**Minutes of the Parish Annual Assembly**

**held on 22 March 2023 at St George’s School, Ascot**

13 Councillors attended

1. Members of the public attended

8423 The Chairman, Councillor Allison Sharpe, welcomed everyone to the meeting and made an announcement regarding safety matters applicable to the meeting. She explained the purpose of the Annual Assembly as being an opportunity for the electorate to hold their Councillors and local charities to account and to find out about the Parish Council’s activities, finances, role and structure.

Cllr Sharpe spoke about the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, an inspirational and outstanding monarch of our time. She thanked the parish office and support workers who, immediately on the passing, instigated Operation London Bridge. The parish council had opened a book of condolence which was taken round the care homes by councillors. We now look forward to the Coronation in May of King Charles III.

The Chairman explained that the Parish Council is here to directly address issues which are of concern to the local community. It has a vital role to play in the provision and management of local services to parishioners and is always looking to improve local amenities where funds permit. The Parish Precept that appears on the Council Tax bill is used to run the affairs of the Parish and maintenance of its resources.

Parish councillors, by signing the Declaration of Office, agree to give time, knowledge and skills to benefit the local community. To do this the council works as a cohesive whole and also through three committees: Planning, Leisure & Cultural and Finance & Personnel. There are also currently three working groups: for Community Infrastructure Levy; Walking & Cycling; Sunninghill Victorian Street Fayre preparations. In addition the parish council works directly with the local community, for example with the Litter Picking group.

1. The minutes of the Annual Assembly, held on 23 March 2022, were approved as a correct record and signed as such.
2. Presentations were received from parish councillors regarding activities during the past year and future plans:
* Cllr Robin Wood, Lead Member for Finance, showed a breakdown of the percentage of expenditure to the various areas the parish council is responsible for, and explained that maintenance of the facilities at Blythewood, South Ascot and Victory Field costs approximately £60,000 per annum. In addition, in 2022, extra costs incurred due to the Covid pandemic amounted to £7,000, and £18,000 was spent on hanging baskets across the parish. Of capital projects the largest by far was at Cheapside where the play equipment was replaced. Cllr Wood pointed out that, of all the parishes in the borough, Sunninghill & Ascot has the lowest precept. Looking ahead, the precept has been increased in the 2023/24 year by 4%, to cover general inflation. This will cover many areas including: a full year of three part-time staff; continuing costs for maintenance; funding to cover improvements to the South Ascot recreation facilities. The parish council is also looking to use CIL to fund ‘infrastructure’ to offset the pressures caused by development.
* Councillor Robert Ellison, Chairman of the Leisure & Cultural (L&C) Committee, spoke about the committee’s activities. There are four parks - at Victory Field, Cheapside, Blythewood and South Ascot; the council is currently waiting for a new lease to be signed with Sunninghill Trust on the South Ascot recreation ground. Behind the Victory Field is Tom Green’s Field which, over the years, has been opened up to make it more welcoming for wildlife and people. In addition to the recreation grounds and playparks, the parish council has a wildlife area at Blythewood, a cemetery behind St Michael’s church, and allotments in Cheapside. A prize is given each year to the best kept plot. The L&C committee also organises an event each year. In 2022 the Party in the Park was extra special as it celebrated the Platinum Jubilee and finished with the lighting of a beacon which was very spectacular. The event was very well attended and greatly enjoyed by all. This year the council will be bringing back the Victorian Street Fayre in Sunninghill High Street. Due to Covid this very popular event has not been held since 2018, so we are very much looking forward to welcoming the community to the event on 19 November 2023.
* Councillor Robin Wood, Chairman of the Planning Committee spoke about its work in providing local input and recommendations to RBWM on all planning applications in the parish, including house alterations, tree works, works in the green belt and major developments. The committee also provides guidance on adherence to the Neighbourhood Plan and the Borough Local Plan and works to maintain Sunninghill & Ascot as a pleasing, open and leafy area to work and live. In 2022 the planning committee met 12 times and considered 364 applications including: the Bridgerton film set; the MSL House in Sunninghill (extra floor to deliver four 1-bed flats); Berkshire House offices in Ascot (conversion to 30 flats) and; Green Meadows Surgery (replacement with 8/9 dwellings).
* Councillor Wood went on to speak about the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), where the funds come from and what they can be used for. Local community groups and charities were invited to consider applying for CIL funds for projects they may be undertaking.
* Councillor Barbara Hilton, Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council, spoke about the community grants the parish council distributes each year under discretionary powers granted by the Local Government Act 1972 section 137. She explained how an organisation will be eligible to apply for a grant and how to go about applying. In 2022 the parish council awarded grants totalling £5,000 to local charities and, in 2023, has increased its budget for grants to £10,000.
* Councillor Ceri Richardson spoke about the Cycling and Walking Working Group and the work it has undertaken throughout the year. A community consultation on making some roads in the parish 20mph was carried out and the idea proved popular with various roads being identified as appropriate. Work is to be undertaken to consult with RBWM to take this project forward.
* The parish clerk, Mrs Helen Goodwin, spoke about the forthcoming local elections. She explained that such elections are held every four years and set out what councillors do in general, what is involved in being on a parish council and what the expectations are in Sunninghill & Ascot. Mrs Goodwin explained the criteria that must be met to be a councillor and the process to go through to apply to stand for election.

8426 Inspector Dan Bennett, Geographical Inspector for Windsor & Maidenhead at Thames Valley Police (TVP), reported on local policing issues. He gave an overview of some of the activities of the neighbourhood team which is focusing on relationships with the community. A survey has been carried out asking what areas concerned people the most and the areas of burglary, theft from motor vehicles and drugs were highlighted. Actions set up so far by the neighbourhood team include home security packs delivered to hotspot areas and an increase in patrols to those areas. Inspector Bennett invited people to sign up to TVP alerts where a lot of information is shares on statistics, crime prevention and neighbourhood-specific items. He reported that the team attend all residential burglaries and have a dedicated team for this. Speaking about problems with drugs, both dealing and taking, he explained that the team has employed an analyst to help identify hotspots and try to eliminate the supply of drugs in the area.

Inspector Bennett reported that, in Ascot, the most reported crimes are theft from motor vehicles and residential burglaries. The team identifies, understands and acknowledges this as a problem and is working to reduce it. He asked people to look out the TVP alerts to see what is going on in the area.

TVP has launched a draft Race Action Plan in which they will work in combination with RBWM to engage ethnic minorities within the community with policing. There is currently a consultation period – details can be found online and people are encouraged to get involved.

1. The Borough Councillors representing the wards within our parish made presentations:
* Councillor David Hilton spoke about the plans for Ascot Rejuvenation and set out the plans that the developer, London Square, has put forward.
* Councillor Julian Sharpe spoke about the wooded area off Coombe Lane, for which the parish council has submitted a Town & Village Green application, and how the borough council has placed a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) on all the trees across the site. He also spoke about the borough’s work on a review of parking in Sunninghill and how they are attempting to tackle climate change.
* Councillor John Story spoke about health care issues within the borough. He reported that Heatherwood Hospital has been open a year and is a fantastic success. Work is waiting to start on the a new health centre in Sunninghill; there is currently a national pause on NHS capital funding but it is hoped that the project, which will be a replacement for Magnolia House and Kings Corner Surgery, will come to fruition soon.
* Councillor story also spoke about Education in the borough and reported that there is to be a new centre for children with special educational - a very important project that is now coming to fruition.
1. The Windsor, Eton & Ascot Town Manager, Paul Roach, spoke about the role of his office and explained that his most important role is in supporting businesses. He reported that, over recent years, RBWM has created a new Economic Development Team which he sits on. Since Covid they have been doing some work in making sure businesses have the support they need, and trying to understand their needs including training and support. The team has developed a programme for opportunities for job fairs, etc, and has also hosted a number of business summits, including one at Ascot recently, to identify the key factors that businesses look for when relocating.

Other key areas that Mr Roach’s office is involved with include:

* Monitoring work such as footfall counts, vacancy rates, etc;
* Working with the racecourse around their events;
* Ascot High Steet redevelopment;
* Hosting regular network meetings – a monthly retail & business forum looks at key factors, best practice and key trends affecting businesses, to support a safer town centre;
* A regular pub-watch group;
* A Civic Events Planning group – which covers coronation activities, etc;
* Street markets and farmers markets.

Mr Roach spoke about RBWM plans to mark the Coronation on 6th May. On 7th May a Big Lunch will be hosted in Windsor on the Long Walk, and tickets are being allocated for a concert to be held on the Sunday evening on the east lawn at Windsor Castle. Pubs and licensed premises will be allowed to open late over the coronation weekend. Via a dedicated webpage, RBWM has supported a lot of the street parties that have been applied for.

1. A presentation was given by Ed Wai, trustee of Youthline, setting out the work done by the organization and how they are involved with, and offer services to, young people in the parish.
2. Kirsty Hunt, of RBWM Electoral & Democratic Services spoke about the forthcoming local elections. A new act has been passed intended to make it easier for people to vote, which will include the provision of a range of accessibility in polling stations to aid people with all sorts of disabilities. There is a polling station review launching in October and people will be asked to review polling stations from this May.
3. The latest accounts were received from the following local charities:
* Ascot Fire Brigade Trust
* Sunninghill Parochial Church Council
* The Sunninghill Trust
1. Due to time constraints, residents attending the meeting were invited to ask questions of councillors over refreshments.

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending the Assembly and St George’s School for their hospitality. The meeting closed at 9.15pm. Refreshments followed.

--------------------------------------------

Councillor Allison Sharpe, Chairman