



# SIMPSON AND ASHLAND PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 16th May 2022 at Simpson Village Hall

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

**Also present:** Katherine Harmsworth, Parish Clerk (KH)

**Apologies:** None

**Others present:** 15 Members of the public (MOP)

## Part 1 – Annual Parish Meeting commencing at 7pm

### 16) Welcome

### 17) Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021 were agreed and signed by the Chair as a true and correct record.

### 18) Chair to celebrate achievements of the last year

See attached report (Appendix 1).

### 19) Presentations from invited speakers

Gaynor Arrowsmith on Heritage (Appendix 2).

Sue Napleton on The Friends of Simpson Village Hall (Appendix 3).

Ross Eatwell read on behalf of the Ashland Lakeside Steering Group (Appendix 4).

### 20) Public Forum

Discussion focused on key questions including:

- 1) How can the Parish Council engage others? and
- 2) How can the Parish Council get more people involved?

DP explained that the Parish Council will not be able to sustain the current level of activity in the future unless more people come forward to be Parish Councillors or to volunteer their time in other ways.

There are currently 4 Parish Councillors out of a possible 8.

### 21) Refreshments

## **Part 2 – Annual Meeting of the Council commencing at 8pm**

### **22) Introductions and Apologies for Absence**

None received.

### **23) To Appoint Chair for 2022/23**

David Pye confirmed he was willing to stand again. No other nominations were made. The Parish Council unanimously supported this nomination and Cllr Pye is the new Chair for the forthcoming year. The Declaration of office was signed at the meeting.

### **24) To Appoint Vice Chair for 2022/23**

Peter Barnes confirmed he was willing to stand again. No other nominations made. Parish Council unanimously supported this nomination and Cllr Barnes is the new Vice Chair for the forthcoming year.

### **25) Specific Declarations of Interest**

No change to current declarations in place.

### **26) Minutes of Last Meeting**

The minutes of the last annual meeting of the council held on 8th May 2021 were received and signed as a correct record.

### **27) Finance Report and Discussion**

- a) Payments made between 29<sup>th</sup> January 2022 and 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022 were reviewed and approved.
- b) The financial summary for 2021/22 was reviewed and approved.
- c) It was agreed to transfer £27000 from the current account to the reserve account.
- d) It was agreed to use the bank account that was previously for the S106 funds, as a dedicated bank account for Simpson Village Hall Hire and Ashland Lakeside Hire.

### **28) Asset Register**

- a) The Asset Register as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 was agreed.

### **29) Audit**

- a) The report from the Internal Auditor was received and approved.
- b) The following recommendations and actions needed from the Internal Audit Report were agreed:
  - (1) “Steps should be taken to ensure that risk assessment forms part of the regular meetings and is included as a regular agenda item” – Action is: To update risk assessment and agree at the next meeting and to review at least yearly.
  - (2) “Councillors should ensure that when invoices are presented for payment that they bear evidence of physical review” – Action is: The Finance Councillor to check a sample of invoices and receipts prior to every meeting of the PC.
  - (3) “Consideration should be given as to whether the small items of equipment with small value should be included in the register of assets” – Action is: To update the asset register removing items of small value and mark these on an inventory list instead.
- c) The questions on the Annual Governance Statement were considered and agreed.
- d) The Accounting Statement Figures were considered and agreed.
- e) The dates of the Exercise of Public Rights as 1/6/22 to 14/7/22 were noted.

### **30) Planning Applications**

- a) 22/00461/FUL 103 Simpson – The PC returned a response of no comment.
- b) 22/00399/FUL 47 Old Groveway - The PC returned a response of no comment and MKC have since refused the application.
- c) PB reported that he had just been notified of a new application (22/01230/HOU) for 426 Simpson. This is a revision to application 21/02173/FUL and includes changes to external materials, removal of window from side extension, addition of roof lights, gravel driveway, steps up to front porch, and installation of log burner and flue.
- d) PB reported that there had been irregularities in the last planning application for Five Acres and this meant that it has been rejected. New plans are expected to be submitted.

### **31) Open Space**

- a) RE gave an update on Open Space. The mowing scheme for Simpson was agreed with Serco in March and is now under way on a regular 3 – 4 week cycle. Serco have the contract until 2023 when a new contract will begin. This contract is currently out to tender.
- b) RE gave an update on the Canal towpath. He has been in discussions with the Canals and River Trust and is hoping to continue the resurfacing works with volunteers in the Autumn.
- c) The Simpson Garden Group have volunteered to help with the maintenance of the flower beds surrounding the war memorial. It was agreed that the PC would cover the cost of some compost to enable this.

### **32) Ashland Lakeside**

- a) RE gave an update on the current situation at Ashland Lakeside. He thanked Andrew Armes, the Architect and Project Manager and the Steering Group for their continued efforts on the project. He explained that there are a few decisions that need to be made with the project. One of the external shutters was damaged in the storms in February and a tougher replacement must be agreed upon. RE also explained that the cladding is very expensive, and an alternative solution would be to use vegetation to soften the look of the building instead. The Parish Council agreed to pursue a more cost effective and eco-friendly alternative to the cladding. RE is having a meeting with the Parks Trust on 23<sup>rd</sup> May to discuss the landscaping. MK College have been volunteering their time to help with the project and have done a fantastic job. It was agreed that PB would draft some letters to send out to the college tutors and students to thank them for their efforts.
- b) It was agreed that RE will discuss the cladding and external shutters with Andrew Armes, the Architect and MKC and then amended plans will be submitted. Once alternative cladding and shutters have been researched a more accurate budget can be agreed upon.
- c) It was agreed that it is not currently possible to set a date for the opening event and this will be reviewed as the project moves forward.

### **33) Simpson Village Hall (SVH)**

- a) Payments and receipts were reviewed for SVH and it was shown that a profit of £393.50 was made in April 2022.
- b) DP thanked the Friends of Simpson Village Hall for all their continued hard work in helping to run and maintain the building.
- c) RE gave an update on the Electrical Installation Condition Report that was done on SVH. It showed that some maintenance needs completing to ensure it complies with new regulations. The work includes needing a new consumer unit and having the lighting circuit redone. RE has received 2 quotes back and is awaiting a third. The PC have agreed to choose the best value quote via email once it comes in and report it as a delegated decision.

### **34) Young People**

- a) It was agreed to commission the Play Rangers from Woughton Community Council to provide summer play sessions in the same format as last year. They will be held at Charles Warren Academy at a cost of £1000 for 5 weeks (Fridays 22nd July 5th, 12th, 19th & 26th August 2022).
- b) Charles Warren Academy have asked if the Parish Council could recommend anyone to be a community representative on their Parent and Community Board. The PC will consider this and respond accordingly.

### **35) Review of Delegated Decisions**

The following delegated decisions were reviewed and agreed:

- a) Equipment and cleaning supplies were bought from Hygiene Supplies online for Ashland Lakeside totalling £386.
- b) Equipment for Ashland Lakeside was bought from Amazon totaling £145.30.
- c) It was decided to grant Alarum Productions (a non-profit organisation) free hire of Simpson Village Hall on 20th May to show their theatre production 'I Dig Canals' to local residents.

**36) To note that the next meeting of the Full Council will be held on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> September.**

**The meeting closed at 21:35.**

## Appendix 1 –

### The Chair of Simpson & Ashland PC

A very warm welcome to this, the annual parish meeting- the first one that we have held indoors at least since 2019! And this is the point in the year, where we look back at what has been achieved and also look forward to the next twelve months or so. And I thought it worth just reflecting on the role of the Parish Council. Given the pandemic, the dreadful events unfolding on a daily basis in Ukraine and the cost of living and other crises that we are in, these are indeed interesting and challenging times. And given all these huge issues it would, and indeed, be very easy to question what is the role and purpose of your Parish Council for when you look at the stark facts:

- We have very little ‘power’ in the sense of being able to effect huge change- basically our powers are around setting the annual level of precept (the amount that is taken to fund the PC as part of your Council Tax payment) and providing grant to local communities
- We have a modest precept in relation to some councils- as you can see in the Financial Papers that you have seen in the pack of documents that has been put together for the meeting today
- We have a clerk (and I would like to formally say thank you to Katherine, our clerk, for all her sterling efforts over the past year) who works up to 8 hours per week and has to ensure that we comply with all the regulations that are required of us as a publicly accountable and indeed democratically elected body
- We have four members (out of a possible total complement of 8) who give of their time freely and in legal terms work with ‘neither fear nor favour’ – and I would like to thank all members of the PC for what they have done and continue to do, to make this great part of MK a better place for all of us to live

And so this is what the PC looks like on paper but I hope you will agree that the situation locally is different- you might not always agree with everything that the PC does or indeed some of the approaches that it takes but we are your most local of councils- hyper local is now apparently the terminology- and we work on your behalf on issues and challenges that you are facing. And we are not driven by political aims or indeed the lure of public office, but rather the desire to make things better locally as far as we can, and importantly to be an advocate for Simpson & Ashland and in this we work with our local ward members, council officers and other local actors and agencies to ensure that your views, concerns and thoughts are heard at a wider level and to this end we are seen in MK as ‘a council that punches above its weight’.

But we cannot do this without you in this room this evening and indeed many others who could not join us tonight, so thank you for all that you contribute for together, I think we do make a positive difference, as far as we can, to the local area. Clearly there have been setbacks and disappointments over the last year (the planning decision around Five Acres for example) but there have also been lots of times when the community has come together, as, for example:

- The Spring 2022 events
- Simpson in Bloom and the work of the garden Group locally
- Heritage activity
- Newsletter and monthly e-bulletin drafting and delivery
- Neighbourhood Watch
- Tuesday Coffee & Chat
- The watering of newly planted trees and bushes
- Litter picking
- Canal towpath maintenance activity

- Street Champions
- Community Energy approaches
- Input to SAPC consultations on planning, traffic, roads, etc
- Traffic monitoring
- Input to the ongoing DRT issues
- Helping to reopen SVH and the huge amount work done here; and
- The enormous efforts of all involved in the development of Ashland Lakeside- Andrew the architect, the local Steering Group members and everyone else involved in ensuring the completion of that new community space and the opening later in the year

As well as this, SAPC acts on behalf of residents in its links that it has with ward members and responding to individual concerns, managing the SERCO contract, liaising with ward members and other agencies (thinking here, the work that we continue to do with Guinness and the developer and Anglian Water on drainage and flooding) to ensure that resident issues and challenges are addressed- so all that stuff that goes on below the radar.

And that is a really long list of what has been achieved over the last 12 months and indeed much of this will continue going forward over the next twelve months with, for example, the opening of Ashland Lakeside and, I imagine, the development of Five Acres, and there will no doubt be change and challenge but we will work together to face this. And what we hear is that, as a community, Simpson & Ashland are welcoming and open and I know that, for example we will be very welcoming to residents who will be moving into Five Acres, despite the concerns we have expressed about the development itself.

And at this time of looking back I just want to pause, for us to remember those members of our community that are no longer with us- it has been a very hard time for many families and individuals over the last couple of years and I know that the community has come together to support and look out for each other when members have experienced grief and loneliness. And today, I just want to mention formally, as this is the PC Annual Meeting, two former members of the council- Cllr John Napleton and Cllr Carole Baume. Their commitment, drive and determination to supporting this great part of MK was unstinting and we remember them now.

Also, as I mentioned, we are now four members of the council and so I wanted to thank Cllr Sheila Thornton for everything that she achieved whilst on the council and I am sure we all join in wishing her and Mike all the best for the next stage of their life- currently on a canal boat in CMK!

But this is also about capturing your views on what the PC could and might do in the future (over and above what we have to do to keep us legal) and so to this end we have a number of short presentations that we hope will act to stimulate discussion going forward:

1. SVH- Sue
2. Heritage activity- Gaynor
3. Ashland Lakeside- Report and discussion focusing on how to manage the community facilities going forward.

So in conclusion, just to say thank you again!

## **Appendix 2**

### **Gaynor Arrowsmith on Heritage**

Gaynor thanked the Parish Council for agreeing to fund the new projector screen that is now in situ in Simpson Village Hall and was used in February to host a well-attended talk on the artist Lowry. Gaynor showed 50 historical postcards of Simpson and explained that Simpson History Group are starting a new project with the aim to get a photographic record of Simpson now to compare to the historical ones. This will also enable a digital record of the Village from the past compared to now. This project will tie in with the MK Heritage Open Days on 17th and 18th September. Simpson Village Hall will be open to the public from 2-6pm for refreshments and a slideshow will show all the photos collected. Around 3pm each day there will be a guided walk of Simpson led by Peter Barnes.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Sue Napleton on behalf of The Friends of Simpson Village Hall**

When the lockdown was lifted in Autumn 2021, a group of Simpson residents, led by Parish Councillor Sheila Thornton, formed The Friends Of Simpson Village Hall to re-open the Hall. None of the group wanted a formal committee structure as our agreed brief was to get the hall into working order and the running and maintenance should be undertaken by others.

Unfortunately, the Village Hall had suffered from being closed over the lockdowns and needed significant funds and serious work to be spent to bring it back into use.

There were problems with the roof, resulting in damp coming through the ceiling. Also the boiler had to be replaced. The hall was also in need of serious cleaning and re-decorating, both inside and out. The Friends set about cleaning the hall, painting the walls, clearing all the old papers and equipment, and externally, painting the railings and woodwork and highlighting the steps for safety. A substantial sign for the front of the building was also obtained and installed.

There was significant administration work to be done. The asset inventory was updated along with various policies such as health and safety and covid regulations. We had to produce rules and advice for users and also a new charging regime.

We are keen to attract new residents and those with children as our current demographic is older people. Child sized chairs and tables were purchased to make the hall more user friendly.

There is difficulty in that we are unable to raise funds for the hall currently. In order to do so we need to become a registered charity. The Friends, bearing in mind their stated aim to get the hall back into use, do not feel able to take on the task of applying for charitable status. We hope that other interested residents take up the gauntlet.

With valuable help from the Parish Clerk, the Friends manage opening and closing the Hall. They also clean up after events and check on the facilities regularly. The Friends have also organized events with the specific aim of advertising the Hall and attracting the community to see the facilities and hopefully arrange events of their own. To date the Tuesday Group has been restarted, although the Saturday quizzes (except occasionally) seems very happy to remain in the Church where they have been during the lockdown. We are able to offer pilates. The Simpson Garden Group is now in full swing once again. There was a talk on the artist Lowry, which was extremely well attended, organized by Gaynor

Arrowsmith. If anyone has an interest or story to tell, please consider sharing it with an audience in the Hall.

A very successful Open Day took place in November which attracted a number of villagers and others from farther afield. The Mount held a Bring and Buy sale. For something lighter, the Friends arranged a social evening in February. There was live music, snacks and nibbles and a glass of wine – all for free. We have a loyal following from a steadfast band of supportive villagers, for whom we are extremely grateful, but we seem unable to attract new residents and volunteers to help run events and activities at the Hall or to attend the arranged events.

As for the future, the Hall is now in a usable state and has been praised by its users for its clean well-equipped facilities and roomy dimensions. The charging regime is one of the cheapest in Milton Keynes. The future depends on interested person to volunteer to run and maintain the Hall, on ideas for events (and for people to organise). We hope that parents will come forward with suggestions. We need more regular use of the hall for example, yoga, art, talks, crafts, performances. Suggested ideas have been providing space for some services for example, chiropody, or use as a business meeting place. If you have a skill or craft why not share it.

We hope that a Facilities Manager for Simpson Village Hall and Ashland Lakeside will be appointed. We also need help with advertising. Suggestions for a way to improve our communication would be much appreciated.

There are a number of events in the Hall planned for the Jubilee weekend in June. Details of the events are in the monthly email bulletin. Please show your support. On Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May please come to Alarum Productions live performance of “I Dig Canals”. Tickets are £8.

I am sure we all agree that the Village Hall is a very valuable asset for the Village. It is the hub of the community and if you want the community to thrive, please support the hall with ideas and offers to participate and help.

## **Appendix 4**

### **Caroline Vooght on behalf of the Ashland Lakeside Steering Group**

Ashland Lakeside is now really starting to take shape, and there's some great progress being made. Firstly, the building has a proper name, which we think reflects the surroundings and its Ashland location. The Steering Group encouraged input from all residents to select a name, and of the 15 suggestions, 3 were selected to go out to a vote. A vote was conducted at the end of March, promoted via Facebook, and Ashland Lakeside was chosen with nearly half of the votes, convincingly beating 'Ashland Pavilion' and 'The AMP'.

With the interior fit-out being conducted very competently by MK College, and the deck now taking shape, attention is now turning to the external fittings and security of the building and landscaping. The building is fitted with CCTV cameras, and railings will be fitted around the decking area. The front door is now on and The Parks Trust will support us by planting exterior shrubs and plants over the coming months.

We're very grateful for the generosity of Bridgman & Bridgman in Wolverton for their support with the sedum roof. If you're tall enough, or lucky to have a 'birds-eye view', you'll notice that only two-thirds of the roof is completed. The remaining section will be used by Bridgman & Bridgman as a test site for them to trial new plants and techniques. In exchange for this, they offered us a considerable saving on cost, which for those managing the budget, was warmly received!

The building has been inspected for fire safety, and internal capacity has been confirmed for 50 people sitting or standing, with 40 sitting around tables (such as for a quiz or a meal). We'll have enough tables and chairs to suit the numbers, and the building feels spacious and airy with these configurations. Many people are now asking about hiring the building and when it may be open. There is still work to be done, and we need the building to be completed before we can arrange insurance. We're still waiting on an approximate date, and we'll let you know as soon as one is available. The Steering Group hopes to be able to hold an opening event, and one that doesn't clash with the summer holidays, so watch this space!

As always, we'd like to acknowledge the generosity of other local businesses, including Brewers in Bletchley who donated the interior paint, and another Bletchley-based business, Just Topps for their gift of the kitchen worktop, which we all think looks fantastic.

MK College has shown considerable commitment, for which we're really grateful, and their students have displayed high levels of professionalism throughout.

As always, our architect Andrew continues to do a fabulous job managing this project to get us to completion, and to the Parish Council who have been steadfast in their determination to complete the building despite all the challenges thrown in the path. And finally, to the Steering Group and local residents who have, and continue to give their time to the project.