

# BOXFORD PARISH COUNCIL

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**Boxford Annual Parish Meeting**  
**Held on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2021 7.00pm Hosted on Webex**  
**DRAFT MINUTES**

**Present:**

Cllr. P. Thompson (Chair)

Cllr. J. Wilcox

Cllr. P. Harris

Cllr. J. Minchin

Cllr. P. Kilding

S. Youldon (Clerk)

3 Parishioners

**Apologies:**

Cllr. M. Hayes-Newington (Vice Chair)

Cllr. J. Cole (Hungerford & Kintbury Ward)

Cllr. C. Rowles (Hungerford & Kintbury Ward)

Cllr. D. Benneyworth (Hungerford & Kintbury Ward)

**The Chairman, welcomed all to the meeting and provided the following summary:**

“It is hard to believe that it is now two years since our last AGM but the past year and a bit have been quite unlike anything that most of us have experienced. The pandemic has impacted every aspect of all our lives, and the role and activities of the Parish Council have been no exception.

Therefore it is right that the first thing I do is recognise the efforts and hard work of our Parish Clerk, Sarah, who has borne the brunt of this activity during the past year, in addition to all the areas of Council business that she handles. From organising virtual meetings for the Parish Council through to arranging medicine collections on behalf of those parishioners who were shielding or otherwise unable to collect themselves, she has assured that Parish business has continued to run smoothly for us all. As a Parish, we are very lucky to have her and I and my fellow councillors rely on her for both guidance and for getting things done. She merits our sincerest thanks for everything that she has done.

I also wanted to say a special thank you to Tor Sandars, a councillor for several years and a former chair, who stepped down from the Parish Council last year. We had several applicants to replace her and were delighted to welcome Jane Minchin on to the council. In 2019, as a result of district Ward changes, Boxford transitioned from Speen to Kintbury & Hungerford Ward. Resident councillors James Cole and Dennis Benneyworth were joined by newly elected councillor Claire Rowles, a resident of this Parish. They have been regular participants in Parish Council meetings and have provided helpful insight and great support, especially in helping to secure the grant for the children’s playground.

Finally, and again related to the pandemic, I wanted to thank our parishioners. When the first lockdown hit, we were largely fortunate as a parish to at least have green fields around us and the opportunity to get some fresh air and exercise. I certainly saw many more people out on walks than in previous years. But we also had some who were confined to their homes, and it is a great reflection on our community that 14 people immediately offered their services in any way they could to help. Between them, our volunteers carried out 19 pharmacy runs, mainly on a weekly basis and some involving multiple deliveries, 10 food bank deliveries, and 6 shopping requests, the latter excluding all the neighbourly offers of support as people did their weekly grocery trips. We also provided general advice and support during this time to five parishioners. It is gratifying to see that this spirit of kindness has not died out either; I recognised familiar faces amongst the volunteers at Newbury racecourse when I had my first vaccination jab. In addition, there was a learning exercise for us all in terms of the changed role of a Parish Council during this time. Everything from ensuring that the parish’s public facilities complied with the constantly changing Covid guidelines, through weekly liaisons with West Berkshire Council, to adapting to virtual meetings, has resulted in a busier time for us all. It is sometimes forgotten that each councillor is also a volunteer, giving up our time to try and do our best for our community. We try to be as accessible and accommodating to parishioners each and every day, and

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it is not unusual to have someone turn up on our doorsteps on a Sunday morning to discuss something that is on their minds.

Unfortunately, this is more often than not a matter that they are unhappy with and that they want the Parish Council to resolve! This can be anything from a neighbour's planning permission 'madness' to a bonfire burning 'out of control' in their garden. Speeding in the village, pot holes, dog fouling, oversized trees, cut down trees, the lack of flowers, the beer being served at the pub, or even organising events for the village. All these and more come our way.

It is of course understandable that people get frustrated when things do not seem to progress or appear not go their way but in reality the Parish Council largely acts as a conduit for public opinion and feedback, and tries to bring about change and action by influencing the real decision makers.

As a Parish Council, we try to be as proactive as we can, and we consider a broad range of issues beyond the more obvious planning applications and footpath issues. As part of this, we are currently working on a new Parish Council plan, looking forward several years to try and understand what a village such as Boxford and the rest of the Parish will need in terms of infrastructure and facilities, so that we can start putting those pieces in place as soon as possible.

We will be circulating a questionnaire to the whole Parish in the summer inviting your thoughts, but we are always happy to get your input as to what you think would benefit our community. We hold regular formal meetings every other month and all Parishioners are welcome to join these, even when they are being held virtually as they are now. I passionately believe that as many people as possible should get involved in parish matters, and there are a number of projects, such as trying to build a safe cycle and pedestrian path to Newbury, where help would be welcomed by anyone with an interest.

All that aside, there is the ongoing business as usual that has been attended to over the past two years and I wanted to provide a summary on this. Highways is a regular item on the Parish Council agenda, and we work closely with West Berkshire Council to monitor the state of the roads around the parish and also to suggest improvements. The state of the High Road is a constant concern, especially as traffic along it appears to be slowly increasing. It had reached a terrible state but improvements were made in the form of extensive patching and this has improved conditions if only for a limited time.

The Parish Council has continued to highlight that the maintenance budget put into the B4000 through Stockcross and onto Wickham where HGV's are banned, is not reflected in the maintenance on the lower Lambourn Road and High Street, where the HGV's are being sent instead. Both roads are suffering from high impact HGV use and money is not being directed to improve these, and we will continue to address this, in addition to concerns around speeding and general levels of traffic on the Lambourn Road.

During the pandemic there was also an issue with HGVs using the car park of The Bell pub, closed at the time, and this was resolved with the help of West Berkshire Council.

The Parish Council also investigated the road naming within Boxford village, as a portion of the main road through the centre of the village is unnamed. However, a response to a survey from those residents sited along the road did not meet the required 75% agreement advised by WBC, and it was decided that no further action would be taken by the Parish Council.

The pandemic did not appear to have any significant impact on planning matters and over the past two years there have been 21 planning applications. The majority received no objections from the Parish Council, but the one that received the most interest from parishioners was an application from The Bell to convert much of the pub in to flats. It was felt by many of you that not only was there a danger that the village would lose its only public house but also that the proposed development was not in keeping with a rural location, given its potential impact on traffic, parking, density of dwellings, environment and overall external design. The application was eventually refused and it is the Parish Council's understanding that the pub is now under new ownership. It is our hope, as I am sure it is of all parishioners, that this become a valued and well utilised asset to the community in the future.

Sadly, last year we said goodbye to the old railway shelter which has been a fixture in the village for so long but which was proving to be uneconomical to repair. The good news was that it was donated to the Gloucester & Warwickshire Trust, and therefore found a new home rather than having to be destroyed. Work is underway to replace this with a new village Information Board, which will complement the new Parish noticeboards that were put in place last year, and which were constructed by a local craftsman.

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We're reaching that time of year when footpaths across the Parish are busier (as they were during the lockdowns), and ensuring they are kept in good condition is something that keeps the Parish Council busy in conjunction with local landowners. Several steps and footpaths have been refurbished during the past couple of years, including new banisters to footpath no.6 up from Westbrook to Bell Meadow.

Much of the beauty of Boxford lies in the river Lambourn as it winds its way through the village, but the latter also requires constant vigilance especially in light of some of the wettest months since records began. Our thanks to our Parish Flood Wardens, Tony Stone and Paul Kilding, who have attended meetings of the Flood Forum, and worked with neighbouring Parishes. Fortunately the only flooding has been very localised on the roads in the Parish, and many of these have now had the relevant drainage systems thoroughly overhauled to prevent any reoccurrence.

The Parish Council is responsible for the general upkeep of the area, and continues to cut the verges, recreation ground and other areas of land, and our thanks to the contractors for a job well done. In addition, the Jubilee bench on the corner of Westbrook was taken away and thoroughly refurbished and repainted, and I am sure you will agree looks as good as new. It was also fortunate to narrowly miss being damaged by a tree that came down around it soon after!

The Council also worked with the Village Hall Committee to make much needed repairs to the children's playground area, including replacing the swings which could no longer be used. Aided by our Ward Councillors, we successfully raised £5,000 in a Members Bid and used some CIL money to ensure that the playground was fully functional once more. We have also been taking a keen interest in 'wires' over the course of the past year. Investigations and discussions have taken place with SEB to see whether the overhead power lines can be placed underground. In addition, we are also consulting with Gigaclear as to whether fibre broadband can be extended to the entire village.

I represented the Parish Council at an Environmental Strategy Consultation held by West Berkshire Council, examining various measures that could be put in place across the region. Part of this is looking at more environmentally friendly, healthy and cost effective forms of transport. The Parish Council has been investigating the potential of creating a safe cycle and pedestrian path in to Newbury, and has consulted with a number of different stakeholders and experts. We received support from local MP Laura Farris, on the premise that this be the starting point for a cycle route along the Lambourn Valley and in to the AONB, and have involved National Cycle Route owner Sustrans to understand what needs to be done next.

No report for the last two years would be complete without recognising the Boxford Big Dig, which turned out to be bigger than anyone suspected. The mosaic that was revealed was truly spectacular and an outstanding reward for the efforts of the Boxford History Project. Their Open Day in the summer of 2019 welcomed 3,000 cars and raised £4,500!

The past two years have flown past and yet at the same time appeared to have gone on forever! I believe that a significant amount has been achieved by the Parish Council but it is never enough and there is still much to be done. I have served as Chair for those two years, longer than is traditional, but I would welcome the opportunity to finalise the Parish Plan and would like to continue as Chair if that is the wish of the Parish and the Parish Council.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to my fellow councillors for the time they have donated, often in the form of long evenings in front of a video screen, and which they have done so without fuss and without reward while providing valuable support and expertise."

Peter Thompson, Chair 2019-2021

**Cycle / Pedestrian Route Creation:** The above summary explained the Parish Council's thinking behind a creation of a safe cycle / pedestrian route into Newbury. Councillors were keen to correct the rumours that it would be going through village gardens, clarifying that this is something that had never been discussed or even considered. Councillors confirmed that this was very early stages of an idea and as it is not something that the PC has any expertise in or any power to put in place was still very much at an early stage. Parishioners questioned if wider views has been canvassed the PC responded that it was planned to include this in the Parish Plan questionnaire. All agreed that making the Lower Lambourn Road a safe route and reducing traffic would provide a good solution and would be beneficial for all. Parishioners also questioned the funding of the project, it was confirmed that Laura Farris MP had been approached on what may be available on a national level, but also with Green grants available, it was felt this was very much on topic at the moment

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and should be something that funds can be found for, as and when the idea had been researched further. Parishioner questioned if neighbouring parishes had been involved in conversations: PC responded that this was part of the next step with the Clerk to draft a letter for neighbouring parish councils to judge interest from them too. **Action - SY**

**Parish Plan:** It was confirmed that the update to the Parish Plan was underway with the intension of the parishioner questionnaire being distributed early this summer. The Parish Council explained that it was keen to ensure the questionnaire covered all aspects of the parish to ensure that a focus for the Parish Council could be put in place and provide a reference point to assist in the response to planning applications and consultations. Parishioner asked if the timing of the Parish Plan could coincide with WBC Local Plan consultation timings, unfortunately the PC cannot influence WBC timings and as it was important to get the Parish Plan underway this would not be an option.

**Sewage Issues on Westbrook:** Resident reported concerns about the mains sewage in Westbrook, for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in 18 months a blockage had occurred and Thames Water had to attend as a matter of urgency to prevent contamination to the SSSI and River Lambourn. Blockage appears to be caused by fat and non-flushable items being put down the drains, it was flooding here as the lowest point in the system. PC agreed education was important and Clerk was in touch with Thames Water trying to get them to provide information to residents, it was agreed that this would also be circulated on the Parish email once received. Resident raised the question that perhaps this was a bigger issue linking to the problems that Winterbourne has experienced and the question on whether the sewage system was still fit for purpose was raised. Clerk to discuss with Thames Water and feedback. **Action - SY**

**The 2021 Parish Council meetings will be held:** 6<sup>th</sup> July; 7<sup>th</sup> September; 2<sup>nd</sup> November.  
**Meeting Closed at 7.53pm** **Signed:** *S Youldon* – Clerk, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021

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