



SIMPSON AND ASHLAND PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting held on 15th May 2023 at Ashland Lakeside

Councillors present: Cllr Pye - Chair (DP), Cllr Barnes – Vice Chair (PB), Cllr Ezeh (CE),
Cllr Eatwell (RE), Cllr Tucker (DT)

Apologies: None

Others present: Katherine Harmsworth (Parish Clerk), Natasha Cheriyan (Facilities Manager), Julie Dawes (The Parks Trust), 4 Members of the Public

Part 1 – Annual Parish Meeting commencing at 7pm

1) Welcome

2) Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes from the last Annual Parish Meeting held on 16th May 2022 were received and signed as a correct record.

3) Annual Report from the Chair

DP gave an annual report on behalf of the Parish Council (see appendix 1 for full report). He spoke about the achievements of the PC over the last year, including:

- Continuing to work with Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) to maintain the open spaces around Simpson and Ashland.
- Opening both Simpson Village Hall (SVH) and Ashland Lakeside (AL) as a warm space to support residents during the cost-of-living crisis.
- Supporting local charities who help our residents by awarding grants.
- Funding holiday play schemes at both Charles Warren Academy and AL.
- Reducing the precepting requirements to relieve the financial burden on residents.
- The opening of AL – with thanks given to the Architect Andrew Armes, members of the PC in particular Cllr Eatwell, Caroline Vooght and the Steering Group, Milton Keynes College and their students, the Ward Councillors and Guinness for their funding.
- Continuing use of SVH by the community – with thanks to Janet Chapman and the Friends of the Village Hall.
- The recruitment of a Facilities Manager for both SVH and AL – welcome to Natasha Cheriyan.
- Responding to the increasing number of planning applications including Five Acres.
- Developing a relationship with the Canal & River Trust.
- Representing the PC to MKCC by participating in the Parishes Advisory Group and the Parishes Forum.
- The Newsletter – with thanks to PB and everyone who contributes to its production.

4) Presentations from invited speakers

The community engagement representative from the Parks Trust, Julie Dawes, came to speak about the Ashland Serpent. She reported that the Serpent was installed in 2013, as a Section 106 fully funded artwork piece. It was designed to be a temporary piece, made from sweet chestnut. Over the last three years measures have been put in place to prolong its life. It has now become unsafe and will be removed in the

autumn. The Parks Trust are keen to engage with the residents of Ashland as well as the PC and would like to keep them informed of the plans for the future. As a legacy to the Ashland Serpent, they intend to plant wildflowers in its footprint.

5) Public Forum

- A question was raised about the lack of bins, particularly in Ashland.
DP explained that bins are a complicated topic. The landowner must agree to have bins on their property and arrangements must be made for them to be emptied regularly, which comes at a cost. Research has shown that if bins are not provided then people are more likely to take their litter home. The PC are arranging litter picks around Simpson and Ashland regularly.
Julie Dawes, from the Parks Trust, explained that rather than installing extra bins they are trying to tackle the root cause of littering by going into schools to educate children. She added that a contractor is engaged to litter pick regularly around Ashland Lake.
- A question was raised about how the wildfowl on Ashland Lake are managed. Julie Dawes, explained that the wildfowl are not managed as they are wild animals. However, if there was an issue with them then the RSPCA should be contacted.
- A question was raised about the access road onto Simpson Drive from the H9 and the safety of the road. DP explained that the PC is working closely with a Ward Councillor and Highways to continue to monitor this road.

6) Refreshments

The meeting closed at 20:00

Signed (Chair)

Date

Signed (Clerk)

Date

Appendix 1

As we come to the start of the new Parish Council year, the Annual Meeting provides us with the opportunity to not only look back at the twelve months just gone but also to consider what the next twelve months might look like. There is a well-known ancient Chinese curse that wishes for us all to 'live in interesting times' - sadly, this quote is neither ancient nor indeed originating from China but I think it does perhaps sum up what we may all be feeling at the moment. We have indeed been living in interesting times, what with the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost of living crisis and the associated challenges that this has brought for all of us. But I am sure that times have always been interesting and we as individuals and communities have evolved and adapted to these as best we can. Perhaps all of us do, at times, have a tendency to think that things aren't what they used to be - a time when stamps were cheaper, it was easier to perhaps make an appointment to see a doctor and there was a postal delivery twice a day! And yes, times have been different but we all know that change happens and that nothing ever stays the same. We know that, for example, the services that we relied upon in the past have changed - thinking about the local bus, for example, or the number of times the grass is cut or the streets are cleaned. To support our local communities during this time of change Simpson & Ashland Parish Council (SAPC) has continued to evolve so that it can, as far as its limited power and resource allows, support communities in new and exciting ways. We are, of course, focused on ensuring that the green spaces are maintained, and as one of the few parish councils that is in a devolved partnership arrangement with Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) we can have a direct say over what is done, where it is done and how it is done. In addition, we used some of the funding provided to SAPC by MKCC to support 'warm space' activities across the parish during what has been a long and rather cold winter. As part of our support of the wider community we have also provided grants to local and city-wide agencies who provide services and support to those in greatest need locally. Using our own funds, we have, in partnership with Woughton Community Council Play Rangers and Treetop Childcare, provided holiday activity clubs for children in the local area and we have also given grant to support other activity that brings community together. And as we are the most local of the local government structure, we are able to, in part address local need and concern where and when we can. We have very little 'power' as a Parish Council and our remit extends to being able give grant and to set a parish precept (the amount that is added to your Council Tax bills that comes direct to SAPC) but little else. So, where we have been able to effect change this has often been through working with MKCC officers, our Ward Councillors, and other stakeholder groups. And talking of the precept, you will have seen that we took the decision to reduce our precept this year as we did not wish to further add to the financial burden of our residents. And I would like to take this opportunity to thank Cllr Barnes and Katherine, our clerk, for all their steadfast work in ensuring that we remain financially robust and also ensuring that are accounts are in order.

I said at the start, that this has been an interesting time for us all and during this time we have been bold and ambitious as a PC in opening our second community space. The Ashland Lakeside community space is superb and provides this part of the parish with its own space to use, as it sees fit. The designing, building and completion of Ashland Lakeside has been a huge achievement and we would not be where we are now without the tireless dedication and support of a very long list of people that is far too long to mention. But I would like to make particular thanks to Andrew Armes our architect, to all the members of the PC who have worked tirelessly to see this project through to completion and to local agencies (such as Milton Keynes College whose students have done a sterling job in helping to fit out the interior) and organisations (for example Guinness who provided a grant that enabled us to fit out the interior) and to our Ward Councillors. And more importantly, I want to thank those residents who have helped out on both the site and in terms of supporting the project including Caroline Vooght and all members of the Ashland Steering Group. The Ashland Lakeside is a fitting tribute to all the efforts that have gone into this and SAPC is so pleased that despite the pandemic, shortages of material and rampant inflation, the facility is now open. We also continue to ensure that Simpson Village Hall (SVH) continues to play a central role in the life of the community and I would like to thank Janet Chapman who cleans the SVH, also all members of the Friends Group for SVH who give so much in terms of their time and effort, which is greatly appreciated by SAPC and the wider community. As a PC, we know that the running and management of two community spaces is a considerable task, and though we can rely on the goodwill of local residents to a great extent, there is a need to put more formal systems and structures in place. To this end, SAPC decided to appoint a Facilities Manager for both community sites and I am really pleased that we were able to appoint Natasha Cheriyan in April 2023, following a robust selection process. Natasha will begin her role in May 2023 and I am sure that, as a community, we will make her feel very welcome and supported.

In addition to the work on the community spaces, SAPC has continued to be active in its management of open spaces (through the devolved MKCC arrangements and SERCO) and we will continue to do this as the contract for open space management moves from SERCO to a new provider in the autumn. We also continue to respond to the seemingly increasing number of planning applications that impact on the parish (the very considerable amount of work associated with the Five Acres development for example) and will continue to do so. Cllr Ezeh continues to develop our work to support children and young people and also promoting the Street Champions approach (and thanks to her and all the Street Champions) and Cllr Tucker has been leading on our relationship with the Canal & River Trust (CRT). In addition, SAPC is represented at MKCC level through the Parish Advisory Forum (PAF) and the Parish Advisory Group (PAG) that ensures that we remain visible at not only the most local of levels. All of this work will continue over the next twelve months, as will our working with our Ward Councillors to ensure that, as far as we can, we get the most positive outcome for residents in this part of the city.

Before I close, I want to take this opportunity to thank again Katherine, our Clerk, for everything that she does to keep SAPC going and also all the member of the PC who freely give a huge amount of effort and their time day in and day out, on behalf of local residents. Specifically, I would like to thank Cllr Eatwell for all his efforts whilst he has been a member of the Parish Council and we wish him and his family well on their forthcoming adventures. And finally, I would like to thank everyone here at the AGM but also everyone who supports the residents in this great part of the city.