



Annual Village Meeting

FOR ELECTORS OF THE VILLAGE OF OXENHOPE

7.00 p.m. Wednesday 5th May 2021
by video conference
Minutes

Present: Cllr Ken Eastwood (Chair)
Cllr Robert Goulding
Cllr Kevin Allmond
Cllr Michelle Dawson
Cllr Helen Hartley
Cllr Peter McManus
Cllr Chris Pawson
Cllr Nick Pearce

No members of the public

1. **Apologies for absence**
None received.

2. **Report from the Chair of Oxenhope Village Council**
Cllr Eastwood presented a report on the activities of the Village Council. As there was no Annual Meeting in 2020, the report covered the past two years.

I would like to begin my report by thanking my fellow Councillors for their contribution to the Village Council over the last 24 months, as no Annual Report was delivered last year due to the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic and subsequent restrictions.

The last 2 years has seen significant changes within the Council, not least in name with the change from Parish to Village Council, in a bid to modernise and become more relevant.

We have also seen a number of changes to Council membership with Nick Pearce, Michelle Dawson, Kevin Allmond and Helen Hartley joining within the last 2 years. I am grateful to all ex councillors for their respective contributions and welcome new members, who have each brought enthusiasm and new ideas, delivering a number of projects positively benefitting the village.

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One of the most significant projects has possibly been the development of Oxenhope's Neighbourhood Plan. This is a valuable document, which will help to shape the future of the village once we have been through the final stages leading to adoption, a process inevitably delayed due to COVID-19.

The Council has continued to actively pursue the protection and acquisition of assets within the village. Significant improvements have been made in the Rose Garden, held by the Village Council under a long lease from Bradford Council. Grant funding supported installation of new benches, bins and noticeboards and much work has been undertaken by residents and volunteers to improve planting and other aspects. However, maintenance of the flowerbeds has proved to be a challenge and we are about to consider a solution to that, recommended by a local professional gardener.

Installation of new Christmas lights was very well received last year, with numerous positive comments and glowing feedback (forgive the pun). Many thanks to Cllr Dawson and our Clerk, Janet Foster, for their work on this. I'm looking forward to seeing next year's display, following the acquisition of further lamp post motifs.

Councillor Goulding led another fantastic project in the village, securing the rights from the family to re-print the well-known and highly regarded book, 'Oxenhope, the making of a Pennine Community' by Reg Hindley. Once print costs have been recovered, proceeds from book sales will be donated to Sue Ryder's Manorlands Hospice who, along with many other charitable causes, have been struggling with fund raising activities during the lockdowns and restrictions on village events.

Recognising this impact, including that affecting small groups and clubs, Councillor McManus put forward proposals for a Community Grant scheme and the Council has been pleased to provide financial support totalling £4,500 to village organisations this year.

Councillors McManus and Dawson also proposed investment in planters in the village and the new assets at Muffin Corner and outside school have looked delightful as Spring has approached. We have again received very positive feedback from residents. Sometimes it's the little things that can make a difference and help brighten up the village, lifting the collective mood – something we have certainly needed during the pandemic.

Throughout the last 2 years, we have continued to comment on planning applications received, supporting development that is in keeping with the village and opposing that which is not. We have also recently commented on Bradford Council's Draft Local Plan, opposing possible designation of village green space for housing development.

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Despite the Village Council having to conduct its meetings via Zoom, often competing with family members for bandwidth, this has still been a busy and energetic period for the Council.

One subject that has captured significant local attention is fly tipping. Sadly, this is a national challenge in rural communities and here in Oxenhope we have seen a marked increase in activity over the last 18 months or so. The Village Council has been working with Bradford Council and other partners on possible solutions, lobbying for increased enforcement and signage and other measures to combat these crimes. I have been delighted to see the offers of help by residents, with a number of people carrying out voluntary litter picks in different locations, making a positive difference to the local environment. We intend to provide further help, assistance and coordination to support such welcome activity.

Cllr Allmond has volunteered to lead work raising awareness of local resilience and reviewing the Emergency Plan for Oxenhope. Emergency arrangements were tested last year with several members of the Council opening and running the Community Centre as a Rest Centre following a serious fire in the village. Refreshments and support were provided to residents evacuated and to the emergency services responding to an incident that tragically resulted in a fatality.

As we emerge from lockdown and COVID-19 becomes more controllable, it seems inevitable we will be facing a significant economic challenge and the squeeze on local public finances is likely to continue. With potentially less money available for non-essential services Bradford Council will face further hard choices with regard to priorities. As I mentioned in my last report of 2019, this presents an opportunity for Parish & Village Councils to try and preserve the services and facilities that matter to local people.

Supporting the Youth Club is one such example here in Oxenhope. Another is our recent decision to create a new post of Village Warden to help us with maintenance and contribute generally to environmental improvements. The Council will shortly be recruiting to the position, which will initially be for 10 hours per week, worked flexibly.

Looking ahead, we are delighted to be working with volunteers to establish an Oxenhope Sculpture Trail. This project is being led by Cllr Hartley and from what I have seen and read about draft designs and plans this should make a great addition to the village.

The Council is currently planning to establish advisory committees, that could also involve interested residents, to undertake work focused on resilience and climate change. The latter issue is arguably the biggest single challenge facing mankind and it is only right that Oxenhope Village Council considers its role in tackling the emergency and exploring local opportunities to reduce climate impacts.

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We also have plans to become a dementia friendly community and to make environmental improvements, with the help of volunteers, to the Horse Shoe Dam, an asset acquired by the Village Council to preserve the habitat for the Village. We also hope to look into the possibility of small scale hydropower generation and after installing a further defibrillator at Marsh, we are exploring a possible site for another unit in Lowertown.

On the subject of assets, we are in discussion with Bradford Council over acquisition of the former toilets at the entrance to the park. Initial plans include re-opening of a toilet facility and possibly also creating a space for pop-up local events.

It's not possible to describe all activity, over what has been a particularly testing time for all, but I hope I have given a flavour of our work and that you would agree, that for a small Council we are making a positive difference to village life.

In addition to the projects mentioned, the Council has secured foundation level recognition in a national quality mark scheme for Local Councils. Many thanks to our Clerk for her hard work in this regard and for her ongoing input into ensuring the Council operates efficiently and effectively.

Once again, I would like to thank all other Councillors for their collective input and hard work. I would also like to thank Ward Councillors and Reverend Cat Thatcher for regularly attending our meetings and providing updates. It has been very rewarding working with you all.

Councillors thanked Cllr Eastwood for his report, stating that Councillors were really working well together. Setting up a Village Councillor Whatsapp group was seen as a positive development, which made for easy communication.

Cllr McManus said that he was planning to retire from the Village Council sometime in the next year and hoped that a suitable replacement could be found. He said the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) was just about finished.

Cllr Eastwood thanked Cllr MacManus for all his work on the Village Council, but especially for the work he had undertaken on the NDP. Cllr Goulding also thank Cllr McManus for his work. Cllrs Goulding, Dawson and Hartley had all been recruited onto the Village Council by Cllr McManus

Cllr Eastwood said the Village Councillors were a really good team who worked together to get things done. He gave the example of the Christmas lights, which had received very positive feedback on Facebook. He said that made him feel that the job is worthwhile.

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He asked for ideas on how to promote all the work undertaken by the Village Council and suggested a newsletter. Cllr Hartley suggested putting an article in the Keighley News, as the school had found this very useful. It was also suggested writing an article for Worth Valley News. Cllr Goulding said it was important to remember that not everyone uses Facebook. Cllr Dawson suggested using Outreach magazine, which the Village Council has used in the past.

3. **Public question time**
None

4. **Village Council's draft accounts**
The draft accounts were noted.

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