
ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY MEETING MINUTES

11th May 2026 at 7pm in 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, Tracy

Leadbeater

Members of Public: 2

1. To receive apologies

Dawn Adams, Ben Holden-Crowther

2. Parish council report

Cllr Fenn provided an update on recent Parish Council activities and ongoing projects.

The Parish Council continues to support the Village Hall Committee as it works towards replacing the village hall roof. Trustees have faced a particularly challenging year in progressing the project, especially in relation to planning applications and obtaining suitable building quotations. Cllr Fenn thanked the trustees for their continued commitment and noted that they would provide their own annual report later in the meeting.

The Chairman then reported on the progress of the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). Following the Parish Council's formal decision on 11 November to proceed with preparing an NDP, work has commenced on this important community-led initiative. The Plan will enable residents to have a greater influence over future development within Midgham. While it will not replace West Berkshire Council's Local Plan, it will ensure that local priorities are taken into account in planning decisions and, once adopted, will allow the parish to receive a larger proportion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding generated by future developments.

Good progress has been made during the year. A public information meeting held in November attracted 19 residents, helping to raise awareness of the project and encourage community involvement. A steering group has since been established, comprising the local District Councillor, three Parish Councillors and four local residents, with additional volunteers also coming forward to support the work. The group has benefited from guidance provided by Laila Bassett, Principal Planning Officer at West Berkshire Council, following a meeting in February, and valuable advice from Ivor McCardle, Chair of Cold Ash Parish Council, who recommended appointing a planning consultant.

Community engagement has continued through the distribution of a parish-wide questionnaire in March, which was hand-delivered to all 125 households and resulted in 33 completed responses. In April, the steering group met online with planning consultant Alison Eardley, following which a report and cost estimate were received. A site visit is planned for May/June, after which the Parish Council will consider approving a budget, capped at £10,000, to progress the Plan towards the referendum stage. Funding opportunities, including lottery funding, are also being explored. The consultant remains confident that the proposed timetable is achievable, with the aim of presenting the Neighbourhood Development Plan for referendum in autumn 2027.

Cllr Fenn also updated those present on the proposed North East Thatcham development. He confirmed that the Parish Council continues to work closely with neighbouring parish councils, Thatcham Town Council and Chris Read to monitor proposals and remain informed of developments through West Berkshire Council.

3. Village hall trust

No representatives of the Village Hall Trust were present. The Chair will follow up separately.

4. District councillors report

Cllr Chris Read gave an update on his work over the past year. He explained that, as a backbench member, he sits on the resourcing committee and is able to call in matters for scrutiny where there are concerns as to whether the appropriate processes are being followed. Cllr Read referred in particular to environmental matters and issues involving Thames Water. He advised that, following analysis of the relevant project, a number of recommendations had been made, particularly in relation to project management and oversight.

It was further reported that Government grant funding is expected to cease within the next three years. In relation to local government reorganisation, Cllr Read advised that a decision is expected in July following Oxfordshire County Council's decision, which should provide a clearer indication of the authority with which West Berkshire may be aligned. It was noted that this may also have implications for next year's elections.

Cllr Read also reported on his role as a member of the Local Access Forum, a statutory body concerned with public rights of way, whose views must be taken into account. He further updated the Council on ongoing efforts to press Thames Water regarding the situation in Woolhampton, including the hope that additional storm drainage measures may be secured.

5. Stuart Logan

The Council received a presentation and advice from Stuart Logan regarding the potential establishment of a community orchard.

Mr Logan advised that, should the Council wish to pursue a planting scheme, careful consideration would need to be given to the proposed site, including aspect, sunlight, slope, shelter from wind and access. Although parking at the site may be limited, it was noted that some visitors could walk and that parking may be available at the Church.

It was noted that newly planted trees would require regular watering during the first year. Consideration would also need to be given to fencing and protective measures to guard against damage from rabbits, deer and hares. Mr Logan advised that larger trees, in the region of 3ft to 4ft 6in, may be preferable, together with appropriate tree guards.

In relation to planting, Mr Logan recommended that holes be dug mechanically where possible and that the quality and type of soil be assessed in advance by digging a trial pit and taking samples. He advised that soil improver or compost could be incorporated and that each tree should ideally be given approximately 1 metre square and 0.5 metre depth for planting. Trees should be planted at a minimum of 10 feet apart, with 12 feet preferable.

Mr Logan advised that fruit trees purchased from specialist nurseries would generally be better value and of higher quality than garden centre stock, often being supplied bare-rooted with a stronger root system. He recommended Blackmoor Nursery and Gilbert White's Selborne Nursery as possible suppliers. Additional materials such as stakes, ties, bonemeal and manure would also need to be factored into the project cost.

Councillors were advised that a mix of fruit trees would be desirable, provided that appropriate pollination groups were selected. Mr Logan confirmed that, once the soil type was known, he would be able to advise further on the most suitable varieties.

The maintenance requirements of a community orchard were also discussed. It was noted that the trees would require pruning, watering and ongoing care, particularly in the first year, and that fruit may need to be removed initially to allow the trees to establish. Further management would include thinning fruit, seasonal pruning and monitoring for disease. Mr Logan advised that trees may begin fruiting in their second year, with a stronger yield expected after 5–10 years.

The Council discussed whether fruit trees would place too great a maintenance burden on the Parish Council, noting that standard trees would require less upkeep. However, it was recognised that fruit trees could provide a greater community benefit and may encourage local engagement. The possible inclusion of nut trees was also discussed, although it was noted that walnut trees can become very large; hazelnuts may be a more suitable option.

As the proposal would be a community project, the Council also discussed possible funding routes. Mr Logan referred to funding previously secured in Stanford Dingley, including support from Veolia. He also advised that a local contractor, Horticultural Horris, may be able to assist with planting and that he would be willing to put the Council in touch. It was noted that Stanford Dingley had planted 20 trees for approximately £1,000, although prices may since have increased, and a site visit may be worthwhile.

Cllr Read advised that up to £4,000 may be available through a funding bid, subject to the submission of a quote and spending proposal by the end of May. He confirmed that he would support the application. The Council discussed the possibility of including benches as part of the scheme, together with a mixture of trees, and also considered whether there may be objections from residents. Cllr Nigel Bassford agreed to obtain costings, with assistance from the Clerk. It was also suggested that the adjoining farmer/hedge owner be approached to discuss whether the hedge height could be reduced to approximately 5–6 feet.

Reference was also made to the community orchard at Cold Ash as a possible example to review.

It was proposed by Cllr Anthony Fenn and seconded by Cllr Francis Long that the Council proceed with developing the orchard proposal further, including obtaining indicative costs and preparing a funding submission. The proposal was approved.

6. To determine dates for the next annual assembly

The next Annual Assembly will be held on 10th May 2027.

7. To record the meeting closed

20:16