

PARISH OF PULBOROUGH

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF ELECTORS

**MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF PULBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY 29th MAY 2025 AT THE VILLAGE HALL, PULBOROUGH**

PRESENT: Parish Councillors: Curd (Chair), Campbell (Vice-Chair), Court, Esdaile, Hare, Labuschagne, Martin, Perry, Riddle, Trembling, HDC Cllr Ellis Brown and 8 members of the public.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr O. Last (Clerk), Mrs B. Nobbs (Deputy Clerk) & Mr P. Richards (Locum Clerk).

The meeting opened at 6:00pm.

1. **Welcome and introductions by Chair** – Cllr Curd welcomed all present and thanked them for attending.
2. **To approve the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 16th May 2024** - the draft Minutes of the previous meeting were taken as read and **APPROVED** by the majority of those present. The Chair then signed the Minutes as a correct record.
3. **To receive the Annual Report of the Council, including Chair's Report, Committee Reports and Financial Report** – the Chair presented the reports which are attached at Appendix A.
4. **Update on the proposed Local Government Reorganisation (devolution)** – Cllr Campbell provided an update and reported that Sussex will be one of the first areas in England to elect a new mayor as part of the government's devolution programme. As part of the devolution programme, local government will be reorganised by replacing two-tier systems with single-tier unitary authorities. This would mean both West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) and Horsham District Council (HDC) would be replaced by a Unitary Authority. The mayoral elections will be held in May 2026 with elections for a new unitary shadow authority scheduled for 2027.
5. **Question and answer session with Electors of the Parish** – the Chair invited questioned from those present.
 - A resident criticised the parish council decision made in January 2025 to (a) relocate the meetings to the United Reformed Church (URC) and (b) change the frequency of the full council meetings. He stated that the Clerk had overstepped his authority in proposing such changes and his complaints



regarding this matter had been ignored. He asked that the parish council revert to monthly meetings and meet at the Village Hall. Cllr Riddle advised that he supported the move to URC as there was no hearing loop in the Village Hall making it difficult with those hard of hearing to follow proceedings.

Another resident also expressed surprise at the 6pm meeting start times which she suggested stopped those with jobs from coming. Cllr Campbell stated he was not aware of the Clerk issues but would be happy to revisit the matters raised. Cllr Labuschagne thought the 6pm start time to be preferable for those, like her, with parental duties, however she was happy that the parish council revisit this topic at a later date.

Cllr Trembling reported that full council did meet every month in recent times but reminded those present that the important issues regarding planning are reviewed by the Planning Committee every four weeks.

HDC Cllr Ellis-Brown suggested that the move to earlier meeting times could have been supported via live streaming using the Owl recording device. He had been told by other residents that they found it difficult to attend the meeting at 6pm due to work commitments and that parking was difficult at the URC. He suggested the parish council was hasty to move to an earlier start and that the recommendations from the Clerk should not have been allowed. He also suggested that a reason to move the meeting would be to help the parish council employees and the views from the community stakeholders had not been considered. The Chair agreed that this matter should be revisited at a future full council meeting.

- A resident reported that Carpenters Meadow was not being maintained by HDC and asked that the parish council remind HDC of their maintenance obligations. Both HDC councillors in attendance agreed to review this with HDC officers.
- A resident referred to the upcoming Armistice Day and asked that the local Churches work with the parish council on 11th November in the Memorial Gardens. The Chair thanked her for her suggestion and asked that she contact the parish office to arrange the details.
- HDC Cllr Ellis-Brown asked if Pulptopia would be held in 2025. The Chair advised that suitable dates were being arranged with the event organisers.
- A resident reported that she was disappointed that at the 2024 Christmas Fair no food trucks were present. The event organiser explained that several food trucks had confirmed attendance but, for various reasons, none arrived on the day.
- HDC Cllr Ellis-Brown referred to the Owl recording device and asked why he and other residents could not listen to previous recordings should draft minutes be challenged as to their accuracy. He advised that the Owl was

bought in order that members of the public could listen to what was being said at a later date. The Chair asked the Locum Clerk to respond. He advised that previous parish council minutes did not record that the public had access to such recordings and that the advice he gave to the parish council was based on this. HDC Cllr Ellis-Brown then asked that the Owl recordings be made available to the public in order to check the accuracy of parish council minutes. The Locum Clerk advised that this would be a matter for the parish council to consider should they wish to do so. He did remind HDC Cllr Ellis-Brown that the draft minutes from any previous parish council meeting were then approved at their next meeting so giving an opportunity for councillors to challenge any inaccuracies. He also advised that minutes are not a verbatim record of the meeting and that, on each meeting agenda, the public are reminded that they and the meeting may be photographed, filmed or recorded.

- A resident criticised the parish council in not posting draft minutes onto the website in a timely fashion. The Chair agreed that meeting papers should be posted onto the website sooner. The Locum Clerk referred to best practice advice that suggested draft minutes should be posted within four weeks of a meeting. The resident also asked if agendas could be posted sooner. The Locum Clerk confirmed that since February 2025, all agendas had been posted in accordance with statutory posting deadlines. Another resident agreed that, in recent times, agendas had been posted sooner.

Cllr Riddle asked if Councillors could listen to Owl recordings if draft minutes needed to be challenged. He also asked how long the Owl recordings were kept for. The Locum Clerk replied that the previous minutes did allow for Councillors to review an Owl recording. He understood that Owl recordings were kept in line with the parish council's retention policy i.e. two years.

Cllr Labuschagne suggested AI tools could be used to assist the parish office. The Clerk agreed to look at this.

- A resident thanked the parish council for arranging to have the hedges cut at Carpenters Meadow but asked that WSCC cut back the vegetation further along the road. Other residents also reported access issues along the A29 at Sopers Hill. HDC Cllr Ellis-Brown suggested that the parish council raise these matters at a forthcoming meeting with the WSCC Highways Manager. The resident appreciated that and further thanked the Chair and councillors for their hard work and achievements.
- HDC Cllr Ellis-Brown referred to the Community Pantry and the parish council's recent decision to move the management and responsibility of the Pantry away from the parish council. He described the steps taken by the existing team that manages the Pantry to create a Charitable Organisation that had proposed to take over the Pantry. He questioned the reasons why the parish council would ask other interested parties to do the same. The Locum Clerk reported that the decision was made at a full council meeting held on 4th

March 2025 and that the parish council had been made aware of more than one approach to manage the Pantry. He explained that the parish council would seek, formally, requests from interested parties, such bodies to be properly constituted. Those interested parties would then be subject to a formal assessment process by the parish council, details to which will be available to the public. This would not be a tender process.

HDC Cllr Ellis-Brown pointed out that the Pantry has adopted an additional back room used previously for meetings. Access to this room by other users would now jeopardise the hygiene certification of the Pantry due to the risk of contamination.

A resident reported others had expressed an interest in managing the Pantry. She also advised that the back room was used previously by the cricket club for afternoon teas. This fund-raising activity had now ceased with no notice of the restriction to use the room. Cllr Hare confirmed that one of the prime objectives for the Sports Pavilion was to support local cricket and that should not be forgotten. He also advised that this matter emphasised the need for a new, modern Sports Pavilion. Cllr Labuschagne noted the verbal interchange between residents from the cricket club and sports and social club and recommended all parties sit down to discuss their individual and joint grievances. Cllr Campbell reiterated the need to resolve this discontent as soon as possible.

A resident noted that the replacement Sports Pavilion had been a long running saga and that the parish council should make its replacement as a top priority. The Chair agreed and confirmed that she and the new Clerk would be leading the project.

There being no further questions, the Chair thanked all for attending and the meeting closed at 7:07pm

Signed

Date

Signed

APPENDIX A – ANNUAL REPORTS

Chair's Report to the Parish including Planning & Services and Recreation & Open Spaces Reports 2024/25

Pulborough Parish Council, together with our staff and community volunteers, has achieved another solid year addressing community needs. Our combined efforts are bringing to life our vision of working with our community to create a thriving Parish for all. A huge thank you goes out to Councillor Members, staff, volunteers, community members and everyone who continues to help make this happen.

I would also like to thank Len Ellis-Brown who did a great job as Chair until January 2025 and introduced many of the projects I will report on. Thank you, Len.

During the last year we have seen a few personnel changes among our staff and Councillor Members but we have continued to ensure a 'business as usual' service, including passing our annual financial and policy audits, overseeing local governance and ensuring community needs were met. The Parish Council continued to engage with residents through regular committee meetings held in public providing an opportunity for them to directly address Councillor Members.

We have recently welcomed a new Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Oliver Last. Oliver is joining at an exciting time as we move forward on key projects. Grateful thanks go to our Locum Clerk, Paul Richards and staff for their support during the recruitment period.

A new **Grounds and Biodiversity Officer, Jack Kilner**, has recently started and is already getting good feedback from community members and sports teams.

We have increased the number of community volunteers but we always need more! We currently have one Councillor Member vacancy. If you have some spare time, please come and get involved.

Extreme weather events have prompted flood alerts in the Horsham District, reinforcing our focus on community resilience. Plans have continued to be put in place preparing the community for emergencies, ensuring local infrastructure can withstand challenges, and to support residents during crises.

Beyond personnel shifts the Parish Council has been actively working on many tactical initiatives to enhance community facilities, sustainability, and local engagement.

These are:

Sports

- **Sports Pavilion** – We've continued to collaborate with stakeholders to **plan a new facility that will meet the needs of the community**
- **The refurbished MUGA** now provides a safe state-of-the-art facility for football and netball practice. Teams can now easily book and pay for sessions online.

Community Projects

- **The Pulborough Pantry** has continued to save thousands of tons of good food from landfill while helping local families to stretch their budgets. It has built close partnerships with local supermarkets, Horsham Matters and a loyal volunteer team. Community volunteer Maria Lee, a founder of the Pantry, was shortlisted for a HDC Volunteers Award last year for her tireless efforts in supporting both the Pantry and numerous events for our community.
- **Little Monkeys Pre-School Playgroup** – we've funded the cost of the weekly hall hire for 25 – 30 children. 85% of these live in Pulborough with a few from Storrington and Fittleworth.

Greener Pulborough

Our initiatives are showing impressive results thanks to formidable efforts of our groundsman, Councillor Members and community volunteers. Maintenance and improvement of public spaces, including parks and recreational areas, has been prioritised. We have a number of green initiatives ongoing including:

- **Community Allotment** – This was launched last year and produced a wide range of fruit, vegetables and herbs, and received the welcome donation of a new wheelbarrow from the Rotary Club of Storrington and Pulborough District.
- **Community Gardens** – These are lovingly tended by a talented volunteer team. Last year our community gardens were awarded a Thriving (Level 4) award in the RHS South and South East in Bloom – It's Your Neighbourhood category.
- **Nutbourne Common** – Regular 'bramble pulls' contribute to making Nutbourne Common a walkers' paradise and safe haven for nature.
- **Rivermead Nature Reserve, Pocket Park and our recreation grounds** – The recent work on these has received strong support from local residents
- **Pulborough Sheddars** – we're working to support their dream of having their own 'shed'. Recent data shows that with our aging population comes the need to tackle social isolation and crucially provide safe community spaces where people of all abilities can help each other with projects or just chat. They are a massive asset to our village.
- **Repair Cafes** – Residents were invited to come and learn how to mend and upcycle clothing and textiles. These sessions have led to a close working relationship with the Pulborough-based Mary How Trust, supporting them to raise vital funds for their lifesaving work.

Recreation

- **Recreation Ground Playground Repaint** – The children’s playground equipment was repainted by volunteers in just three days. Local parents praised the job done.
- **Carpenters Meadow Playground Refurbishment** – The new equipment is providing a more stimulating playing environment for younger residents thanks to funding from Horsham District Council.

Events

Under this heading the following events have been supported:

- **Local Government Reorganisation/Devolution** - Council Members hosted a public Town Hall meeting discussing the future of governance in Sussex with Horsham District Council leaders Jane Eaton and Martin Boffey in March 2025.
- **Pultopia** - our exciting new **community music festival** organised by team of Councillor Members and community volunteers, delivered **live music, food, drink, and family-friendly entertainment**, all while raising funds for local causes.
- **Christmas Fair** - brought festive cheer and attracted over 300 shoppers to a record number of local vendors, holiday themed stalls and entertainment creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere for residents and visitors alike. Local traders snapped up Christmas trees to festoon their premises giving our village a traditional Christmas feel.
- **Remembrance Parade** - Local residents joined Councillor Members and local groups gathered at the Memorial Garden to walk together to St. Marys Church to commemorate our armed forces and fallen heroes at a special outdoor service.
- **Sussex Wildlife Trust – Weald to Waves** - Our joint event at the Village Hall in November to a packed house of nature lovers helped Sussex Wildlife Trust spread the word on the importance of controlling non-native invasive species, eliminating water pollution and creating green corridors.
- **Fairtrade** - Our community continues to be part of the movement to champion Pulborough as a Fairtrade village and hosted their AGM.

Finance and Policy

Throughout the year, as well as ensuring our statutory accounts continue to be well managed, the Finance and Policy Committee has reviewed all policy documents and relevant risk assessments. The Committee also continued to support volunteer schemes and initiatives making a big difference to our community.

Our auditors are very pleased at the way our statutory accounts have been managed and presented. We can thank our Locum clerk Paul Richards and staff for their support with this.

The income for the year to 31st March 2025 was £393,469 compared to £290,528 for 2023 – 2024. Part of this income is from various grants received such as the cleaning grant and then the balance, £292,460 being the precept. The income from interest accrued on our funds was helpful to our finances with an increase from last year at £14,343 to £15,656.

Most of our expenses remain staff costs including the cost of our wardens.

The Ear Marked Reserve Funds (EMR) were little changed from last year moving from £247,375.60 to £251,723.85. These financial reserves are earmarked for several planned projects including the new Sports Pavillion, a new tractor and other items. Some EMR funds were used with S106 funds to revamp and refurbish the MUGA. With a pro-active marketing plan it is expected that the MUGA will generate a good income stream.

We saw more delays to our key project, the Sports Pavillion/Community Hub. However, the designs have been improved in terms of the future versatility of the facilities, making it more sustainable and less costly in capital expenditure terms.

Infrastructure

- **Neighbourhood Plan** – The referendum version of the **Pulborough Neighbourhood Plan** was finalised in November 2024, but subsequently stopped when the inspector found that HDC had failed in its legal Duty to Cooperate on housing needs and water neutrality.
- **Infrastructure and Transport Improvements** – The council has been actively working on **an updated plan addressing current and future needs for roads, footpaths and bridleways**
- **Neighbourhood Wardens** continue to foster **community cohesion and resilience**, making Pulborough a safer and more connected place.

Planning

We have reviewed around 80 planning applications in the last 12 months. This includes new build, alterations to residential and commercial premises and tree work for HDC and SDNP.

The Committee is acutely aware of Government plans to increase housing allocation numbers across Horsham District. Any additional allocation for Pulborough has yet to be agreed, however the focus for the Committee will be to ensure any new development proposals are supported by the appropriate transport and infrastructure upgrades.

Next Steps

For the next 12 months, as well as continuing to deliver on existing projects the following activities and initiatives are planned:

- Move forward towards redeveloping the **Sports Pavilion/Community Hub**
- A new vibrant, inclusive, and engaging Youth Programme. This strategy aims to promote youth participation in sports, leisure, cooking, play and music, ensuring they have access to enriching activities that support their physical, mental, and social well-being.
- Resilience plan upgrade
- Pultopia, Fairtrade, Remembrance Day and Christmas Fair events

- **A marketing plan for the MUGA and the addition of tennis as a bookable activity**
- Subject to legal guidance, we'll hold a referendum on our Neighbourhood Plan
- Lobbying for an Infrastructure and Transport Improvements commensurate with current and future needs
- Launch a Volunteer Programme
- Continue to support the Little Monkeys Pre-School Playgroup –This is a valued service which will continue through 2025/26.
- Pulborough Shedders – We'll continue to support their search for new temporary accommodation and ultimately plan to provide them with their own 'shed' as part of a new community hub project.

All of this activity reflects the Council's commitment to **community well-being, environmental sustainability, compliance, sound financial governance and local development.**

2025/26 will be a busy year as your Parish Council continues to deliver for you, our community.

Finance & Policy Year End Report: Chair of Finance

Unfortunately, after appointing our new Clerk in 2023, he resigned in early 2025. Mr Quenault resolved the anomalies encountered in last year's account and as you can see the auditors are very pleased at the way our statutory accounts have been managed and presented. We can thank our locum clerk and staff for their support in the short term as we seek to recruit a new Clerk and RFO.

Through the year, the Finance and Policy committee have reviewed all Policy documents and relevant Risk Assessments mitigating areas of risk for the improved safety of the residents of Pulborough. The finance committee was very pleased to be able to continue supporting some of the volunteer schemes and initiatives that are making a huge difference to the residents of Pulborough.

The income for the year to date 31 March 2025 was £393,469 compared to £290,528 for 2023-2024: Part of this income is from various grants received such as the cleaning grant and then the balance, £292,460 being the precept. The income from interest accrued on our funds was helpful to our finances with an increase from last year £14,343 to £15,656

Most of the Council's expenses remain staff costs including the cost of our wardens. Staffing remains an issue as our long serving groundsman retired and we had problems recruiting new members of staff. However, once we have appointed our new Clerk then those issues will fade.

The Ear Marked Reserve funds (EMR) were little changed from last year moving from £247,375.6 to £251,723.85. These financial reserves are earmarked to be used for several planned projects such as a new Sports and Social club, a new tractor and other items. Some EMR funds were used with S106 funds to revamp and refurbish the MUGA (Multi Use Games Area). Now we are working on marketing the facility and publicising this brand-new facility. It is expected that the MUGA will generate a good income stream.

Your Council saw more delays to its key project, the Sports Pavilion. Working together with Thakeham the designs for the facility have been improved and their expertise helped both in terms of the future versatility of the building but also in making it more efficient and less costly in capex terms.