

MIDDLETON & SMERRILL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING Held on 13th March 2024

Attendance: Councillor Dianne Jeremy (Chair)

Other Electors of the Parish: Lisa Bingham, Helen Brocklehurst, Paul Jeremy, David Mallaband and Jamie Wigley

Non-electors: Matthew Lovell (Parish Clerk), PCSO Boswell & DDDCllr Laura Mellstrom

1. Appointment of Clerk to the Meeting.

The meeting appointed the Parish Clerk to take the minutes.

2. Apologies – Cllr Pat Musgrave and Simon Spencer (County Cllr)

3. To confirm the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 15th March 2023

The minutes were confirmed and signed

4. Presentation to David Mallaband - A presentation was made to David Mallaband who retired in March 2023 after fifteen years of service to the community as a parish councillor - ten of which were as the Chair of the parish council.

5. Chair's Report

It has been an eventful year with some very positive developments and also some challenges provided by the wet and stormy weather. The deterioration in the state of local roads and pavements has been a continuing cause for concern. There have been regular reports of potholes requiring repairs; a new village name sign has been requested for the Smerrill entrance to the village.

Litter has been less of a problem since the substantial collection of 80 bags was made in 2022. Volunteers regularly remove litter from the centre of the village and a major litter-pick takes place on the surrounding roads and paths each year in March.

Blocked drains have caused localised flooding on some roads, the DCC has been asked to clear gully leaf blockages in The Rakes ; and to remove leaves from roads and pavements when autumn leaf-fall is over. The drain at the triangle by the entrance to the Dale was completely blocked after recent storms and was cleared by Jamie Wigley.

Storm damage in December resulted in falling branches from two of the large trees in private gardens in the Square. No personal injuries were sustained, but a parked car belonging to a local resident was written off due to damage caused by a fallen branch.

The protracted work to improve the sewers in the Dale has caused significant disruption to the paths over the last few weeks.

The information board at Bateman's tomb sustained some weather damage again this year but has been repaired. The pathway up to the tomb was improved last year. The area inside the railings around the tomb is regularly weeded and the pathway is mown and strimmed to ensure access for visitors.

The Middleton memorial trees (a beech tree for the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, and crab apple tree for the coronation of King Charles III), on the approach to Bateman's tomb, have been cared for and are growing well. Both trees are to be recorded and mapped as part of the Million Trees project. [<https://milliontrees.co.uk>]

The defibrillator in the telephone box in the Square has been regularly checked and new pads/batteries replaced as needed.

The DDC is currently undertaking a public toilets review: District Councillor Laura Mellstrom supports our aim to have the Middleton toilets open all year and has asked the

DDC to consider this option. This would be a significant improvement to village facilities as there are currently no alternative toilets for walkers and other visitors between October and March.

An initiative using air quality monitoring equipment in different parts of the parish in 2022-2023 provided information which was shared with the DDDC. This issue is being discussed further to decide what more action is needed to produce accurate, comparative and useful data which will be published.

The Parish Council Climate and Nature Group has continued to meet weekly to maintain and improve the environment. A 'scented garden' area has been created adjacent to the shed in the playground. Additional snowdrops and daffodils were planted in the grass border at the side of the playground. The community herb garden is well-established in the Picnic Garden and the borders in that area now contain a variety of bulbs, flowers and shrubs which provide seasonal displays. The village planter is regularly renewed so that it is always attractive and since the removal of the dilapidated trailer from outside the Tor Farm wall there is a new wildflower area being developed. There is also a focus on supporting local wildlife. Middleton now has a thriving population of hedgehogs. Several residents provide suitable food, water and shelter for these highly endangered creatures. It seems that the hedgehogs had a very successful year. There were numerous sightings, night-time video captures and reports of litters of baby hedgehogs being successfully reared. Purpose-built and naturally occurring shelters helped to support them. Efforts to alert motorists to their presence will continue and we hope that it will avoid fatalities this year.

Council regularly discusses planning applications and in line with our aspirations for the parish there is a preference for planning developments which would provide housing for permanent residents and affordable housing options. This year an application to convert historic barns into holiday lets was supported because it will preserve heritage buildings and also protect wildlife, notably a population of bats.

The parish council has raised grant funding to support improvements to the facilities in the area behind the Village Hall which is owned by the parish council.

Some of the work to clear the site was started last year. Volunteers worked hard to clear the weeds and debris that had accumulated there. The old toilet block building has been re-roofed to make it safe and weatherproof. New doors have been fitted to ensure it is secure. Further work is required to remove debris and rubbish from inside the building. It is intended that the renovated block will be put to community use, such as a storage facility in the first instance. A grant from County Councillor Simon Spencer was used to fund work on the toilet block. Another exciting development behind the Village Hall is the greenhouse for community use. The greenhouse is being built by the parish council's Climate and Nature sub-committee with help from other volunteers. This large greenhouse will be used to grow plants for the annual stall at the village market in May and will also be available for use by local residents. The greenhouse was funded by a grant from the Community Lottery Fund. Additional items for the gardening work (two child-safe water butts and a heavy duty wheelbarrow) were funded by a grant from Councillor Mellstrom's Local Project's fund. The popular children's playground has also been improved. In addition to the new picnic tables, swings and exercise equipment installed last year, the playground has been resurfaced to remove the badly damaged tarmac which was becoming unsafe for children. This was funded by the grant from the Community Lottery fund.

The parish council receives regular reports from the Village Hall committee, some of whose members have also been actively involved in supporting the construction of the greenhouse and the development of the area behind the hall. The VH committee has invited the parish council Climate and Nature group to submit a proposal to support further the greenhouse and garden initiatives for community benefit.

In order to strengthen the community's case for ownership in the future, the parish council has now acquired the 'Community Asset' designation for the Village Hall from DDDC. This assists the community's case for eventual ownership of the hall.

I would like to express my thanks to the members of the Parish Council, the Climate and Nature Group and members of the Village Hall Committee for all their work in supporting our community by giving their time, energy, offers of materials, transport and more. Thanks also to our financial supporters this year – Cllr Laura Mellstrom, Cllr Simon Spencer, the National Lottery Community Fund. Thanks to PCSO Anthony Boswell for his regular reports to PC meetings, keeping us up to date. My special thanks to our PC clerk Matthew Lovell who provides all the essential support to ensure that the Parish Council can work effectively, has succeeded in obtaining the grant funding, and is always available to give advice and share his knowledge and experience.

It is very heartening to have so many people in the parish who are committed to preserving, developing and improving our local facilities and environment for everyone who lives here, or comes here as a visitor, to enjoy.

Dianne Jeremy, Chair, Middleton and Smerrill Parish Council

6. District Councillor – Laura Mellstrom noted that the Council has set its budget to the maximum 2.99% increase allowed by central government and hopes to remain in the black this year. The new corporate plan has been set for the next 4 years. Housing is a priority outside the Peak Park where the new affordable homes in Monyash have one property empty at present due to the strict criteria for residency. She noted that there is a County Council consultation on bus provision closing on 18th March and the meeting were informed by a parishioner that the 171 service is ceasing (Andrews will provide the school bus) so only the 172 Matlock to Bakewell service will remain.
7. PDNPA Member no longer allocated for any parishes specifically
8. County Councillor Simon Spencer – sent his apologies.
9. Police – PCSO Boswell attended and noted crime was increasing with a spate of burglaries and shed break ins in the Hope Valley and advised looking at security of buildings and outbuildings – strengthening doors, padlocks, alarms and CCTV. Their priorities are dictated by the Derbyshire Talking Survey which repeats every 3 months and whilst the Road Safety – especially ticketing vehicles parked where there are solid white lines in the middle of the highway remains number one, fear of burglary has been added for this quarter and the SNT are visiting as many parishes as possible to offer advice and hear concerns. The SNT welcomes invites to all coffee mornings and events to listen to residents' concerns.
10. To consider any other Parish matter that may be brought forward by the Council or local government electors.
A parishioner raised the unacceptable and embarrassing situation created by DDDC in only opening its toilets for 6 months of the year when walking is year round and the insanitary conditions created by their closure are appalling. The fact that their lease when they created the public toilets is conditional on 365 day opening is a black mark against DDDC and Council was asked to write to the Leader of DDDC to ask if they intend to maintain their bad faith or restore the toilets to comply with the lease.
A sign to direct complaints to DDDC should be placed on the entrance so that visitors understand that this is not the fault of residents.

The worsening road surfaces were discussed with the poor service when work is actually carried out with one DCC team watched taking a whole Sunday morning for 3 potholes and missing out others.

The meeting ended at 20:15