

WEREHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

TUESDAY 9th May 2022 6.30 PM

In the Wereham Village Hall

In attendance:

Cllr Jo Bruce

Cllr Annie Bruce

Cllr Sandra Calvert

Cllr Jacki Hitching

Helen Richardson, Parish Clerk and RFO

Members of public in attendance – 1

1 Apologies for absence- Were received and accepted for Cllr Charlie Bourne.

2. Last Year's Annual Parish Minutes May 2021 - Matters Arising

Were accepted as a true record. There were no matters arising.

3. Chair of the Parish Council Report

Chairs report 2022

I thought this year's report ought to be an educational one. There seems to be a lot of misinformation out there that obviously then fuels strong emotions. Social media in all walks of life has caused its challenges. The Wereham village page is testament to the negative as well as positive aspects of this form of communication.

Nowadays people can complain immediately, hiding behind their pc. Strong debates then occur in full view of all. Its really not pleasant to watch. My own family have been involved a number of times. Trying to defend Mum because when people attack the parish council of course your loved ones take it personally on your behalf. We're all human.

This last 12 months in particular we've had to deal with quite toxic behaviour from members of the public that were not even residents of Wereham! I'm sure we've all seen the Jackie Weaver "You have no authority here" clip. We're better than that. There's no need for it.

There are areas of the village we have responsibility for – the playing field, church yard, pond & cemetery to name but a few. Other areas fall under other authorities responsibility like highways or the church. We cannot encroach on their areas without planning ahead & having a budget to spend on it in the first instance & seeking their agreement. We agree our annual budget every January we don't have surplus to suddenly spend on other things. We cannot easily increase our precept amount without it impacting on every parishioners council tax bill. Therefore, it's a fine balancing act between progressing our plans for the village alongside ensuring everyone can comfortably afford those plans.

Many years ago when I first joined the council the Lynn News & Advertiser printed an article about us doubling our precept one year. Very controversial! What wasn't printed was that same year we didn't have enough funds to pay our clerk. Things were mismanaged & left to get to that point. There's usually a reason behind our choices. And they aren't made lightly.

Currently we have the whole debate of keeping everywhere looking nice, verges trimmed more regularly & the environmental impact that could cause versus no mow may! Who wins that debate? Having a balance of councillors with different skills, ages, genders & backgrounds ensures overall the majority of our decisions are balanced ones.

So I wanted to take this opportunity to thank all the those councillors & clerks I've worked with since 2010. It's been a long, & eventful at times, 12 years.

In fact we've had 2 successive elections now & neither have been contested. In other words, we have only just filled our 7 seats both times. This succession planning issue is a problem that needs tackling & I fear will only get worse.

Maybe if I can offer any advice to members of the public it's this. Be kind to us. Not one of us is sat here with their own agenda in mind. Not one of us is sat here in a paid role. I don't think any of us are 'do gooders', there to simply meddle in day to day life. We all simply want to help. Let's keep the passion in the debate but leave aggression at the door. It's not a pleasant atmosphere to work within. I am speaking on behalf of councillors & clerks when I say that.

Respect the way we work, as Helen is the only paid member of the team it's only polite to go through her for anything in the first instance. The days of turning up unannounced at councillors' front doors is past. We all lead busy lives and would hate to be rude or unavailable when you need us. So, check in with Helen first.

Remember we cannot agree to anything outside of a public meeting anyway, so it's always better to put your issue to us on email so Helen includes it on future agendas. And finally remember the meetings are for us to debate those items in public. Not for the public to join in too. Your part is always at the beginning now so you can voice any concerns/issues you may have. If we want input during the meeting from the public we will ask. And if it's given outside of that invite you may be politely asked to leave!

We have a vacancy currently & I'd encourage anyone wishing to be involved to come forward, we're a friendly bunch. Don't worry about what I just said, it is part of the job I'm afraid. But as long as you park your personal views at the door & come in to represent the village as a whole then you cannot go wrong. Our clerk is here to help us all. She does a brilliant job of easing new councillors in gently. If anybody wants any help or advice both Helen & I are here to help so just email us any time.

It's election time again next May. Maybe next time you'll consider putting yourself forward so I can give everyone a break!

4. Public Concerns

There was none.

Meeting Closed 6.30 pm