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## PARISH COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

6<sup>th</sup> July 2026 at Midgham Village Hall

**This meeting was conducted strictly in accordance with Standing Orders as adopted by Council in May 2021. All Councillors are reminded to acquaint themselves with these Standing Orders.**

District Councillor: Chris Read

Councillors: Anthony Fenn (Chair), Francis Long (Vice Chair), Nigel Bassford, Dawn Adams, Ben Holden-Crowther

Members of Public: 7

### Public Session

#### *Proposed Buddhist & Community Wellbeing Centre*

Sam Gurung attended the meeting to present proposals for the former Coach & Horses site and to seek comments and feedback from the Parish Council, which would help inform a future planning application.

Sam provided some background to the charity and its aims, explaining that the organisation was established in 2017 and seeks to build sustainable communities, strengthen community connections and provide an inclusive environment for people of all backgrounds.

The proposal would involve purchasing and sympathetically restoring the existing building, which is currently in a state of disrepair, and improving accessibility and landscaping. The project is proposed to take place in three phases: securing the property and planning permission, undertaking the refurbishment and building works, and ultimately opening the facility for community use.

The proposed centre would provide a combination of Buddhist worship, reflection and cultural activities alongside wider community and wellbeing activities. These could include Thanka painting classes, meditation, celebratory ceremonies, memorial services, a café/function space and a relaxing garden. The facility could also be used for celebrations, events and other activities to generate income for the charity.

Sam explained that the intention was to work with the Parish Council and West Berkshire Council to retain important historic features of the former Coach & Horses while also incorporating some Buddhist cultural elements. The charity would also seek to work with local people and support other local charitable activities.

The potential benefits of the proposal were outlined as:

- Preserving a valued historic building.
- Creating a welcoming community hub.

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- Promoting inclusion and social harmony and reducing social isolation.
  - Enhancing the local environment and supporting other local businesses.
  - Delivering lasting social and cultural benefits and fostering friendship and a sense of belonging.

Councillors discussed the proposal and noted that it could provide an alternative to the building being converted to residential use. There was, however, concern regarding the proposed external appearance, particularly the inclusion of an ornate pinnacle, and whether this would be considered appropriate within the traditional character of the village.

Parking was also discussed as a concern, particularly given that parking is not available on the hill or main road. Sam explained that the proposed opening hours would be approximately 8am to 6pm and that it was anticipated that some visitors would travel by bus and train rather than by car.

Cllr Bassford expressed concern that the proposal may not be viewed as a community asset by local residents and questioned how many people within the village would make use of the facility. It was noted that Midgham is a small rural village of approximately 130 houses and 300 residents.

The potential use of the building by cyclists was also discussed, with some councillors questioning whether the location would attract cyclists as it is not directly situated on a cycle path.

Sam advised that discussions were taking place regarding a purchase price of approximately £525,000. It was explained that the centre would not need to operate for profit and that any income generated would be reinvested into the community and charity. The facility would operate on a booking system.

Councillors questioned whether the previous failure of the Coach & Horses as a public house raised concerns regarding the viability of the proposed use. Sam explained that the purpose of the project was not to generate profit but to provide a facility for public use. It was noted that the nearest similar facilities were in Newbury, Reading, Swindon and Bracknell, and that visitors were therefore likely to come from further afield rather than primarily from Midgham.

The potential for collaboration with the Village Hall was discussed. Jeremy noted that the Village Hall already undertakes activities aimed at inclusion and community engagement, including coffee mornings, and suggested that the two facilities could work together rather than duplicate activities.

Questions were raised regarding whether anyone would live at the property. Sam advised that there may be some accommodation associated with the centre for individuals such as catering staff and a religious teacher.

# MIDGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

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Sam expressed a willingness to collaborate with and support local charitable organisations and noted that members of the Gurkha community could potentially provide valuable support and volunteering.

It was noted that some aspects of the proposal may be perceived as a significant change by local residents. Councillors considered the concept to have potential but stressed the importance of considering the views of the residents they represent and avoiding elements which could unnecessarily antagonise the local community.

It was suggested that the applicants consider obtaining architectural elevations showing the proposed external appearance. This may assist residents and the Parish Council in understanding how the historic character of the building would be retained alongside the proposed changes.

**1. To receive apologies**

Tracey Leadbeater

**2. To receive any declarations of interest**

There were none

**3. To receive and approve the minutes of the last meeting of the council**

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved and signed

**4. To receive the District Councillors Report**

The report will be added to the Parish Council website.

It was reported that the Parish Council had been successful in its application for a Members' Bid for the Community Orchard. Further investigation is required into available water options. It was noted that water would only be required for the first two years.

**5. To receive the Clerks report**

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|                                   | Payments   | Receipts | Balance            |
|-----------------------------------|------------|----------|--------------------|
| <b>Balance as at 1st May 2026</b> |            |          | <b>£ 31,443.55</b> |
| <b>Income</b>                     |            |          |                    |
| Interest received (May)           |            | £ 12.01  |                    |
| Interest received (Jun)           |            | £ 11.94  |                    |
| Precept                           |            | -        |                    |
|                                   |            |          |                    |
| <b>Payments</b>                   |            |          |                    |
| Service Charge (May)              | £ 4.25     |          |                    |
| ICO                               | £ 47.00    |          |                    |
| Salary (May)                      | £ 238.10   |          |                    |
| Homeworkers allowance             | £ 120.00   |          |                    |
| Insurance                         | £ 536.54   |          |                    |
| Service Charge (Jun)              | £ 4.25     |          |                    |
| Salary (Jun)                      | £ 238.10   |          |                    |
|                                   |            |          |                    |
|                                   | £ 1,188.24 | £ 23.95  |                    |
|                                   |            |          |                    |
| <b>Balance as at 06/07/26</b>     |            |          | <b>£ 30,279.26</b> |

## 6. To receive/review any Planning Applications

### 6.1 Awaiting decision from West Berks Planning

- **26/01229/HOUSE** - Hunters Moon, New Road Hill, Midgham, Reading RG7 5RY. Section 73 application to vary condition 2 (approved plans) of Planning Permission 25/02947/HOUSE. Convert garage to habitable accommodation. Side extension to the front of the property. First floor linking roof between garage and dwelling. Open veranda extension to rear side and single-storey rear extension with alteration to rear roof. New dormer.
- **26/00931/HOUSE** - Field Mouse Cottage, 11 Midgham Green, Midgham, RG7 5TT. Front extension to bring the principle elevation inline with the left hand side, using exact matching materials. Rear extension including vaulted ceiling with southern facing top windows.

## 7. Village Hall Matters

Jeremy provided an update on Village Hall fundraising. The recent plant sale raised £540 and fundraising efforts are continuing.

The ongoing roof issue was discussed. Works are required and the updated quotation is approximately £18,000 higher than previously anticipated. There is not currently a plan in place to raise the additional funds required, and some potential fundraising opportunities have raised concerns regarding parking.

The possibility of relocating the Village Hall to a new site further up the hill was discussed as a potential longer-term option. Such a site could provide improved facilities and infrastructure but would require significant additional funding to purchase land and construct a new building. CIL funding was discussed as a possible source of funding.

Cllr Long noted that this could provide an opportunity to consider the longer-term requirements of the village. Potential advantages of a new site could include easier access from Birds Lane, a site of approximately 1–2 acres, opportunities for tree planting, a larger building, on-site parking, a children's play area and improved disabled access. There could also be potential for synergy with Midgham Church, including shared parking.

The economics and viability of a new facility were discussed, including the potential for greater opportunities to hire out a larger building. It was noted that CIL funding could potentially be in the region of £400,000–£600,000. A planning application could potentially be progressed as part of the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

The disadvantages of relocation were also noted, including the future use of the existing Village Hall, which would remain a village asset. The existing site could potentially be sold or redeveloped if additional funds were required. The ongoing costs associated with maintaining two sites would also need to be considered.

Cllr Long acknowledged the work undertaken by Jeremy and Sharon in maintaining and supporting the Village Hall and considered that relocation could be a viable longer-term option.

Jeremy advised that approximately £50,000 would be required to address the roof and upgrade the kitchen, while parking and disabled access issues would remain.

**ACTION** – Cllr Long to speak to his contact regarding the potential alternative site.

It was noted that an email had been received from a neighbouring property. This will be passed to Jeremy for consideration.

**ACTION** – Chair to forward the email to Jeremy for a direct response.

## **8. Neighbourhood Development Plan**

It was noted that, with the exception of Cllr Holden-Crowther, councillors had taken part in the parish tour with Alison Eardley on 12<sup>th</sup> June.

Councillors were asked to raise with Alison Eardley, when next in contact with her, whether she required any further information and to ask about the Ordnance Survey requirements.

## **9. AOB**

### *Parish magazine - Villages*

The possibility of including a small section about the Parish Council in the parish magazine was discussed as an alternative means of communicating with residents in addition to the website.

**ACTION** – Clerk to investigate how the Parish Council can obtain a section in the magazine, including the submission deadline and word count.

*NE Thatcham meeting*

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An update was provided regarding a meeting involving Jeff Brooks and Chairs from neighbouring parishes. It was noted that there was a feeling that previous discussions had not resulted in sufficient progress.

A further meeting is scheduled for 15<sup>th</sup> July, when it is hoped that a more substantive update will be available.

### *Police Hub*

It was noted that, when representatives previously attended the Parish Council meeting, they had indicated that the proposed Police Hub would be located up to the treeline. It now appears that the proposed location extends beyond this area.

ACTION – Cllr Read to send the relevant link.

### *Millenium Garden*

A resident had raised concerns regarding the condition of the flower bed at the corner of Birds Lane and Church Hill.

It was noted that, given the current dry conditions, this may not be the appropriate time to undertake improvements. The possibility of seeking volunteers to assist with the area was discussed.

### *Roads*

The condition of the village roads was discussed, including weeds, broken pavement and damaged road edges. It was noted that assistance is required to ensure that the village does not continue to experience significant weed growth each year.

ACTION – Clerk to forward the resident's email to Cllr Read.  
– Cllr Fenn to write to Cllr Read regarding the condition of the roads.

## **10. To determine dates for the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be held on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2026.

## **11. To record the meeting closed**

21:11