

Little Easton Parish Council

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Notes from the **Little Easton Annual Parish Assembly** held at **Memorial Hall** on **WEDNESDAY 19 APRIL 2023 AT 7:00PM**

Councillor	Attendance
VACANT	
VACANT	
Cllr Rebecca Fowell	NO
Cllr Emma Wells	YES
Cllr Simon Benstead	YES
Cllr Peter Bright	YES
Dist Cllr Michael Tayler	YES
Cnty Cllr Martin Foley	YES

19 member(s) of the public
 Clerk – Mr Ian Brown

APA/01/23	CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL WELCOME AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE 2022 ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY The Chairman welcomed all attending and duly signed the minutes of the 2022 Annual Parish Assembly
APA/02/23	RECEIVE THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT Full report at APPENDIX A
APA/03/23	RECEIVE THE CLERK & RFO FINANCE REPORT INCLUDING BUDGET PERFORMANCE Full report at APPENDIX B
APA/04/23	DATE OF NEXT ASSEMBLY MEETING – TBC – CLOSE – 7:25PM

Signed.....Date.....

APPENDIX A

As acting chair for the Parish Council I am required by the Local Government Act 1972 to give a report annually on the achievements of the Parish Council for the preceding twelve months.

Now, those of you who religiously monitor the Parish Council’s affairs will know that I was co-opted onto the council at the end of October and the first meeting I attended as a councillor was in November. So how can I report on the year as a whole?

Well, that is simple. I have attended Parish Council meetings regularly over many years and Mr Brown, our Parish Clerk is extremely detailed in his minute taking.

But, being brutally honest, and taking the definition of “achievements of the council” literally, I have only five achievements worthy of note over the past year:

1. Approved the replacement of the playground fence and commencement of on-going playground safety inspections.
2. Approved the restoration of the beacon basket and erection of the beacon on the recreation green.
3. Agreement to fund the on-going cost of defibrillator consumables.
4. Overseen the first year of a three year agreement to ensure the trees the council are responsible for are maintained for safety via pruning, crown reduction and pollarding.
5. Approved commencement of a bench refurbishment programme.

I do not include general maintenance and repair work regularly carried out by council-appointed contractors as council achievements. But I do thank those contractors for their hard work.

Last year the Queen’s Jubilee celebrations were organised by the community with the majority of the cost funded by a grant applied for by the council. And the council has also recently agreed to subsidise another community organised event - the King’s Coronation.

Additionally, following action by Stop Easton Park the 1,200 houses appeal was attended by several parishioners, most of whom decided to speak. The previous LEPC chair and deputy also *eventually* spoke at the enquiry. A decision is still awaited - expected by mid-May.

I would have liked to have reported more achievements. And I can assure you that next year the chair in post then, will be able to.

Turning to the future, a business plan for the forthcoming year together with suggested ear-marked projects was introduced during last November’s meeting and approved by councillors in January along with the precept. This will be published on the web shortly and a limited number of hard-copies made available at the King’s Coronation Street Party. In the plan we have substantially increased project expenditure but still been able to reduce the parish precept by around 12%.

The election of district councillors will take place on May 4th. Some Parish Councils will also be contested. Little Easton is not one of them - only three councillors have submitted nominations to apply for the six roles on the council. Rebecca has decided not to stand again. Since being co-opted in October 2017 Rebecca has diligently gone about her duties as a Parish Councillor, uncomplaining and without fuss. We are truly sorry to lose her but much appreciate her 5+ years of service. The loss of Rebecca means there will be three vacancies on the council after 4th May which is disappointing and means the risk of being inquorate at some point is stronger than it should be. Regardless of this, all three councillors plan to deliver projects that have been unaddressed for far too long. BUT we would like to fill the three vacancies as quickly as possible.

Co-option is a mechanism that allows a Parish Council to fill vacant roles by parishioners submitting a request to the Parish Clerk to join the council as unelected but fully-fledged councillors. Subject to a few restrictions any parishioner can be co-opted and existing councillors do NOT have to approve a

candidate unless there are more candidates than vacant roles. This ensures that existing councillors cannot refuse to co-opt a candidate who is otherwise qualified simply because they dislike him/her.

Now some councils have introduced a co-option policy to override this default approval. This council does not to plan to do that. We welcome and will work collegiately with any parishioner, only suggesting that it is good etiquette for the candidate to deliver a short speech (written or verbal) about how their co-option can add value to the parish. So please submit your application (or spread the word) to become a co-opted councillor.

Finally I would like to pay tribute to my fellow councillors Emma and Simon who agreed to be co-opted onto the council in the most trying of circumstances. The parish should feel very comfortable in their ability to deliver. I know I am. But most of all I'd like to thank our tireless Parish Clerk - Mr Brown - his patience, knowledge, guidance and endeavour has weathered some very difficult moments over the past couple of years. The thanks given to him by attendees at LEPC's November meeting was heartfelt by so many more.

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APPENDIX B

CLERKS REPORT – Annual Parish Assembly 19 April 2023

Tasked with making local gov finances interesting...

The audit starts with testing Governance practices and risk management before moving onto the numbers.

A council with over £25K income or expenditure but below £6.5 Million it MUST have an internal and external review.

The aim is to ultimately achieve an unqualified audit from the government appointed auditors.

The internal auditor commeth Friday am, Val for her forensic review, fierce, firm but fair. Once completed her review the government Auditor, PKF Littlejohn has a go..

EV – In local government accounting the term is Explanation of Variances, where the RFO has to explain why the 7 areas tested in the audit differ from last year not only in terms of why but in terms of pounds shillings and pence. For those not sure the RFO is in fact me for this council, I am the Responsible Finance Officer.

The 7 distinct areas tested by the auditor when it comes to finance are:-

1. Opening balance – how did that come about, a parish council is permitted to hold up to twice its precept in the bank without explanation but above that the fun starts, a council is not meant to accumulate funds for no good reason, so whilst in business a year end surplus is good news, for a PC it is not always such good news and Littlejohn will put me to task to explain. We ended up closing at £57,000 with a £13,700 underspend against budget. Not twice last year's precept.

The current incumbents not responsible for that budget nor the majority of its delivery.

2. Precept - you will note a £5000 decrease in this year's precept, primarily due to not needing ever more funds for this year.
3. Income – This council derives income from Grants, Donations and VAT126, 126 is an authority to reclaim VAT when not registered for VAT, hence PC budgeting tends to ignore VAT costsas it only affects cashflow. We have reclaimed just over £1500 for 22-23, should be in our bank soon.

If we had hall hire, allotments, operated a car park or burial grounds we could register for VAT and become a free tax collector for the Treasury.

4. Onto Costs ...with the CLERK being the most important item of expenditure...the Clerk costs are a specific item on the audit and only include their Salary, the Tax and NIC payments plus any pension costs, nothing else is included or expected to be included in Clerk costs, the rest are council Administrative costs such as travelling.

Currently this council has elected to not offer a pension.

5. Loan repayments – this council has none
6. All other payments not included in Clerk costs
7. We end up with the year end position or Balances carried Forward
8. Sneakily they add Item 8 – Bank balances at the end of the year which of course must mirror Item 7 but you are allowed a massive £2 rounding error...
9. Assets value
10. And finally ANY Borrowings, which we have none.

So with a £13,700 surplus against budget and a year end balance of £57,000 it begs the question in what areas and to what amount were your administration NOT able to spend their budget during the year 2022.

I will repeat the current sitting administration were neither responsible for the budget nor for its total delivery.

In reality it would be simpler to list where the council overspent as the underspend against budget was in almost every area of the 2022 budget.

Most noticeably, the largest underspends or potentially over budgeting include Training, £1100, Play Area £1500, War memorial £2200, Grants £1200, Events & Parties £555, NP £1700, Capital projects and Contingencies £3300. And woefully underpaid the Clerk by some £1300 which I shall take up at my annual review....

The why is probably less simpler to explain other than circumstances, the inability to lawfully progress matters due to not being quorate and thus unable to meet at times during 2022 to approve next steps, receive updates or approve spending.

As I have stated it is not a parish council's job to accumulate funds beyond up to 12 months of operating costs at any one time plus a bit of rainy day monies, suffice to say your council

is well positioned for 2023 onwards and this administration has solid plans to fulfil previous commitments whilst bringing on fresh ideas.