

The Gressingham Annual Parish Meeting was held on Monday 29th April 2019 in Gressingham Old School Room.

The meeting was open to everyone registered on the electoral roll in Gressingham Civil Parish.

Present: Martin Brooks, Christine Grieve, John Hamlett, Michael Hampson (by invitation to speak), Ross Hunter (by invitation to observe), Jane Leaf, Michele Luxon, Mary McClements, Jane Paxman, Neil Read (Chair), Sally Riley, Moyra Simnet, Rosie Smith, Glen Stevens, Frank Wareing, Lesley Wareing (note-taker), David Wiper.

No apologies were submitted.

1. Preliminaries

The chair of Gressingham Parish Council, Neil Read, outlined the purpose of the Annual Parish Meeting and explained that in accordance with established convention, the chair of the PC was normally asked to chair the Annual Parish Meeting and the Clerk to the PC asked to take the minutes. The meeting accordingly invited Neil Read (NR) to take the chair and Lesley Wareing (LW) to take the minutes – which they each agreed to do.

2. 2018 Gressingham Annual Parish Meeting Minutes

It was noted that the minutes of the 2018 Gressingham Annual Parish Meeting had already been circulated via TinyLetter and also posted on the Gressingham village notice-board and on the Gressingham section of the Hornby Village website. The minutes were agreed to be an accurate record of the 2018 meeting by those people present on 29th April 2019 who had attended the meeting in May 2018.

3. Old School Room/Gressingham Village Trust report

Neil Read reminded the meeting that since at least 1981, by convention, the Gressingham Annual Parish Meeting had overseen the appointment of the OSR trustees. The newly created Gressingham Village Trust had now replaced the Old School Room Trustees but under its newly approved constitution, the Gressingham Annual Parish Meeting remained the body responsible for appointing trustees. He invited Michael Hampson (MH), chair of the GVT to speak.

MH explained the background and history of the OSR Managers/Trustees and how an application had been made the Charity Commission to replace the OSR Trustees/Managers with a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (a new form of limited-liability legal entity designed for non-profit organisations) called the Gressingham Village Trust. The application had been approved and a new constitution, based on an OSR Managers/Trustees constitution drafted in 1954, had been approved at the same time. Under this new constitution the GVT requires seven trustees.

Three are ex-officio appointments (the Vicar of Gressingham, and the two Gressingham churchwardens or, in the absence of churchwardens, up to two individuals to be appointed by the Gressingham Parochial Church Council). The other four trustees are to be appointed by the Gressingham Annual Parish Meeting.

The three ex-officio trustees are currently:

Michael Hampson (Vicar of Gressingham)

Mary McClements (Gressingham Churchwarden)

Louise Stevens (Gressingham PCC appointee).

Four OSR trustees were appointed under the old system at the 2018 Gressingham Annual Parish Meeting:

Heather Bell to April 2019

John Hamlett to April 2020

Rosie Smith to April 2021

Martin Brooks to April 2022

These four subsequently became Trustees of the new GVT when it was established to replace the OSR Managers/Trustees. As Heather Bell's term of office ended in April 2019, a new trustee was required to fill the fourth position.

A few questions followed, including one about the ownership of the land on which the OSR stands. MH explained that the GVT Trustees intended to register the GVT with the Land Registry as the owner of the property and land. (This would be the GVT as a legal entity and not the individuals who happened to be trustees at any given time.)

NR thanked MH on behalf of the village for his work in sorting out the governance of the OSR.

MH then explained that the GVT has formally adopted the Pearson Trust Working Group (PTWG) as a sub-group under Clause 14 of the new GVT constitution. He explained that Jane Paxman, who chairs the PTWG, had volunteered to become a trustee of the GVT and her appointment would therefore neatly formalise the relationship between the GVT and its sub-group the PTWG.

NR asked if there were any other individuals interested in becoming a GVT Trustee, and when a negative response was received, Jane Paxman's appointment was proposed by John Hamlett, seconded by Rosie Smith and unanimously agreed by the people present at the meeting. Heather Bell was thanked for her contribution over several years.

Jane Paxman was therefore duly appointed as a Trustee of the Gressingham Village Trust for the period 29 April 2019 to the date of the Gressingham Annual Parish Meeting in 2023.

4. Pearson Trust Working Group (PTWG) report

During the previous year the PTWG had continued to explore ways of converting Gressingham Church for use both as a place of worship and a social centre for Gressingham. The meeting received a summary of progress from Jane Paxman (JP) as set out below.

- An exhibition had been held in the church in the autumn of 2018 to illustrate how the church could be converted to social space for the village in place of the OSR and to seek feedback from villagers. 40% of households in the village had submitted feedback on the proposed designs and 80% of the people who had submitted feedback had supported continuation of the project. The exhibition had featured the two options favoured in feedback from an earlier exhibition plus two new options which included an idea for a glass pod. This latter option had received more support than any other option and the PTWG had

therefore decided to seek an architect's opinion on the structural and practical viability of the proposed pod. Funding for this (from local sources) was now in place.

- Work was also underway to cost other building work and repairs needed in the church and also to draw up plans for the conversion of the ground floor of the OSR into a flat. Work to estimate the ongoing running and maintenance costs for the church space after conversion was also planned together with work to estimate whether these costs could be funded from the OSR rental income from two flats.
- The PTWG was also preparing publicity materials to communicate with villagers about the proposed Community Right To Build Order (CRTBO) process which would include a formal consultation period prior to a referendum. It was expected that the CRTBO process could take up to nine months.
- JP explained how the CRTBO process works and explained why this route had been chosen rather than the Local Authority Planning Application process.
- The referendum question would be a binary question asking for a "yes/no" response to whether the ground floor of the OSR should be converted to a flat and although conditions could be laid down for a "yes" response, it would not be possible for practical reasons (e.g. space and avoidance of complexity) to spell out the detail of every action/change proposed for the OSR and for the Church.

The subsequent open discussion of progress to date and planned future work indicated considerable interest in, and support for, the project as a possible way of saving Gressingham Church for future generations. Nevertheless several people present supported the view that the PTWG should do everything possible to ensure that the consequences of voting one way or another in the referendum were made clear during the consultation process and that villagers should be able to see plans for the proposed alterations to the OSR and to the church as well as information about the financial aspects of the whole project – i.e. the conversion of both the OSR and the church and the likely future running and maintenance costs for both buildings. In addition to written communications it was suggested that further village meetings should be held.

NR reported that the first step in the CRTBO process would be to apply to Lancaster City Council to designate a "Neighbourhood Area" which would be the area to be covered by the referendum. Under the CRTBO rules, the PTWG would not be eligible to make this application itself, and had therefore asked the Parish Council submit the Neighbourhood Area Designation application on its behalf. Those present at the meeting were supportive of the PC making this application. It was expected that the referendum would be held towards the end of 2019.

JP and the PTWG were warmly thanked for the enormous amount of hard work they had already done and would continue to do.

5. Gressingham Parish Council report

NR noted that all five of Gressingham Parish Councillors positions were up for re-election in the May 2019 local government elections. David Wiper and Sally Riley had decided not to stand for re-election and Penny Foulds and Michele Luxon had agreed to stand. They and the other three councillors: Martin Brooks, Grant Parker and Neil Read

had been elected unopposed. NR recorded his thanks to all those who had served and who continued to serve as Councillors, and to the Clerks (previously George Metcalfe, now Lesley Wareing) and the Internal Auditor (Andrea Lumb). He thanked Sally Riley for the work she had undertaken on governance issues and David Wiper for acting as the liaison between the PC and the PTWG. He also acknowledged the contribution of the late Sheila Liggett who had been a member of the PC for several years.

NR then outlined some of the areas in which the PC had been active over the previous year, including:

- re-routing local buses away from Rabbit Lane
- the Green Energy Group investigating heating the church from renewable energy
- the pursuit of traffic and road safety issues including road repairs, traffic mirrors, road markings and signs, the Speed Indicator Device, signage to prevent further damage to Loyn Bridge, dog fouling prevention
- the installation of a defibrillator and the provision of training
- the annual Litter Pick
- the provision of directions for ambulances and other emergency services
- efforts to deal with the slippery surface on the footpath over the white bridges
- responding to and monitoring planning applications that might have a negative impact on the village.

In addition the Parish Council had also consolidated its finances and strengthened its governance processes.

NR also thanked Alice Helyar for organising the Himalayan Balsam clearance team activities.

Those present at the Annual Parish Meeting expressed their thanks to the Parish Council for its work on behalf of the village and in particular to Neil Read who had served as chair for six years.

6. Comments and questions from those in attendance

Jane Paxman mentioned that she had had to apply to Lancaster City Council to fell four diseased beech trees on the edge of Gressingham Hall land near Mill Bridge. LW explained that the Parish Council had been formally consulted and had held a site meeting with Jane Paxman. Given the potential of damage to Mill Bridge, the road and to any passing vehicles, people and animals if the trees were to fall, it had been accepted that if the Lancaster City Council Tree Officer considered that the diseased trees posed a threat then there would be no alternative but to fell them.

7. No Other Business was raised and the chair closed the meeting.