

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting  
In Sulgrave Church Hall, Magpie Road  
On Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2025 at 7.30pm**

Present: Cllr's Richard Fonge, Neil Higginson, Sarah Parker and Mike Powell

Christine Coles (Parish Clerk) and eight villagers

**1. Introduction/Apologies**

The Chair of the Parish Council welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Peppiatt, Cllr Priestman, Martin Sirot Smith and Colin and Pamela Wagman

**2. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting Held 9<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

To carry forward to the next meeting.

**4. To receive a report from the Parish Council (Cllr R Fonge, Chairman)**

The last year has been a good one for the village I believe with your Council playing an active role. Our task as Councillors is not only to listen and take note of villagers views, but to maintain the integrity of Sulgrave, and bring new ideas to the fore that enhance the quality of life for all those that live here.

There are three initiatives that we can be justly proud of. Firstly last June we held an event on Castle Green where various organisations came together and put on an afternoon of entertainment, followed by an evening of song by The Polka Dots and a fish and chip supper. A great example of the village pulling together to enjoy one another's company and raising money. Thanks to the many sponsors, including £1500 from HS2. It cost the council £400, but this was a village event.

Secondly, the Parish library in the Church was moved to the north transept. Working closely with the P.C.C it has become a more welcoming area. Our thanks go to Sue Sanderson for maintaining a good library.

Thirdly a coffee morning was held to welcome new residents to the village. Ten out of the nineteen invitees came. The event was a great success. This has been an exceptional year for the number of new households. New residents bring new ideas and support to the village and the adage that "Nobody is indispensable" is so very true. Your council for example have all moved into Sulgrave over the last fifteen years.

The pub has changed landlords and is attracting more villagers and the Manor by selling Kiln Farm and Manor cottage has at long last seen the renovation of those properties, much to all of our delight. They have been such a sad site for so long.

Castle Green has been costly this year, with wall repairs and fence renewal, and Pocket park needs money this coming year. A survey carried out on the future of the park, produced some very interesting answers, but with the high cost of play equipment your council is very restricted in what they can afford. HS2 are being approached for funding and Sulgrave Charities have generously offered £2000 towards a new swing.

This last year has seen the resignation from the Council of two Councillors, due to their work pressures. They both made a significant contribution to the village, and our thanks and appreciation goes to them. In their place we co opted on Joanna Peppiatt and Sarah Parker both of whom have fitted in seamlessly.

Finally my sincere thanks to my fellow Cllrs for their selfless work on your behalf. I look upon ourselves as a team, and that is borne out by our twice yearly pub suppers where we enjoy each others company, along with our much respected clerk Christine, whose knowledge, sound advice and friendship is respected by all.

Thank you all, not least those loyal villagers who attend our regular meetings. That support means a lot and gives me pride in leading such a special village.

**5. To receive a report from the Parochial Church Council (Shrimp Christy and Andrew Dixon)**

The library has made a huge difference and thanks was given to Sue Sanderson and Tony Keatley (for removing the pews). Fund raising continues. A successfully Christmas Fayre took place and a Safari supper is planned for September. The church is open every day for visitors and nice comments have been recorded in the book. A VE Day Service will be held on 10<sup>th</sup> May at 11am. The Church Hall was renovated in 2021 and has an active website with Terms & Conditions, health and safety regulations and safeguarding. Many hirers use the hall including the Parish Council.

Andrew Dixon spoke about the library. All the work took place in one year and the PCC were very grateful to the Parish Council for promoting the idea and meeting the expenses. Thanks was given to Claire Nash, Sue Sanderson and Tony Keatley for their work. The quinquennial review which is a mandatory five year assessment was carried out in April. The Diocese pay for the architect to carry out the review. The tower was repaired and west all repointed. The north port is rarely used and needs a new roof. The job went out to tender and JP Conservation were appointed. A faculty was applied for to get the work done but a bat survey has now delayed work. Storm Darragh on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2024 caused the weather vane to blow off. Thanks was given to Damian Lever who went up to the tower to mitigate the risk. This was covered by the insurance and a claim is in progress.

The Church hall was renovated in 2021 and has an active website. There are rule and regulations in place and the hall is used by different hirers such as the Parish Council, pilates, sewing club and coffee mornings. Some clubs are seasonal. The hall is a lovely meeting place. Various parties have been held in the hall, funeral wakes and it will be a polling station for the local elections in May. The finances are ticking over. People are encouraged to use the hall. Electricity is expensive. Small tables have been purchased. The top window is being replaced like for like. Secondary double glazing will be put on the bottom window and there will be a general car park tidy up on 26<sup>th</sup> April.

**3. To receive a report from West Northants Council (Cllr Alison Eastwood)**

Cllr Eastwood represents 22 villages and she thanked the Parish Council and village for what they do. An election is coming up. There will be 31 villages split between three Councillors and she encouraged everyone to vote. She went on to read her report.

And so, we have reached the end of first 4 years of the Unitary Council Which has continued to protect essential services and tackle significant challenges whilst setting a balanced budget for the year ahead. At the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> February, Councillors agreed the authorities' final budget and housing revenues whilst setting council tax for 2025/2026. WNC along with Council's across the country continue to face severe financial pressures caused by increasing costs for both Children's services and adult social care. Despite this, the council has managed to set a balanced revenue budget for 2025/2026 of 956.6 million (431.8 million excluding the dedicated school grant).

WNC started its budgetary process this year with an anticipated short fall of £53m for 25/26 and embarked on an early review of its finances reducing the spend to 39m by July, followed by a major drive over the autumn to close the gap. The budget includes a council tax rise of 4.99% whilst balancing the books into its 5<sup>th</sup> year. It is in line with the government's threshold and an average increase on a band D property £1.71 per week or £88.00 per year. This generates extra funding of around 19m per year with 2% of the increase going towards funding adult social care.

Cllr Malcom Longley, who sadly does not stand for re-election at the WNC this May, stated that setting the budget has once again been complex and challenging. The election falls on Thursday 1st of May with final results confirmed on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. Our Silverstone Ward will be renamed Rural South Northants. Charles Manners and I stand again with Councillor David Smith replacing Dermot Banbridge. David currently holds the role of Community cabinet under the current Council. Purdah commences on March 18<sup>th</sup> and we will be

canvassing busily across 29 villages . Of course we are here to answer questions at all times. Our fliers have a telephone number and an e-mail printed especially for your use.

South Midlands are not currently included in the Governments Devolution programme; Milton Keynes and Luton refused to join the party as part of the priority programme. It will happen in the future and we will continue to work with the government.

#### OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST

Recycling centres are to be opened 7 days a week as new contracts are signed.

In the past year the cycling tour of Britain boosted our economy by £3.6m coming from attendee spending.

This year Women's Rugby world cup comes to Northamptonshire The trophy has already made various stops over the past 2 months, organised by WNC and All Saints in anticipation of the incredible event.

Final construction has begun on the Sandy Lane relief road along the A4500, and the Towcester by pass/relief road finally moves to its last stages of construction.

We will celebrate the great Fire of Northampton 1675 with events starting with OAK APPLE DAY outside all Saints church at the end of April. There will be exhibitions on the Great Fire across the county, with a son e Lumiere outside all Saints, and Carnival to celebrate the event. Concerts and art exhibitions will be held over a period of 3 months throughout the summer. Watch WNC space for information.

I lead a scrutiny enquiry into the consultation of Voi Scooters, which amongst poor and good press had been a tremendous asset in Blackmills industrial estate. The project is monitored on a 3 monthly basis, and the consultation period extends for another 18 months.

#### Schools

In May 2021 Fiona Baker assumed the position of local minister in charge of education. She and her team have done a terrific job raising the standards according to Ofsted dictates from POOR to outstanding in one case. Send needs continue to be a challenge, however the purpose-built school for Send pupils opens at Tiffeld this Autumn.

HS2 Continues to be a bug bear. We have successful negotiated a new road design in Boddington, however it still involves extensive closure along the Banbury Road , and Spella Road Our two new MPs Sarah Bool and Stuart Andrew have both taken enormous interest in trying to mitigate on your behalf.

Extra traffic travelling the B4525 from Middleton Cheney has resulted in appalling road damage and numerous car accidents. We are working with the Northamptonshire police to reduce the travel of speed. DHL - As you may be aware the appeal against the refusal of planning consent for the DHL site in Towcester concluded on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> February. The inspectors' findings will be announced on or before 23<sup>rd</sup> April Once again Sarah Bool has actively opposed the DHL development; see Sarah Bool DHL appeal submission; The development of 5 sites with storage units along the A43 is a hot potato. The confirmation of work on all 5 sites will probably await the Inspectors report.

Maggies Cancer support centre; Finally after 8 5 years, we have managed to raise the funds to begin development and build the unit adjacent to the oncology department at Northampton General on the Billing Road. A brilliant scheme implemented 33 years ago at the Edinburgh infirmary by Maggie. There are now 26 support units attached to principal hospitals across the country We become the 27th unit, with future units planned for Cambridge and Coventry. Free at the point of access, they are staffed with available help to support families tackling cancer whether it be domestic, financially, or to discover further information on the dreaded affliction.

Finally with the pending elections on May 1,<sup>st</sup> we say farewell to Cllr Dermot Bambridge; He will not be joining Charles Manners and myself on the election panel. He has served the County for 23 years as a

councillor, chairman and cabinet member. A very faithful servant. We thank him for his extraordinary sense of duty and commitment.

Four years have passed since the UNITARY council was formed and I was elected to represent you locally. I love all that I do within our villages, but I thank you for your support and patience. Should you have any questions my email and telephone number are below.

Alison,Eastwood1@outlook.com      07967 867726

Cllr Fonge thanked Cllr Eastwood for all her work and expressed what a great Councillor she is.

**6. To receive a report from Sulgrave Manor (read by Cllr Fonge)**

2024 saw a number of developments for the Manor and plans are afoot for 2025 including:

1. The Manor opened for the summer season on Sunday, 23 March. The Manor will open to the public on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday every week until 30 September, 10.30 to 4.00, with last entry at 3.00, with education visits and group tours able to take place on other days. All parishioners are welcome as in previous years with free entry for regular opening continuing this year, with just a £5 administrative charge, and we hope many local people will pop into the Manor when we are open to sign up and collect their card.
2. The sale of the two Kiln Farm thatched cottages after a protracted period and the new owners are busy renovating them currently.
3. The completion of the new garden building to provide safe space for large and expensive garden equipment.
4. The launch of a new Facebook page which helps people to be aware of the 2025 season's activities.
5. In February 2024 the Manor welcomed the Lord Lieutenant, local mayors and other guests to a garden open day.
6. In June 2024, the Manor welcomed our American friends and Supporters to the biannual Dames Day.
7. The development of a partnership of organisations to mark 'America 250' in the UK for 2026 where the Manor will use its significant George Washington collection as well as the Manor itself to raise Sulgrave Manor's profile further in the UK and America.
8. During 2024 the Manor had a fair amount of staff turnover but is now delighted to have a settled team which is enabling it to do more, to have short term loan exhibitions on site, and to share our collections on a wider stage.
9. The Manor has raised funds to move away from an oil-fired heating system and rewire its modern Courtyard Hall buildings. Also plans are afoot to make onsite accommodation for staff in a small apartment. The necessary work will take place in the autumn/winter 2025/26.
10. The Manor aims to resurface the car park in time for the 2026 open season.
11. For 2025, we have some exciting events lined up including.
  - a. Monthly pop-up talks in the Manor, included with your entry, to share historic insights on topics such as 18<sup>th</sup>-century dining, Easter traditions, and the history of tea.
  - b. performances by The Pantaloons, featuring "Robin Hood" and "Sense and Sensibility," as well as a musical tale of love and Tudor tragedy with "Anne Boleyn: Wolf at the Door."
  - c. Throughout July until 3<sup>rd</sup> August, we will display historically accurate replicas of the magnificent gowns worn by each Tudor Queen in their iconic portraits.
  - d. On 6<sup>th</sup> July the Manor will celebrate American Independence with our Independence Day Celebrations. Car enthusiasts can enjoy a display of American vehicles on our paddock.

**7. To receive a report from the Village Shop (Charles Smyth Osborne)**

It has been a good year trading wise. Turnover is up by 8%. There are good margins and money has been saved on costs. It's a community shop and not a profit organisation. Membership of an annual cost of £5 has dwindled over the years. There was a successful drive last year to get more members. Another twenty people signed up. There is a strong committee. The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated during the year. A party was held at Rectory Farm for volunteers and a party was held outside the shop on 18<sup>th</sup> September. Cake and prosecco were served. The shop has been put forward for the Countryside Alliance Regional Award. The winner will be announced on 6<sup>th</sup> April. The shop relies on volunteers and they are always

needed. Thanks was given to the Parish Council for their support. Cllr Eastwood noted how other villages are envious of this shop.

**8. To receive a report from Sulgrave Allotment Society**

Control of the allotments has been handed back to the Parish Council. This is due to ongoing costs such as insurance. Three plots are being used out of eight. The future of the allotment area will be discussed at the Parish Council meeting in May.

**9. To receive a report on footpaths (Paul Crowley)**

First, I would like to thank Graham Roberts for the work he has done over the past 5 years in maintaining and improving the footpaths in our parish. I am in the fortunate position, that as I take up the role of footpath warden all footpaths, apart from the bridge on AY5 the path behind the Manor House and leading onto the old railway embankment, are in good shape.

With regard to the bridge, it was washed out last September and was reported on the Fix my Street website. After assessing the damage the Council have set up a ticket to replace it with a new foot bridge just to the side of the existing structure. I had notification last week that the work has been scheduled and that the average wait times for this type of job is 38 days.

Other work has included adding a concrete weight to the kissing gate on the path AY8 off the Helmdon Rd to prevent sheep from the adjoining fields getting through. The council delivered the materials and with help from Tony Keatley and Richard Fonge we installed the weight as well as lower the gate. There has been some pruning the foliage around a number of kissing gates as well as the path over the old railway line and where needed the footing through several of the gates has been improved with stone and rubble, thanks to Phil Watts and Graham Roberts for their help. Apart from that I think the paths are in pretty good shape.

**10. To receive a report from Castle Green**

The Parish Council look after the asset called Castle Green. Repairs have taken place to the walls and fencing during the past year.

**11. To receive a report from Sulgrave Charities (Paul Crowley)**

Apologies were received from James Kirkham for not being able to attend this evening in person.

The Sulgrave Educational Charity has made a number of contributions this year to assist the young people in the wider village and also a number of individuals. We supported the artwork for the children at the unveiling of the coronation flag and funded the falconry at the village Summer Fete. Thank you for all the efforts of the other people and organisations which put these events on. They were a great opportunity for the village to get together. It was also great to be able to assist young people in the village by supporting funding requests to the Educational Charity to support young people in the village for both vocational training and equipment to go to university.

We welcome requests from any young people (under 25) in the village to help them take part in recreational or educational training so please let anyone know who this may be of assistance to. We recently also agreed to make a contribution to a new swing set in the park following a request from the Parish Council. The Relief in Need Charity has had a quiet year but please do alert any residents to it if they require assistance.

In terms of finances the Educational Charity has an income of approximately £1,500 per year. The Educational Charity currently has approximately £11,000 that is available to assist young people in the village as the fund has accrued over a number of years. The Relief in Need Charity is a smaller fund and currently receives approximately £140 per year in income. There is currently approximately £1,500 available to spend in this charity.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact myself or other Trustee.

Thank you  
James Kirkham – Chair of the village charities.

**12. To receive a report on the Village Website (Colin Wootton)**

It has been both a privilege and a pleasure to edit the village website on behalf of the Parish Council for the twenty years since 2005. Many people will be aware that things have been somewhat difficult for me at home during the last year or so.

However, I hope to be able to continue with my work on the website for a while yet, not least because it is a way of keeping contact with the community at a time when I am not able to get out as much as I used to. Nevertheless, at 86 years old with a troublesome heart condition, the time must soon be near to hand over this responsibility. During the forthcoming year I will be happy to talk to anyone with the skills and resources to take over this rewarding task. Over the years I have tried to cover as many village events as possible and to upload reports and photographs without delay. Attendance at these happenings is somewhat less easy for me than it once was but I have been ably assisted by members of the Sulgrave Camera Club, especially in covering the 24 days of the Advent Calendar Window Unveiling Parties in the month before Christmas. Although no longer able to attend these parties myself, the photographs arrive promptly for me to upload which enables me to feel that I am still part of it all! A regular monthly entry continues to be your Chairman Richard Fonge's Farm Notes, which I have the pleasure of illustrating. These provide an excellent guide to what is happening in the countryside around us together with humorous anecdotes about village characters in the past.

In the matter of advertising village events I am grateful for the prompt arrivals of digital copies of the monthly village newsletter, recently edited by Lisa Roberts but now requiring a new volunteer. For those villagers who may have mislaid their paper versions or people outside the parish who wish to keep in touch with village affairs, copies of all newsletters are available on the website. The agenda for Parish Council Meetings continues to be advertised in the "Diary and Events" section of the website and a prompt summary of proceedings by the Chairman will be found under "Latest Parish Council News". The formal minutes are to be found on the Parish Council page. Technical Service Provision for the website continues to be provided by my grandson Sebastian, at no charge to the Parish Council. His prompt assistance to me when things go wrong is invaluable. The only charge to the public purse is a modest amount for the domain name [www.sulgrave.org](http://www.sulgrave.org).

The Chair thanked Colin Wootton for all his work. It is appreciated by all.

**13. Open Forum**

Cllr Powell is in regular talks with Haidee Williams on behalf of EKFB. Road closures are coming up. EKFB are compliant and receptive to feedback.

A bring your own picnic will take place in Pocket Park for VE Day in May. A brass band will attend. Thanks was given to Cllr Parker for her work.

The Chair spoke about the work of Brackley Area Volunteer Service. He is a driver and more are wanted. It's a fantastic service.

The Chair concluded the meeting by thanking everyone for supporting the village.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8.50pm.