

## HERMITAGE PARISH COUNCIL

### Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly of Hermitage Parish Council held at Village Hall, Hermitage, Berkshire RG18 9WL on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2025 at 8pm

#### Present

Cllr R Cottingham (Chairman), Cllr I Govier (Vice Chairman) Cllr D Brown, Cllr V Burgess, Cllr J Rigby, Cllr Alex Williams, Cllr A Goldsmith

45 members of the public were in attendance.

#### Apologies for absence:

Dist. Cllr P Dick, Dist. Cllr H Codling, Ms N Pierce (Parish Clerk).

#### 01.04.25 Welcome

The Chairman of Hermitage Parish Council, Ruth Cottingham, welcomed all to the APA.

#### 02.04.25 Update from The Downlands Practice – Dr Sarah Morton – Senior Partner

The pharmacy team has grown, with more dispensers and pharmacists added. Systems and processes have been implemented, and the pharmacy is now dispensing 20,000 items per month. Collections are available from Compton and Chieveley, with a limited delivery service.

Team Growth: Over the past year, a GP has become a GP trainer, with four new GPs being trained and two new trainee GPs. Pharmacists have become accredited checkers, and practice nurses have completed courses to offer more services.

Financial Concerns: The pharmacy faces financial challenges, predicting a £20,000 loss, however, they are exploring alternative income streams outside of the NHS and may launch a fundraising campaign. Plans include installing dispensing lockers in Compton and Chieveley for patients to access their prescriptions after office hours and over weekends. Vaccination Statistics are high with the uptake for spring COVID boosters (860 appointments), RSV vaccinations (500 people vaccinated), and shingles vaccinations being well supported. (96% uptake compared to the national average of 60-70%).

Staff Changes: Dr. Kabe has retired, and Dr. Akin immigrated to Canada. Two new GPs will start in June and September. The team remains committed to their values and the community, with strong support from the patient population.

Audience Questions: A member of the audience asked about the spring COVID jab, which is only offered to certain candidates.

#### 03.04.25 Hermitage Community Event – Cllr Ian Govier

Cllr Govier provided further details on the Hermitage Community Event due to take place on Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> of July. This will be a collaboration between both pubs in the village, the Parish Council and Hermitage Village Hall Committee.

Activities planned for the day will include crafts by local people in the big hall, tea and coffee in the small hall, and outdoor activities include 5-a-side football (teams from Fox, White Horse, and the village), rounders, netball in MUGA, and a tug of war.

Food and Drink will be for sale on the day with alcohol for sale from The Fox Inn and The White Horse, with burgers, and fish and chips van.

The day will conclude with evening entertainment by a tribute band with tickets costing £10.00 per person; however, we would need to sell 150 tickets for this entertainment to go ahead. At present, only the date is confirmed; other plans are tentative and Ian has appealed for volunteers to help organize the event. The goal is to turn this into an annual event to bring fun and community spirit to the village.

#### **04.04.25 Hermitage Youth Football – Cllr Ian Govier**

Cllr Govier reported that the youth club did not take off as hoped. The current proposal is to form a Hermitage Football team, including boys' teams and girls' teams. In order to proceed with this initiative, we will need football club managers and volunteers to run the teams. Finances for this project are already in place. The recent Parish Council survey indicates there is a need for the football teams/sports events for children in the village. Please contact Cllr Govier or the Parish Clerk if you would like to volunteer or know of someone who can help support the initiative.

#### **05.04.25 Annual report of Hermitage Parish Council. Cllr Cottingham presented a report.**

The Chair presented her annual report, and the key highlights are listed below: The Neighbourhood Plan Referendum achieved 92% approval, and the policies are now referenced in West Berkshire planning applications. West Berkshire Council has refused the Traveller Site application, and the applicant has appealed. A planning inspector hearing is set for May 20th.

The Chair advised residents to consult the Neighbourhood Plan and design code before submitting planning applications.

The Parish Council is working on improving mobile phone service in the village's southern area.

The Chair provided a brief financial update with paper copies provided to the audience. Please refer to receipts and payments to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 on website.

Land Transfers updates included the Leylandii site, opposite Furze Hill, to be transferred to parish council ownership following delays. Fencing near the gas governor still awaits replacement by developers. This is being monitored by the Parish Council with regular communication made to the developers.

The Burial Ground is now being overseen by Cllr David Brown. John Rigby leads the Community Speedwatch efforts, succeeding Carolyn.

Overflowing dog waste bins are rare thanks to the new provider being used.

The Parish Council are supporting a village hall event on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July with our local village pubs also taking part. Sadly, lack of support hindered youth club initiatives.

The online residents' survey has received 100+ responses, and paper copies are available tonight for those not wishing to complete the survey online.

With regards to Parish Council recruitment, the Parish Council are operating with 7 members instead of 11. The Chair welcomed Alex Williams to the Parish

Council, and we are still seeking 4 members. An appeal was made to interested residents to submit a brief CV to the parish clerk.

The Chair finished off her report by giving thanks to Parish Council members, district councillors, Mr Lawrence, and Nicky Pierce for their continued contributions to the village. A special mention was made in remembrance to ex-Cllr Roy Marr, who was an asset to the council.

**06.04.25 Report from District Councillor**

None.

**07.04.25 Community Speed Watch – Cllr John Rigby**

Cllr Rigby reported the objective of the Community Speed Watch is to reduce speeding through a volunteer-led initiative supported by the police, focusing on data collection rather than enforcement. Another reason is to avoid having speed bumps or speed pillows on our main road. We may look to install a permanent solar powered Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) to remind drivers of their speeds. For police intervention to occur, you would need to prove there is a threshold of over 30% speeding; our current data shows around 6-7%.

Effectiveness: Speeding incidents reduce quickly with more sessions. You will see the volunteers wearing high visibility vests and speed guns are used to promote safer driving. During these sessions, volunteers are capturing details of vehicles exceeding 35 mph (number plate, car make, car model, time, date) and passing them to the police. Repeat offenders receive a letter or a visit for extreme cases. Cllr Rigby appealed for more volunteers. If you are interested, please contact Cllr Rigby or The Clerk. Cllr Rigby acknowledged Caroline Purchase for her tireless contributions, over the past few years which included finding locations, writing risk assessments, and scheduling.

**08.04.25 Reports from the following village groups were presented on behalf of:**

**Preschool**

Mel Needham expressed gratitude for the ongoing support to Hermitage Pre-School and highlighted the strong community spirit of the village. They shared excitement about the upcoming project to create a mini village in the garden, which will include a post office, farm shop, cafe, and hospital. This project aims to foster imaginative play and develop real-world skills among the children. The grant from Hermitage Parish Council will contribute towards this project.

The past year at Hermitage Pre-School was filled with fun and learning. Notable events included a trip to Bucklebury Farm, the annual Easter Bonnet Parade, and preparations for graduation as some children move on to big school. Sports day was a highlight, featuring competitive and entertaining events like the toddler dash and child-parent relay race.

Throughout the year, the focus remained on creating a safe, happy, and nurturing environment for the children. The speaker shared humorous anecdotes about preschool life, emphasizing the growth, friendship, and milestones achieved. They concluded by thanking everyone for their support, which helps provide a loving and enriching start for the children.

### **Holy Trinity Church**

Jane Staunton, on behalf of Holy Trinity Church, thanked the Parish Council for their financial and practical support, including maintaining the churchyard grass areas.

The Church has experienced changes with the departure of Team Vicar Rev Sue Webster in 2023 and the retirement of Rector Rev Wayne Lautenbach in July 2024. Retired clergy and lay ministers have taken more services, with congregation members leading one service a month. The Cate Church service on the third Sunday, planned and led by congregation members, has become popular.

Looking forward to welcoming Rev Nicola Hulks in early June, who joins from St Mary's in Thatcham. Nicola will move into The Rectory with her husband, a teacher at Trinity School, and their two young children. She plans to visit the primary school regularly.

#### Upcoming Events:

- Quiz night on Friday, 16 May at Curridge WI Hall with quiz master Rob Burgess.
- Event in The Rectory Garden on Sunday, 22 June, featuring a BBQ, cakes, refreshments, and a raffle. This will be an opportunity to meet Nicola.

### **Hermitage Village Hall**

John Lawler, the Hermitage Village Hall Chairperson explained the Hermitage Village Hall remained a vital community hub, and offered diverse activities, events, and services throughout 2024.

John Lawler reported a remarkable year of growth and engagement, with increased participation and community involvement. The focus on inclusivity and accessibility has made the village hall welcoming for all.

#### Key Achievements:

- Community Events: Hosted various events including seated chair exercise, dog training, dance classes, Pilates and Yoga, fitness and wellbeing classes, and judo classes.
- Facility Improvements: Upgrades included a new sound system, redecoration and cleaning of Pinewood Hall, an upgraded website, car parking review, and planting a Christmas tree for village events.

Financial Overview: The village hall maintained strong financial health with a balanced budget:

Total Revenue: £64,388

Total Expenses: £56,379

Surplus: £8,009

- Major Revenue Sources: Hire fees, fundraising events, and community donations.
- Major Expenses: Facility maintenance, staff salaries, and utility costs.

Volunteer and Staff Contributions: Trustees and volunteers contributed significantly, supporting various activities and facility upkeep. Their hard work and commitment are greatly appreciated.

There are ambitious future plans for the Village Hall including expanding the car park, extending audio facilities into Furze Hall, improving the entrance area, and developing a business plan to ensure the hall remains central to village activity.

In conclusion, the Hermitage Village Hall continues to thrive as a vibrant community hub, thanks to the hard work of trustees, staff, volunteers, and community support. The hall looks forward to building on this momentum in the coming year.

The Parish Council Grant will go towards replacing the chairs which are near their end of life and over 10 years old.

### **Hermitage Primary School**

Mrs Turner shared that in the past year, the school has undergone significant building projects such as the replacement of the roof, revamping the infant playground, and completing a memorial garden for Mrs Vickie Axten. The memorial garden is maintained by staff and children. The recent Ofsted inspection was extremely positive, with three inspectors spending two days at the school. They interacted with nearly every child and reported that Hermitage Primary School (HPC) is inclusive and a place where children shine. The school maintained its "Good" rating, with "Outstanding" for personal development. Additionally, 98% of parents surveyed would recommend the school to friends and family. Please refer to the attached Ofsted Report for further details.

The current Year 6 students recently went on a residential trip to Wales, and swimming lessons at Downe House are taking place in partnership with Madden schools. Numerous trips are planned, and sports still play a significant role in the school's activities. Hermitage Primary School achieved excellent results in recent cross-country events. Outdoor elements are integral to the curriculum, with the round house used for bushcraft and as an outdoor classroom. The PTA remains a valuable asset, and members are currently planning a summer event. Funds raised from the PTA will be used for smart boards for classrooms and outdoor enhancements. The grant received from the Parish Council will help improve car park facilities to ensure safety for all users.

### **Hermitage Cubs**

Apologies received from Mark Kerry. Written report on website.

#### **09.04.25 Questions**

Cllr Govier asked the members of the public for feedback on the proposed Community event and all agreed it is a great idea.

Cllr Govier also asked the members of the public for their thoughts on the idea of the Football club and although the audience demographic on the night was not the right one, most agreed that there might be a market for a new football club to be started. Some members of the audience suggested Cllr Govier makes an appeal on Facebook to gather expressions of interest.

#### **10.04.25 Presentation of grant cheques**

Grants were awarded to Holy Trinity Church, Village Hall, Primary School, Preschool, Cubs.

#### **11.04.25 Closing remarks**

Cllr Cottingham thanked all for coming to the meeting.

#### **12.04.25 Date of the next Annual Parish Assembly**

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2026 at 7.30pm at the Village Hall, Hermitage, Berkshire RG18 9WL. There being no further business the meeting closed at 20.55pm.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Dated \_\_\_\_\_