

- 1) The village hall is a ‘white elephant’ with inadequate parking facilities and poor access for the disabled and elderly
- 2) He resents the amount of tax payers’ money to be spent on a village hall
- 3) He suggests the viability of disposing of the village hall and sharing facilities with Woolhampton
- 4) He challenges Midgham Parish Council to prove they have a mandate to increase the precept to help fund the village hall repairs

The resident is not alone in sharing concerns over the future of the village hall, and for the benefit of our new parish councillors, I will attempt to clarify the situation:

Midgham Parish Council are trustees of the deeds of the village hall, granted in 1938. Midgham Parish Council is not responsible for the maintenance of the village hall – that is the province of the village hall trustees.

In the days of COVID, Midgham Parish Council met via Zoom video conferencing and on one of these occasions (30/09/20), the question of retiring the village hall and joining forces with Woolhampton was raised. It was agreed that the trustees would instigate a local residents’ vote on the future of the village hall and to consult with the Charity Commission and Kate Meads of Community Buildings Advice.

The purpose of the vote was to gauge public opinion and to encourage those in favour to become trustees. It was never intended to be a referendum.

Only 26% of Midgham residents responded; 49 in favour of abandoning the village hall, and 19 in favour of keeping the Village Hall.

The advice from the CBA was both interesting and relevant:

- 1) Do not dispose of an asset that might be required in the future
- 2) The original 1938 conveyance, registered with the Charity Commission governs the use of the land – it can only be used as a Village Hall.

Therefore, any attempt to sell the Village Hall would involve the trustees of the village hall in an enormous expense to challenge the original conveyance with no guarantee of success.

Consequently, Midgham Parish Council took the view that it was more beneficial for the parish to assist with the maintenance of the Village Hall.

Throughout 2024, discussions were held at parish council meetings to increase the precept to support the Village Hall.

On 8th July, there was unanimous agreement to raise £10,000 for the Village Hall on the following conditions:

- 1) The funding should be solely for the use of repairing the roof.
- 2) Building regulations and planning permission to be agreed.
- 3) An approved and registered company to be appointed.
- 4) Village Hall trustees to demonstrate partnership funding – The Greenham Common Trust.
- 5) Matched funding from the Village Hall Committee.

With regard to the mandate; I will simply state that under Section 137 Local Government Act 1972, Midgham Parish Council has discretionary powers to award grants to bodies that provide for local areas.

The resident made reference to a ‘White Elephant’ which is very succinct because to quote the original definition of a White Elephant;

“It is a possession that its owner cannot dispose of without extreme difficulty or cost”

However, one cannot fail but agree with the resident’s sentiments on the issue of parking and disabled access, concerns which are shared by Midgham Parish Council and with that in mind, District Councillor Read has an idea to suggest to the meeting:

District Cllr Read agreed that the Village Hall was an important asset for the village; Midgham has a unique perspective in that it is not a service village so joining forces with other villages will lose some of the identity of the Midgham community. Regarding the parking and access, District Cllr Read suggested he could lobby West Berks for CIL funding to develop a carpark. However, landowners need to be approached to develop this, because at the moment space is limited.

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Chair Fenn suggested that it first needs to be established who owns the land adjacent to the hall to discuss development of the land as a carpark. The Village Hall could and should be developed as a community asset for the use of Midgham residents and beyond. **ACTION** – Chair Fenn to make contact with local landowners to further explore the development of land as carparking.

Village Hall Trustees also received the email from the local resident and wished to read the following statement:

Speaking on behalf of the Village Hall Committee we believe it would be useful to clarify a few points.

When our annual report indicates a profit of £500 this indicates a surplus of £500 after any outgoings which include payments for any repairs and improvements.

Since the new committee was formed the hall has had extensive work done on the grounds, new emergency lights fitted above the front door and new fire exits signs erected. A new heating system has been installed and a new mains water pipe fitted funded entirely by the hall.

The Committee and guests have worked hard to raise funds and are pleased to inform the Parish Council that a sum equal to the Parish Council's donation of £10,000 was raised even before villagers were invited to sponsor a tile, so far 33 people have sponsored one or multiple tiles.

Since the new Committee has taken over, events have been well supported: up to 16 villagers attend the coffee mornings and for many of them this is the only social contact they have.

The last quiz night was over-subscribed, over 60 villagers have bought the annual Village Hall lottery tickets, the plant sale alone raised £400 and we expect these successes to continue, with another event planned for next week.

The repair to the floor is a minor one and no funding will be required.

One guest has requested we look at LED lights but no decision has been made. It is not a priority, and if it is decided to go ahead, the hall expects to fund the cost of these.

9. Other matters the Chairman feels necessary

Chair Fenn thanked District Cllr Read in his assistance in lobbying West Berks Council to clear footpaths along the A4. There are still some areas which require clearing; councillors to monitor.

10. To determine dates for the next meeting

20th January 2025 at 7pm

11. To record the meeting closed

20.34