

Toppesfield and Gainsford End Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 19th May 2011 At The Village Hall, Toppesfield at 7.30pm

Peter opened the meeting by thanking all for their attendance and welcomed two new councillors to the team – Alan Collard as an elected member and Clare Condie as a co-opted councillor.

1. Attendance and Apologies for Absence:

The following Councillors were in attendance:

Peter Moore - Chairman
Andrew Bull – Vice Chairman
Fran Laskowski
Alan Collard
Clare Condie

Also in attendance:

Kaaren Berry – Clerk to the Parish Council
Virginia Laskowski – Village Hall
Margaret Dyson – Doctors Car Service
Maureen Dimmock – Village Hall
Sheila Braithwaite
Anne Read – Community Shop and Flower Show
Trisha Roberts
Sian Davies-Hatton – Little Chestnuts Pre-school
Zoe Hughes – Art & Craft Club and Little Hedgehogs
Tony Davison – Toppesfield Parish Charities
Paul Thompson – Allotments
Malcolm Braithwaite - VANTAGE

Apologies were received from:

Shaun Sheldrake, John Levick and St. Margaret's School.

2. Minutes of the last meeting:

The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting had previously been signed. Peter read through the matters arising so all present were aware what was discussed last year.

3. Matters Arising from the minutes:

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. Parish Council Report:

Peter Moore gave his report – attached as appendix A. In addition to his report Peter thanked Andrew for all his effort and hard work in producing the newsletter.

5. Organisation Reports:

Reports were received from various organisations.

Zoe Hughes gave her reports on the Art Club and Toddler Group (see Appendix B). Zoe also mentioned that the Art Club would find it beneficial for a projector and screen to be available for use in the hall. Fund-raising for this would be looked into and discussions with the Village Hall committee will take place to see if this could be viable.

Sian Davies-Hatton gave a report from Little Chestnuts Pre-school – see Appendix C.

Virginia Laskowski gave a report from the Village Hall committee – see Appendix D.

Margaret Dyson reported that the doctors car service is nearly ready to go 'Live'. There are a team of volunteer drivers ready the only thing they are waiting for is a mobile phone from the parish council. Peter said there is no problem with the parish council providing a phone and asked which network would be best and how would top-up's be managed. Margaret will liaise with Peter regarding the best network and top-up's can be purchased through the post office. Mileage for drivers will also be paid for by the parish council. Margaret is hoping to get the service running when she returns from holiday. Tony stated that when Braintree District Council brought out the scheme only Toppesfield took it up.

Ann Read gave reports on the Community Shop and the Village show – see Appendix E.

Malcolm gave an update on the village plan – the questionnaires are going to the printers tomorrow (20th May 2011). There are nearly 100 questions in the questionnaire. Volunteers are delivering and collecting the forms. A volunteer is needed to deliver questionnaires to Camoise Close – Clare Condie volunteered to do this. A separate questionnaire will be issued to those over 11 years old for their views. The VANTAGE group are engaging with other stakeholders in the village for their views and statements. Feedback from the national census should be received during August and from our questionnaire by the end of August. The village organisations have been asked to provide their views/statements by September. In January 2012 there will be a meeting for all and the launch of the plan is scheduled for June 2012. All timings are on track at present. Communications have been an issue at times with some but there has been lots of people supporting and contributing to the village plan.

Peter thanked Malcolm for his help and drive on this project and the team that supports him.

Paul Thompson reported that there are 11 allotments being used. There are also two bird boxes that have been put up and are occupied by blue-tits. Paul has approached several people regarding a water supply to the allotments. The cost of a borehole was in the region of £10k and understands the reluctance of the parish council to pay for this. Paul has contacted the Anglian Water Authority and it could be possible to get a standpipe for as little as £500 - £1000, Paul asked if produce from the allotments could be sold in order to fund raise for the standpipe – the general feeling was that this would not be allowed and so other fund raising ideas would need to be looked at.

The first Toppesfield schematic walk has been done and has been given to the Year 5's at St. Margaret's School as part of a project with historical points on it. It was suggested that the walk could be printed in the newsletter or published on the website.

Shelia gave an brief report on the W.I. - the group is growing in numbers and they hold their meetings once a month. Speakers are often found and guests to meetings are always welcome. They also hold fun and social evenings and outings – it's not all Jam and Jerusalem! Trisha also stated that the group are more active in lobbying certain issues.

Peter thanked the representatives from the different organisations for coming to the meeting and giving their reports.

6. Charities Report:

Tony Davison gave his report and provided a copy of the charities awards for the year ending March 2011. For Tony's report see Appendix F. Peter asked Tony if he could do a piece on the Charities and what goes on so this could be published. Andrew will work with Tony on this.

Tony also mentioned that there are to Japanese Elm trees that need attention, the trees are located near Toppesfield Hall.

7. Questions from the public:

Ann brought in the first copy of the newsletter, this was Autumn 1982 the editor was Mr Sid Read. The headlines were Parish Church Services, Congregational Church, Doctor's Free Car Service, Sick Room Equipment, A New Service for the village (Meals on wheels), Toppesfield United Football Club, The Garden Society, 1st Toppesfield Brownies, Toppesfield Playgroup, W.I., Good Companies, Luncheon Club, W.E.A., British Legion and Parish Council. Many of these topics are still in the newsletter today.

Trisha asked that as next year will be the 30th anniversary of the newsletter it would be nice if something could be done. Ann has the old newsletters and maybe they could be published.

Malcolm asked when the parish council accounts could be seen as the last ones on the website are 2007/2008. Peter reported that some old copies have been found but it's proving hard to locate all paperwork due to the transition of clerks. This will be pursued and hopefully will be resolved in the near future.

Tony stated that he has slides and photos of the events that took place in the parish for the Silver Jubilee in 1977 if anyone would like to see them.

Trisha suggested that the volunteers who help organise the Silver Jubilee events could be approached to see how it was done then to give ideas how to do celebrations for the Diamond Jubilee.

8. Date and Time of the Next Meeting:

The next parish council meeting will be held on Thursday 9th June 2011 at 8pm at Toppesfield Village Hall.

9. Any other Business:

Zoe stated that the TSA at St Margaret's School are planning a mosaic and any donations of old tiles or glass beads would be gratefully received. It was mentioned that planning permission maybe required depending on where the mosaic will be hung.

10. Wine and Nibbles:

The meeting was closed at 8.45pm and all were invited to stay for wine and nibbles.

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Chairman

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Date

Appendix A

Toppesfield and Gainsford End Parish Council

AGM

Year Overview

2010/11 has been a very busy year for the Village and Parish Council. The first major change for the Parish was the resignation of Steve Marshall. Steve had been the Clerk for the Council for over 15 years but we believed we would be better represented by someone who lives in the village and has a real commitment to Toppesfield. Kaaren Berry was appointed to the role and has settled in very quickly. She is already engaging with other Clerks to align Toppesfield with other parishes in the area.

Councillors Amerio and Croft have decided to step down this year having served 4 years and one year respectively. A big thank you goes to them for their hard throughout the year.

The Web site was launched earlier in on the year. This was down to Councillor Levick's hard work in getting the content pulled together. The website will continue to evolve and I hope will become an intrinsic part of the village in years to come. Any links or content from other groups in the village would be welcome.

The Christmas tree lighting was a great success again with minced pies and mulled wine around the pump - thanks to Bridget Sheldrake and Sally Croft

The Royal Wedding was truly an event to be proud of! It was a massive amount of work, with some very creative ideas and fantastically organised – a great big thanks to Sally Amerio, Mary Ann Stevenson, Margaret Dyson and all the rest of the team.

Toppesfield also carried on the "Arts in the Community" event after Essex on Tour was closed by the County Council. Andrew Colley took it on his shoulders for the second year running to organise another event. This year he managed to book the well-known comedian John Hegley. This again was a great success and made a financial contribution to the village hall.

The allotments have been a great success this year and continue to go from strength to strength; I believe there are now 9 allotments and even a small vineyard.....

The Village Plan Committee is now well established and we are very fortunate to have Malcolm Braithwaite chairing this team and moving the Plan forward. I am really looking forward to seeing this evolve during the course of this year

Overall it has been another great year for Toppesfield. We are very lucky to have such a fantastic community spirit in our village but this only happens because people are prepared to give up some of their free time to make it happen. Please think about what you can do to help in 2011/2012 – all efforts gratefully received.

Peter Moore
Chairman

Appendix B

Report for the Art and Craft Club.

The Art and Craft Club meet every Wednesday from 7.30pm to 9.30pm (ish), at the moment our age range is the youngest is 12 years and our oldest is 76 years. We paint and create in different mediums from water colours, card making to knitting and embroidery. We have a regular membership of twelve with varying numbers each week who attend. Subs are paid up front 6 weeks ahead, and some choose to pay as they go. We hold an Art Exhibition yearly with the flower show and offer a painting competition for young artists. All are welcome. Future plans for the group are: Group subject drawing, live models, save for a projector and screen for the hall as the art club uses DVD's and to advertise and up date.

Report for Little Hedgehogs Parent and Toddler Group.

We have been running for almost 23 years on Mondays during term time, are numbers are low and we are just launching an advertising campaign around the area. We are enjoying the use of the outside play equipment – thanks to the pre-school for making a safe area, the grass growing is in progress! May we continue to meet the needs of parents/carers and children in the village and local area for many years to come..... We now have children that attended when they were young returning with their own children, the next generation.

Appendix C

Little Chestnuts Pre-school has been part of Toppesfield village for over 35 years. We provide a preschool service for local children aged between 2 – 5 years which is run by the parents and serves the surrounding villages. We are a charity run organisation and receive funding, for children over 3 years of age, off Essex County Council. The dedicated committee and fully trained staff continuously fund raise to provide for the needs of the children and to keep up with Ofsted and the government's ever-changing rules and regulations. We have kept our fees at a low for several years and are the cheapest in the area which attracts children from other villages as far as Heddingham, Ridgewell and Finchingfield and the children that leave, generally move over to St. Margaret's school for their next level of education.

At present we have 7 staff (2 full time and 5 part time) and we have kept our numbers as high as 22 children in on some days. We advertise through local magazines and door drop leaflets when and as we need to as we cannot take more than 25. This year we have been preparing for our inevitable Ofsted which should take place soon, we have fund-raised to provide for new safety matting for our outdoor play area, added gates for security, paid for half of the village hall curtains, and paid for the new green gates on the concreted area as it was mentioned in the Ofsted report from previous. We have provided coaches to take the children out on several occasions i.e. strawberry picking, animal farm, and pond dipping to Clare.

The committee have purchased some new toys to do with multicultural themes, and we have also added to other areas i.e. home corner, maths table, and outdoor activities, new books, and lots of training for the staff, which we pay for as well. We are currently fund-raising for new small tables that fold flat for storage, as we are taking too much space up in the village hall with our existing ones.

The committee as a whole would like for pre-school to keep busy with numbers of children, in the future have a self contained building in the village for ourselves, so we don't have to keep packing up at the end of every day.

Appendix D

Last year as a group we decided to brighten the hall up. So we had it redecorated, the floor was resealed, the holes in the roof repaired, new stage curtains made (pre-school helped in buying them). We also bought a new oven, a second one is being purchased with the help from Art & Craft Club, The Shop and W.I.

We also had Maureen Dimmock who helped us put together a wish list for a grant from the Sainsbury's Trust. I am pleased to say we heard last week that they have awarded us £5000. This will enable us to purchase new table and chairs for the hall. We had asked for £8000 so we won't be able to do everything on the wish list at the moment, but for now all tables and chairs will match so we won't look like the poor cousins.

Also this year we are getting a work party together to paint the outside of the hall. This year in November the hall will be 50 years old which we will be celebrating.

Appendix E

Toppesfield Annual Parish Meeting 19th May 2011 Report on Toppesfield Community Shop

This has been a very exiting year during which we have built on the very firm foundation laid down by the original committee. The Post Office plays its' part in the income of the shop and Sat morning opening is very popular.

We always did stock some local food but this year we have really focused on stocking new lines of local produce. We now stock Ranger products Long Melford, Priors Hall Lindsell, Gilbert's Galloping Chef Glemsford, Apple Juice White Colne, Earey Sible Hedingham, Moojuice Haverhill, Inn Sandwich Witham, Fisher and Wood Saffron Walden, Cider vinegar Toppesfield and Plants from Gt Yeldham.

The Plunkett Foundation launched a Local Food Initiative and gave us a grant of £100 to promote local food. We used this to finance wonderful stall at the Show. Following this we were visited by Sarah Mayell, from Plunkett's Local Food Initiative. Her job was to look at the shop and suggest ways in which we could make better use of the space and promote products. I will just read you a short quote from her report."A fabulous inviting shop with a bright airy feel. Merchandise is well displayed giving a feeling of depth of product and actively encouraging customers to shop." These comments were echoed by the man who came to do the stocktaking. This is all credit to all the volunteers..

In November Rural Communities Council hosted a workshop day for people running shops and pubs in rural areas. Previously, when visiting the shop, RCCE representatives asked me if I would talk about the shop. I said I would be happy to do that. However I was rather surprised when the agenda for the day arrived and item 5 was Look and Tell "The Toppesfield Shop Story" It was also introduced by the chairman as The Exemplory Village Shop.

During the year we have responded to Seasonal Events such as Easter, Christmas, Valentines Day, Mothers' day and father's day and also themed promotion weeks such as sandwich week, British Sausage Week and British Food fortnight. At Christmas, as well as purchasing gifts and cards we had our own Christmas cards which were very popular and many people took up the offer of ordering Turkeys, cheeses and other Christmas Fayre from the shop to take the hassle out of Christmas shopping.

As the weather closed in we decided to try stocking coal and logs. The shop became a lifeline. The combined effect of the bad weather and the rise in fuel prices resulted in record ever takings. Of course The Royal Wedding had its' impact on the shop and we were able to supply delicious goodies for the street tea party

On the volunteer front, we have lost one volunteer, Phyllis Tinson who decided to retire this year having been a volunteer since the shop opened. We thank her very much for her enthusiasm and commitment to the shop. We have delighted to welcome five new volunteers to our merry band. It is so good to have new people to share the load and bring in new ideas.

Each year we set aside some of our surplus into a grant fund. This fund is available for any organisation in the village to apply to to fund a specific project. This year we have given grants to St Margaret's School for tea shirts for the choir, village hall towards purchasing another cooker, a food hamper for the T.S.A. Raffle at the school's Christmas Bazaar and vouchers and book tokens for the village wedding celebrations.

Future plans :- We hope to have new Toppesfield Christmas Cards and possibly a Toppesfield calendar. Watch this space.

Ann Read

Appendix E (cont.)

Annual Parish Meeting 19th May 2011 Report from Toppesfield and Gainsford End Village Show

The show was held in September 2010 and records indicate that there has been a horticultural show in Toppesfield since the early 1900 with a break of about 30 years covering the war period. During this time the show has changed a great deal but I like to think that we have managed to maintain the basis and whole ethos of a competitive village show. So many villages have lost their horticultural shows.

Last year, for the second year running, we held the show in St Margaret's School. The plan had been to have events and stalls spilling out from the school hall onto the school playing field but wet weather prior to the day and forecast for the day forced us into changing our plans and we made use of the school play ground instead. We also had the climbing wall set up there as well. This was a great success and the sun shone anyway!

Always the judges of the different sections in the show comment on the high standard of the entries and this year I was particularly pleased with quantity and quality of the entries in the fruit and vegetable sections. With all the activity on the allotments I am hoping for even greater things in this year's show.

Last year there was a football match, Toppesfield -v- Veterans, on the village playing field at the same time as the show and I hope this will happen this year. We have decided to return to the Village Hall for this year's show, with the stalls possibly flowing out onto the street as well. We have had to take a long hard look at the finances of the show as we did lose money on it last year and have not raised the cost of entry for many years. It does cost over £300 to stage the show with prize money and printing costs. This year, by making a few small adjustments, we hope to put the show on a more secure financial footing.

The schedule will be out shortly. There are several changes to the classes in the schedule and I hope even more people will enter and come to the show. There is something for everyone. The date is 10th September in Toppesfield Village Hall. Please put the date in your diary.

Ann Read

Appendix F

Annual Report of Toppesfield Parish Charities

The Parish Charities meet once a year in December - and this year it was a sad occasion as it was the first time since the death of Dick Ruggles who had been our secretary for the last 30 years, as you may have seen in my article in the newsletter. We will now have 2 new members on the committee as Brian Moody has replaced Dick as one of the 2 church representatives, (the other being Dennis Mortlock) and the Rev. Barbara Dennis replaces Keith Holloway as ex-officio chairman.

Our income main comes from rent on Parish Land together with various smaller Annuities & Trusts.

This year our income has increased by £130. This is due to the change in arrangements for rent on the 12¾ acres of Parish Land in various plots within the farmland at Toppesfield Hall, the new owners of which are fully aware of the existence of the parish land and were very co-operative. In past years we have allowed for 2¾ acres for the allotments, drawing rent on 10 acres. As the area of the allotments have decreased, this year we were able to draw rent on 12 acres. The money is divided equally between the church and the older folk of the parish and this year 18 residents benefited.

As usual the income from the Robert Edwards Educational Trust purchased 2 Book Tokens. These are presented to two pupils in their last year at Toppesfield School one for Excellence and one for Effort.

Tony Davison (Hon. Treasurer.).